

A REVIEW ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING ONLINE AUTHENTIC MATERIALS WITHIN EMP CLASSES

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Abstract

The main trends of international and national policies in the field of education are unlimited access to information and reduced costs of education. The use of web resources engages students in various tasks, in order to expand their language learning and knowledge skills in certain specific areas and to give students the opportunity to practice real-life activities in the classroom. Using and exploiting authentic online materials might ensure an active involvement of students during the classes, an increase in the voluntary attention level, an increased motivation and interest, quality of homework assignment, etc. Most importantly, the Internet offers truly unique opportunities and a wide variety of authentic materials, which give a new impetus to both teachers and students. The importance of authenticity and authentic materials in the teaching and learning process of English is essential for medical students since they should be able to manage and assimilate a continuous and enormous flow of specific professional information, as well as develop professional communication skills, subsequent attitudes and a degree of autonomy and self-training in their future career.

Keywords: authenticity, authentic online materials, EMP, medical students.

Introduction

Teachers involved in teaching and educating future medical specialists have been seeking for different methods of developing communication skills. Recently, video-based and online learning has become one of the most popular approach due to its interactivity, relevance, content motivation, as well its unlimited potential to enhance and improve the student learning outcomes.

Medical discourse is different from the literary one in that it delivers specific, scientific data that leaves little room for imagination.

They are based on specific information on the diagnosis, prognosis or treatment of various medical diseases, description of the organs and their role in the human body, research results and accurate explanation of some medical investigations or interventions.

According to Dede Teeler and Peta Gray (How to Use the Internet in ELT (2000), the Internet is probably the largest library in the world. Today, it is difficult to imagine our life without the use of technology and Internet, which have become an indispensable and effective tool in communication and education. The teachers can also become learners and extend their knowledge; or can be leaders and lead an on-line course for their students. [4]

The main trends of international and national policies in the field of education are unlimited access to information and reduced costs of education [2]. There is a growing need for lifelong learning, especially in the professional field, so education is increasingly focused on the alternative of an open, virtual, student-centered education, as well as the accessibility of lessons and various online sources.

In his publication, *The Internet and Young Learners* (2004), Gordon Lewis suggested the following learning purposes in the use of web sources: "communication, information retrieval and content production". The use of web resources engages students in various tasks, in order to expand their language learning and knowledge skills in certain specific areas and to give students the opportunity to practice real-life activities in the classroom. Students will be able to:

- *plan how to use the content-based web-sites in order to select information and deliver a peer-to-peer communication;*
- *collaborate and interact with their colleagues to meet the lesson objectives;*
- *assess the web information;*
- *synthesize information from several websites.* [3]

Undoubtedly, web resources offer a wide range of language learning opportunities for both general and professional learners that might encounter the most specific medical needs. The role of the

teachers, who are engaged in teaching EMP courses might be a simple guidance of the students, thus giving them an opportunity to access relevant "authentic" medical articles and vocabulary.

Subsequently, medical students might further develop autonomic skills of analyzing authentic online resources and thus ensuring a sustainable development and a life-long learning perspective.

Among the main advantages of using authentic online resources are the "high motivation of students, authentic language and global awareness" (Meloni, 1998).

According to the specialized literature, the use of authentic online materials:

- provides educational opportunities;
- offers unlimited resources for the development of specific knowledge;
- offers relevance and coherence;
- facilitates communication, interactivity and data exchange;
- promotes foreign language acquisition;
- offers a wide variety of text types and styles, etc. [5]

A careful selection of sites and activities, as well as monitoring students' progress, can provide a highly effective online learning experience that contributes to the skill training and an ongoing learning of the language independently, at a convenient time and at their own pace. "Learning English with the help of the Internet is like throwing students into an ocean of words, concepts, genres, tenses, and even other languages". (Mansfield 2002).

Moreover, Internet resources provide two types of authenticity. First of all, it offers students unlimited opportunities for accessing authentic language, though if not guided by the teacher, it might sometimes be challenging due to specific English pronunciation aspects, cultural, and language barriers etc. On the other hand, the Internet offers specific and precise content, based on the interests of future physicians.

Since the medical students require up-to-date knowledge, terminology or specialized language and appropriate skills, online data

can be sometimes combined with the teacher's vision of the language itself and learning needs to prepare a specific course syllabus. Using and exploiting authentic online materials might ensure an active involvement of students during the classes, an increase in the voluntary attention level, an increased motivation and interest, quality of homework assignment, etc. Most importantly, the Internet offers truly unique opportunities and a wide variety of authentic materials, which give a new impetus to both teachers and students.

In order to maximize the benefits of using authentic materials within the EMP classes, the teacher must evaluate their content in advance. Therefore, we should consider the following criteria:

- ***Relevance of contexts.*** Topics should be relevant and interesting for students and be associated with their daily professional activities (writing a report or medical article, discussing with patients or foreign colleagues, participating in international seminars and conferences).
- ***Appropriate length.*** Texts, videos or articles should not be too long, as they are more difficult to manage and can decrease students' enthusiasm.
- ***Adequate readability.*** Before presenting authentic materials, teachers should ensure that the content is not difficult for learners or provide explanations for new vocabulary or more complex concepts [1].

The Online sources include medicine-related websites, online medical questionnaires and tests, social networks, online scientific conferences, blogs, interactive games, online simulations, etc. Any teacher who enjoys internet access can use electronic text analysis tools to explore many aspects of medical language with their students. Web resources offer a varied set of texts targeting medical services, content aimed at different audiences: patients, professionals and students. Teachers can simply select texts from these sites, which offer relevant articles, information and vocabulary and then exploit them in an "authentic" way.

Given this, a review of the most useful medical online sites that might be used during English medical language classes is presented below. It should be mentioned that these include the most relevant and interesting sites with medical content like medical texts and articles, case and situation simulations, interactive games, quizzes, vocabulary tests, online forums, audio and printed resources, interactive dictionaries and slides, etc.

- ❶ <https://www.medicalenglish.com/> offers a wide range of activities, interactive games, simulations and short online tests based on the new vocabulary. It contains 51 various topics (starting from the structure of the human body to interviewing and examining the patient), which in turn are divided into several tasks and activities of reading, listening, learning new vocabulary, etc. Teaching activities include multiple choice, matching, true / false, questions and answers. The site provides downloading PDF and MP3 files.
- ❷ <https://emedicine.medscape.com/> is purely medical professional site that reveals authentic material in video format and scientific articles. It contains a series of activities that can be used as a supplement to English medical classes or used for student's individual presentations and research. It provides audition exercises, clinical case studies, slideshows, tests and online quizzes that can be uploaded to receive immediate feedback.
- ❸ <https://www.news-medical.net/> is a useful and highly scientific and medical portal, providing the most up-to-date information in the field of medicine, which can be used for various purposes by both students and teachers. It contains a variety of medical topics arranged in alphabetical order. We can also find images of medical equipment and instruments with their description there.
- ❹ <http://ed.ted.com/> is one of the most effective online sources that contains a great variety of content, including medical, with subsequent tasks, listening exercises, writing and communication, worksheets. It allows you to upload your own projects and write comments, communicate with other native

- speakers or join groups with the same interests to discuss various topics. This site offers downloadable lesson plans that contain a series of speaking, listening, grammar, etc. activities. such as: Peter Saul: Let's talk about dying (Ethanasia ethical issues), etc,
- ⑤ <http://www.medicaldiscoverynews.com> offers data on the latest medical discoveries. Here students can find interesting information and medical articles that provide subsequent listening drills. Students might identify words or concepts on a given topic, use search engines to find articles based on words or phrases; and select appropriate and relevant information.
 - ⑥ <https://medlineplus.gov/> is well structured online portal that offers a wide variety of useful data and research opportunities. It contains various materials, starting with articles, video materials and images. Moreover, it contains interactive games (Jeopardy, Bingo Game, Reconstructors) for assessing medical knowledge and vocabulary. The games can be used online or downloaded in PPT format. They are easy to access and can be used directly from the phone during the classes. It also contains its own search engine of its own database, organized by categories.
 - ⑦ <https://www.occupationalenglishtest.org> contains video material and allows their free downloading, as well as text downloading and printing. It also includes general English grammar tests (on writing, communication, listening, and reading) divided into specialties: General medicine, nursing, dentistry, optometry, physiotherapy, etc.
 - ⑧ <http://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/> provides high quality online resources that is created by the British Council and experts in teaching English from around the world. Created for adult learners, they can improve their English skills. It offers various materials both general and specific culture, includes listening tasks and extensive reading divided into levels (A2-C2). At any time, students can use the grammar and vocabulary sections to support learning (the vocabulary contains a lot of tasks in the form of interactive quizzes with immediate feedback). It offers

the download of files and tests, as well as the free viewing of online videos

- ⑨ <http://www.webmd.com/> is a source of relevant information and interactive activities. It offers videos, followed by online quizzes based on the vocabulary from the movies watched. Students might also find PPT presentations with the description of each slide below. This website is an indispensable source in reporting and preparing for the conferences.
- ⑩ <http://hospitalenglish.com/> is well known for the greatest range of general teaching materials and specialized ESP materials, including a series of worksheets for students, as well as medical English lesson plans for teachers. It hosts medical vocabulary exercises, patient-counseling activities, health professional articles, ESP worksheets and much more. Worksheets include articles, listening tasks and text comprehension tasks in terms of interactive tests. It contains a series of printable materials that describe the equipment, medical instruments, medical staff, etc., which can be additionally exploited by using various authentic tasks. A specific advantage of this site is that students might design their own online activities (crosswords, puzzles, search the words, odd one out, etc.) based on a studied content.

CONCLUSIONS

Thus, it should be concluded that motivation for medical students and future physicians, who are exposed to a maximum degree of information overload, compared to other students from other universities, is the driving force and even an essential pre-condition for receiving positive, qualitative and quantitative student outcomes. The importance of authenticity and authentic materials in the teaching and learning process of English is essential for medical students since they should be able to manage and assimilate a continuous and enormous flow of specific professional information, as well as develop professional communication skills, subsequent attitudes and a degree of autonomy and self-training in their future career.

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