

# Navigating The Effectiveness Of Authentic Reading Materials Toward Esp University Students' Reading Proficiency

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## NAVIGATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AUTHENTIC READING MATERIALS TOWARD ESP UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' READING PROFICIENCY

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**Abstract.** The field of ESP teaching has undergone a revolutionary transformation with the integration of ICT tools and other authentic materials. These resources have proven to be invaluable to learners as they enable real-life interaction with native speakers. Various studies have explored the challenges faced by teachers and learners in ESP teaching situations. Therefore, this paper aims to describe the effectiveness of reading authentic materials toward the reading proficiency of psychology department students. The study was conducted at the Psychology Department of Universitas Wijaya Putra. The students participated in 14 meetings, during which the experimental group was exposed to authentic reading materials and the control cluster received streamlined materials, a pre-test and post-test of the reading comprehension test were given to the students. The marks obtained were analyzed using SPSS and the students were given a set of tasks that included 50 multiple-choice questions and 10 essay questions. The research results revealed that the mean deviation score for the experimental group was 80, while it was 65 for the control group. Consequently, this provides evidence supporting the acceptance of the hypothesis, indicating an improvement in student performance after receiving the treatment. Specifically, the results revealed that exposure to authentic materials improved the reading proficiency of psychology department students.

**Keywords:** ESP, Authentic Reading Materials, Reading Proficiency

**Abstrak.** Bidang pengajaran ESP telah mengalami transformasi revolusioner dengan integrasi alat-alat TIK dan bahan-bahan autentik lainnya. Sumber daya ini terbukti sangat berharga bagi para pembelajar karena memungkinkan interaksi kehidupan nyata dengan penutur asli. Berbagai penelitian telah mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru dan pembelajar dalam situasi pengajaran ESP. Makalah ini bertujuan untuk menggambarkan efektivitas penggunaan bahan ajar autentik keterampilan membaca terhadap kemampuan membaca mahasiswa jurusan psikologi. Penelitian ini dilakukan di Jurusan Psikologi Universitas Wijaya Putra melibatkan 50 mahasiswa dalam 14 pertemuan, di mana kelompok eksperimen yang diberikan bahan ajar pada bahan bacaan autentik dan kelompok kontrol menerima bahan bacaan yang disederhanakan. Pre-test dan post-test dari tes pemahaman bacaan diberikan kepada mahasiswa. Nilai yang diperoleh dianalisis menggunakan SPSS, dan mahasiswa diberi serangkaian tugas yang mencakup 50 pertanyaan pilihan ganda dan 10 pertanyaan esai. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa skor deviasi rata-rata untuk kelompok eksperimen adalah 80, sedangkan untuk kelompok kontrol adalah 65. Oleh karena itu, ini memberikan bukti yang mendukung penerimaan hipotesis, menunjukkan peningkatan kinerja mahasiswa setelah menerima perlakuan. Secara khusus, hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa paparan pada bahan autentik meningkatkan kemampuan membaca mahasiswa jurusan psikologi.

**Kata Kunci:** ESP, Bahan Bacaan Autentik, Kemahiran Membaca

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, numerous research efforts have been dedicated to highlighting the pivotal role of reading skills in the context of an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Proficiency in reading is regarded as an enduringly valuable skill, both within and outside the classroom, as it is believed to underpin the development of various other language skills (Blagojević, 2013). For example, students may encounter challenges when articulating their thoughts orally or producing written outputs like journals or articles if they lack the background knowledge that reading can provide.

To enhance students' reading abilities and strategies, educators employ a range of approaches within the reading class. In essence, many teachers strive to devise effective methods and strategies to attain this objective. However, it's worth noting that some teachers nowadays primarily concentrate on enhancing students' learning through diverse learning strategies, often neglecting the critical role of teaching materials as a means of connecting students with new knowledge. In such cases, the choice of inappropriate teaching materials can pose obstacles to students' comprehension of the text. Regrettably, in contemporary education, the majority of EFL classes, spanning from the fourth to the twelfth grade, predominantly rely on non-authentic materials. ESP has gained wide interest and popularity all over the world thus became commonly known that ESP is the type of English that is used for teaching specific purposes: business, technology, medicine, psychology, etc. Furthermore, studying English is not only restricted to English learners but it is now taught in other departments: business, economics, psychology, and engineering as well. In addition, it is a common assertion that materials in general play a crucial part in language learning and teaching. This accounts for the fact that discussions about the roles of materials appear in almost all books on course design (Octaberlina et al., 2021), (Setyowati, 2023). Additionally, incorporating authentic materials into ESP classrooms around the world has become incredibly popular for teachers of English as a second or a foreign language. In fact, Blagojević, Zohoorian et al., and Alshra'ah stated that authentic materials are being increasingly viewed as much better than any materials that are created intentionally for ESP students (Blagojević, 2013), (Zohoorian et al., 2016), (Alshra'ah, 2022). Furthermore, authentic instructional materials serve a dual purpose by not only affording learners access to a diverse array of valuable information but also contributing to the enhancement of learner motivation. In this context, the ESP approach offers learners the opportunity to acquire English in a manner that aligns with natural language acquisition. Learners engage with the language within contexts that resonate with their personal interests, thus underscoring the fundamental objective of ESP courses, which is to furnish learners with

a specific level of English proficiency tailored to situations where the language will be applied.

In this context, numerous researchers namely Jijel's, Pandian's, Namaziandost's, Alshra'ah and Namazovna's have dedicated their work to the selection of pedagogical materials that hold pertinence for learners, recognizing their potential to facilitate language acquisition (Jijel, 2016), (Pandian, 2011), (Namaziandost et al., 2021), (Alshra'ah, 2022), (Namazovna, 2023). Among the resources identified as particularly valuable in the pedagogy of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is the category of authentic materials. These materials encompass a spectrum of visual, auditory, and audiovisual resources that inject real-world language into ESP classrooms. Luana conducted a notable study on the significance of authentic materials in the pedagogy of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) (Luana et al., 2023). The research underscored the notable benefits of utilizing such materials within ESP instruction. Thus, the study contended that authentic materials play a pivotal role in keeping students abreast of current global events and, in addition, expose them to authentic discourse, thereby facilitating more effective communication with native speakers. In a similar Namazovna, articulated that the incorporation of authentic materials serves to immerse students more directly in real-world language, surpassing the efficacy of artificially created classroom materials when used in isolation (Namazovna, 2023).

A similar corroborative perspective emerges from on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy and the role of authentic materials. His study underscores the substantial advantages of incorporating authentic materials in ESP instruction (Čolakovac & Borucinsky, 2020). The findings indicate that authentic materials exert a positive influence on learners' motivation, cater to their specific needs, and offer opportunities for enhanced comprehension and attainment of higher proficiency levels. Additionally, Haryati et al emphasizes that teachers can effectively bridge the gap between the classroom and the external world by integrating authentic materials (Haryati et al., 2023). This approach creates an authentic linguistic context for the use of English, exposes students to diverse language varieties and accents, and provides valuable listening practice. Furthermore, Heryatun et al conducted a study that underscores the affirmative impact of authentic materials in ESP classes (Heryatun et al., 2023). Her research highlights three critical circumstances: the exclusion of language forms no longer in use by native speakers, a reduced gap between learners and the real world, and the transformative influence of authentic materials on the teacher's perspective on language.

In summation, authentic materials emerge as crucial assets in the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education, as the foregoing discussions have underscored. Their utility in ESP classrooms stems from their ability to ignite and sustain learner motivation, while also

facilitating immersion in the specific linguistic domains that necessitate practice and proficiency development. The significance of authentic materials lies not only in their content but also in their origins, as they can be sourced from a myriad of outlets. However, there is a discernible predilection for retrieving authentic materials from the internet, primarily due to the ease with which they can be regularly updated. This feature not only ensures the currency of the materials but also aligns with the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of ESP, enabling educators to maintain a contemporary and relevant instructional environment for their learners. Consequently, the internet serves as a valuable and convenient repository for authentic materials, supporting the evolving needs of ESP pedagogy and the diverse requirements of learners in specific domains of English language acquisition.

<sup>1</sup> There has been a growing scholarly interest in the incorporation of authentic materials within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses. is recognized as one of the early proponents who advocated for the integration of authentic materials in ESP instruction (Namaziandost et al., 2021). They argued that natural texts "adequately represent every aspect of the language." In contrast, artificial materials often exhibit a limited range of grammatical structures, vocabulary elements, and word combinations, neglecting other equally or potentially more essential aspects of language. Hariyati underlines the contemporary preference among English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals for authentic materials over pre-fabricated examples in language instruction. When designing ESP courses and selecting materials for ESP learners, (Haryati et al., 2023) underscores the significance of authentic materials as a valuable resource. These authentic materials encompass a wide range of text types, such as instructional leaflets, journals, manuals, advertisements, internet resources, registration forms, demonstration videos, statistics, and job listings. Furthermore, Alshra'ah highlights the instructional benefits of authentic materials for ESP teachers (Alshra'ah, 2022). Given that ESP is inherently learner-centered and tailored to meet specific language needs, it necessitates the use of authentic materials derived from real-world sources. Authentic materials are uniquely suited for communicative purposes, as they provide a genuine context for tasks directly aligned with learners' specific needs. Hence, the utilization of genuine language resources for instructing a second language is widely endorsed by a significant proportion of language educators, particularly <sup>8</sup> in the context of teaching English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Consequently, authentic materials are frequently integrated into ESP curricula. They serve as invaluable assets within ESP classrooms, as they serve to inspire and engross learners within distinct domains of the target language that require skill development.



The Preliminary study of <sup>3</sup> the Psychology students' responses on the need to study English for Psychology presented that a significant portion of the respondents (92%) acknowledged that the current ESP course particularly demanded reading comprehension skills as the priority. Moreover, a notable portion (90%) reports vocabulary should be given stress to the course. Another group of students (87%) also required speaking skills in ESP instruction. In contrast, a smaller percentage (85%) of learners believe that ESP contributes to the development of their grammar skills, and a mere (78%) of students claim that listening skills are the minimum needed. These can be seen in the following table:

<sup>3</sup> **Table 1.** The psychology students' responses on the need for studying english for psychology

| No | Need Analysis of Psychology student's need in learning English for Psychology | <sup>3</sup> Strongly Agree | Agree | Not Agree | Strongly not Agree |
|----|---|-----------------------------|-------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1. | Listening Skills  | 78%                         | 12%   | 0%        | 0%                 |
| 2. | Speaking Skills   | 87%                         | 13%   | 0%        | 0%                 |
| 3. | Reading Skills  | 92%                         | 2%    | 0%        | 0%                 |
| 4. | Writing Skills  | 87%                         | 12%   | 1%        | 0%                 |
| 5. | Grammar   | 85%                         | 15%   | 0%        | 0%                 |
| 6. | Vocabulary  | 90%                         | 10%   | 0%        | 0%                 |

The table above provides an overview of the need for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses on students' skill development in the Psychology faculty, including <sup>9</sup> listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. In summary, the data suggests that English for Psychology courses have a notable demand on enriching students' reading comprehension skills (Setyowati, 2023).

Over the past few decades, numerous research <sup>8</sup> efforts have been dedicated to highlighting the pivotal role of authentic reading materials in the context of English Specific Purposes. In ESP, reading comprehension skills particularly which is regarded as an enduringly valuable skill, both within and outside the classroom, as it is believed to underpin the development of various other language skills. For example, students may encounter challenges when articulating their thoughts orally or producing written outputs like journals or articles if they lack the background knowledge that reading can provide. To enhance students' reading abilities and strategies, educators employ a range of approaches within the reading class. In essence, many teachers strive to devise effective methods and strategies to attain this objective. However, it's worth noting that some teachers nowadays primarily concentrate on enhancing students' learning through diverse learning strategies, often neglecting the critical role of teaching materials as a means of connecting students with new knowledge. In such cases, the choice of inappropriate teaching materials can pose obstacles to students' comprehension of the

text. Regrettably, in contemporary education, the majority of EFL classes, spanning from the fourth to the twelfth grade, predominantly rely on non-authentic materials.

Reading authentic materials holds particular significance within the realm of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), primarily because the ESP classroom places a paramount emphasis on the contextual aspects, as opposed to the conventional focal points of grammar or language structures, as noted by (Sufiyandi & Fadhli, 2020), (Trujeque-moreno et al., 2021), (Rachman et al., 2022) (Kusuma et al., 2023), (Setyowati, 2023). Moreover, Blagojević added that a genuine language sample can be effectively chosen from a diverse range of real-world materials that convey messages of various types, content, length, and diverse purposes. The texts provide valuable guidance on the preparation of authentic materials for language instruction and propose that when distributing authentic texts to students, they should be organized into groups, as this approach is known to enhance their motivation. In short, it can be underscored that for reading authentic materials to be impactful, the accompanying questions must be skilfully constructed to achieve several objectives namely enabling students to practice English, fostering students' confidence in their English proficiency, exposing students to cultural variances and customs, enhancing students' ability to swiftly retrieve pertinent information.

Prior research has demonstrated the utilization of Authentic Reading Materials. A case study conducted by (Haryati et al., 2023)) illustrated the use of Authentic Reading Materials to enhance students' expressive capabilities. Furthermore, a subsequent study conducted by (Namazovna, 2023) that authentic reading materials could connect students with real-life applications of the English language, thereby enhancing their communicative and cultural proficiencies. This investigation uncovered three key themes regarding teachers' perspectives, namely, the selection of authentic reading materials, the specific skills targeted for improvement through reading, and the challenges teachers face in integrating authentic reading materials into classroom settings.

## METHOD

The researcher employed an experimental design for this study with a non-equivalent Control Group, which is a non-randomized Control Group Pretest-Posttest Design.

**Table 2.** Research Design

|    |     |     |      |
|----|-----|-----|------|
| Ex | Pre |     | Post |
|    |     | Tr1 |      |
| Ct | Pre | Tr2 | Post |

Note:

Ex : Experimental Group

Ct : Control Group

Pre : Pres Test

Tr1 : Treatment (learning with authentic reading materials)

Tr2 : Treatment ( learning with non- authentic reading materials)

Post : Post Test

In this study, the independent variable under investigation is Authentic Reading Materials (X), while the dependent variable of interest is Reading Comprehension (Y). The research was carried out during the period from August to October 2023, and the study was conducted at Universitas Wijaya Surabaya East Java. The researcher employed purposive sampling to select the sample for this study. This method was chosen as it allows for the selection of participants based on specific population characteristics and aligns with the study's objectives. The control group, referred to as Class A (Psychology Department A), and the experimental group, referred to as Class B (Psychology Department B), were the classes designated for this purpose. Then, the two groups are called the population and described as the following:

**Table 3.** The population of research

| <b>Class</b> | <b>Number</b> |
|--------------|---------------|
| Psychology A | 20            |
| Psychology B | 30            |

To gain the effect of authentic reading materials pre and post-tests were conducted to assess reading comprehension skills. The primary objective of both the pre-test and post-test was to evaluate the development of skills in reading comprehension, encompassing various tasks. These tasks were meticulously designed to ensure fairness to the individuals taking the test within their specific context. This approach, as advocated by (Ary et al., 2014), serves to minimize potential methodological biases. In particular, the tasks were structured to closely mirror real-life scenarios encountered in both professional and academic domains, while considering the limitations and inherent artificiality of the testing environment. Each task's foundation was rooted in a genuine purpose, similar to what a language user would encounter in the practical realms of the professional or academic world, encompassing activities like scanning, skimming, determining the main idea, and determining the vocabulary in context. Additionally, the selection of texts was carefully curated to provide subject-specific content in alignment with the requirements of these tasks.

The researcher conducted a preliminary examination to assess the validity and reliability of a question test intended for use as both a pre-test and a post-test. The initial trial involved a



set of 50 questions. Once the reliability of the test was established, the researcher proceeded to administer the pre-test prior to implementing any treatment. Subsequently, following the treatment, the researcher administered the post-test. The instrument used for both the pre-test and post-test was in the form of multiple-choice questions.

**Table 4.** Test format

| No | Indicator                                | Number of tasks | Weighting |
|----|--|-----------------|-----------|
|    | Determining the main idea of a paragraph | 5               | 10%       |
| 1. | paragraph                                | 5               | 10%       |
| 2. | Determining facts of paragraph           | 10              | 20%       |
| 3. | Determining the inferences               | 6               | 12%       |
| 4. | Finding vocabulary (synonyms)            | 9               | 18%       |
| 5. | Determining implied meaning              | 10              | 20%       |
| 6. | Determining unstated facts               | 10              | 20%       |

The T-test has been employed in this study to investigate the hypotheses underpinning the research, specifically, whether the null hypothesis or the alternative hypothesis is affirmed. The primary objective of this test is to assess the impact of intensive reading on the reading comprehension of descriptive text among students. In the present investigation, an Independent Sample T-test was employed with a two-tailed test of significance, utilizing IBM Statistics SPSS version 24. If the outcome reveals a p-value or significance level (two-tailed) greater than the pre-established threshold of  $\alpha=0.05$  (5%), the null hypothesis is deemed valid. Conversely, when the computed p-value or significance level (two-tailed) is lower than the predetermined  $\alpha=0.05$  (5%), the alternative hypothesis is substantiated. The following table shows the criteria for students' scores:

**Table 5.** Criteria of students' scores:

| No | Score   | Classification |
|----|---------|----------------|
| 1. | <85-100 | Excellent      |
| 2. | <70-84  | Good           |
| 3. | <60-69  | Satisfactory   |
| 4. | <50-59  | Poor           |
| 5. | <49-0   | Weak           |

The outcome of the pre-test will be juxtaposed with the post-test results, conducted after the students have received the prescribed interventions. The overarching objective of this comparative analysis is to assess the student's performance in the domain of reading comprehension.

## RESULT

### Pre-test Score

The pre-test was administered to assess the student's proficiency levels in reading comprehension prior to the implementation of the authentic reading materials. The pre-test scores were categorized into five groups: weak, poor, satisfactory, good, and excellent with corresponding percentages assigned to each classification as shown in table. The following table presents the pre-test score:

**Table 6.** Pre-test Score

| Score | Experimental Group (Class B) |      | Control Group (Class A) |      |
|-------|------------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
|       | Frequency                    | F(%) | Frequency               | F(%) |
| >70   | 20                           | 70%  | 12                      | 60%  |
| 70-80 | 7                            | 20%  | 6                       | 35%  |
| 80-90 | 3                            | 10%  | 1                       | 5%   |
| > 90  | 0                            | 0    | 0                       | 0    |
| min   | 40                           |      | 45                      |      |
| max   | 90                           |      | 90                      |      |
| mean  | <b>55</b>                    |      | <b>59</b>               |      |

The data indicates a prevalent deficiency in reading skills among the most tudents in both classes. Consequently, the researcher proposes to implement targeted interventions, specifically employing authentic reading materials, to enhance the student's reading comprehension. Moreover, given the experimental class's comparatively lower mean score in comparison to the controlled class, it has been selected as the focus for these interventions aimed at improving reading comprehension through the application of authentic reading materials. Furthermore, to ensure a clear representation of the data, the author illustrates the pre-test score data in the diagram provided below.

### Post-test Score

After exposing authentic reading materials intervention over the course of six meetings to the experimental group, while the control group received no such intervention, a post-test was conducted for both groups. The objective of the post-test was to assess the reading comprehension achievements of students in both classes. Similar to the pre-test methodology, post-test scores were categorized into five categories: weak, poor, satisfactory, good, and excellent, each with corresponding percentage distributions. The ensuing table presents the post-test scores for both the experimental and controlled groups.

**Table 7. Pre-test Score**

| Score | Experimental Group (Class B) |      | Control Group (Class A) |      |
|-------|------------------------------|------|-------------------------|------|
|       | Frequency                    | F(%) | Frequency               | F(%) |
| >70   | 15                           | 50%  | 10                      | 50%  |
| 70-80 | 6                            | 20%  | 7                       | 35%  |
| 80-90 | 2                            | 15%  | 1                       | 5%   |
| > 90  | 2                            | 15%  | 2                       | 10%  |
| > 95  | 0                            | 0    | 0                       | 0    |
| min   | 60                           |      | 55                      |      |
| max   | 93                           |      | 93                      |      |
| mean  | <b>80</b>                    |      | <b>65</b>               |      |

According to the data presented in the table the controlled class having a higher mean score than the experimental class in the pre-test, the post-test results indicate a reversal, with the experimental class achieving a higher mean score. This supports the conclusion that authentic reading materials have a positive impact on students' reading comprehension.

## DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of authentic reading materials on students' reading comprehension. The findings indicate that authentic reading materials have a positive influence on the reading comprehension of Psychology students at Universitas Wijaya Putra. The subsequent paragraphs provide a comprehensive overview of the data results. In the data presentation, tables were utilized to illustrate the pre-test and post-test results reflecting students' achievements in reading comprehension. The pre-test was conducted to assess students' skills before any interventions were implemented. The pre-test results revealed that the mean score of the experimental group was lower than that of the control class. Specifically, the mean score of the experimental group was 55, whereas the mean score of the control group was 59.

The experimental group received intensive reading treatment over approximately six class sessions, while the control group did not undergo such treatment. Subsequently, a posttest was administered to assess the reading comprehension achievement of both groups. The posttest results revealed that the mean score of the experimental group surpassed that of the control group, with a mean score of 65 for the experimental group and 80 for the control group. This outcome substantiates the effectiveness of authentic reading materials in enhancing students' reading comprehension. In short, this study confirms the significant positive impact of employing authentic reading on students' reading comprehension.

Furthermore, these findings were corroborated by several prior studies conducted (Pandian, 2011), (Chatsungnoen, 2015), (Alsamadani, 2017), (Čolakovac & Borucinsky, 2020), (Namaziandost et al., 2021), and (Haryati et al., 2023). Nevertheless, disparities between this research and the aforementioned Studies exist. Firstly, Nasser Rashidi and Marjan Piran, in addition to Mohammad Ali Erfanpour, employed the Oxford Quick Placement Test for sample division, whereas the present study did not. Furthermore, these two researchers examined both intensive and extensive reading concurrently, whereas our study and the others exclusively focused on intensive reading. Additionally, Namaziandost et al., Kurniawan, Alshra'ah employed a classroom action research approach, while the other studies, including ours, used a quasi-experimental design. (Namaziandost et al., 2021), (Kurniawan, 2021) and (Alshra'ah, 2022). Furthermore, their research encompassed three cycles, involving planning, implementation, observation, and reflection, which was distinct from the approach adopted in this study. Another notable distinction pertains to the study's sample.

The present research underscores the success of <sup>6</sup>the use of authentic reading materials, as suggested by <sup>1</sup>the noticeable improvement in learners' performance. It also highlights the significance of adopting a needs-based approach <sup>7</sup>to the design of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, as advocated by scholars such as Ulfah's, Rachman's, Setyowati's and Heryatun's (Ulfah et al., 2021), (Rachman et al., 2022), (Setyowati, 2023), and (Heryatun et al., 2023). It is essential to note that students in the experimental group exhibited superior test scores compared to their counterparts in the control group, <sup>7</sup>who were instructed using non-authentic reading materials. This outcome underscores the effectiveness of the experimental materials in addressing the specific requirements of the target learner group, particularly in terms of providing efficient reading materials

## CONCLUSION

The investigation proved that subsequent data analysis unequivocally indicates that students exposed to authentic reading materials exhibit significantly higher levels of reading comprehension compared to their counterparts instructed with non-authentic texts. Moreover, engagement with authentic materials facilitates the development of enhanced reading proficiency, particularly in the realms of discerning primary concepts, identifying supporting details, understanding factual interconnections, acquiring topic-specific vocabulary, enunciating references, and recognizing word meanings. The assortment of articles is delimited to descriptive and narrative texts aligning with the proficiency requirements of students engaged in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). This approach affords students the opportunity

to hone scanning and skimming skills through authentic textual resources. It is recommended that future researchers extend the scope of inquiry by investigating diverse categories of authentic materials, employing larger participant samples, and conducting studies in varied research settings. This would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of authentic materials on student learning outcomes.

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