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OPTIMIZING BUSINESS ENGLISH TEACHING TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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ABSTRACT

English is a compulsory subject at schools and universities in Indonesia, with students commonly learning General English and English for Academic Purposes. Some universities integrate Business English or English for Specific Purposes into their curriculum, given the increasing demand for workplace communication skills. However, teaching Business English requires not only linguistic competence but also familiarity with professional contexts, appropriate instructional strategies, and mastery of specialized terminology. This study aimed to discuss insights and recommendations for teaching Business English to university students by conducting a systematic literature review. This issue warrants further exploration as evidence shows that many Indonesians learning Business English struggle to perform key business communication tasks, such as negotiating, giving presentations, and writing emails and reports, due to limited exposure to real-world language use and insufficient instructional support. The study concludes that Business English teaching can be enhanced through the integration of simulations and role-plays, as well as the use of authentic materials that reflect actual workplace practices. These approaches help bridge the gap between classroom learning and real business communication demands.

Key Words : Business English; role-plays; authentic materials; university students

INTRODUCTION

Business English is a specialized area of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), designed to meet the communicative needs of students preparing for careers in business and commerce. In today's globalized economy, fluency in Business English is not only desirable but essential. In the Indonesian context, it is pretty challenging for university teachers to prepare students to engage in Business English activities, such as attending meetings, negotiating, writing reports, and delivering presentations. Teachers are required to have a working knowledge of Business English, understand the relevant jargon and terminology, and be able to deliver the materials effectively using appropriate teaching methods.

Regarding the working knowledge of Business English, it is recommended that teachers gain practical exposure to real-world business contexts within national or multinational companies to develop a deeper understanding of the language. They may obtain the knowledge from the existing coursebooks, yet they may not be able to 'feel' the authentic use of the knowledge. Gilmore (2007) strongly supported the idea that authentic materials—those taken from real-world contexts, such as newspapers, TV

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shows, interviews, or casual conversations—offer significant benefits to language learners. He underlined that:

- Authentic materials reflect the complexities and richness of real language use, including idioms, discourse markers, and cultural references.
- They enhance learner motivation because they are more engaging and meaningful than contrived textbook dialogues.
- Exposure to real language helps learners develop communicative competence, which is essential for real-life interaction.

The concept of authentic materials has been defined in various ways. Ellis and Johnson (1994) defined authentic materials as encompassing content derived from real-world contexts, rather than content specifically developed for educational settings, while Gardner and Miller (1999) defined authentic materials as any form of text—whether printed or digital—or audio recording that was designed for purposes unrelated to teaching the target language.

Paton and Wilkins (2009) said that the term *authentic* refers to materials that were not created for language instruction, while House (2014) emphasizes that a text can be considered authentic if it employs genuine language and was produced by an actual speaker or writer for a real audience. According to Chapelle (2020), the use of authentic materials enables students to engage in critical reflection on the social, cultural, and political issues relevant to the country or countries in which the target language is spoken. Hence, concerning the teaching of Business English, employing authentic materials helps teachers and learners understand relevant jargon and terminology of Business English, and consequently, they can use them in more authentic use and settings.

In addition to the use of authentic materials, teaching Business English requires appropriate teaching methods. To create authentic business contexts, three components are included, one of which is employing simulation activities (Sampath & Zalipour, 2009). Simulation or roleplay is a highly effective method for second language (L2) learning. It promotes critical thinking and creativity, allows learners to explore and apply new language and social skills in a low-pressure environment, and helps foster the motivation and engagement needed for successful learning (Tompkins, 1998).

Having defined the authentic materials and role-plays, this study aims to provide practical insights and recommendations for teaching Business English to university students by integrating role-plays and authentic materials approaches.

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METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

This study employed a qualitative library research approach to generate insights and recommendations for optimizing the teaching of Business English to university students. The research focused on discussing existing literature addressing pedagogical strategies of teaching a foreign language, particularly Business English.

A systematic search was conducted using Google Scholar with keywords such as Business English, how to teach Business English, authentic materials, and role-plays/simulations. The earlier studies were selected based on their relevance and contribution to practical teaching approaches in higher education.

The selected literature was employed as references to identify the significance of the authenticity of language teaching materials and role-plays regarding teaching Business English to university students. They were then interpreted to inform the formulation of insights and recommendations for university-level Business English teaching.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Xie (2023) reported that the students learning Business English involved in her study favoured simulations and workplace scenarios. Most of them agreed that simulation activities were beneficial and had a positive effect. These simulations helped them develop writing abilities, gain insights into corporate and business practices, and expand their business-related vocabulary. Another study conducted by Sari and Havwini (2022) showed that role-play helped students gain confidence when speaking English. In addition, it improved students' vocabulary.

The results of the research carried out by Tipmontree and Tasanameelarp (2018) suggest that role-plays have a positive impact on students' oral communication skills in a Business English context. Also, by doing a role-play, students improved their confidence. This is in line with a study done by Rajindra (2022). The research findings suggest that incorporating role-play into classroom activities can be valuable for teachers aiming to improve students' communication skills. The role-play tasks demonstrated encouraging outcomes in preparing students to become competent, well-rounded graduates who are equipped to handle real-world situations in the future.

To sum up, the early studies of the effect of role-plays/simulations on teaching Business English revealed that role-plays are an effective classroom activity. Students benefited from role-plays in a way that they can improve their communication skills and Business English terminology. Moreover, they can help students build up their confidence and prepare them for real-life situations by enhancing their communication abilities.

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To successfully teach Business English to university students, teachers need to have working knowledge of Business English and understand its jargon or terminology. They are both obtainable in coursebooks, but they may not be authentically used. In other words, authentic materials provide useful resources for acquiring authentic language use.

In general, authentic materials can help learners develop their communicative competence (Tomlinson, 1998). Many scholars have highlighted the importance of authenticity as a key element in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teaching approaches (Breen, 1985; Rogers & Medley, 1988; Guariento & Morley, 2001; Gilmore, 2007; Berardo, 2006).

Shrum and Glisan (2000) noted that authentic materials are highly effective for presenting genuine language, integrating cultural elements, and enhancing comprehension. Richards and Schmidt (2002) also argued that authentic materials often reflect more natural and realistic language use compared to those found in standard textbooks. Richards (2001) summarized the main benefits of authentic materials as follows:

- a. they expose students to real-world language;
- b. they boost motivation;
- c. they enhance language output;
- d. they build confidence;
- e. they improve awareness of natural speech patterns;
- f. they offer genuine cultural insights;
- g. they better match learners' needs;
- h. they encourage creative teaching methods;
- i. they stimulate interest in the practical use of the target language.

Benabdallah (2017) reported that authentic language materials positively supported learners' interests, performance, cultural understanding, skill acquisition, and language development, while Garrido and Silveira (2015) underlined that role-plays in Business English classes increase the likelihood that students will develop the targeted skills, knowledge, or competencies. Furthermore, they allowed for differentiated instruction. This approach is advantageous because it actively engages learners, motivates them to participate in the learning process, and helps reduce their anxiety.

Gunnarsson (2000) pointed out that communication plays a vital role in an organization, not only in ensuring the effectiveness of various communicative tasks but also in maintaining the organization's existence. As a result, students need to understand the real forms of language used in businesses, become familiar with daily workplace routines, and make a strong effort to accurately learn the specific types of communication typical in professional environments (Zhang, 2013).

Lazovic (2017) said that it is evident that authentic materials can be effectively used in foreign language classrooms and can support the learning process when applied appropriately. His research revealed how

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advertisements, as an example of authentic materials, can serve as valuable educational tools, offering practical examples for teaching and learning vocabulary and grammar, enhancing speaking and writing abilities, and promoting cultural understanding in Business English settings.

In summary, authentic materials provide realistic language exposure, enhance learners' motivation, and build practical skills essential for real-world business contexts. They not only improve linguistic competence but also raise cultural awareness and confidence. To prepare students for the demands of professional environments, teachers should thoughtfully integrate authentic materials into the teaching of Business English, ensuring that instruction is both relevant and reflective of authentic business practices.

DISCUSSION

This study offers insights and recommendations for teaching Business English to university students. The insights and recommendations include the use of role-plays/simulations and the incorporation of authentic materials. Both role-plays and authentic materials are essential tools for effectively teaching Business English at the university level. Role-plays simulate professional interactions, enabling students to practice key business skills—such as negotiating, presenting, and problem-solving—in meaningful ways that prepare them for actual workplace scenarios. Likewise, authentic materials provide learners direct exposure to the language, cultural nuances, and communication styles used in real-world business contexts, fostering greater motivation, linguistic competence, and confidence.

A systematic review of previous studies confirms that role-plays and authentic materials, when used thoughtfully and complementarily, enhance vocabulary development, oral and written communication, and cultural understanding. Moreover, they cater to diverse learning needs and reduce classroom anxiety by creating engaging and relevant learning experiences. Therefore, Business English teachers should be encouraged to integrate simulation-based activities and authentic materials into their language teaching. By doing so, they can better equip their students with the practical language skills and communicative competence necessary to succeed in global business environments.

Authentic materials and role-plays closely align with both Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as they share key principles, including promoting real-life language use, meaningful interaction, and learner engagement (Richards and Rogers, 1986; Moore, 2018). Through these approaches, students can be exposed to sociolinguistic and pragmatic norms. In addition, they encourage meaning-focused rather than form-focused learning. This implies that students learn to use the language appropriately in specific contexts and settings.

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Teachers should curate or adapt real documents from business contexts rather than relying solely on textbook content. This helps learners internalize how language is naturally used in business environments. Classrooms should be turned into simulated business settings where students perform real-life roles, such as negotiating, presenting, or participating in meetings.

These pedagogical implications, which integrate authentic materials and role-plays into Business English language teaching, should consider students' level of English. CLT or TBLT is more appropriate for the intermediate level, as CBLT or TBLT require students to use language for meaningful communication, not just to learn about the language (Richards and Rogers, 1986; Moore, 2018).

Ellis (2003) posits that the complexity of language tasks should correspond appropriately to the learners' level of proficiency. Beginner learners may struggle with open-ended, communicative tasks due to limited linguistic resources. Thus, simple tasks for beginners and more complex and communicative ones are for intermediate learners who can engage in negotiation of meaning and fluency building.

CONCLUSION

In light of the studies reviewed, it is evident that both role-plays and authentic materials serve as pedagogical tools in Business English teaching to university students. Role-plays provide learners with the opportunity to simulate real-life business interactions, thereby enhancing their confidence, communication skills, and Business English terms and jargon. Meanwhile, authentic materials expose students to genuine language use, cultural nuances, and practical communication styles, all of which are essential for functioning effectively in business contexts. Together, these strategies foster learner engagement, improve language competence, and better prepare students for the communicative demands of the workplace. Therefore, integrating role-plays and authentic materials into Business English curricula is not only beneficial but necessary to ensure that learners are equipped with the linguistic and pragmatic skills required in today's globalized business environment.

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