

Authentic Materials, Motivation, and Language Learning: A Pedagogical Perspective

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Article History: Received 25 May 2025; Reviewed 18 August 2025; Revised 28 October 2025; Accepted 27 November 2025

Abstract

The use of authentic materials has gained increasing attention in language pedagogy due to their potential to bridge the gap between classroom instruction and real-world language use. In ESL/EFL context, learners are exposed to prescribed textbook materials that can limit their communicative competence and intrinsic motivation. Against this background, this study explores the pedagogical role of authentic materials in enhancing learners' motivation and facilitating meaningful language learning. The primary objective of the study is to examine how authentic materials influence learners' motivational orientations and language learning experiences from a pedagogical perspective. To accomplish the objective, researcher adopted narrative research design under the qualitative research method. This research is completed through a narrative case analysis on the basis of unstructured interview making the meaning from informant's (teacher) 15 years of teaching experiences who used authentic materials in classroom teaching. Researcher purposively selected an experienced teacher and focused on studying a single person, gathered data through the collection of stories; reporting individual experiences and discussing the meaning of those experiences. Discussing on narrative analysis, the findings indicate that authentic materials significantly enhance learners' intrinsic motivation by increasing exposure to contextualized language, cultural relevance, and pragmatic usage. It revealed that there was greater interest, participation, and confidence in using English for communicative purposes while using authentic materials. It was acknowledged that authentic materials support learner autonomy and foster critical thinking. The study underscores the pedagogical significance of authentic materials as a motivational and instructional resource in language education. The findings offer practical implications for curriculum designers, teachers, and teacher educators seeking to promote communicative competence through authenticity driven pedagogy. It suggests that careful selection and pedagogical mediation of authentic materials can lead to more meaningful, motivating, and effective language learning experiences.

Key words: Authentic materials, Motivation, Professional development, Input hypothesis, Sociocultural context.

Introduction

Teaching is challenging job in itself if we can't incorporate all teaching components. One of the components in teaching is the selection of appropriate materials. The use of relevant materials can enhance learners' motivation in learning considering learners' socio-cultural and

learning style. Selection of appropriate materials can add beauty in our teaching. Teaching materials related to our content can be prepared and found in our surrounding. Generally, our teaching runs without teaching materials. We go our classroom depending on text-books, chalk and talk. In this context, can text-book, chalk and talk only motivate learners? Can't we collect and use them contextually? In this study, I discuss about how authentic materials can help to motivate in learning.

In our surrounding, there are very useful and relevant authentic materials but we are quite unaware of them. Can't we collect, store and use them relevantly? Of course, we can. I briefly talk about what authentic materials and how we choose them. The term authentic means to be real and genuine. Swaffar (1985) says "an authentic text oral or written, is one whose primary intent is to communicate meaning" (P.17). He viewed that authentic texts must possess "an authentic communicative objective," as opposed to the purpose of foreign language textbooks, which is to "teach language rather than to communicate information" (P.17 as cited in Thomas, 2014, p. 15). Devit and Singleton (2001), authentic text is "created to fulfill some social purpose in the language community in which it was produced (as cited in Thomas, 2014, p. 15). Another writer Tomlinson (2012) writes:

an authentic text is one which is produced in order to communicate rather than to teach...The text does not have to be produced by a native speaker and it might be a version of an original which has been simplified to facilitate communication (as cited in Thomas, 2014, p. 15).

The key to understanding what makes materials authentic is to think of them as texts that were not intentionally produced for language classroom or learners. Similarly, Widdowson (1978):

drew attention to this problem and introduced a distinction between 'genuine', which he used to describe a text that was actually used in the real world and 'authentic', which he defined as a feature of the process by which specific people engaged with a specific text for a specific purpose (p.13 as cited in Morrow, 2014).

It can be concluded that authentic materials are made for real communication and that the purpose of authentic material is to communicate meaning and information rather to teach language. The key feature is that this material is not specially written for learners in order to illustrate some teaching points; instead, it is originally produced by people using English for some authentic communicative purpose. As a result, this approach concentrated on finding and using real world that is engaging and relevant. In this context, "the most significant synonyms are genuine and natural; on the other hand, the most significant antonyms are artificial and unnatural" (Thomas, 2014, p. 14).

Some examples of the types of authentic materials like cooking recipes, restaurant menus, brochures/ leaflets, vacancy announcement, advertisements, notices, message of congratulations, condolences, calendars, visiting-cards can create engaging EFL classroom activities. These texts are authentic because there were created to communicate useful information in the real world rather than to teach language. Such materials are easily found in our surrounding.

Authentic materials must have the relevance of those texts to the students and teachers about the ways they feel their real world while reading. Different types of texts, people read or listen to, may not be relevant to their real-life situation. Those materials which are not concerned to their real-life situation may have less effect in their reading comprehension ability. In this context Morrow wrote in his article 'Authentic Assessment' (2014):

...particularly when enthusiastic teachers chose real material that they had found but that was of no interest or relevance at all to their students. Imagine a secondary level teacher in Nepal using a recording of an authentic announcement on a railway station in Britain with his/her learners of English; for a small minority of students who might be planning to travel to Britain, this might be interesting-but for the vast majority who have never had the chance to travel by rail, it would be completely meaningless (p. 8).

While choosing authentic materials, socio-cultural aspects of learners' can be taken to consideration. In the name of choosing authentic materials, non-relevant material can cause demotivation. Materials which are engaging, interesting and relevant are to be considered as authentic materials. It is felt that if learners are able to work with material that is 'real' it will be much more interesting and effective for them. When students are engaged with a text and get out of it something relevant or interesting to them, then the process is authentic (Parajuli, 2015).

We understand the importance of student engagement and motivation to achieve academic success. Motivation is a key factor in improving L2 learning, as has been significantly elaborated in the literature (Fidaou et al., 2010; Gilmore, 2011). It is a non-language factor which is basically related with the socio-psychological aspects of a learner. Scholars differentiate between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The former represents learner's desire to learn a language for its own sake and the latter refers a desire to learn in order to reach an external goal (e.g., a better job). Learners of English as a second or foreign language who perform both types of motivation have a maximum likelihood of continuing language study and accomplishing long-term goals (Rubenfeld et al., 2007; Wang, 2008). The learner has different degree and modes of motivation. The more learners are motivated the more learning achievement occurs. High motivation can bring maximum learning achievement. In this way motivation can be taken as base-line of language learning. Authentic materials create motivation and motivation maximizes learning environment.

Bhandari (2009) carried out a researcher on 'Effectiveness of Teaching Materials for Teaching Vocabulary in Grade Four' with the objectives of findings out the effectiveness of teaching materials for teaching vocabulary in grade four. To carry out this research work, thirty-six students of grade four studying at Janata Lower Secondary School a public School, situated a Dulari-8, Morang were selected as sample population. Only sixty-five vocabularies from the text-book of grade four were selected for this work. The mode of the test was written. A Pre-test of the both groups was compared to find out the effectiveness of teaching materials for teaching vocabulary. The main finding of this research work was that teaching words through pictures and realia as teaching material in grade four was more effective than teaching without using teaching materials (Pictures and realia).

Bhandari (2010) conducted research on "Reading comprehension Ability of Primary level English Teachers. The objective of the study was to find out the reading comprehension ability of primary level English teachers and to compare their ability in terms of experience and training. For this purpose, he selected the primary level English teachers of Chitwan district. He collected data from the sampled population of 50 primary teachers. The primary level English teachers were given three sets of tests in their own Schools. Their responses were administered classifying into trained and untrained and experienced and inexperienced. Their scores were tabulated on the basis of the test items and were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. This study found out that teachers training and experience affect their performance in reading comprehension.

Namaziandost et al. (2022) conducted research on 'The Impact of Authentic Materials on Reading Comprehension, Motivation, and Anxiety among Iranian Male EFL Learners'. They aimed to examine the effect of using authentic materials on English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' reading comprehension, reading motivation, and reading anxiety. In this study, 58 Iranian male EFL learners were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental and a control group. Both groups were pretested through a reading comprehension test and the motivation for reading questionnaire (MRQ) to test their reading comprehension ability and reading motivation. Having participated in a period of 20 sessions in which the experimental group received treatment of exposure to authentic materials and control group to simplified materials, the students took a post-test of the reading comprehension test and completed the MRQ. Additionally, to test students' reading anxiety, the two groups completed Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) in two pre- and post-test assessments. The scores obtained were analyzed using one-way analysis of covariance and paired samples t-tests. The results indicated that authentic materials enhanced Iranian learners' reading motivation and their reading comprehension ability. In addition, the findings suggested that the use of authentic texts significantly improved EFL learner's anxiety in the experimental group.

The above researches have been conducted to find out the effectiveness of teaching materials in developing language skills. Though, these studies have found that teaching materials play vital role in teaching different language skill, especially no concrete research was conducted to find out how authentic materials motivate learners in learning, yet. The present study is different from all the studies carried out so far in the related topic in the sense that it focuses on the authentic materials and its role in creating motivation in learning. Moreover, no research work has been carried out that shows necessity of authentic materials in teaching to motivate learners. That is why the researcher is interested in this work to help those teachers who teach English as a foreign language in Nepalese context through authentic materials. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) motivational framework, Saville-Troike's (2006) second language acquisition theory and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural view of language learning, and Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis support me to understand the concept of motivation and second language acquisition.

Methods

I believe in interpretivism. So, I have adopted qualitative method, particularly a narrative research design, that 'typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual' (Cresswell, 2012, p. 502). Ontologically I believe in subjective and multiple realities. Since the knowledge is socially constructed. Epistemologically, my study is related with multiple nature of acquiring knowledge. I have valued participant's information as it is value laden. I worked purposively with a secondary level English teacher to elicit rich data, who had 15 years of long teaching experiences in both private (started teaching in the beginning years) and community school (currently). I had more than 18 years of familiarity with the participant as we are neighbor belonging to a small Nepali speaking community near to that community school, located in Tansen Municipality of Palpa district. This school runs classes from nursery to Grade 12.

Bikalji (pseudo name of informant teacher) has completed Master's degree, specialization in English. Being myself a school teacher and neighbour, I used to make informal discussion with him about teaching techniques, professional development and most of the time, I used to meet and talk about education related issues. What knocked me about this study is when one of my Grade 10 students asked to provide some more model examples of 'Message of Congratulations' writing. Then, I became more eager to collect and showed them. My students shared that they find these materials more interesting and engaging. Before this event, I was not so serious about such materials and decided to study further about authentic materials and its motivation.

In this way, I attempted to carry out this research contacting Bikalji who had more than 15 years of teaching experiences in school level. So, I chose to listen to Bikalji's experiences of more than 15 years of teaching and use of authentic materials in his own words. I listened to his concerns and helped him in sorting out problems among the family members with "Tea-Talk" and gradually I talked to him individually, sometime inviting at my home and sometime visiting his house; about his teaching and learning experiences. I mostly talked to Bikalji on Saturday for at least one hour in a family-friendly environment. I conducted 15 rounds of narrative interviews; until no new information appeared, with Bikalji, in Nepali language mostly one to one and a few times accompanied by other members as my and his spouse were also teachers; focusing on his experiences in English teaching as second language teaching, in particular, teaching with authentic materials and teaching depending on text-book only.

During my interview with Bikalji, I tried my best to create natural setting, so I used no recording device and I did not take fieldnote. I wrote detail account of his experiences within 24 hours of our conversation that included all the events, examples and anecdotes associated with his experiences with some direct quotes significant to the study. In writing those accounts, I was aware of the possibility of understanding or overstating his voice, so I attempted to "bracket" my own perception and understanding of teaching with authentic materials. The descriptive notes

were coded using a general inductive coding method (Thomas, 2006). I created a small number of summary categories to capture the key themes in his stories. I tried to maintain ethical integrity, so I revealed the fact that his story would be the part of my research. But I also convinced him that his right to anonymity and privacy would be protected by not disclosing his identity in my written works. Maintaining good rapport, I was able to collect rich narrative data from him who enabled me to explore the motivational aspects of authentic materials and explain the teachers' mentality in terms using authentic materials, more broadly. I also adopted member checking strategy to enhance the validity of this study.

Findings and Discussion

This section consists of the results of the individual experiences of the research participant and their interpretation. After transcribing the data, the following themes and conclusion were drawn. The findings show that searching, selecting and using appropriate authentic materials in our classroom centers around the broader theme of what Gardner and Lambart (1972); Saville-Troike (2006) call motivation, through motivation, they learn reading, writing, listening and speaking gradually. Such motivation can be created through language-friendly authentic materials. The finding also corresponds with the idea of Krashen (1985) 'Input Hypothesis' one of the major components of Monitor Model, which help to interact /expose the second language (acquisition) through authentic materials. Authentic materials functioned as language input to support learners' language learning. Similarly, knowing the importance of authentic materials in teaching and employing authentic materials in classroom is the identification of professional development. Those teachers who are professionally developed can create learning-friendly classroom using content related authentic materials. The following themes illustrate how authentic materials promote motivation in learning.

Maximum Learners' Engagement

Due to disruptive, non-attentive and carefree nature of some students in the classroom, sometimes teachers find difficult to create motivation among the students. Motivation plays significant role in learning. While dealing classroom activities, in the beginning days as a novice teacher; Bikalji lacked teaching techniques. He was less confident in teaching. Bikalji stated, "I was completely hopeless and wanted to quit the job". He shared that he was quite hopeless as his students did not listen his words at all. He only passed the exam but there lacked teaching skills to be performed. He further said that his beginning one month in teaching was really irritating as he lacked teaching skills. Gradually, he started coping with the students' need and expectations and became confident to handle the classroom activities. Especially, he had started employing (group work, pair work activity) authentic materials as teaching aids to embolden his teaching.

Bilkalji went on organizing his class smoothly. He went on equipping himself with adequate knowledge and skills to motivate students in learning. Most importantly, when he started using authentic materials (audio cassette, postcards, brochures, songs, newspaper, restaurant's menu, and obituary), the participation and engagement increased abundantly. He shared that he was so happy when he found his students engaging in the activity with authentic material related classwork. He recalled:

I provided one authentic material to one pair of desk-bench, five different types of authentic materials as far I remember- notice, advertisement, obituary, greeting card, visitors' guide (brochure). I found everyone was happy to get different taste than the usual class. Then I told them to read and students read these materials interestingly. I was so happy that they asked the meaning of unfamiliar word. Then they were assignment with finding synonyms/antonyms and short question-answer and most of them engaged in the task and solved without difficulty.

This evidence showed that learners want new taste other than chalk and talk, when new taste, engagement becomes high. Classwork was done happily. Engaging in the task and questioning is the result of motivation. When they get such materials based on their own interest; work in their own style and at their own pace. Students take the initiative to learn. According to Cohen (1998) language learning is intrinsically a private activity and that it is something learners have to try for themselves. Thus, authentic material provides a real insight into the pleasures of reading, speaking, writing and listening. He further said that applying authentic materials in language classroom presents broader perspectives to the value of learning a foreign language. Bikalji confidently said, 'When I began using authentic materials understanding their need, interest and socio-cultural context, I found them engaging in the given activity'. As Vygotsky (1978) suggests that teaching is a socio-cultural activity; teaching best occurs in creating appropriate context. In this way, contextual authentic materials create motivation and engagement; as a result, learning is enhanced. Without motivating learners, learning does not occur. Undoubtedly, contextual selection of authentic materials are the key motivating factors for language learning as Gardner and Lambart (1972) talk about motivation.

Language Interaction

Having discussed on the theme of 'Maximum Learners' Engagement, we now move to language interaction. Language interaction through contextual authentic materials is the next fundamental theme which makes the meaning from the Bikalji's 15 years of long experiences. Bikalji (being happy) stated that after the continuous and contextual use of authentic materials, learners started giving nice performance regarding the language learning. He further said that authentic materials provided meaningful exposure to target language as it is actually used, motivated learners and helped them develop a range of communicative competences and enhanced positive attitudes towards language learning. This statement is in line with the Krashen (1985) 'Input Hypothesis' where he concluded that exposure to comprehensible unit would be sufficient to allow learners to progress through developmental stages on the grounds that the language that learners needed to make further progress would always be available if there were enough language exposure. We understand input as more than the language exposed to the learners. It incorporates entire social, cultural and functional contexts where the language is used. Bikalji remembered, 'I provided 10 different forms of notice writing within two days teaching and third day they became able to write the notice on their own.' This shows that learners' learning is scaffolded positively. Here exposure itself is the form of interaction through which learners are learning efficiently.

Learners get opportunity to interact with the target language through authentic materials. This type of exposure helps learners perform confidently. As Bikalji told that when he had gone to class with authentic materials then he found his students slowly doing better; learners started asking questions and giving the response of classwork. He further shared that exposure of the authentic materials developed their confidence in communicating and writing as they started involving in classroom activities actively. 'The way they asked, the way they reply has been gradually changed and improved' he said. Authentic materials pave the way for getting the exposure in the field of English language learning and teaching and help the students to learn varieties of cultural words. They help to widen the capacity of understanding language in the context. Motivation is what they get after the exposure of authentic materials. In this way, authentic materials are the way of contextualizing the language learning with motivation and interaction.

Professional Development Strategy

Having discussed on the themes of 'Maximum Learners' Engagement and Language Interaction', we now turn to the professional development strategy. Knowing the importance of authentic materials and employing as teaching aids to motivate the students is considered as one of the professional development activities. Professional development is another theme which elaborates a part of Bikalji's experiences. Different scholars (Richards & Farrell, 2005; Soproni, 2007; Sultana, 2004) have highlighted on the different aspects and strategies of professional development. At the beginning phase of his teaching, he was nearly hopeless but did not lose hope. He started participating in professional development programs like TPD training, NELTA conferences, consulting with professionals and got auto-motivation and confidence in teaching. His confidence brought new dimension in his teaching career. He shared, 'TPD training, reading journals, bulletins and NELTA conference really boosted me up and learned different professional development strategies to tackle with classroom difficulties.' Teachers must be pedagogically competent and professionally developed to motivate learners. So, Bikalji adopted professional development techniques: using authentic materials as a teaching aid to create motivation among the students. He further said that using authentic materials instilled a positive change in his professional career as he became able to motivate learners interestingly.

Authentic materials help motivate the learners by bringing the content and the subject matter to life for the learners. Authentic materials encourage learners to connect between the world of classroom and world outside the classroom. Identifying learners' need and goals, teachers have to select contextual and relevant authentic materials to motivate in learning. Authentic materials, particularly audio-visual ones, offer a much richer source of input for learners and have the potential to be exploited in different ways and on different levels to develop learners' communicative competence.

Conclusion

This study was carried out to explore the pedagogical significance of authentic materials in relation to learner motivation and meaningful language learning within ESL and EFL contexts. Drawing on a qualitative narrative research design, the study foregrounded the experiences of an experienced teacher who has consistently integrated authentic materials into classroom

practice. The findings, interpreted through the theoretical lenses of Gardner and Lambert's (1972) motivational framework Saville-Troike's (2006) second language acquisition and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural view of language learning, and Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis provide compelling evidence that authentic materials function not merely as supplementary resources but as powerful pedagogical tools that reshape learners' motivational orientations and learning experiences.

One of the most salient conclusions of this study is that authentic materials substantially enhance learners' intrinsic motivation. In line with Gardner and Lambert's (1972) distinction between integrative and instrumental motivation, the use of real-world texts, media, and communicative artifacts appears to nurture learners' integrative orientation by enabling them to engage with the target language as a living social practice rather than as an abstract academic subject. The narrative accounts reveal that learners demonstrated heightened interest, sustained engagement, and increased confidence when exposed to language as it is naturally used in social, cultural, and professional contexts. This finding reinforces the argument that motivation in language learning is deeply connected to learners' perceptions of relevance, purpose, and personal meaning, all of which are effectively addressed through authentic materials.

From a sociocultural perspective, the study further concludes that authentic materials create an interacting environment with them that reflects the social embeddedness of language. Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on language learning as a socially mediated process is clearly echoed in the teacher's narratives, which highlight how authentic materials facilitate interaction, negotiation of meaning, and contextual understanding. By situating language within familiar or recognizable sociocultural frames, authentic materials help learners construct meaning through shared experiences and social interaction. This not only enhances communicative competence but also fosters critical awareness of how language operates across different cultural and pragmatic contexts. Consequently, language learning becomes a participatory and dialogic process rather than a passive reception of linguistic forms.

The findings also strongly support Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, particularly the notion of comprehensible input. Authentic materials, when carefully selected and pedagogically mediated, were found to provide rich and meaningful input slightly beyond learners' current proficiency levels. The teacher's experiences underscore that authenticity alone is insufficient; rather, the effectiveness of authentic materials lies in the teacher's ability to scaffold learning, contextualize difficult language, and align materials with learners' needs and proficiency levels. When such mediation is present, authentic input becomes accessible, engaging, and developmentally appropriate, thereby facilitating natural language acquisition. This conclusion challenges the assumption that authentic materials are inherently too difficult for learners and instead emphasizes the central role of teacher expertise in mediating authenticity.

Another important conclusion emerging from this study concerns learner autonomy and critical thinking. The narratives indicate that authentic materials encourage learners to take greater responsibility for their learning by engaging with texts that require interpretation, inference, and

evaluation. Exposure to real-world language tasks fosters independent learning strategies, promotes reflective thinking, and encourages learners to move beyond rote memorization. This aligns with contemporary pedagogical goals that prioritize learner-centered approaches and the development of transferable skills. Authentic materials thus serve not only linguistic objectives but also broader educational aims related to autonomy, agency, and lifelong learning.

At the same time, the study acknowledges the challenges associated with the use of authentic materials, including linguistic complexity, time constraints, and the demands placed on teachers in terms of material selection and adaptation. These challenges, however, do not diminish the pedagogical value of authentic materials; rather, they highlight the need for sustained professional development and institutional support. Teachers require training to develop skills in evaluating, adapting, and integrating authentic materials in ways that are pedagogically sound and contextually appropriate. Therefore, an important conclusion of this study is that the successful implementation of authenticity-driven pedagogy is closely tied to teachers' professional competence and reflective practice.

This study affirms that authentic materials play a crucial role in enhancing motivation and facilitating meaningful language learning when employed within a theoretically informed and pedagogically mediated framework. By bridging classroom instruction with real-world language use, authentic materials address key motivational, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of language learning. The study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for authenticity in language pedagogy and offers valuable implications for curriculum designers, teachers, and teacher educators. It ultimately suggests that authenticity, when thoughtfully integrated, has the potential to transform language classrooms into dynamic spaces where motivation, communication, and learning converge in meaningful and sustainable ways.

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