

EFFECTIVE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS WITHIN EFL CLASSES UTILIZAREA EFICIENTĂ A MATERIALELOR AUTENTICE ÎN CADRUL ORELOR DE LIMBĂ ENGLEZĂ

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CZU:37.016:811.111

DOI: 10.46727/c.cv-2023.p24-31

Abstract

The world nowadays is marked by constant socio-educational transformations, which require innovative approaches to organizing the educational process by fusing ITC and effective teaching tools. This research contributes to a better understanding of the adaptive pedagogical strategies in the realm of English language teaching. English, as a global lingua franca, is taught in diverse settings, and its effective teaching is essential for the success of language learners, particularly in specialized fields. Teaching English for Medical Purposes mostly focuses on career-relevant language skills, enabling students to apply acquired knowledge in meaningful communication within their professional settings. The goal of the Medical English Course is to develop highly competent medical professionals proficient in both workplace communication and language usage. Therefore, authentic materials are considered to bring real-world context into the classroom, as well as enhance improved target language acquisition, student engagement, motivation, and achievement. These may also enable learners to connect with language in a meaningful way and encourage a more creative approach to teaching and learning. The article also investigates the efficiency of various types of authentic materials in integrating language skills and assesses whether they outperform traditional teaching methods (or the adapted ones). The present research introduces interactive and authentic approaches to help students effectively discuss medical topics and prepares them for self-directed learning in their future careers, as well as encourage students to engage in discussions on specialized medical subjects, thereby facilitating effective English for Medical Purposes acquisition.

Keywords: authenticity, authentic materials, students' needs, interactive approach.

Rezumat

Lumea de astăzi este marcată de transformări socio-educative constante, care necesită abordări inovatoare în organizarea procesului educațional prin fuzionarea ITC și a unor instrumente didactice eficiente. Această cercetare contribuie la o mai bună înțelegere a strategiilor pedagogice adaptative în domeniul predării limbii engleze. Limba engleză, ca lingua franca globală, este predată în diverse medii, iar predarea sa eficientă este esențială pentru succesul celor care învață limbi străine, în special în domeniile specializate. Predarea limbii engleze în scopuri medicale se concentrează în principal pe competențele lingvistice relevante pentru carieră, permițându-le studenților să aplice cunoștințele dobândite într-o comunicare semnificativă în cadrul mediilor lor profesionale. Scopul

cursului de engleză pentru scopuri medicale este de a dezvolta profesioniști medicali foarte competenți, care să fie pricepuți atât în comunicarea la locul de muncă, cât și în utilizarea limbii. Prin urmare, materialele autentice sunt luate în considerare pentru a aduce contextul lumii reale în sala de clasă, precum și pentru a îmbunătăți achiziția limbii țintă, implicarea, motivația și rezultatele studenților. Acestea pot, de asemenea, să le permită cursanților să se conecteze cu limba într-un mod semnificativ și să încurajeze o abordare mai creativă a predării și învățării. Articolul investighează, de asemenea, eficiența diferitelor tipuri de materiale autentice în integrarea competențelor lingvistice și evaluează dacă acestea depășesc metodele tradiționale de predare (sau pe cele adaptate). Cercetarea de față introduce abordări interactive și autentice pentru a-i ajuta pe studenți să discute eficient subiecte medicale și îi pregătește pentru o învățare autodirijată în viitoarea lor carieră, precum și pentru a-i încuraja pe studenți să se angajeze în discuții pe teme medicale specializate, facilitând astfel dobândirea eficientă a limbii engleze în scopuri medicale.

Cuvinte-cheie: autenticitate, materiale autentice, nevoile studenților, abordare interactivă.

Introduction: What is Authenticity and authentic materials?

When discussing the current trends of postmodernist education, the primary concerns are focused on not only investing into a knowledge system but, more importantly, guiding and stimulating students towards cognitive, affective, and social development. The focus is on practicing skills in diverse contexts to prepare students for optimal integration into professional activities and social life. According to J. N. Rosenau, the student should be guided or encouraged to participate within real world communication settings as frequently as possible, as further to be able to become autonomous and take correct decisions. The current postmodernist paradigm promotes the idea of keeping pace with the ongoing socio-economic changes and rapid digitization of education by integrating ITC innovations into foreign language teaching and learning. This involves leveraging new information and communication technologies, which have high potential, in the field of education. The motto of postmodernist policy is "Think globally, act locally" [4, p.57].

In the international attempt to implement effective strategies for ESL learning, there is a significant emphasis on the authenticity of teaching practices, aiming to equip students to navigate real-life situations and meet task demands. Authentic materials, recognized as valuable tools, are considered effective, interesting, and motivating for teaching in various contexts. Recently, the benefits of using authentic materials in EFL classes has gained considerable attention, since these may bridge the gap between the classroom classes and the real world, bringing a higher level of motivation, interest and participation among learners. The use of authentic materials has been extensively studied for their ability to expose learners to genuine language in authentic contexts. Unlike ESL materials, worksheets, textbook topics, content-based study, and lesson plans, authentic materials are created for native speakers and involve language occurring naturally in target language-speaking contexts, as Tatsuki (2006)[10, p.2] states that "authenticity is taken as being synonymous with genuineness, realness, truthfulness, validity, reliability, undisputed credibility, and legitimacy of materials or practices." The artificial nature of non-authentic texts and structures means that these do not reflect how the language is really used in the target language environment. They are useful for teaching structures but poorly facilitate the acquisition of language skills, since they are not "natural." Thus, an authentic material can be defined as any kind of spoken or written text material that is not

produced with the language learner in mind, but with the native speaker in mind, and that is used for real communicative purposes within the EFL classroom. Many EFL/ESL teachers adapt already existing authentic materials and media, including videos, television programs, and other sources of language – anything that might stimulate language use. Nevertheless, one may confuse authentic with non-authentic materials, which include anything produced for the English classroom, i.e. course books, ESL games, and web materials. Some teachers believe that textbooks and workbooks are authentic, since they are part of the curriculum. Non-authentic does not mean they are useless or bad; they are just produced for different purposes.

Authentic materials can provide students with access to an alternative rather than traditional textbooks, allowing them to practice target language and its culture directly during the classes. The motivational aspect of authenticity is essential, as authentic materials promote students' interest in learning EFL, providing a sense of achievement when understood and encouraging further learning. Authenticity-based classes involves language occurring naturally in native-speaking contexts, deviating from standard English learning. Whereas the main goal in teaching ESP (English for Specific Purposes) is to largely use authentic specialized texts, as these correspond to the needs and motivation of students and can be efficiently utilized in their professional field. Therefore, the role of the teacher is to select, manage, guide, and use appropriate texts (or provide their own material) to generate and stimulate ideas, discussions, and conversations relevant to a specific field.

Authenticity is believed to "bring" the real world into EFL/ESP classrooms, ensured by various technological implementations such as authentic video materials, websites, or even real objects or materials (realia). Several attempts have been made to describe the process of EFL/ESP teaching using technologies and instructional methodologies, such as content-based instruction, case-based instruction, or task-based instruction. Task-based and content-based instruction are somewhat similar in their use [2, p.38]. Moreover, incorporating authentic materials in classrooms cultivates a dynamic learning environment, fostering students' adaptability to the language's real-world applications. This immersive experience encourages active participation and engagement, as students interact with genuine language forms encountered in their professional domains or a variety of situational cases, since it involves using language-learning materials produced by native speakers for a real purpose, rather than materials designed solely for the classroom. The *purpose of this study* encompasses assessing the effectiveness of various types of authentic materials in integrating English language skills and determining whether their use surpasses the efficacy of traditional teaching methods.

Rethinking Approaches to EFL/ESP Teaching in Today's Global Context

The teaching of foreign languages is increasingly focusing on the functional use of language, specifically on methodologies that allow a closer reflection of the language students will later use outside the classroom. The materials used in English language teaching are numerous, but most of them typically concentrate on teaching the structure and grammatical aspects of the English language.

T.R. Khaniya (2006) stated that over the past decade, the use of authentic materials has become increasingly popular in the teaching-learning process, particularly in specialized language

instruction. This shift extends from traditional methodology to intensive approaches, aiming for effective linguistic preparation for field specialists [5, p. 17].

Consequently, the use of authentic texts is also subject to an educational paradigm shift, transitioning from the traditional approach to an authentic one that aligns with the needs of today's world, as shown in the following table:

Table1. Transition from traditional to authentic approach.

Traditional Approach	Authentic
<i>Purpose:</i> to develop a <i>productive student</i> (efficient within an academic-professional framework).	<i>Purpose:</i> To develop a <i>productive citizen</i> (efficient in a professional field).
To be a productive citizen the learner should possess certain <i>knowledge</i> and <i>skills</i> .	To be a productive citizen, an individual must be able to perform <i>authentic tasks</i> used within the real world.
The student <i>is trained</i> to possess knowledge and skills.	The student <i>is guided</i> and encouraged to become proficient in performing tasks that will be used later within a <i>professional community</i> .
Students are assessed for acquired knowledge and skills at the end of a course or program.	Students are assessed to perform authentic tasks that resemble some situations or challenges from the real world to see if they are capable of handling them later on.

Undoubtedly, the earlier applied traditional approaches to EFL teaching has well suited the needs of non-professional students, whereas due to today's global economic advance, there is an increasing demand for a more effective basis for teaching language for specific purposes, requiring career-specific language skills used by many professionals within their particular domain and includes specialized terminology and lexis, jargons, workplace culture in terms of their safety, effectiveness, and authenticity.[5, p.8]

Several linguists and ESP educators, including P.C. Robinson (1991), argue that ESP emerged as a result of three primordial issues: (a) global demand; (b) the revolution in linguistics; and (c) the "centrality" on the student [9, p. 224]. Classic traditional approaches (direct grammar translation method, audio-lingual and silent methods, suggestopedia, etc.) viewed the student as a psychosocial being, perhaps requiring less attention. However, two factors appear to be crucial for the development of ESP- the responsibility and the subsequent needs of the student, defining the student as an adult personality with intrinsic motivation and specific needs in acquiring knowledge that can be later applied in the professional environment.

Particularly noteworthy are the studies of the renowned English educator T. Dudley-Evans (1997), who emphasizes three common features of ESP (English for specific purposes): (a) authentic

materials, (b) goal-orientedness, and (c) self-direction [11, p. 4-11]. Hence, new arguments are brought forth confirming that authentic materials can significantly impact the teaching-learning process within a specialized context and certainly in the curriculum (similar to other analytical programs). Authentic materials offer learners a personal experience of the language as it is used by professionals in their respective fields, fostering a deeper understanding of the target subject. Secondly, goal-orientedness is a pivotal aspect in ESP since it provides a clear purpose in mind – to equip learners with the language skills necessary to achieve specific goals within their professional or academic domains. This focus on tangible objectives ensures that the language instruction is directly relevant and applicable to the practical

needs of the learners. It directs the teaching-learning process towards outcomes that are meaningful and immediately beneficial in the specialized context. Finally, the importance of self-direction in ESP is outlined by the fact that learners take an active role in their language acquisition process, assuming responsibility for their learning progress. This self-directed approach empowers learners to identify and address their individual language needs, making the learning experience more personalized and effective. The integration of authentic materials and a focus on clear objectives and learner autonomy contribute to a comprehensive language learning experience, ensuring that learners in both specialized and general language contexts are well-equipped for effective communication in real-world situations.

T. Hutchinson and A. Waters (1987) defined ESP as an "approach" rather than a "product." They explain that learners' needs are based on the specific language teaching approach, especially the necessity of learning English for specialized language. Methodology and teaching materials are viewed as means to achieve learning goals. Shifting the paradigm from "How is it learned?" to "What is learned?" focuses more on content or the "product" than on the structure or language itself [Cited 1, p 117].

Complementing this perspective, Richard M. Ryan (2000) defines the relationship between students and teacher motivation as either "positively or negatively synergistic" (Figure 2) [8, p.7].

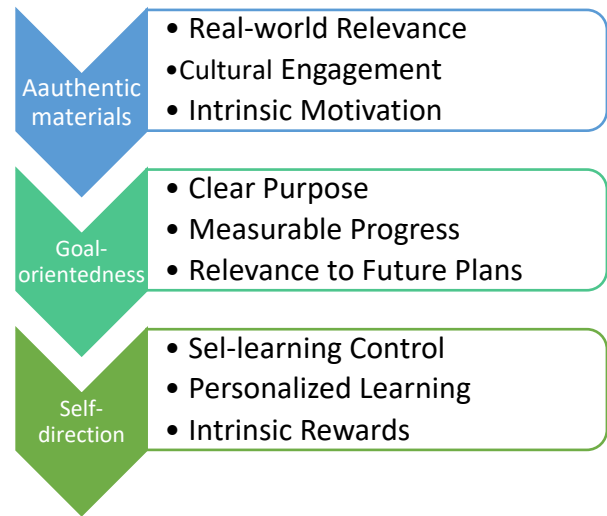


Figure 1. The Triad of Authenticity, Goal-Orientedness, and Self-Direction in Effective Language Instruction.

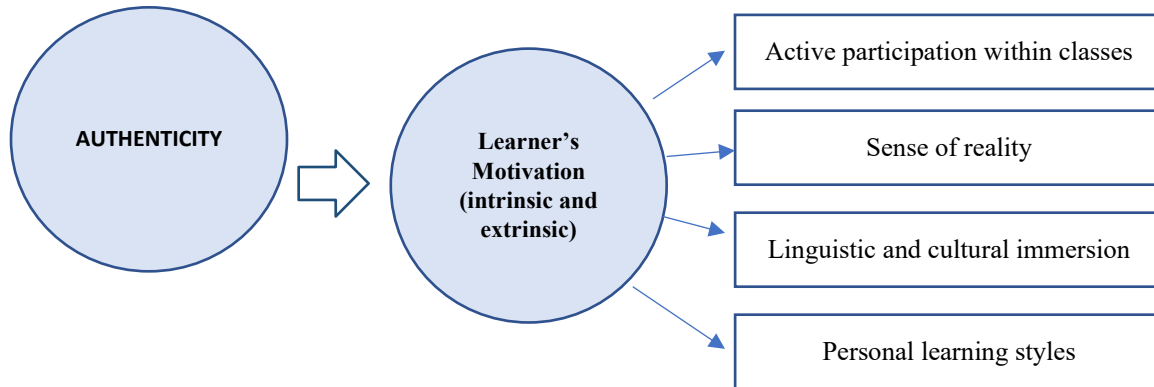


Figure 2. The Relationship between Authenticity and Student Motivation
(Adapted from Richard M. Ryan, 2000)

This complicated interplay between the learner's motivational factors, shape the overall learning experience and outcomes, one focused on the methodological approach and content of specialized language learning and the other on the synergistic nature of student-teacher motivation, might contribute to a holistic understanding of effective language education.



Figure 3. The correlation pyramid between the relevance of authentic materials, communication competence, and student autonomy.

Extrinsic motivation is linked to the desire to fit into the workplace or pass exams at the end of a course, while intrinsic motivation includes a set of values, such as gaining knowledge of a foreign culture and integrating into society; in other words, learners are motivated for personal purposes. Therefore, the authenticity of materials can enhance motivation within the classes since they are more interesting and relevant to their professional field. Additionally, this leads to a more active engagement of students in class, by improving and developing their communication skills..

Ultimately, effective and fluent communication not only facilitates understanding and collaboration but also allows students to approach their personal learning style, fostering autonomy or lifelong learning.

The methodology of using authentic materials in an EFL/ESP teaching environment has been analyzed and appreciated in various studies

(G.H. Widdowson, 1979; R. Kelly et al., 2002) to identify the following benefits for both students and teachers:

- Students are exposed to real language in natural contexts, utilizing the authentic language of native speakers.
- Texts use real, unmodified language. Authentic materials hold an interdisciplinary status, presenting data and information about various aspects of life, science, culture, etc., through the target language.
- Learners' motivation is heightened; students often feel that they are learning in a natural and more relevant way to their needs. The immediate relevance of what they study and what they will need in the future becomes evident.

- Authentic materials can be a source of inspiration for some students. The traditional teacher-student model is often reversed; students can initiate the idea of using a particular source and providing their own material.
- Authentic materials promote a more creative approach to the teaching-learning process. The same text can be used to explore various activities and tasks.
- It encourages student autonomy by stimulating further reading or viewing of video materials.
- Language is a continuously evolving system, a creation, and authentic materials reflect new developments.
- Specialized reading texts provide context for a better understanding and consolidation of specialized terminology. [3, pp. 11-23].

Teaching materials are an essential part of foreign language instruction. Currently, the internet provides truly unique opportunities and a rich variety of authentic materials, offering a new impetus for both educators and students. Most importantly, students can access a multitude of information related to their field of interest in an interactive and non-boring manner. Roughly speaking authentic materials can be classified into:

Audio/Video Authentic Materials: TV shows, radio broadcasts, songs, professional communications, TV advertisements, talk shows, relevant news (in public health), documentaries, motivational movies (such as "Gifted hands" – the story of a renowned surgeon); Phone messages (doctor appointments, emergency calls, etc.).

Visuals: Photographs, images, artworks, diagrams, schedules, maps, symbols, illustrations, drawings, brochures, pamphlets, company websites (e.g., pharmaceutical companies), etc.

Printable Materials: Newspaper articles, fill-in sheets, medical records, case study descriptions, magazines, written notes, and messages, etc.

Realia (Real Objects): Various objects taken from the real and professional world used to illustrate specific moments during task-based activities, facilitating the effective memorization of the taught content. These include medical tools (stethoscope, blood pressure monitor, etc.), folded paper, various boxes and packages, vessels, glasses, stones, plants, models, jars, and first aid items (gauze, bandages, splints, etc.).

Online Sources: Websites, online medical quizzes and tests, social networks, online scientific conferences, blogs, interactive games, online simulations, etc. The web resources offer a diverse range of texts targeting for different audiences and learners. Teachers can simply select texts from these websites that propose relevant articles, information, and vocabulary, allowing for their "authentic" use. [7, p.58]

In the realm of technological advancements, the integration of authentic audio/video materials and online resources not only enriches the learning experience but also aligns with the contemporary communication mediums prevalent in various professional fields. The use of realia, tangible objects from the real world, further enhances the authenticity, providing a tactile dimension to language learning.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the integration of authentic materials in language instruction stands as a pivotal strategy, offering a multifaceted approach to language learning. The diverse array of authentic materials, including audio/video sources, visual aids, printable resources, realia, and online platforms, facilitates a holistic language acquisition experience. This approach not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also aligns with the broader objectives of preparing students for real-world communication and professional engagement. Thus, when exposed to real-world language applications, students are better equipped to navigate the complexities of their particular future job-related fields.

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