Exploring the Use of Authentic Materials for Developing Communicative Competence: A Qualitative Study in Vocational Education

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Abstract - This study aims to explore the use of authentic materials in developing students' communicative competence in vocational education. The authentic materials included promotional brochures, social media content, marketing emails, and video advertisements which all used within the professional context of hospitality communication. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation involving 27 hospitality students. The findings reveal that the use of authentic materials enhances student engagement and supports the development of both verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Challenges included the complexity of promotional language and limited practice time. Students expressed a desire for more hands-on experiences with real-world communication tasks. The study highlights the significance of integrating authentic materials and contextualized learning to foster communicative competence in vocational ESP settings.

Keywords: *authentic materials, communicative competence, vocational learning, hospitality communication, ESP*

1. INTRODUCTION

In vocational education, the role of English language instruction extends beyond the mastery of grammar and vocabulary. It must also foster the communicative competence needed to succeed in real-world professional contexts. Communicative competence is needed as it shows the ability to use the language correctly and appropriately to communicate effectively in real life situations. In the hospitality sector, the ability to communicate effectively in English is essential for marketing, customer service, and cross-cultural engagement. Communicative competence encompasses not only linguistic accuracy but also pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and nonverbal skills such as body language

and tone of voice, all of which are vital for future professionals in dynamic service environments.

In teaching practice nowadays, educators have increasingly turned to authentic materials in the form of real-world texts and media such as promotional videos, Instagram posts, hotel brochures, booking site reviews, and marketing emails. These materials reflect the actual language, formats, and communicative functions used in the workplace. As Nia et al., (2025) explained that as educators, authentic materials are seen as a bridge between the language used in the classroom and real-life communication task that later the students will encounter in their workplace. This integration of real-world content into the classroom offers learners a more contextual and relevant language experience.

Multiple studies support the pedagogical value of authentic materials in English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Pramono et al., (2025) asserted that authentic listening materials will help the learner to expose them to real-life language input, including various accents, idiomatic expressions, and discourse structures that are not typically found in textbooks. It is important that in the vocational setting learners get the exposure where they are expected to interact with a linguistically and culturally diverse clientele. (Juita, 2023) further highlights that the use of authentic materials in teaching ESP could motivate the students and also increase their awareness of language use in specific professional contexts. Motivation and contextual awareness are critical for long-term language acquisition and practical readiness.

In the hospitality and tourism industries, promotional communication is a key area where students must apply both linguistic and performance-based skills. When students are assigned to create brochures, write social media captions, record audio promotions, or present a hotel product in English, they are engaging in communicative tasks that mirror their future job roles. Ramdani, (2024) stated that the integration of authentic digital materials to learning process will allows learners to simulate real world communicative tasks in the classroom. These tasks not only build vocabulary and structure but also train students in persuasive, multimodal, and strategic communication.

Moreover, students often demonstrate a stronger connection to learning when the material reflects real-life challenges and expectations. Castillo, (2022) observed that students experienced increased confidence and a sense of accomplishment when they were engaged in tasks involving authentic promotional materials, such as writing and presenting marketing content in English. Similarly, Maulana & Rini, (2025) found that the use of real-world reading texts such as advertisements and news articles would foster greater student engagement and improved comprehension levels. These experiences

contribute directly to the development of communicative competence, as learners begin to internalize the expectations of professional discourse.

In designing this study, the theoretical foundation draws from Hymes, (1972) theory of Communicative Competence, which comprises grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic dimensions. It is also informed by Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which promotes the use of real-world tasks as a vehicle for language learning (Ellis, 2003). Authentic materials, as tasks in themselves or as inputs to tasks, provide learners with contextualized opportunities to practice language for professional communication. According to Nurdin et al., (2019), incorporating digital tasks that reflect students' prospective professional environments plays a crucial role in enhancing their communicative competence, especially within the context of vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) education.

Despite the growing implementation of authentic materials in language classrooms, there remains a research gap in understanding how vocational students experience and interpret these materials in the context of ESP learning. Most previous studies focus on linguistic outcomes or teacher perceptions, with limited emphasis on students' voices and how they construct communicative competence through interaction with authentic tasks. Utami, (2025) highlighted the importance of using authentic materials as a means to connect what students learn in the classroom with the communication skills they will need in their future professional roles. However, there is still a lack of in-depth qualitative research that explores how this connection is actually formed through classroom practices.

The present study aims to explore how authentic materials contribute to the development of communicative competence in English among vocational students engaged in hotel marketing communication tasks. Specifically, it investigates how students perceive these materials, how they engage with them during language tasks, and what communicative strategies they develop as a result. Hidayat et al., (2025)) pointed out that using authentic materials in vocabulary instruction supports students in learning words and phrases that are contextually appropriate and relevant to everyday communication. This type of vocabulary development is closely integrated with practical, purposeful language use rather than being taught in isolation.

Operationally, authentic materials in this study refer to texts and media produced for professional communication purposes (e.g., advertisements, brochures, digital content), while communicative competence is defined as the ability to use language accurately and appropriately in professional interactions, including verbal, written, and nonverbal elements. The research question that guides this qualitative study is: How do vocational students perceive and experience the use of authentic materials in developing their communicative competence in English

By addressing this question, the study hopes to provide practical insights for curriculum designers, ESP instructors, and vocational training programs aiming to enhance the real-world applicability of their language instruction.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore how vocational students develop communicative competence through the use of authentic materials in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it allowed an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and engagement with real-world tasks and materials commonly used in professional hotel marketing communication. The study focused not only on what students learned but also on how they interpreted, interacted with, and responded to authentic inputs in classroom settings.

2.2 Research Population and Sampling

The research was conducted at a vocational higher education institution in Bali, specifically within an English course designed for hotel marketing communication. The participants consisted of 27 fourth semester students enrolled in this course. These students had previously completed others English courses and were in the phase of applying English in more specific, job-related contexts.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following criteria:
1. They had participated in learning tasks involving the creation of hotel brochures, audio advertisements, Instagram promotions, and presentation simulations.
2. They were able to reflect on their learning experiences using authentic materials.
3. They had completed all major course tasks related to real-world promotional communication.

2.3 Data Collection Instrument

To address the research question, the study employed three main techniques of data collection:
a. Semi-Structured Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted with all 27 participants. The interview guide focused on four key themes:

1) Students' experiences and perceptions of using authentic materials.

2) The impact of these materials on their English language skills.

3) How they developed confidence and communication strategies in promotional tasks.

4) The perceived relevance of classroom activities to their future job contexts

Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was conducted in a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and depth of responses.

b. Observation of Student Projects

Student-generated outputs such as hotel brochures, promotional audio recordings, and presentation performances were collected and analyzed as artifacts. These materials were used to triangulate the interview data and to understand how communicative competence manifested in students' language use.

c. Field Notes

The researcher also took field notes during class activities and presentations. These notes captured student behavior, language use, nonverbal communication (e.g., body language, gesture), and teacher feedback. They provided contextual richness for the interpretation of students' responses and outputs.

2.4 Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis to examine qualitative data collected from interviews, observations, and student-generated artifacts. Thematic analysis was selected for its flexibility in identifying patterns and meanings across large textual datasets, particularly suitable for exploring student experiences and perceptions.

The analysis followed the six steps of Braun & Clarke, (2006) (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) theme development, (4) theme review, (5) defining themes, and (6) report writing. Coding was conducted manually, with recurring patterns grouped into key themes such as relevance of materials, language development, confidence building, and real-world communication simulation.

To enhance trustworthiness, triangulation was applied across data sources, and member checking was used to validate interview summaries. A second coder was also involved in reviewing a subset of data to ensure consistency and reduce bias.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This section presents the findings of the study derived from the thematic analysis of qualitative data collected from 27 student participants through interviews, classroom observations, and task artifacts. The analysis aimed to explore how the use of authentic materials contributes to the development of students' communicative competence in a vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) setting.

A total of 158 initial codes were generated from the responses of all 27 students. On average, each participant contributed approximately 5 to 6 meaningful units of analysis,

which were identified and grouped into six overarching themes. This ensured that every student voice was represented in the construction of the findings. The themes reflect recurring perceptions, experiences, and learning outcomes related to their engagement with authentic learning tasks in the classroom. Below is the summary of the distribution of codes across the six themes.

Theme	Number of References	% of Total Codes
Simulation of Real-World Communication	34	21.5%
Relevance of Authentic Materials	28	17.7%
Increased Confidence	26	16.5%
Language Development	31	19.6%
Use of Nonverbal Communication	21	13.3%
Exposure to Realistic Language Use	18	11.4%
Total	**158**	**100%**

Table 1. The Distribution Of Codes Across The Six Themes

3.2 Discussions

This qualitative study explored how the integration of authentic materials contributes to the development of communicative competence among students enrolled in a vocational English for Specific Purposes (ESP) program. Drawing on the data collected from 27 student participants via interviews, classroom observations, and the analysis of learning tasks, six key themes emerged: Simulation of Real-World Communication, Relevance of Authentic Materials, Increased Confidence, Language Development, Use of Nonverbal Communication, and Exposure to Realistic Language Use. These themes offer deep insights into the learners' experiences and their perception of how authentic materials enhance their communicative competence. This section discusses these themes in relation to existing literature and highlights the implications and limitations of the findings.

1. Relevance of Authentic Materials & Student Engagement

The data from the interviews consistently revealed that students appreciated the authenticity of tasks such as creating hotel brochures, designing promotional posts for Instagram, and developing audio advertising scripts. They felt these tasks were aligned with their career goals and represented the kind of communication they would be required to do in the real world. Students perceived these learning experiences as highly relevant. This finding aligns with the study by Yelubayeva, (2024) which found that the use of digital authentic materials (DAM) in ESP classrooms significantly increased student engagement and contextual understanding of language.

Similarly, Jannah et al., (2025) observed that digital materials sourced from real-world platforms exposed students to a richer linguistic environment, although they also

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acknowledged some challenges in adjusting these materials to students' proficiency levels. In the current study, students reported increased motivation and comprehension when using authentic materials compared to textbook content, thus confirming the importance of contextual relevance in ESP learning environments.

2. Simulation of Real-World Communication & Nonverbal Skills

The theme of "Simulation of Real-World Communication" is particularly significant because it encompasses not only the verbal aspects of communication but also nonverbal cues and performative skills. Students mentioned that presenting their promotional materials in front of the class, or recording audio advertisements, helped them feel as if they were participating in genuine hotel marketing activities. They reported having to practice eye contact, posture, voice modulation, and gestures to effectively deliver their promotional messages.

It is supported in the work of Alfonso Vargas & Romero Molina, (2023), who emphasized that task-based activities modeled on real-life communication foster both pragmatic and discourse competence. Likewise, Tursunova, (2025) supported the idea that when students are placed in simulated professional situations, they are more likely to develop language fluency and communication confidence. Thus, the current findings support previous research while adding insights into how students perceive and respond to nonverbal expectations embedded in authentic tasks.

3. Challenges & Learner Differences

Despite the overall positive outcomes, the study also identified several challenges students faced when engaging with authentic materials. Some students found the materials too complex or culturally unfamiliar, especially when dealing with advertising language and idiomatic expressions common in promotional content. This finding is consistent with Alamri, (2025), who pointed out that authentic listening materials often present difficulties in terms of vocabulary load, speed, and accents.

Jannah et al., (2025) also raised concerns regarding mismatches between students' proficiency levels and the demands of authentic materials. In the current study, these challenges did not appear to demotivate students but rather highlighted the need for adequate scaffolding and instructional support. Students benefited when teachers provided models, vocabulary glossaries, and opportunities for rehearsal.

4. Exposure to Realistic Language Use

Exposure to real-world language, as revealed in this study, played a crucial role in helping students understand how language is used contextually in the hospitality industry.

Participants highlighted that they encountered new vocabulary, tone variations, and discourse patterns in real hotel brochures and advertisements that were not typically found in textbooks. This observation is supported by Nurmetov et al., (2025), who argued that ESP learners benefit from language that reflects the norms and expectations of professional settings.

Yelubayeva, (2024) further emphasized that real-world language offers learners the opportunity to internalize idiomatic phrases, improve fluency, and build a sense of communicative appropriateness. The findings show that students appreciated the exposure to this kind of language, particularly when it was directly applicable to their promotional communication tasks.

5. Practical Implications for ESP Vocational Settings

Synthesizing the findings with the literature reviewed, several practical implications can be drawn for ESP instruction in vocational contexts:

a. Task Design: Instructional tasks should be authentic and mirror the kinds of communication students will perform in their future jobs. This includes promotional writing, digital content creation, and oral presentation.

b. Scaffolding and Differentiation: Because students have varying proficiency levels, teachers should provide language support through glossaries, examples, and modeling.

c. Teacher Preparation: Teachers need to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to select, adapt, and integrate authentic materials. Training and collaborative material development may help in this regard.

d. Assessment Methods: Assessments should consider multimodal performance tasks that reflect real-world communication scenarios, rather than relying solely on traditional tests.

These implications are supported by several recent studies (e.g., Molina, 2023; Alamri, 2025), which emphasize that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction must go beyond general language teaching to reflect the authentic communicative practices and expectations of specific professional fields. Alfonso Vargas & Romero Molina, (2023) highlighted that learners are more engaged and retain more information when learning tasks replicate real job-related scenarios, while Alamri, (2025) stressed the need for carefully designed support structures to help students handle complex real-world language. Together, these findings reinforce the importance of designing ESP pedagogy that is not only linguistically rich but also practically aligned with the communicative demands students will face in their future careers.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the role of authentic materials in developing communicative competence among vocational students in an ESP context. Based on data from 27

students, six themes emerged: real-world communication simulation, material relevance, increased confidence, language development, nonverbal communication, and exposure to realistic language.

The findings highlight that authentic tasks such as designing brochures, creating Instagram ads, and delivering promotional presentations that will enhance students' motivation, engagement, and practical language use. These tasks also helped students prepare for the communicative demands of real workplace settings, particularly in hotel marketing communication.

While overall responses were positive, some challenges were noted, especially for learners with lower English proficiency. This suggests a need for scaffolding and instructional support when using complex, real-world materials.

The study contributes to the growing literature on ESP and authentic learning, emphasizing the value of aligning language instruction with professional contexts. Educators are encouraged to adopt authentic, performance-based tasks that reflect students' future careers while providing the necessary support to ensure learning success.

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