

REVIEW OF USING AUTHENTIC TEXTS TO ENHANCE PHILOLOGY STUDENTS' LEXICAL SKILLS

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Abstract: Lexical competence, a critical component of language proficiency, enables learners to understand and produce language effectively in both spoken and written forms. For philology students, who often engage deeply with literary, academic, and media texts, robust lexical knowledge is foundational to their academic and professional success. This review article explores the theoretical and pedagogical significance of using authentic texts in foreign language instruction to enhance lexical competence. Drawing on current literature and previous studies, the paper examines the nature of authentic materials, their benefits, and their alignment with communicative and task-based teaching approaches. The article emphasizes the importance of context-rich input in promoting deeper vocabulary acquisition and encourages the thoughtful integration of real-world texts into the language curriculum. It concludes with recommendations for educators and suggestions for future research in the field of lexical development.

Keywords: lexical competence, philology students, authentic texts, foreign language learning, vocabulary development, language instruction

Lexical competence, understood as the ability to recognize, comprehend, and appropriately use words and word combinations, constitutes a cornerstone of communicative competence. It plays a vital role in second language acquisition, as it directly affects learners' ability to understand and produce meaningful language. Foundational scholars such as Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980) have emphasized its importance alongside other key components of communicative competence, including grammatical, sociolinguistic, and discourse competencies.

Building on this foundation, lexical competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is acknowledged as a multifaceted construct. It extends beyond the breadth of vocabulary—the sheer number of words known—to include the depth of lexical knowledge. This depth comprises semantic properties, collocations, word formation patterns, and stylistic nuances. For philology students, who engage in tasks such as translation, literary interpretation, and linguistic analysis, lexical competence not only supports academic progress but also underpins their professional readiness.

Given its complexity, researchers emphasize that vocabulary acquisition should not be limited to rote memorization of isolated word lists. Instead, it must be grounded in meaningful use within authentic contexts. This includes mastery of synonyms, antonyms, idiomatic expressions, phrasal verbs, and culturally specific vocabulary.

As a result, increasing attention has been devoted to the role of authentic texts in fostering vocabulary development.

Authentic texts—defined as materials created by and for native speakers for real-life communicative purposes—have gained prominence in EFL instruction due to their ability to expose learners to contextually rich, natural language input. These materials, ranging from literary works and newspaper articles to interviews, blogs, advertisements, and academic publications, enable learners to engage with real-world vocabulary embedded in meaningful contexts. For philology students, such exposure bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical language use.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that authentic texts significantly contribute to the development of lexical competence. They introduce new vocabulary in memorable and meaningful ways, thereby enhancing both comprehension and retention. For example, literary texts are replete with figurative language, idiomatic constructions, and stylistically marked vocabulary, making them particularly beneficial for advanced learners seeking to broaden their lexical repertoire. Furthermore, authentic texts promote incidental learning, where vocabulary is acquired implicitly during comprehension, interpretation, or analysis, rather than through deliberate memorization (Nation, 2001).

Beyond vocabulary acquisition, authentic materials provide additional linguistic and cultural benefits. They expose learners to a range of genres, registers, and sociocultural contexts, fostering a more intuitive understanding of word usage. This includes grasping subtle aspects such as connotation, collocation, and stylistic appropriateness. For philology students, who frequently work with advanced and culturally nuanced texts, this form of exposure is essential for preparing them for academic and professional discourse.

Equally significant is the motivational impact of authentic texts. In contrast to artificial or simplified textbook dialogues, real-world materials tend to be more engaging and contextually relevant, which helps learners perceive the practical value of their language studies. This intrinsic motivation, in turn, supports sustained vocabulary growth and prepares learners for real-life communicative situations (Lewis, 2003).

The pedagogical value of authentic texts in EFL instruction is supported by several theoretical frameworks that emphasize the importance of meaningful and contextualized learning. One such framework is constructivist learning theory, which suggests that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment (Piaget, 1972). Authentic texts provide the rich, contextualized input necessary for learners to build both lexical and linguistic understanding.

Building on this foundation, additional theoretical models further reinforce the benefits of authentic materials in promoting vocabulary acquisition and overall language development. Similarly, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) advocates for

the inclusion of materials that offer comprehensible input slightly above the learners' current proficiency level (i+1). Authentic texts, with their natural complexity and linguistic variety, often meet this criterion, allowing learners to gradually acquire vocabulary in a subconscious and incremental manner. This aligns with the principles of natural language acquisition, where exposure to slightly challenging input fosters learning and retention.

In addition to individual cognitive processes, the social and cultural dimensions of learning also play a critical role in the effective use of authentic texts. Another relevant framework is Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which highlights the role of social interaction and cultural context in language learning. Authentic texts, by reflecting the sociocultural realities and historical contexts of the target language, enable learners to internalize vocabulary in meaningful and culturally appropriate ways. This is particularly important for philology students, whose academic and professional activities often require a deep engagement with culturally embedded texts.

Moreover, lexical acquisition extends beyond understanding individual word meanings and includes the recognition of the collocational patterns and structures in which words typically occur. Finally, the Lexical Approach proposed by Michael Lewis (1993) emphasizes the importance of learning language in chunks and collocations rather than as isolated words. Authentic texts serve as ideal sources for noticing and internalizing such lexical structures, helping learners develop more natural and fluent language use. By encountering collocations, idiomatic expressions, and context-driven vocabulary in authentic materials, learners can build a more robust and practical lexical foundation.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a strong justification for incorporating authentic materials into vocabulary instruction, especially for learners with advanced academic needs. In conclusion, the integration of authentic texts into EFL instruction is strongly supported by various theoretical perspectives. These perspectives demonstrate how such materials foster contextualized and meaningful vocabulary acquisition, essential for advanced learners, particularly philology students, who require nuanced and comprehensive lexical knowledge.

However, despite the strong theoretical support, the practical integration of authentic texts into classroom instruction comes with notable challenges. Although the use of authentic texts in foreign language education has been widely recognized for its benefits in enhancing lexical competence (Gilmore, 2007; Berardo, 2006), their practical implementation in the EFL classroom presents several challenges, particularly in terms of linguistic complexity and alignment with students' proficiency levels. Educators must navigate a range of pedagogical and logistical considerations to use these materials effectively.

Among the most significant issues is the inherent linguistic complexity found in authentic materials, which can be both a strength and a barrier. Authentic texts frequently contain idiomatic expressions, cultural references, and colloquial language that may hinder comprehension, especially for learners at lower proficiency levels. Without adequate scaffolding, such content can overwhelm students rather than support their vocabulary development (Nation, 2013). For philology students, this complexity offers rich learning potential but may also lead to disengagement if not appropriately mediated.

In addition to linguistic challenges, ensuring the suitability of authentic texts for learners' proficiency levels is another key concern. A critical concern is selecting texts that align with students' linguistic competence. Materials that are too basic may lack the depth needed for meaningful vocabulary expansion, while overly advanced texts can result in frustration and demotivation (Mishan, 2005). Careful alignment with students' proficiency levels and academic needs is essential for maximizing lexical gains.

Furthermore, the instructional use of authentic texts often requires a greater investment of time and preparation compared to traditional materials. Integrating authentic materials often necessitates additional instructional time for pre-reading activities, vocabulary previews, and comprehension checks. Teachers must design and implement these activities, which can be time-consuming in curricula with rigid schedules (Field, 2008).

Alongside time constraints, educators also face difficulties in assessing vocabulary learning outcomes tied to authentic text engagement. Evaluating vocabulary acquisition through authentic texts is complex due to the nuanced nature of real-world language use. Unlike standard vocabulary tests, authentic text-based learning involves context-sensitive understanding, collocations, and semantic nuance, which are less easily captured in traditional assessments (Read, 2000).

In conclusion, lexical competence is vital to communicative competence and plays a key role in second language acquisition. For philology students, mastering lexical competence is essential for both academic achievement and professional success. It extends beyond mere word knowledge to include understanding nuances, collocations, idiomatic expressions, and cultural contexts.

Authentic texts, ranging from literary works to academic publications, offer a valuable means of deepening lexical knowledge. These materials expose learners to real-world language and promote incidental learning, allowing them to engage with complex linguistic and cultural elements.

Theoretical frameworks, such as constructivism, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, support the use of authentic texts in the classroom. Despite challenges, such as the linguistic complexity of authentic texts and

the need to align them with learners' proficiency levels, research indicates that, with proper planning, these texts can significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition.

In summary, integrating authentic texts into EFL instruction is a proven method for promoting lexical competence, enabling students to use vocabulary accurately and contextually in both academic and professional settings.

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