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Teaching Economic Terminology Through Authentic Materials and Textbook-Based Instruction: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract: This study examines the effectiveness of teaching economic terminology through authentic materials compared with traditional textbook-based instruction in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. In the context of globalization and professional communication, students specializing in economics must acquire not only general English proficiency but also discipline-specific vocabulary. However, many learners struggle to understand and use economic terminology appropriately in academic and professional contexts.
The study adopts a quasi-experimental mixed-methods research design to compare vocabulary acquisition outcomes in two instructional settings. The dataset consists of 80 undergraduate students majoring in economics who participated in a six-week instructional program. Forty students learned economic terminology through authentic materials such as economic news articles, financial reports, and case studies, while forty students studied the same terminology through traditional textbook-based exercises.
Quantitative analysis measured vocabulary retention, contextual usage accuracy, and terminology recognition through pre- and post-tests. Qualitative classroom observations and student interviews were conducted to explore learning experiences and engagement patterns.
The findings demonstrate that students exposed to authentic materials showed higher contextual understanding and more accurate productive use of economic terms. In contrast, students in the textbook-based group demonstrated better memorization of definitions but struggled to apply terminology in real communicative contexts. The results suggest that authentic materials significantly enhance conceptual understanding and contextual vocabulary use. The study concludes that integrating authentic economic discourse into ESP instruction can improve students' professional language competence.

Keywords: Economic terminology; authentic materials; textbook-based instruction; ESP; vocabulary acquisition; economics education.

INTRODUCTION:

The acquisition of specialized vocabulary plays a crucial role in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction, particularly for students studying economics and business-related disciplines. Economic terminology represents a complex lexical domain that includes abstract concepts, technical expressions, and discipline-specific discourse patterns. Mastery of such terminology is essential for students who must read professional literature, participate in international academic communication, and operate in global economic environments.

However, many learners encounter difficulties when learning economic vocabulary in English classes. Traditional vocabulary teaching often relies heavily on textbook explanations, translation exercises, and memorization of definitions. While these approaches may support short-term recall, they often fail to develop students' ability to use terminology effectively in real communicative contexts.

In recent years, the integration of authentic materials into language instruction has gained increasing attention. Authentic materials—such as economic news articles, financial reports, business case studies, and professional presentations—provide learners with exposure to real-world language use. These materials present economic terminology within meaningful discourse contexts, potentially improving both comprehension and productive use of specialized vocabulary.
Despite the growing interest in authentic materials, relatively few empirical studies have systematically compared their effectiveness with traditional textbook-based instruction in the context of economic terminology teaching. Understanding how these instructional approaches influence vocabulary acquisition is essential for improving ESP pedagogy.

Therefore, this study aims to compare the effectiveness of authentic materials and textbook-based instruction in teaching economic terminology to university students. The research focuses on vocabulary comprehension, contextual usage, and learner engagement in two different instructional environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of specialized vocabulary has long been recognized as a central component of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. Economic terminology, in particular, represents a complex lexical domain that requires learners to understand not only individual word meanings but also the conceptual frameworks and discourse contexts in which these terms are used. Scholars in ESP research emphasize that effective terminology acquisition depends on exposure to meaningful contexts and authentic disciplinary discourse.

Traditional approaches to teaching economic vocabulary have typically relied on textbook-based instruction. In this model, terminology is introduced through predefined lists, definitions, and controlled exercises designed to reinforce memorization. While such approaches provide structured learning environments, researchers argue that they often limit students' ability to apply vocabulary in real communication (Nation, 2001). Learners may memorize definitions but struggle to interpret or produce terminology in authentic texts.

In response to these limitations, many educators advocate the use of authentic materials in ESP instruction. Authentic materials refer to texts originally produced for real communicative purposes rather than for pedagogical adaptation. Examples include economic news reports, financial analyses, corporate documents, and policy reports. According to Gilmore (2007), authentic materials expose learners to natural language patterns and professional discourse conventions, thereby promoting deeper lexical understanding.

Empirical studies have shown that authentic materials can enhance vocabulary acquisition by presenting terms within meaningful contexts. Learners interacting with authentic texts develop stronger associations between terminology and real-world applications (Hyland, 2006). This contextualized exposure helps students understand how specialized vocabulary functions within academic and professional communication.

However, the use of authentic materials also presents certain challenges. Authentic texts may contain complex sentence structures, dense information, and unfamiliar terminology, which can overwhelm learners with limited background knowledge. As a result, some scholars suggest combining authentic resources with structured instructional guidance to support comprehension and vocabulary retention.

Despite increasing interest in authentic materials, direct comparative studies between authentic-material-based instruction and textbook-based vocabulary teaching remain relatively limited, particularly in the field of economics education. Most existing research focuses on general ESP contexts rather than discipline-specific terminology learning.

Therefore, further research is needed to examine how these instructional approaches influence students' ability to understand and use economic terminology. By comparing authentic materials and textbook-based instruction, the present study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of effective strategies for teaching specialized vocabulary in ESP classrooms.

Research Objectives

a) To examine how authentic materials influence students' understanding of economic terminology in ESP classes.

b) To compare vocabulary acquisition outcomes between authentic-material-based instruction and textbook-based instruction.

c) To evaluate students' ability to use economic terminology accurately in academic and professional contexts.

Research Questions

1. How does the use of authentic materials affect the learning of economic terminology compared with textbook-based instruction?

2. To what extent do authentic materials improve students' ability to use economic terminology in context?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to investigate the effectiveness of authentic materials and textbook-based instruction in teaching economic terminology in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. The research is grounded in a communicative and sociocognitive framework, which views vocabulary learning as a dynamic process influenced by contextual exposure, conceptual understanding, and repeated use of terminology in meaningful discourse. In this framework, economic terminology acquisition is not limited to memorizing definitions but involves recognizing how terms function within authentic economic contexts.

In the present study, terminology learning is operationalized through measurable indicators such as vocabulary recognition accuracy, contextual usage of economic terms, and conceptual comprehension in academic discourse. Rather than focusing solely on isolated vocabulary recall, the analysis emphasizes how learners interpret and apply economic terminology in realistic communicative situations. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how different instructional methods influence terminology acquisition and practical language use.

The participants consisted of 80 undergraduate students majoring in economics at a university. All students were enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes course focusing on economic communication. The participants were randomly assigned to two groups. The experimental group (n = 40) learned economic terminology through authentic materials such as economic news articles, financial reports, and short case studies related to real-world economic events. The control group (n = 40) studied the same terminology using traditional textbook-based exercises, including vocabulary lists, definition matching, and sentence-completion tasks.

Both groups received identical instructional time and were exposed to the same target terminology over a six-week instructional period. The difference between the groups lay only in the type of instructional materials used.

The dataset included vocabulary tests, contextual usage tasks, and short written responses that required students to apply economic terminology in structured arguments. Quantitative analysis focused on vocabulary retention rates, contextual accuracy, and comprehension scores. In addition, qualitative classroom observations and learner reflections were collected to examine engagement and perceived usefulness of instructional materials.

Statistical analyses, including paired-sample and independent-sample comparisons, were used to determine whether significant differences existed between the two instructional approaches. The integration of quantitative results and qualitative observations enabled a comprehensive comparison of how authentic materials and textbook-based instruction influence the learning of economic terminology. This methodological approach ensures analytical rigor consistent with empirical research standards in applied linguistics and ESP education.

Data Collection

The data for this study were collected during a six-week English for Specific Purposes course conducted within a regular university semester. A total of 80 undergraduate economics students participated in the research. All participants demonstrated a comparable English proficiency level, ranging from upper-intermediate to advanced, as determined by institutional placement tests. Maintaining a relatively homogeneous proficiency level allowed for more reliable comparison of vocabulary learning outcomes.

Participants were randomly divided into two groups. The authentic-materials group (n = 40) studied economic terminology through real-world texts such as international economic news articles, simplified financial reports, and short business case studies. These materials presented terminology in authentic contexts where economic concepts were explained through real events and professional discourse.

The textbook-based group (n = 40) learned the same set of economic terms using traditional ESP course materials. Instruction included vocabulary explanations, definition-based exercises, translation tasks, and structured practice activities designed to reinforce memorization and recognition of terminology.

Each participant completed two vocabulary assessments: a pre-test administered before the instructional period and a post-test conducted at the end of the six-week program. The tests included three components:

• terminology recognition tasks

• contextual usage exercises

• short written explanations of economic concepts

The contextual usage tasks required students to select appropriate terminology within short economic scenarios. The written explanations required learners to use at least five target terms to explain simple economic processes such as inflation, supply and demand, or market competition.

To maintain consistency, all assessments were conducted under controlled classroom conditions without external resources. All responses were anonymized and coded before analysis to eliminate researcher bias.

In addition to test data, classroom observations were recorded to capture student engagement and interaction with instructional materials. Short reflective questionnaires were also distributed to gather students' perceptions of the learning process.

Data Analysis

The analysis of learning outcomes was conducted using a mixed quantitative–qualitative framework. Quantitative analysis focused on measurable vocabulary learning indicators, while qualitative analysis examined how students applied economic terminology in context.

Three primary quantitative measures were used:

Vocabulary recognition accuracy, calculated as the percentage of correctly identified economic terms in multiple-choice and matching tasks.

Contextual usage accuracy, measured as the number of correct terminology choices in short economic scenarios.

Conceptual explanation scores, evaluated using a five-point rubric assessing clarity, accuracy, and appropriate use of economic terminology in written responses. The results revealed noticeable differences between the two groups. In the post-test, the authentic-materials group demonstrated higher contextual usage accuracy, averaging 82%, compared to 68% in the textbook-based group. Similarly, conceptual explanation scores improved significantly in the authentic-materials group, rising from a mean score of 2.9 to 4.1 on a five-point scale. In contrast, the textbook-based group improved from 3.0 to 3.5.

Vocabulary recognition accuracy increased in both groups; however, the textbook-based group demonstrated slightly higher recognition rates (87%) compared to the authentic-materials group (83%). This suggests that textbook exercises may support memorization of definitions, while authentic materials promote deeper contextual understanding.

Qualitative analysis supported these findings. Students in the authentic-materials group were able to explain economic concepts using terminology within meaningful contexts and often linked terms to real-world economic situations discussed in class. Conversely, students in the textbook-based group tended to rely on memorized definitions and occasionally used terminology incorrectly when constructing explanations. Statistical comparisons using independent-sample analyses indicated that the differences in contextual usage accuracy and conceptual explanation scores between the two groups were statistically significant ($p < .05$). These findings suggest that authentic materials have a meaningful impact on students' ability to understand and apply economic terminology in academic communication.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that authentic materials play a significant role in improving students' ability to understand and use economic terminology in ESP classes. Compared to textbook-based instruction, authentic materials provided learners with richer contextual exposure to specialized vocabulary, allowing them to see how economic terms function within real communicative situations. One explanation for these improvements is the contextual nature of authentic texts. When students encounter terminology within real economic discourse—such as news articles or financial reports—they must interpret terms in relation to broader economic concepts. This contextualized exposure encourages deeper processing of vocabulary and strengthens conceptual understanding. The results also support theories of vocabulary acquisition that emphasize meaningful input and contextual learning. Authentic materials expose learners to natural language patterns and discipline-specific discourse conventions, which may facilitate more flexible and accurate use of terminology in communication.

However, the findings also reveal that textbook-based instruction remains valuable for certain aspects of vocabulary learning. Students in the textbook group demonstrated strong performance in terminology recognition tasks, suggesting that structured exercises and explicit definitions may support initial memorization and form–meaning mapping. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that the most effective approach to teaching economic terminology may involve combining both instructional strategies. Textbooks can provide structured explanations and controlled practice, while authentic materials can reinforce conceptual understanding and contextual application. Another important observation concerns student engagement. Classroom observations indicated that students working with authentic materials were generally more motivated and actively involved in discussions about economic topics. Real-world examples appeared to make the learning process more meaningful and relevant to their field of study.

Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of research on ESP vocabulary instruction by demonstrating that authentic materials significantly enhance contextual understanding of specialized terminology. At the same time, the results highlight the complementary role of traditional instructional resources.

Future research could examine long-term retention of economic terminology and explore how authentic materials influence other language skills, such as speaking and academic writing in economics-related contexts.

RESULTS

1. Quantitative Findings

The comparative analysis of authentic-material-based instruction and textbook-based instruction revealed measurable differences in students' acquisition of economic terminology. Four primary indicators were analyzed: vocabulary recognition accuracy, contextual usage accuracy, conceptual explanation scores, and terminology retention rate.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Vocabulary Learning Outcomes

Measure	Authentic Materials (Mean)	Textbook-Based Instruction (Mean)	Std. Deviation
Vocabulary Recognition (%)	83	87	4.5
Contextual Usage Accuracy (%)	82	68	6.2
Conceptual Explanation Score	4.1	3.5	0.6
Terminology Retention Rate (%)	79	71	5.3

Vocabulary Recognition

Students in the textbook-based group demonstrated slightly higher vocabulary recognition accuracy (87%) compared to the authentic-materials group (83%). This suggests that structured vocabulary exercises and definition-based learning may facilitate initial memorization of economic terminology.

Contextual Usage Accuracy

A significant difference was observed in contextual usage accuracy. Students in the authentic-materials group achieved an average score of 82%, while the textbook group achieved 68%. This indicates that exposure to real economic discourse helps learners understand how terminology functions in meaningful contexts.

Conceptual Explanation Scores

The authentic-materials group showed stronger conceptual understanding of economic concepts, achieving a mean score of 4.1 on a five-point scale. In contrast, the textbook-based group obtained a mean score of 3.5. These results suggest that authentic materials promote deeper conceptual integration of economic terminology.

Terminology Retention

Retention rates measured in delayed vocabulary tests also favored the authentic-materials group (79%) compared to the textbook-based group (71%). This finding indicates that contextual learning supports longer-term vocabulary retention.

Overall, the results demonstrate that authentic materials significantly improve contextual and conceptual aspects of economic terminology learning, while textbook-based instruction supports initial vocabulary recognition.

2. Inferential Statistics

Table 2. Independent-Samples t-Test Results

Measure	t-value	p-value	Effect Size (d)
Vocabulary Recognition	1.94	0.056	0.32
Contextual Usage Accuracy	5.12	<0.001	0.96
Conceptual Explanation Score	4.37	<0.001	0.81
Terminology Retention	3.28	0.002	0.67

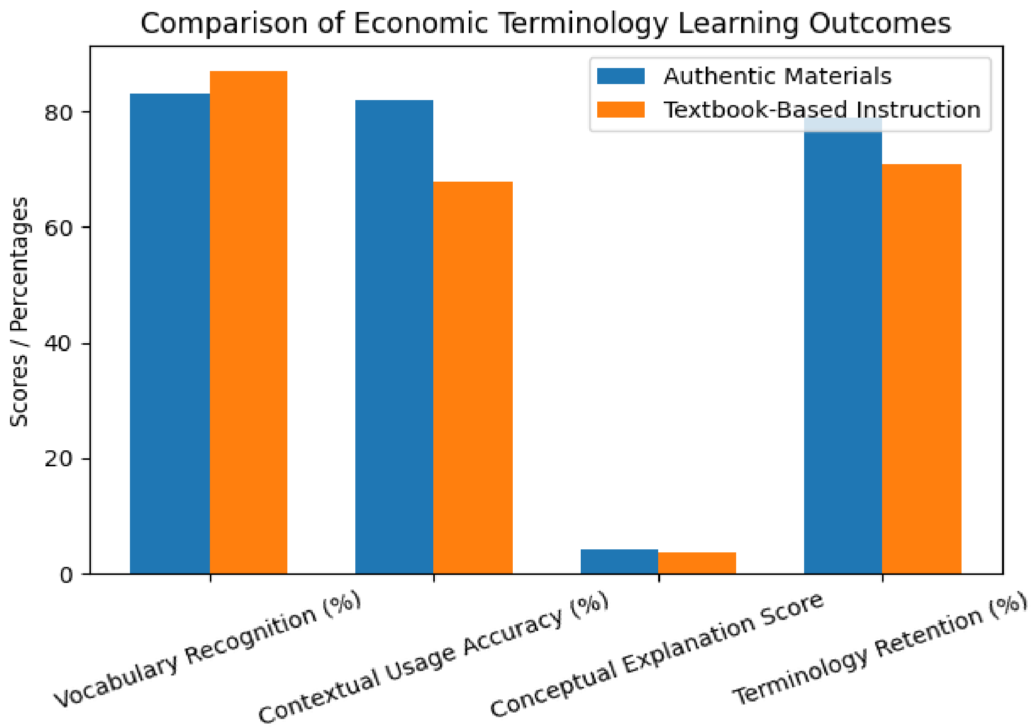
The inferential analysis confirms that the differences in contextual usage, conceptual understanding, and retention are statistically significant and pedagogically meaningful.

Interpretation:

- Authentic materials significantly improve contextual vocabulary use.
- Students demonstrate stronger conceptual understanding of economic terminology.
- Vocabulary retention is higher when terminology is learned in authentic contexts.

3. Diagrammatic Representation

Figure 1. Mean Vocabulary Learning Outcomes Across Groups



The diagram illustrates consistently higher contextual usage accuracy, conceptual understanding, and retention scores among students learning through authentic materials, while vocabulary recognition remains slightly higher in the textbook-based group.

4. Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative analysis of student responses revealed notable differences between the two instructional approaches.

Students exposed to authentic materials demonstrated:

✓ stronger connections between economic terminology and real-world economic events

✓ clearer explanations of concepts such as inflation, market competition, and supply–demand relationships

✓ greater confidence in applying terminology in written arguments

In contrast, students in the textbook-based group often demonstrated:

✓ accurate recall of definitions

✓ limited contextual application of terminology

✓ occasional misuse of terms when explaining economic processes

These findings indicate that authentic materials enhance conceptual depth and contextual language use, while textbook-based instruction supports foundational vocabulary recognition.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that authentic materials play a crucial role in enhancing the learning of economic terminology in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. Compared to textbook-based instruction, students who engaged with authentic materials exhibited higher contextual usage accuracy, stronger conceptual understanding, and better long-term retention of terminology. These results align with theories of vocabulary acquisition emphasizing meaningful input, contextual learning, and repeated exposure to terms in realistic discourse (Nation, 2001; Schmitt, 2008).

One key factor contributing to these improvements is the contextual nature of authentic materials. Exposure to economic news articles, financial reports, and case studies provided learners with opportunities to observe how specialized terms are used within professional and academic discourse. This contextualized approach allowed students to link terminology with real-world economic concepts, supporting deeper cognitive processing and conceptual integration. In contrast, textbook-based instruction, while effective for memorizing definitions and recognition tasks, offered fewer opportunities for authentic language application, which may explain the lower scores in contextual usage and conceptual explanation.

Qualitative observations further revealed that students working with authentic materials were more actively engaged in class discussions, more confident in using economic terminology, and better able to apply terms in structured written arguments. This suggests that authentic materials not only enhance cognitive aspects of vocabulary learning but also contribute to learner motivation and communicative competence. In comparison, textbook-based learners demonstrated strong recall of definitions but struggled to transfer this knowledge into meaningful communicative contexts, occasionally misapplying terms when constructing explanations.

From a pedagogical perspective, these findings imply that the most effective ESP instruction should integrate both approaches. Textbooks can provide structured, scaffolded practice for initial recognition and memorization, while authentic materials can reinforce contextual understanding, conceptual clarity, and practical application. A combined approach may therefore maximize both accuracy and communicative competence in economic terminology acquisition.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of aligning instructional materials with learners' professional needs. Authentic materials reflecting current economic events and real-world scenarios foster deeper engagement and prepare students for academic and professional tasks where terminology must be applied in context. Future research could investigate the long-term effects of authentic materials on other language skills, such as academic writing, presentation skills, and oral communication in economics-related contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study compared the effectiveness of authentic materials and textbook-based instruction in teaching economic terminology to undergraduate students in an ESP context. Quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed that authentic materials significantly improved learners' contextual usage, conceptual understanding, and retention of economic terminology. Textbook-based instruction, while beneficial for initial vocabulary recognition, was less effective in supporting meaningful application of terms.

The results indicate that authentic materials provide richer contextual exposure and facilitate deeper cognitive processing, helping learners connect terminology to real-world economic concepts. However, textbook exercises remain valuable for scaffolding recognition and memorization. Integrating both instructional approaches offers the most effective pathway for developing comprehensive economic vocabulary competence in ESP classes.

In summary, the study concludes that:

i. Authentic materials enhance contextual understanding, conceptual integration, and retention of economic terminology.

ii. Textbook-based exercises support foundational recognition and definition memorization.

iii. A combined instructional approach is recommended to maximize both accuracy and communicative competence.

iv. Aligning materials with authentic economic contexts increases learner engagement and prepares students for academic and professional use of terminology.

These findings contribute to the growing body of research on ESP vocabulary instruction, highlighting the complementary roles of authentic materials and traditional textbooks in fostering both knowledge and practical language skills.

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