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Using Authentic Medical Texts to Enhance Vocabulary Acquisition in Efl Context

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Abstract: Vocabulary acquisition is a central component of English for Medical Purposes (EMP), particularly in EFL contexts where learners have limited exposure to real-life medical discourse. This study investigates the effectiveness of using authentic medical texts in enhancing vocabulary acquisition among EFL medical students. Drawing on Content-Based Instruction (CBI) principles, the research examines how exposure to real medical materials such as clinical case reports, patient information leaflets, and simplified research articles influences students' lexical development. The study concludes that integrating authentic materials into EMP courses offers pedagogical advantages over traditional textbook-based instruction.

Keywords: Authentic materials, medical vocabulary, EFL, Content-Based Instruction, English for Medical Purposes.

Introduction: Since recent years, English for Medical Purposes (EMP) has received even more international attention through the globalization of healthcare and medical research. In EFL, medical students need not only to understand general English but also to learn specific medical vocabulary to understand professional texts and communicate successfully in academic and clinical settings. Nonetheless, traditional vocabulary instruction approaches use fixed words and basic book material; such tools may not provide an accurate picture of the real medical conversation. Content-Based Instruction (CBI) stresses learning language through content and has been recognized as an effective pedagogical approach for English for Specific Purposes (ESP). The use of authentic materials is vital in this context as they offer exposure to language used for practical purposes.

Authentic medical texts (e.g., clinical reports, patient guidelines) give real context that aids in a more in-depth vocabulary processing and retention [1,34]. Although authentic materials have become increasingly popular, very few empirical studies have assessed their contribution to the acquisition of medical vocabulary in EFL. Consequently, the purpose of this research is to assess the effect of authentic medical texts on vocabulary learning of EFL medical students, as well as to investigate how the learners perceive this instruction.

Literature Review

Knowledge of vocabulary is one of the widely mentioned and well-accepted variables contributing to language proficiency, especially in ESP. Nation explains that vocabulary learning takes place faster when words come to mind in context rather than when they are learned singly [2,67]. This perspective is in line with CBI, which promotes use of language within context via disciplinary content. Authentic materials are described as texts that are produced originally for authentic communicative use rather than as language education materials [3,15]. Materials in medical education of this kind are clinical case studies, discharge summaries, research abstracts, and patient education leaflets. Studies indicate that authentic texts promote exposure for learners to discipline-bound speech and increase lexical inferential ability [4,92].

Numerous studies have reported on the advantages authentic materials have given ESP students from different types of contexts. Similarly, Gilmore notes that authentic materials promote pragmatic competence and contextual understanding, which are essential for specialized vocabulary acquisition [6,58]. However, some scholars caution that authentic texts may be linguistically challenging for lower-level learners. To address this issue, researchers recommend careful text selection and pedagogical scaffolding, such

as pre-teaching key terms and using guided reading tasks [7,211]. Despite these challenges, the literature largely supports the integration of authentic materials into ESP instruction, particularly when aligned with learners' academic needs.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative component aimed to measure vocabulary gains, while the qualitative component explored students' attitudes toward learning through authentic medical texts. The participants were 40, second-year medical students studying English as a foreign language at a non-English-medium university. Their proficiency level ranged from B1 to B2 according to the CEFR. All participants had previously studied medical subjects in their native language.

The research instruments included:

- a medical vocabulary pre-test and post-test consisting of 30 multiple-choice items;
- a questionnaire with Likert-scale and open-ended questions to gather students' perceptions.
- The vocabulary tests focused on terms frequently occurring in the selected authentic texts.

These instruments were carefully designed to ensure both reliability and validity of the collected data. The pre-test and post-test were administered under similar conditions to provide a fair comparison of students' vocabulary knowledge before and after the intervention. The questionnaire complemented the test results by capturing learners' attitudes, motivation, and perceived usefulness of the instructional materials. Moreover, by selecting vocabulary items directly from authentic texts used in the lessons, the assessment accurately reflected the target language input, thereby strengthening the overall credibility of the research findings. The intervention lasted eight weeks. During this period, students were exposed to authentic medical texts, including simplified clinical case reports and patient information leaflets. Each lesson followed a CBI-based structure: pre-reading activities, guided reading, vocabulary-focused tasks, and post-reading discussions. The same vocabulary test was administered before and after the intervention. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to compare pre-test and post-test results. Qualitative data from questionnaires were thematically analyzed to identify recurring perceptions and attitudes.

Results And Discussion

When comparing pre-test and post-test scores, it can be seen that students' medical vocabulary knowledge significantly improved. The mean score increased from 58% in the pre-test to 76% in the post-test. This finding supports the claim that the acquisition of vocabulary is improved if learners encounter lexical items numerous times in natural situations [2,71]. Students improved their ability to infer meanings from context, including compound medical terms and collocations. This finding is in line with past research, which indicates that authentic text can stimulate deeper lexical processing [4,95].

In questionnaire data, 85% found authentic medical texts more appealing than textbooks. Many students said that practicing in real medical texts built their confidence in reading professional-level texts. These results are consistent with Dudley-Evans and St John's finding that authenticity increases learner motivation and relevance [5,148]. Some, however, struggled initially with the complicated nature of the text. This confirms previous worries of the cognitive load of authentic materials [7,214]. However, a majority of participants reported that teacher encouragement along with pre-reading activities supported them to overcome these difficulties.

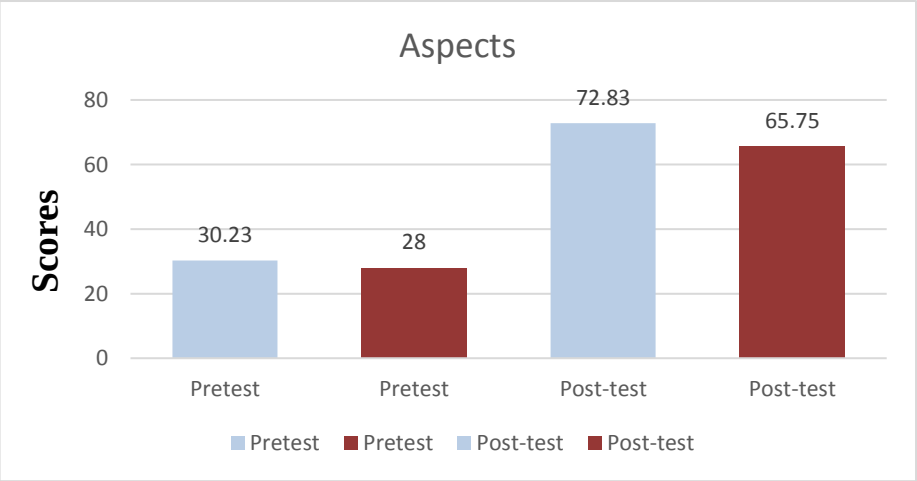

Figure 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test mean scores

This figure illustrates a clear improvement in students' medical vocabulary knowledge, with the mean score increasing from 58% in the pre-test to 76% in the post-test. The visual evidence supports the quantitative findings discussed in this section and highlights the effectiveness of repeated exposure to vocabulary through authentic medical texts. The increase also reflects students' enhanced ability to infer meanings from context and process medical collocations more effectively.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effectiveness of using authentic medical texts to enhance medical vocabulary acquisition in an EFL context. The findings clearly indicate that systematic exposure to real medical discourse leads to significant improvement in learners' vocabulary knowledge, contextual understanding, and overall confidence in reading professional-level texts. The notable increase in test scores from the pre-test to the post-test confirms that repeated encounters with lexical items in natural contexts support deeper vocabulary learning.

In addition to quantitative gains, the questionnaire results revealed a high level of learner motivation and engagement when authentic materials were used. The majority of participants perceived authentic medical texts as more appealing and relevant than traditional textbooks, which positively influenced their learning experience. Although some learners initially faced difficulties due to the linguistic complexity of authentic materials, these challenges were largely overcome through teacher guidance and pre-reading activities. Overall, the study contributes to the fields of ESP and English for Medical Purposes (EMP) by providing empirical evidence for the pedagogical value of authentic materials in medical vocabulary instruction.

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