

# THE EFFECT OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS ON EFL LEARNERS' COLLOCATIONAL COMPETENCE

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**Abstract:** Vocabulary plays a significant role in languages, for it is significantly used for communicative purposes. However, understanding the form and meaning of words is not enough. Hanks (1987) stated that words occur together to make collocational patterns. In other words, despite the possibility of a word to be synonymous with another, word combination should be of importance as not only do they enhance accuracy, but they also enhance fluency. Furthermore, in order for the researcher to teach collocations, he made use of authentic materials. Cook (1981) supported that students can get more benefits from authentic materials, from which students can get closer to the target language. For that reason, this research is conducted to find out whether authentic materials helped to improve EFL learners' collocational competence. Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1997) categorized lexical collocations into 7 types. However, this study only focuses on "verb + noun" category. To measure the students' collocational competence, the researcher administered a pre- and post-test to 18 students of Tourism Academy in Bunda Mulia University. During the treatment, the students were given 5 newspaper articles on tourist attractions in Indonesia. In order to find out whether or not the authentic materials have effects on their collocational competence, the researcher used a paired sample *t*-test to compare the means of the pre-test and the post-test. The findings revealed that the authentic materials improved their competence in lexical collocations.

**Keywords:** collocational competence, authentic materials

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## INTRODUCTION

In the past, it had been a common practice that when it came to teaching, most lecturers often used non-authentic materials, such as course book or work book as their reference. As a result, when teaching vocabulary, lecturers took the reading passage from the book.

Currently, there are many teaching materials available for EFL teachers to accommodate their various needs. Many of these materials are produced for commercial purposes. These materials can include texts, audiotapes with accompanying workbooks, videotapes with student worksheets, and various Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) programs. There are materials available on the market for teaching reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar, vocabulary-building, pronunciation, business English, TOEFL preparation, and other various content-based English courses.

Some lecturers at universities, junior colleges, and private language schools may find themselves teaching with designed materials. Whatever situation a teacher may have, it is very likely that the teacher will find the need to adapt a particular text or lesson with material that one feels is more useful for promoting learning.

In vocabulary learning through texts in the past, the materials used in the classroom teaching were mostly non-authentic materials. Feeling the needs to get beyond the limitations of

a given text or lesson, many lecturers often adapt or create activities involving authentic materials or media. In the last decade, however, the teachers have begun to use authentic materials in teaching English. As supported by Sanderson (1999) and Rost (2001), authentic materials are valuable because they contain natural language, which students may encounter in real situation.

A study of using authentic materials in teaching reading comprehension to EFL learners by Khoshbakht & Gorjian (2017) was conducted to investigate the effect of both authentic and non-authentic materials on improving reading comprehension of the Iranian Intermediate EFL learners. 50 Iranian EFL learners studying English in Pooya Language Institute in Abadan were selected. 24 of the students were randomly assigned into two homogeneous groups. First of all, both groups were given a pre-test to see their competence. In the treatment, during a 12-session course, both groups were taught 12 passages selected by the researcher. The authentic group under treatment received authentic based reading passages, while the non-authentic one received non-authentic-based reading passages. Finally, the learners in both groups were given a post-test. Independent samples t-test were used to compare the means of the pre-test and the post-test of both groups. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the groups concerning reading comprehension.

Until the present time, it is obvious that the students' abilities to comprehend the passage and answer the questions have been the main concern when teaching vocabulary through reading; As a result, many studies on the students' reading comprehension have been conducted to find out whether reading really improves their vocabulary knowledge and understanding. However, studies on English lexical collocations through reading seem to have been neglected.

It is widely known that vocabulary plays a crucial role in languages as through words, one can understand what others need or desire. However, knowing its form and meaning of a word may not be adequate. Hanks (1987) affirmed that words occur together to make collocational patterns. Simply put, the words do not co-occur freely and randomly. In fact, collocations are believed to have its importance for learners, as not only do they increase accuracy, but they also enhance fluency.

Even though the use of authentic materials have been rising for the teaching of reading comprehension as well as vocabulary, such materials were occasionally used for the teaching of lexical collocations. In fact, authentic materials such as newspaper articles or magazine are beneficial for learners to learn natural and real use of the language. Cook (1981) supported that students can get more benefits from authentic materials, and by having them the students can get closer to the target language. To put it differently, students will learn the real language when authentic materials are utilized.

Realizing the importance of the knowledge of the English lexical collocations, the writer conducted this research to see whether or not authentic materials as the tool of teaching collocations really worked out to improve students' English repertoire of lexical collocations.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### ***Collocations***

Hill (2001) asserted that collocation is somehow vital as to some extent; the choice of words that can be combined in language is predictable. In other words, a simple substitution of a word with another word though having a correct grammaticality is not sufficient, and the combination in which one word and another co-occur is already somewhat fixed.

That a word has similar sense to other words does not mean that it can serve in a place of another in all occasions. For instance, the words *hear* and *listen*, although similar in meaning in the sense that both verbs mean to listen to someone or something, we cannot just substitute one word with another. The combinations of words in *listen to music* and *hear music* have different sense; *Listen to music* means that one really gives attention to someone or something in order to hear music, while *hear music* signifies one becomes conscious of music. Hence, it can be concluded that the combination of words are already somewhat predictable and fixed, and it is these fixed combinations that distinguish one word with another, even though they are synonymous in meaning.

Benson, Benson, & Ilson (1997) divided collocations into 2 major groups, namely grammatical collocations and lexical collocations. They distinguished between lexical collocations such as *do research*, *pack of dogs*, *deeply absorbed* and grammatical collocations such as *interested in*, *look into*, *discussion about*, *suggest that*.

Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1997) further classified lexical collocations into seven types, which can be seen from the table below.

No.	Types of Lexical Collocation	Examples
1.	verb (creation-activation) + noun (pronoun, prepositional phrase)	reach a verdict; fly a kite
2.	verb (eradication-nullification) + noun	break a code; demolish a house
3.	adjective + noun	reckless abandon; sweeping generalization
4.	noun + verb (action characteristic of a person or a thing)	Bees buzz; Bombs explode
5.	noun + of + noun (groups / units of things)	a bouquet of flowers; an act of violence
6.	adverb + adjective	strictly accurate; deeply absorbed
7.	verb + adverb	appreciate sincerely; argue heatedly

### **Authentic Materials**

Nunan (1988) & Martinez (2002) defines authentic materials (e.g. newspaper, magazine) as the material, which have been produced for purposes other than to teach languages. They also added that those materials come from spoken or written language that has been produced in the course of genuine communication, and not specifically written for purposes of language teaching.

Brosnan et al. (1984) justified the importance of the use of authentic language in the classroom, namely: (1) language is natural, (2) authentic language contains complete and meaningful messages, (3) printed authentic materials provide students with the opportunity to make use of non-linguistic clues (layout, pictures, colors, symbols, the physical setting in which it occurs) to help them discover the meaning more easily, and (4) adults are able to see immediate relevance of what they do in the classroom to what they do in the real life.

In contrast to authentic materials, Miller (2003) state that non-authentic materials are those materials that are specifically designed for learning purposes and the language used in them is fabricated with well-formed sentence, which is useful for teaching grammar. Course book, textbook, and students work sheets are good instances of non-authentic materials.

## METHOD

The participants of the current study were eighteen (18) students of the Tourism Academy from the first semester at Bunda Mulia University. They were all exposed to the same treatment, where they were given authentic materials, more specifically five (5) newspaper articles taken from <http://www.thejakartapost.com>, which were all related to famous tourist attractions in Indonesia, as the device for learning lexical collocations.

The instruments of this study were the tests administered to the students. There were two different tests: (1) pre-test and (2) post-test, which had the same test items. Each of the tests had two parts, each of which had ten (10) test items, making twenty (20) items in total. The focus of the tests was lexical collocation recognition in both parts; in part one there were only options, while in part two there were options with contexts provided. From 7 types of lexical collocations as proposed by Benson, Benson, and Ilson (1997), the type of “verb + noun” was the only center of attention in this study. In each question, the students were presented with three co-occurring words that are synonymous; *capture a scene*, for example, have similar sense with *photograph a scene*, and *snap a scene*.

In the first part of both pre-test and post-test, the students were only expected to use their language repertoire, knowledge of lexical collocations in particular, and opt for the most natural or correct collocations. In part two, however, the students were given a context to see whether it really helped them answer the question.

There were 3 steps that were carried out in doing the research: (1) administering a pre-test to know the students’ familiarity with the English lexical collocations, (2) giving the treatment, in which the students were given authentic materials, and (3) administering a post-test to investigate the effect of the authentic materials.

In the pre-test, the students were informed about the purpose of this research, which is to know what collocation is all about. Afterwards, the students were given 5 newspaper articles. The students were informed about what the articles were all about, and about the definition of difficult vocabularies they might have encountered. Finally, after they were all presented with the authentic materials, the post-test was administered.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In order to find out whether there was a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test, or discover whether the authentic materials worked well to improve the students’ score, the researcher used paired sample t-test.

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PreTest	55,28	18	11,307	2,665
	PostTest	63,06	18	16,009	3,773

The output of the Paired Samples Statistics shows the means of both pre-test and post-test were 55,28 and 63,06 respectively. In other words, there was indeed an increase of 7.78 points in the post-test, after the treatment was carried out.

### Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PreTest - PostTest	-7,778	10,463	2,466	-12,981	-2,575	-3,154	17	,006

From the table of the Paired Samples Test of pair 1, with  $df = 17$ , the  $t$  score of 5% significance level from  $t$  table is 2.110 and that of 1% significance level is 2.898. With both  $t = 3.154 > 2.110$  and  $t = 3.154 > 2.898$ , it signifies that null hypothesis is completely rejected, and proves that there is a significant difference between the results of pre-test and post-test for either 5% or 1% significance level. To put it differently, the authentic materials like newspaper articles do really have effect on improving the EFL students' lexical collocations competence.

Furthermore, with both the  $p$ -value (probability value) of 5% significant level =  $0.006 < 0.05$  and  $p$ -value of 1% significance level =  $0.006 < 0.01$ , it can be concluded that the null hypothesis is completely rejected, meaning that the scores of both pre-test and post-test were not the same, or there is a significant difference between the two tests.

From the result, it can be concluded that the use of authentic materials proves to have positive effect on improving the students' lexical competence. Despite being presented with all five newspaper articles at once, the students managed to learn lexical collocations by themselves. Although the writer only gave them some information on what the articles were all about, and explain some difficult vocabularies they found in the articles, they seemed to have successfully learned something from the authentic materials.

Even though the students managed to improve the score of the post-test in general, not all students benefited from these authentic materials. In fact, there were some students who even scored lower in the post-test, ranging from 5 to 10 points compared to the pre-test. The possible reason for them to have failed to score higher was that they might have found the vocabularies in the reading articles difficult to understand. It could be seen from the moment when the treatment was going on; the students asked a lot of questions about the difficult words. They also said that many words in the newspaper were somehow new to them. They even had a hard time understanding what the articles were all about.

On the other hand, the number of students that successfully achieved a higher score in the post-test was a lot more. However, there were only few students that made it to get 25 points higher, and the rest of the students only managed to get 5 – 10 points higher.

All in all, in spite of the success of the authentic materials in improving the students' lexical collocation knowledge, the materials might only have raised their awareness of how the words co-occur together. The students will still probably encounter problems when they have to produce the lexical collocations, since the authentic materials were in the form of reading passages, which only affect their receptive skills, but not their productive skills.

### CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

For many years, many lecturers still had been so dependent on the non-authentic materials in the teaching of English. They relied so much on the non-authentic materials, as they believed

the non-authentic materials to be more useful and focused to what they wanted to teach. In other words, the non-authentic materials that are specifically designed for learning purposes are more targeted. In the teaching of vocabulary, for example, most of the times, the lecturers used passages that were taken from the books. In fact, many of the vocabularies presented in the textbooks are artificial and are taken from the academic words list. Newspaper articles, however, use natural language, which students may encounter in real situation.

The writer believes that when it comes to learning vocabularies, it is highly recommended that the EFL learners learn vocabularies, especially lexical collocation from authentic materials, since they provide language that is more common and natural in use. If students only learn from textbooks, the way they use the language as well as the structure will definitely be rigid, and sound unnatural.

The writer did not try to say that non-authentic materials were old fashioned. In fact, he himself still actually uses the non-authentic materials in teaching English, specifically the rules of the language. The writer often finds the use of non-authentic materials quite frustrating, and rigid. They are indeed good since they are to the point. However, we can learn many things from authentic materials. When it comes to the learning of vocabulary, for example, how the language is used would certainly be more diverse compared to that in non-authentic ones.

All in all, it is stipulated that a language be learned from authentic materials, since the language is used in real contexts, and in real situation. Besides, the language is more natural, and thus making the learners more fluent in the use of the language.

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