

Authentic Resources in Technology-based ESP Learning

Vilhelmina Vaičiūnienė, Daiva Užpalienė

Abstract. The authors of the article aim to present ESP students' attitude towards and impact of different authentic materials on their motivation, to identify advantages and disadvantages of using these authentic resources for learning purposes, to discuss the need for new ways of information finding and to research ICT tools used by students to access online materials. The article also focuses on the significance of technology in ESP learning which encourages students to come across different authentic materials related to their study subject, develop interaction and critical thinking skills and become more autonomous and responsible for their own learning. The ESP teachers' considerations and observations how to use the web resources to promote ESP learners' motivation are based on the research findings obtained through the questionnaire survey. To support this view the authors present the analysis of the survey findings that reflect students' ESP learning needs and motivation. The respondents of the survey were the first year students of the two Bachelor study programmes: Finance and Economics and Business Informatics at Mykolas Romeris University. The findings obtained through the questionnaire reveal that the respondents from both study programmes indicate similar benefits offered by authentic resources: educational and communicative value, development of professional knowledge, valuable source of language input. The web-based learning environment has great potential to support students' performance of tasks and enhance their learning outcomes. However, the collected data indicate that ESP students still prefer the safe world of textbooks ranking profession-based Internet sites and general Internet sites in the second and third position.

Key words: *English for Specific Purposes (ESP), authentic resources, web resources, ICT, motivation, autonomous learning.*

Introduction

Today's education at large experiences challenges caused by new technologies, abundance of information sources, thus being forced to search for new and effective methods of teaching delivery and learning.

The application of ICT as a driving force in higher education implying fundamental changes in the area of educational technologies has been discussed since the last decade of the 20th century.

ICT application for teaching/learning purposes is becoming one of the major issues of contemporary education. Research concerning ICT use for language learning is becoming a question of the day. Complexity of learners' attitudes and expectations that help understand language learning aspects is highlighted in literature on foreign language teaching (Hurd, 2003). In Lithuania ICT use in language teaching settings is counting its first years; therefore research into the ICT impact on learning is rather scarce.

English has become "the established language of science and technology" (Fortanet-Gómez and Räisänen, 2008). ESP concentrates more on language in context than on teaching grammar and language structures; therefore, authentic contexts and language use in typical work situations raise interest in learning ESP (Vaičiūnienė, 2009; Fiorito, 2005).

The paper discusses ESP learning experience at Mykolas Romeris University and presents research findings obtained through the questionnaire survey. **The aim of the**

research is to investigate students' attitude to different authentic materials and prove the need for new ways of information finding for learning purposes. This aim is best achieved through analysis of learners' attitude to authentic resources and technologies, their advantages and disadvantages, encountered problems and learning outcomes. **The participants of the survey** were Mykolas Romeris University students of two Bachelor study programmes: Finance and Economics and Business Informatics.

The research tasks:

1. To analyse students' attitude towards and impact of authentic materials on their motivation.
2. To identify advantages and disadvantages that students encounter while working with authentic materials.
3. To research ICT tools used by students to access online materials.

The method of the research was quantitative and comparative analysis of the data received from the **questionnaire survey** administered to students of two ESP programmes.

Authentic resources used in ESP learning

Nunan and Miller (1995) define authentic materials as those which "were not created or edited expressly for language learners. Authentic materials illustrate how English is used naturally by native speakers." This means that most everyday objects in the target language can be qualified as authentic materials and can be used not only

for general English but for ESP learning/teaching as well. There are unlimited authentic resources; it is simply a matter of searching creativity:

- *Day to day objects* (e.g. Business cards, banks leaflets, photographs, receipts, catalogues, currency, reports, financial statements, instructions, banks accounts, application forms, pictures, registration forms, letters/emails, diagrams, agreements, brochures, bank instructions, etc.);
- *Broader* (e.g. newspapers, journals, TV and radio broadcast, films, documentaries, internet websites, general or special literature);
- *Easily accessible websites* (e.g. authentic specialist publications in the field, statistics, reports, surveys, etc.).

One of the most challenging tasks constantly facing ESP teachers is how to capture the students' interest and stimulate their motivation to learn. The materials derived from the real worlds, brought into the classroom by teachers or ESP students, can reflect the real language use and may contribute to the overall learning process. With the advantage of the world websites, ESP teachers/students have at their disposal large amount and variety of material available: texts, visual materials, newspapers, magazines, live radio and TV, video clips and much more. Throwing ESP students in at the deep end of authenticity makes them develop their own strategies for dealing with real language and on the other hand prevents students from being reliant on simplified language.

Easily accessible websites can help students to find relevant authentic task-based materials. The role of the learner as the text provider in this case is important, because in the day to day learning/teaching the exposure to authentic materials can make the task more interesting and motivating.

The Internet search provides almost unlimited resources for profession-based or specific topics. The interaction online (e.g. the teacher searches for sites on a specific topic, makes questions, and posts the students online) can successfully replace authentic printed materials brought into the classroom and make the ESL classroom significantly livelier. Computer-based information (e.g. TV and radio interviews, the news, video clips, advertising, TV copies on YouTube, etc) provides authentic resources to develop listening/reading/writing/speaking skills in the classrooms as well as autonomously. Technologies for reading authentic texts are ideal. "Whereas newspapers and any other printed materials, e.g. textbooks date very quickly, the internet is continuously updated, more visually stimulating and being interactive, therefore promoting a more active approach to reading rather than a passive one"(Berardo, 2006). Authentic materials online keep students informed about what is happening in the world around us so they have educational value. "Extracting information from a real text in a new/different language can be extremely motivating, therefore increasing students' motivation for learning by exposing them to "real" language" (Guariento and Morley, 2001).

Anything can be used as authentic material, but from a practical/economical point of view, the most useful resource is the Internet, with large amounts of different text types, language styles, and videos of interviews that cannot be found in textbooks which become very dated and do not include improper English. The variety of internet-based text types means that it is easier to find something that will interest the learner and may even encourage for further reading, listening or watching. It can also promote other skills such as skimming/scanning, extensive/intensive reading, summary, essay, email writing, outlining, mapping, sorting, adding information and may result in oral performance, such as newscasts, conversations, interviews, presentations, lectures, reports, etc. The resources of authentic spoken English may stimulate and maintain motivation, especially if the activity does not require identifying or producing every word and when control is transferred from teachers to students by giving ESP students access to technologies. One-way/two-way interactive listening is effective communication that develops competence in listening and interacting with others as well as in critical thinking – real talk, real questions. The purpose of such activities is to provide opportunities for ESP students to access different online materials, take responsibility in the interaction and to develop independent learning skills.

The emphasis that students do not need to understand every word is essential in building their confidence and helps to produce a sense of achievement. If the message interests the learner it can also be related to the learner's own experiences.

Some of the materials may be too difficult to understand, because of the vocabulary not relevant to the students' immediate needs.

It might be very time consuming to search, select and collect necessary authentic materials. Special preparation is also necessary to use them.

Authentic spoken English that includes natural intonation, repetition of forms and phrases, redundancy, a little overlap between speakers, background noises, incomplete sentences, false starts, accents, and dialects are the factors that influence listening text difficulty.

There are many headlines, adverts, signs, abbreviations, etc that can require good knowledge of the particular subject or cultural background.

Authentic materials can become outdated easily, e.g. news stories, articles.

The impact of technology on teaching and learning ESP

Information technologies provide with a variety of opportunities and forms of learning; therefore it sometimes is a highly important factor, influencing learning from the cultural, social and value perspective (Hennesy et al., 2005; Heemskerk et al., 2005). Hennesy et al. (2005) highlight significance of ICT as a *cultural artefact* that is gradually influencing pedagogy in parallel with changes in teachers' practice, thinking, approach, roles, and methods of technology use. Some authors claim that learning

outcomes depend on the following: learning environment, learners' attitude to the aim of a task and motivation (Harper et al., 2000).

Rapid changes in the technological area challenge educational traditions in teaching. ICT application for teaching/learning purposes is becoming one of the major issues of contemporary education.

“Given the volatility of the technological environment in the past decade, any attempt at predicting what the next ten years will bring to the field of foreign language teaching and learning is probably foolhardy.” (Report to the Charles E. Culpeper Foundation, 1998)

Moreover, these changes pose questions that cannot be given readymade answers. Research concerning ICT use for language learning is becoming a question of the day. Complexity of learners' attitudes and expectations that help understand language learning aspects is highlighted in literature on foreign language teaching (Hurd, 2003).

Prensky (2008) argues that “today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors”. This author states that “future” content is to a large extent digital and technological.

The use of technology enhances student motivation for language study by enabling them to choose activities, media sources and content topics most appropriate to their interests and learning styles. Another educationalist Mark Warschauer (1996) considers that hypermedia creates authentic learning environment and allows „to combine reading, writing, speaking and listening in a single activity“. Technology also contributes to the *authenticity of the learning process* by enabling the approximation of “real life” situations and exposure to authentic cultural artefacts.

Research methods

Seeking to determine students' opinion about the resources used in ESP classroom and the problems they face a survey was conducted among the university students.

The research sample was homogenous; composed of 122 participants – the first year full-time mode students of Bachelor study cycle: Business Informatics – 62 students, Finance Economics – 60 students (see Table 1.). The participants were 51 female and 71 male students. The age of the surveyed students ranged between the ages of 18–21.

Table 1. Survey respondents

Study programme			
Business Informatics (BI)		Finance Economics (FE)	
Frequency	%	Frequency	%
62	50,8	60	49,2

The research instrument was composed of 14 close-ended questions and designed to gather data about Finance Economics and Business Informatics students' attitude towards authentic learning materials and learning technologies used to access them. The research findings are presented using frequencies and based on the comparative analysis of students' responses from two

different study programmes. The comparative analysis of students' responses revealed their priorities in ESP development process.

Discussion of the results

Benefits of using the authentic sources in ESP classes

The respondents' preferences to the benefits of using authentic materials from both study programmes were almost the same. The answers show that almost a half of the surveyed students think that authentic materials have *educational value* because, firstly they are unlimited *resources for professional knowledge development* (BI – 40; FE – 42), and secondly, they *keep students informed about what is happening in the world* (BI – 27; FE – 23).

In the second position of ranking both study programmes respondents indicate the benefit of encouragement to *communicate, interact, share thoughts and exchange information* (BI – 30; FE – 30), and in turn, build greater *confidence in using ESP* (BI – 24; FE – 28) and *promote language process itself* (BI – 24; FE – 28).

Comparative analysis between the two study programmes respondents' responses reveals that both groups appreciate opportunities to use *a big variety of text types, language styles offered by authentic sources*.

Language-related problems in dealing with authentic resources

The research findings obtained through the questionnaire survey reveal the *language-related problems* that ESP students from both study programmes face in dealing with authentic resources that the authors present in order of priority. The obtained data indicates (BI – 28; FE – 35) that some of the authentic materials may be *too difficult to understand, because of very specific vocabulary* not relevant to the students' immediate needs. The survey results illustrate that natural intonation, repetition of forms and phrases, redundancy, dialects, a little overlap between speakers, incomplete sentences, etc. are the factors of *authentic spoken English* can result in problems while dealing with authentic resources (BI – 19; FE – 25). The respondents (BI – 19; FE – 13) indicate that special preparation is necessary to cope with *complex authentic materials* and it is *time consuming*. One of the problems that two study programmes respondents (BI – 20; FE – 13) highlight is that authentic materials can *become outdated easily*. (e.g. news). Some students (BI – 10; FE – 9) point out the *length of the text* as the main factor influencing the difficulty of authentic materials.

Information resources motivating students in ESP learning

A very important variable in the overall context of the survey was related to students' opinion about learning resources that motivate them in acquisition of ESP. Research findings obtained through the questionnaire survey indicate ESP students still prefer the safe world of textbooks and resent reality of real English. The answers to this question show that more than a half of the surveyed students (60 %) from both study programmes see their *course book* as the most motivating resource (BI – 36;

FE –39). In the second position they rank *profession-based internet sites* (BI – 31; FE – 39; 57 %) and *general Internet sites* are given the third position (BI – 29; FE – 34; 50 %). Such resources as *videos/audios* (BI – 26; FE – 21), *authentic visual materials* (BI – 21; FE – 21) *online encyclopaedias* (BI – 24; FE – 15) also motivate students to improve their ESP skills. Comparison between the study programmes reveals that Business Informatics students also value *Internet-based language learning tools* (BI – 19), whereas the respondents from Finance Economics study programme appreciate authentic *printed materials*, such as newspapers, magazines etc. (FE – 26).

ICT tools used in learning ESP

Next question focused on ICT tools that students use to access online authentic materials. A famous educationalist and philosopher Prensky (2001) states that contemporary students can use a variety of tools to learn independently.

“Today’s technology, though, offers students all kinds of new, highly effective tools they can use to learn on their own – from the Internet with almost all the information, to search and research tools to sort out what is true and relevant, to analysis tools to help make sense of it, to creation tools to present one’s findings in a variety of media, to social tools to network and collaborate with people around the world.” (Prensky, 2008)

The majority of Business Informatics (BI) students (61) and more than a half of Finance Economics (FE – 36) use search engines; the Internet is in the second position (BI – 45; FE – 40); wikis also enjoy popularity among the respondents from both study programmes (BI – 38; FE – 22). YouTube is slightly more popular among Finance Economics students (BI – 24; FE – 29). The least usable tools are: blogs (BI – 9; FE – 9); social forums (BI – 18; FE – 8) and emailing (BI – 13; FE – 9) (see Figure 1).

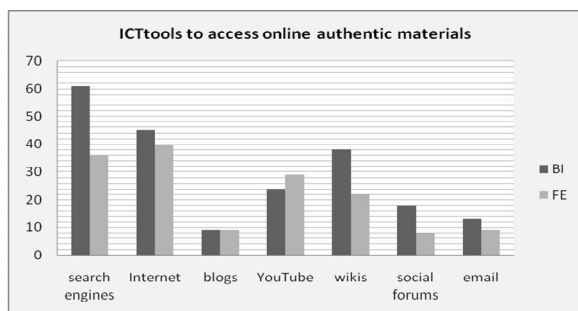


Figure 1. ICT tools to access authentic materials

The research revealed that the most popular technological tools among the surveyed students are search engines which are used by 97 respondents (80 %), the Internet by 85 students (70 %) and wikis by 60 students (49 %).

Difficulties experienced in exploiting web resources

The surveyed students were asked about difficulties they experienced in exploiting web-based authentic resources. Their responses indicate that the majority of them experience problems of “*information overload*” and “*the link does not function*”. The first problem implies psychological factor, whereas the second is purely technological. The other problems (*URL is obsolete*; *lack*

of computer skills) are not so frequent. The findings are presented in Figure 2. Comparative analysis between the two study programmes respondents’ responses highlighted similarity of encountered problems. However, more than half of the surveyed Finance Economics students (55 %) experience the problem of information overload. The obtained data indicates that there are twice as many students from Business Informatics who experienced problems with links if compared to Finance Economics (BI – 38,7 %; FE – 18,3 %). This finding most probably indicates Business Informatics students more extensive work with the Internet in relation to their study subject.

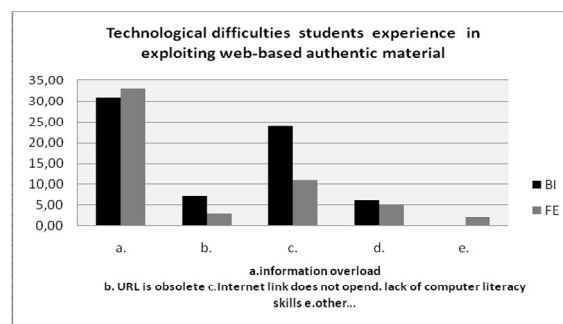


Figure 2. Difficulties experienced in exploiting web resources

On the basis of the research results the authors illustrate the significance of technologies and claim that the web-based learning environment has great potential to support students’ performance of tasks and enhance their learning outcomes, offer a valuable source of language input, reinforce the direct relationship between the language classroom and outside world, develop language skills and promote different types of interaction that enhance learning, and, in turn, lead to increased students’ motivation in the subject matter and ESP language proficiency.

Conclusions

The authors of this article acknowledge the importance of technologies as an opportunity for learners to find authentic materials and develop proficiency in ESP language studies. The survey findings reveal that:

- The respondents from both study programmes indicate similar benefits of using authentic materials: educational value, communication, exchange of information, unlimited resources for professional knowledge development, opportunities of using a big variety of text types, language styles offered by authentic resources that result in greater students’ confidence and motivation in ESP learning.
- ESP students encounter language-related problems such as very specific vocabulary, authentic spoken English, length of the text, outdated materials that cause difficulties while dealing with authentic resources.
- Variety of ICT tools among which search engines (40 %) the Internet – 70 % and wikis – 49 % are the most often applied encourage students to come across different authentic materials related to their study subject and become more autonomous and responsible for their own learning.

- However, the most motivating resource is still a course book; profession-based Internet sites and general Internet sites are ranked in the second and third position.

Authentic resources in technology-based ESP learning context, besides the main language skills, promote a more active approach to autonomous and constructive learning.

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Autentiškų šaltinių vaidmuo taikant technologijas profesinės anglų kalbos mokymosi procese

Santrauka

Šio straipsnio autorių tikslas yra ištirti dviejų mokymosi programų – Finansų ekonomikos ir Verslo informatikos pirmo kurso studentų požiūrį į aktualios ir autentiškos informacijos gausą bei jos prieigą naudojant technologijas, kurias studentai gali pasitelkti profesinės anglų kalbos žinioms plėsti bei įgūdžiams tobulinti ne tik auditorijose, bet ir savarankiškai. Internetas pateikia besimokantiems gausybę aktualios ir autentiškos medžiagos, kuri mokymąsi praturtina realiomis situacijomis bei autentiškais ekonominio, socialinio bei politinio gyvenimo pavyzdžiais.

Tyrimo rezultatai atspindi autentiškų šaltinių taikymo mokymosi tikslams įvairovę, jų privalumus ir trūkumus. Elektroninė mokymosi aplinka turi didelį mokymosi išteklių potencialą, skatinantį studentų autonomiškumą ir siejantį mokymosi procesą su išorės pasauliu. Tačiau studentų požiūrio į mokymosi medžiagą analizė atskleidė, kad jie labiausiai vertina vadovėlį. Informacijai kaip pirminei medžiagai, kuri randama profesinėse interneto svetainėse ir bendros informacijos interneto puslapiuose, jie skiria antrą ir trečią poziciją. Gauti rezultatai išryškino problemas, su kuriomis studentai susiduria naudodami technologijas profesinės užsienio kalbos mokymosi tikslams – informacijos apkrova, neaktyvus internetinis adresas arba jo prieiga yra apribota ir nepakankami kompiuterinio raštingumo gebėjimai. Gauti duomenys pagrindžia technologijų svarbą kaip įgūdžių ir žinių įsisavinimo, studentų motyvacijos ir kūrybiškumo skatinimo veiksnį, naudojant autentišką medžiagą profesinės anglų kalbos mokymosi procese.

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