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WHAT MAKES AN ESP CLASS AUTHENTIC?

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Abstract. This paper examines the adaptation of authentic materials for English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, focusing on the unique challenges and strategies involved in teaching English to students of Information Technology (IT). The study explores the principles of authenticity in language learning materials drawing on the insights of authoritative scholars in the field. Authentic materials, such as technical manuals, software documentation, industry reports, and real-world case studies, provide students with relevant linguistic exposure, bridging the gap between academic study and professional communication. Building on these foundational concepts, this paper delves into the specific linguistic and cognitive demands of IT students, highlighting their need for specialized vocabulary, discourse structures, and communication skills essential for both academic and workplace settings. It also discusses the role of context-driven learning in enhancing students' engagement and motivation. The study presents a framework for adapting authentic materials to suit different proficiency levels, ensuring accessibility while maintaining the richness of real world content. Furthermore, the paper proposes a range of practical exercises designed to help IT students expand their technical vocabulary, develop critical reading and listening skills, and refine their spoken and written communication. Finally, the paper aims to demonstrate how incorporating authentic materials into an ESP classroom can create a more immersive and effective learning environment equipping IT students with the linguistic and communicative competencies needed for their future careers.

Key words: authenticity, content-based teaching, subject-specific, input, authentic materials

1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), the focus is primarily on addressing the unique language requirements of learners in specific fields. To meet these specialized needs effectively, ESP practitioners must adopt a multifaceted approach that extends beyond traditional teaching methods. This involves taking on various roles (such as teacher, course designer, and materials provider) each contributing to a comprehensive educational experience that is tailored to the students' professional contexts. This brings us to the bedrock of every English language course – classroom materials. Developing classroom materials for ESP courses demands particular attention and effort from

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practitioners. Undoubtedly, there are plenty of materials, books from well-known and renowned publishers but they are not able to fully meet the professional, subject specific needs of learners. The given article focuses on authenticity of materials in teaching ESP courses and the ways of adapting them for Information Technology classes.

Since English is the language of technology, the needs of future IT specialists demand thorough consideration of content delivered in the ESP classrooms that would meet their future professional needs in the given field. However, instructors are usually not highly motivated to bring authentic materials into their classes. First of all, this process is time consuming. Teachers have to conduct the needs analysis of their learners' and then select appropriate materials from real life context. Furthermore, the assignments relating to the selected materials must be authentic as well. Secondly, developed authentic materials cannot be used for a long time, especially in the field of emerging technologies which develops very fast. As a result, ESP instructors have to update them periodically, based on the students' learning needs. Consequently, the majority of professional English courses are reliant on rote memory, which means simply memorizing specific terminologies or instructors just being focused solely on published textbooks. However, this alone cannot fully meet learners' professional needs in learning English since each particular field has its own peculiarities and specificities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The role of developing authentic materials in ESP classes

According to House (2008) authentic materials link the formal, artificial environment in the classroom with the real world where learners will use the language they are learning. Moreover, authentic materials have a wider range of grammatical and lexical features (Gilmore (2007:11). This makes it necessary to provide ESP students with a large number of authentic materials, many more in fact than the simulated-authentic texts usually studied in detail in language classrooms. This also necessitates a focus on content first, and on form afterwards. This is in line with what Safont and Esteve (2004) have shown in their study. Their research has proven the beneficial effect of using authentic material in the EAP classroom.

As mentioned before classroom material development begins with identifying language needs of future specialists in their professional field. Hence, there are two main requirements for developing ESP course materials: a) materials must be authentic and b) materials must be developed according to learners' needs. What should be also pointed out, instructors do not have any training on developing specific materials for teaching English for professional purposes. This lack of training can lead to a gap between the materials available and the actual needs of the learners. To bridge this gap, instructors should engage in continuous professional development, focusing on understanding the specific contexts and challenges faced by their students. Collaborating with industry professionals can also provide valuable insights, ensuring that the materials not only reflect real-world scenarios but are also relevant and applicable. By prioritizing authenticity and learner-centered approaches, instructors can create more effective and engaging ESP course materials that truly support their students' professional growth.

In addition to seeking insights from industry professionals, collaboration with subject teachers is essential for developing effective ESP course materials. Subject teachers possess a deep understanding of the specific content and skills required in their fields,

allowing them to provide valuable input on terminology, key concepts, and real-world applications. By working together, language instructors and subject teachers can create a cohesive curriculum that not only enhances language proficiency but also aligns closely with the professional competencies needed in various industries. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that learners receive a holistic education that prepares them for the challenges they will face in their careers. To achieve this, a teacher has to define specific learners' needs and then develop authentic materials for the course. According to Tomlinson & Masuhara (2010) authentic materials are designed not only to transmit declarative knowledge about the target language but also to provide an experience of the language in use. One of the first who stated the effectiveness of using authentic materials in class Henry Sweet (1899 *apud* Gilmore 2004)) was convinced that such materials "do justice to every feature of the language" while using non-authentic materials is the repetition of grammar structures, vocabulary excluding even more important aspects.

Preference of authentic materials to already published ones gives us an opportunity to bring the classes, especially ESP lessons, closer to the real world, motivate students and let them immediately immerse themselves in their professional environment. In other words, learners in ESP classes should learn foreign language, its grammar, vocabulary or specific terminology in a professional context not separately. In addition to this, Shomoossi and Ketabi (2007 *apud* Oxford 2001) claimed that group learning, task based learning and content-based learning encourage authentic interaction in the learning process. Furthermore, Richards (2001) believes that communication in the classroom must stimulate the communication observable in the real world outside.

In order to achieve the abovementioned benefits it is essential to choose appropriate methods as well as ways of utilizing authentic material. For instance, content-based instruction (CBI) is one of the effective ways to do that. According to Tarnopolsky (2009) it is based on four principles: a) systematic selection of the content oriented to develop students' professional knowledge; b) professional authenticity of learning materials; c) content-based teaching; and d) authenticity of professional-related activities in ESP classes. As experienced ESP instructors, the authors fully agree with the Tarnopolsky's proposed principles since bringing authentic content to the classroom can be very encouraging and motivating for students. This is in line with Guariento & Morey (2001), who find using authentic materials in class extremely motivating as they bring the real world into the classroom. According to Gulikers et.al (2005 apud Huang 2002) two principles can motivate students in the learning process. The first principle is problem-solving orientation of the task where students are more engaged when they solve problems from real life. The second principle is that learners are more motivated when they gain knowledge that helps them solve problems in their professional career. This means that the abovementioned viewpoints prove that using authentic materials in the classroom, namely in ESP lessons, are crucial and more effective than teaching language with the help of ordinary textbooks since authentic materials do not deal only with content but also professional tasks to be carried out by students. Thus, integration of authentic materials in ESP classrooms plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between language learning and realworld professional demands. By prioritizing authenticity, instructors can create an engaging and meaningful learning environment that fosters both linguistic proficiency and practical application. However, this requires careful selection of materials, collaboration with industry professionals and subject teachers, as well as on-going professional development for educators. Implementing content-based instruction and problem-solving tasks further enhances student motivation and learning outcomes. Ultimately, by embedding authentic

materials and real-world tasks into ESP courses, instructors can better equip students with the skills and knowledge necessary for success in their professional fields.

Finally, as ESP practitioners navigate their multifaceted roles as teachers, course designers, and classroom materials developers—they must focus only not on selecting appropriate authentic resources but also facilitating meaningful interactions that mirror real-world scenarios. The effectiveness of authentic materials is further amplified when coupled with pedagogical strategies such as task-based and content-based instruction, which foster an immersive learning environment. Moreover, the motivation of learners is deeply tied to their perception and interaction with these materials, highlighting the necessity for thoughtful integration into the curriculum. Ultimately, the use of authentic materials in ESP not only enriches the educational experience but also equips students with the language skills and contextual knowledge essential for their future careers, reaffirming the importance of adapting teaching approaches to meet the evolving needs of specific professional fields.

To effectively implement authentic materials in ESP courses, educators must adopt a systematic approach to material selection that aligns with learners' professional objectives. This process involves not only identifying suitable resources but also ensuring that they meet the specific linguistic and cognitive demands of the students. By integrating authentic materials with well-defined instructional strategies, educators can create an immersive and dynamic learning experience that fosters both engagement and skill acquisition. However, the success of such an approach relies heavily on a thorough understanding of learners' needs, as well as continuous adaptation of materials to reflect industry developments and technological advancements. This brings us to the critical first step in designing an effective ESP course—conducting a comprehensive needs analysis.

2. Methodology

Methodology consists of several key stages beginning with a thorough needs analysis to identify the specific language requirements and professional contexts of the learners. The analysis includes conducting interviews and surveys to gather insights into learners' specific language difficulties, learning objectives, and preferred methodologies, as recommended by Tomlinson (1998). Following the needs analysis, the next step involves making informed decisions regarding the language context in which the ESP course will be delivered, such as lectures or business meetings. Based on these contextual factors, we categorize the language to be presented, focusing on essential elements such as grammar, lexis, situational context, topics, and communicative skills.

Methodology, additionally, emphasizes certain language skills and sub-skills that will be the focus of the course. These may include listening, reading, writing and speaking, each tailored to align with the professional needs identified earlier. Moreover, types of classroom activities (such as pair work or group discussions) are singled out to facilitate active engagement and application of language knowledge.

As far as material design is concerned, Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) four essential elements are mosly adhered to: input, content, language, and task. *Input* encompasses various communication data—such as texts, videos, and dialogues—appropriate to the defined needs, allowing learners to engage in information processing and utilize language-specific skills. *Content* is crafted to convey subject matter, encouraging meaningful

communication throughout the learning process. *Language* focus facilitates the application of foreign language skills in performing communicative tasks, while *tasks* are structured to enable students to integrate both content and language knowledge effectively. Once the materials are prepared, they undergo a piloting phase to assess their effectiveness. Feedback is collected from students, instructors, and stakeholders during and after the course, which informs necessary revisions. This iterative process ensures that the materials remain relevant and effective in meeting the evolving needs of the learners.

Historically, the first step prior to selecting learning materials, teaching methods and assessment criteria is to conduct learners' needs analysis. This is aligned with Tomlinson's (1998) postulation that materials development shows its effectiveness when it is developed on the basis of thorough analysis of learners' needs, that is, specific language difficulties, learning objectives and preferred learning methodology. Thus, according to Bernard and Zemach (2003) the following steps are highly recommended for preparing authentic ESP teaching materials:

- Defining the needs and preference of the learners conducting interview/survey;
- Making decision on language context(lectures, business meetings);
- Deciding on categories for presenting the language (grammar, lexis, situation, topic, communicative skills);
- Deciding what language skills and sub-skills the course will be focused on (listening, reading, writing or speaking);
- Defining types of activity that will be used during the class (pair work, group work etc);
- Deciding on the page layout of worksheets and preparing templates;
- Preparing the material;
- Piloting the materials; collecting feedback;
- Revising the material;
- Using the material;
- Getting feedback from students, teachers and sponsors during and after the course;
- Reviewing the course periodically.

Moreover, development of effective ESP course materials requires a structured learnercentered approach that begins with a thorough needs analysis. By carefully selecting appropriate content, language elements, and tasks, instructors can create materials that align with students' professional goals and enhance their language proficiency in a relevant context. The recommended framework by Bernard and Zemach (2003) and Hutchinson and Waters (1987) provide valuable guidance in designing authentic ESP materials that are both practical and engaging. Regular feedback and revisions further ensure the continuous improvement of course content, ultimately leading to a more effective and meaningful learning experience for ESP students. Furthermore, the effective design of ESP materials hinges on a thorough understanding of learners' needs and clearly defined goals, which serve as the foundation for selecting appropriate materials and methods. The structured approach recommended by Bernard and Zemach (2003) ensures that the materials developed are not only relevant but also engaging, stimulating active learning and encouraging students to take ownership of their educational experience. By integrating Hutchinson and Waters' (1987) four essential elements-input, content, language, and task-educators can create a dynamic learning environment that promotes meaningful communication and skill application. This studentcentered methodology fosters a deeper connection between language learning and professional contexts, ultimately equipping learners with the competencies necessary to succeed in their

respective fields. Regular feedback and periodic review of materials further enhance their effectiveness, ensuring that the learning experience remains aligned with the evolving needs of both students and the professional landscape.

Ultimately, periodic reviews of the course and course materials are conducted to ensure ongoing alignment with learners' needs and professional developments. This comprehensive methodology not only supports the development of effective ESP materials but also fosters an engaging and responsive learning environment that empowers students to achieve their language goals in professional contexts.

3. RESULTS

For IT students (particularly software developers), a strong grasp of reading and understanding terminology is essential for several reasons. First, the tech industry is characterized by rapid advancements and evolving languages, frameworks, and tools, making it crucial for developers to stay updated with the latest developments. Familiarity with technical terminology enables them to effectively read documentation, engage with coding communities, and understand best practices. Furthermore, comprehending specific terms allows developers to communicate clearly with peers, collaborate on projects, and troubleshoot issues more efficiently. As a result, a solid foundation in relevant terminology not only enhances individual competency but also fosters collaboration and innovation within teams, ultimately contributing to successful project outcomes.

Here is an interesting authentic activity on UI design, which is one of the essential and vocabulary rich topics in Software Engineering studies.

3.1. Pre-Reading Tasks

Prediction activity

Instructions: Look at the title "User Interface (UI) Design" and skim the first few sentences of the text. Predict what aspects of UI design might be covered. Consider aspects like *visual design*, *usability, or interaction*. Discuss with a partner or jot down your thoughts.

This task activates prior knowledge and sets a purpose for reading. It allows students to predict some terminology according to the context and share their ideas about the topic with their peers.

3.2. Vocabulary Pre-Teaching

Instructions: Familiarize yourself with the following terms: "visual design," "typography," "responsive design," "accessibility," and "user experience." Create a list of these terms and write a brief definition or explanation for each based on your prior knowledge.

The given activity helps build familiarity with key terms that will aid comprehension. After that students read the text in detail paying attention to special terminology related to the topic and then they match the list of terms with their definitions. It is considered as a first stage of remembering the new terminology. By matching new terms with their definitions students remember them within the context.

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User Interface (UI) design is a critical component in the development of digital products, ranging from websites to mobile applications and software interfaces. It focuses on creating visually appealing and user-friendly layouts that facilitate effortless interaction between users and technology.

Key elements of UI design include visual design, which encompasses typography, color schemes, icons, and imagery. These elements are carefully chosen to convey information effectively and create a cohesive visual identity for the product. Functional design involves the arrangement of interactive elements such as buttons, menus, and input fields, ensuring they are intuitive and easy to navigate.

UI designers also consider responsive design principles to ensure optimal usability across different devices and screen sizes. This involves adapting the layout and functionality of the interface to provide a consistent and seamless experience, whether accessed on a desktop computer, tablet, or smartphone.

Accessibility is another crucial aspect of UI design, ensuring that interfaces are usable by people with diverse abilities. Designers strive to make interfaces perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust for all users, regardless of their physical or cognitive capabilities.

In summary, effective UI design combines aesthetic appeal with usability, aiming to create interfaces that not only look good but also enhance user experience through intuitive interaction and accessibility.

Match each vocabulary term (1-9) with its correct definition or description (A-I).

Vocabulary Terms:

- 1. Typography
- 2. Visual design
- 3. Functional design
- 4. Responsive design
- 5. Accessibility
- 6. Icons
- 7. Interactive elements
- 8. Color schemes
- 9. Cohesive visual identity

Definitions/Descriptions:

- A. The arrangement of buttons, menus, and input fields to ensure usability.
- B. Ensuring interfaces are usable by people with diverse abilities.
- C. Graphic symbols used to represent functions or features.
- D. Consistent look and feel across all design elements.
- E. Choosing typography, colors, icons, and imagery to create a unified visual style.
- F. Harmonious combinations used to create a pleasing visual appearance.
- G. Adapting the layout and functionality for different devices and screen sizes.
- H. Style and appearance of text used in design.
- I. Components like buttons and menus that users can interact with.

In order to help students master the new terminology they can also do the following activity.

Terms: *Typography, Visual design, Functional design, Responsive design, Accessibility, Icons, Interactive elements, Color schemes, Cohesive visual identity*

Sentences:

1. The ______ of a website includes typography, color schemes, icons, and imagery to create a unified look and feel.

2. _____ involves arranging buttons, menus, and input fields to ensure intuitive user interaction.

3. ______ ensures that a website or application adapts seamlessly to different screen sizes and devices.

4. ______ is crucial for designing interfaces that are usable by people with diverse abilities.

5. _____ are graphic symbols used to represent functions or features within an interface.

6. _____ like buttons and dropdown menus enhance user engagement by providing interactive functionalities.

7. Choosing appropriate ______ is essential for creating a visually appealing and harmonious interface design.

8. A ______ refers to the consistent visual style and elements across all pages and screens of a product.

Additionally, instructors can ask learners to do multiple-choice tests with the terminology they are familiar with combined with the new one. Multiple-choice questions can quickly assess a broad range of terminology, allowing instructors to evaluate learners' understanding of key terms and concepts in a time-efficient manner. They provide an opportunity for immediate feedback, helping learners to quickly identify and correct misunderstandings or gaps in their knowledge since technical terminology is crucial for learners in the field of software development and design. One effective method to acquire new terminology is through collaborative exercises that encourage learners to explore the nuances of related terms. By comparing and contrasting terminology, students can clarify meanings and improve their ability to apply these concepts effectively in the real-world scenarios. Here, learners should aim to explain new terminology in their own words, use it in context, and understand how it fits within a larger framework of software engineering. Techniques might include summarizing definitions, discussing terms with peers, or creating concept maps that show relationships between terms. One of the proposed exercises is comparing and contrasting two terms. For instance, in pairs students should *compare and contrast* the following terminology:

- 1) Visual design and Functional Design
- 2) Responsive Design and Accessibility
- 3) Icons and Interactive Elements
- 4) Color Schemes and Cohesive Visual Identity

By examining similarities and differences, learners gain a more nuanced understanding of each term. This helps clarify what each term specifically means and how it relates to other terms in the same domain. The active engagement, required in comparing and contrasting, helps to strengthen memory and associating terms with their distinction, which makes it easier to remember and apply them correctly later on. By understanding how terms are related, learners can expand their vocabulary and use it more precisely in context. Knowing how terms compare

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can help learners apply them more effectively in practical situations, improving both comprehension and communication. For instance, in order to practice their knowledge in UI design, students can evaluate some bad designs in UI and discuss them with each other expressing their opinion. The following exercise can be a good practice, which is closely related to design:

Task. Evaluate pictures of websites and mobile applications given below and choose the appropriate answer.



Fig. 3 UI design mistakes

Fig. 4 UI design mistakes



4. DISCUSSION

Authenticity in ESP classrooms is a crucial factor in ensuring that students develop language skills relevant to their professional fields. Unlike general English courses, ESP instruction must closely mirror real-world communication, incorporating authentic materials, tasks, and contexts that students will encounter in their careers. While textbooks provide structured content, they often lack the flexibility and real-world applicability that is required for ESP learners. To bridge this gap, instructors must supplement traditional materials with industry-specific resources, real-life case studies, and interactive tasks that engage students in meaningful language use. This discussion explores the key elements that contribute to authenticity in ESP classes, emphasizing the role of materials, tasks, and instructional approaches in creating a learning environment that prepares students for professional communication.

The activities employed in the teaching process highlight a multifaceted approach to education. Pre-reading tasks, such as prediction activities and vocabulary pre-teaching, play a critical role in preparing students for deeper engagement with the content. Prediction activities, for instance, encourage learners to actively anticipate the key aspects of UI design, such as visual design, usability, and interaction. This activation of prior knowledge establishes a cognitive framework that facilitates better comprehension during subsequent lessons. By predicting content and terminology, the students are also primed to connect new information to their existing knowledge base fostering meaningful learning.

The vocabulary-focused exercises represent a particularly effective strategy in technical education, where mastery of specialized terminology is essential. Matching tasks, sentence completion, and multiple-choice questions are all designed to reinforce familiarity with terms

like "responsive design," "accessibility," and "cohesive visual identity". These activities ensure that students not only understand definitions but also recognize the practical applications of these concepts. The iterative exposure to key terms and the use of those terms in various contexts promote long-term retention, equipping students with the linguistic precision necessary for professional communication in UI design.

One of the key findings in this paper is the effectiveness of collaborative and active learning exercises in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For instance, the task requiring students to compare and contrast terms such as "visual design" and "functional design" encourages learners to analyze the nuances and overlaps between related concepts. This deeper engagement fosters a more comprehensive understanding of how these elements contribute to effective UI design. Similarly, collaborative discussions on responsive design and accessibility emphasize the interconnectedness of these principles, reinforcing the importance of inclusivity and usability in modern interface design. Additionally, the evaluation of poorly designed interfaces serves as another cornerstone of student learning. By analyzing examples of flawed UI, such as unaligned elements or poor touch targets students are encouraged to apply theoretical knowledge in the practical context. This task not only sharpens their analytical skills but also fosters an appreciation for the significance of thoughtful design choices. The ability to critique real-world examples prepares students to address complex challenges in their future careers, bridging the gap between classroom learning and industry expectations.

Moreover, our findings extend beyond individual classroom practices and look upon broader trends in UI design education. One notable aspect is the emphasis on accessibility and responsive design—both of which are critical in today's digital landscape. By teaching students to prioritize inclusivity, educators are instilling values that align with contemporary industry standards. The focus on designing for users with diverse abilities reflects a growing awareness of the need for equity in technology, ensuring that interfaces are operable, perceivable, and understandable for all.

Another key implication is the focus on active learning and student engagement. The activities outlined in the results—such as matching exercises, collaborative discussions, and critical evaluations—demonstrate a shift away from passive, lecture-based instruction. Instead, these methods place students at the center of the learning process, empowering them to take ownership of their education. This pedagogical approach aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize the importance of active, hands-on experiences in building meaningful understanding.

Lastly, while the results underscore the effectiveness of these strategies, there are areas that warrant further exploration. For instance, the long-term impact of vocabulary acquisition exercises on professional performance remains unclear. Future studies could track how well students retain and apply technical terminology in real-world scenarios, providing insights into the lasting benefits of these methods. Future research could also explore the scalability of these strategies in larger, more diverse classrooms, examining how they can be adapted to meet the needs of varied student populations. Another potential avenue for investigation is the role of technology in enhancing these teaching strategies. For instance, the use of interactive digital tools to teach UI design principles could further engage students and provide immediate feedback, enhancing their learning experience. Virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) could also be explored as tools for simulating real-world design challenges, offering students a more immersive and practical learning environment.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings in this paper highlight the crucial role of authentic materials in the ESP instruction, particularly in the context of IT courses. By integrating authentic texts, technical documentation, and industry-specific tasks, educators can bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application, fostering both linguistic proficiency and career readiness. The findings underscore the importance of careful material selection, ongoing curriculum adaptation and collaboration with industry experts to ensure relevance and engagement.

The research conducted for the purposes of this paper demonstrates that a studentcentered, content-based approach—complemented by interactive learning strategies enhances motivation and comprehension. Activities such as vocabulary pre-teaching, problem-solving tasks, and critical evaluations of real-world UI designs contribute to a deeper understanding of professional terminology and communication strategies. Additionally, the emphasis on accessibility and responsive design prepares students for the continuously evolving demands of the digital industry.

In conclusion, the effective implementation of authentic materials in ESP courses not only enhances students' technical language competence but also equips them with the analytical and communication skills essential for success in their professional fields. Thus, future research should explore the long-term impact of these methods and the potential for emerging technologies, such as AI-driven learning tools and virtual simulations, to further enhance ESP instruction. By continuously refining teaching strategies, educators can ensure that ESP courses remain dynamic, practical, and aligned with the ever-changing needs of specialized industries.

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