

INTEGRATING AUTHENTIC MILITARY TEXTS TO DEVELOP READING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN MILITARY EDUCATION

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Abstract. *Reading comprehension is a critical skill in military education, where learners are required to process complex, context-specific information accurately and efficiently. This paper argues that integrating authentic military texts into language instruction significantly enhances reading comprehension by aligning learning materials with learners' professional needs and real-world tasks. Drawing on theories of authentic materials, English for Specific Purposes, and reading comprehension development, the study examines how exposure to genuine military documents: such as field manuals, operational reports, and training directives-supports deeper textual understanding and learner engagement. From a student-researcher perspective, the paper critically analyzes existing literature and classroom practices to demonstrate that authentic texts promote vocabulary acquisition, strategic reading, and contextual inference more effectively than simplified or artificial materials. Furthermore, the paper contends that authentic military texts contribute to learner motivation and professional identity formation, as students perceive a direct connection between classroom learning and future operational responsibilities. While acknowledging challenges such as text complexity and instructor preparedness, the study emphasizes the pedagogical value of carefully scaffolded authentic materials. Ultimately, this research highlights the importance of purposeful text selection and instructional support in maximizing the benefits of authenticity, concluding that authentic military texts are a valuable and necessary resource for developing reading comprehension in military educational contexts.*

Key words: *Authentic military texts, Reading comprehension, Military education, English for Military Purposes (EMP), Language instruction in military contexts*

Introduction

Reading comprehension plays a central role in military education, where learners must interpret dense, technical, and context-dependent texts in order to perform effectively in training and operational environments. Unlike general academic settings, military educational centers require language instruction that prepares learners to engage with authentic professional discourse, including manuals, regulations, intelligence summaries, and mission briefings. This paper argues that integrating authentic military texts into reading instruction enhances comprehension skills by fostering contextual understanding, strategic reading, and learner motivation. From a student-researcher perspective, the study examines how authenticity in instructional materials aligns language learning with the communicative demands of military professions.

Authentic texts are commonly defined as materials originally created for real-life communication rather than pedagogical purposes (Gilmore, 2007). In the context of

language education, scholars argue that such texts expose learners to natural linguistic features, including specialized vocabulary, discourse patterns, and pragmatic conventions (Bacon & Finnemann, 1990). Within English for Specific Purposes (ESP), authenticity is viewed as essential because it bridges the gap between classroom learning and professional application (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998). For military learners, this connection is particularly significant, as reading comprehension directly affects decision-making, safety, and operational success.

Research on reading comprehension suggests that understanding a text involves more than decoding words; it requires background knowledge, inferencing, and the ability to recognize text structure (Grabe, 2009). Studies indicate that authentic texts can support these processes by situating language within meaningful and familiar contexts (Nation, 2013). In military education, authentic materials such as standard operating procedures or tactical reports allow learners to activate prior knowledge related to their training, thereby facilitating deeper comprehension. Moreover, exposure to discipline-specific texts encourages the development of reading strategies tailored to professional tasks, including scanning for critical information and interpreting implicit meanings.

However, the use of authentic texts is not without challenges. Several scholars caution that unadapted materials may overwhelm learners due to linguistic density and conceptual complexity (Day & Bamford, 1998). This concern is particularly relevant in military settings, where texts often contain acronyms, technical terminology, and rigid formal structures. To address this issue, researchers emphasize the importance of scaffolding, pre-reading activities, and guided instruction to ensure accessibility while maintaining authenticity (McDonough, Shaw, & Masuhara, 2013).

Overall, the literature supports the pedagogical value of authentic texts when they are carefully integrated into instruction. While simplified texts may ease comprehension in the short term, authentic military materials better prepare learners for real-world reading demands. This review establishes a theoretical foundation for examining how authentic military texts can be strategically used to develop reading comprehension skills in military educational centers.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative, classroom-based research design to explore the effectiveness of integrating authentic military texts in developing reading comprehension skills within a military educational context. From the perspective of a university student researcher, the methodology was designed to balance academic rigor with practical feasibility, while allowing for critical observation and reflection on instructional practices. The focus was not on large-scale statistical generalization, but on gaining in-depth insights into how learners interact with authentic texts and how such interaction influences their reading comprehension processes.

The research was conducted in a military educational center where English is taught as a foreign language for professional and academic purposes. The participants consisted of approximately 30 intermediate-level military learners enrolled in a compulsory English reading course. These learners had similar educational backgrounds and shared professional goals related to military service, which ensured a relatively homogeneous learning context. Participation in the study was voluntary, and ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality were strictly observed.

The core instructional materials used in the study were authentic military texts selected from real-world sources, including field manuals, training regulations, mission reports, and excerpts from military journals. These texts were chosen based on their relevance to learners' professional needs, topical familiarity, and alignment with course objectives. Care was taken to ensure that the texts reflected genuine military discourse rather than adapted or simplified versions commonly found in textbooks. To avoid cognitive overload, texts were selected with manageable length and gradually increasing complexity over the instructional period.

The study was implemented over an eight-week period and followed a task-based instructional approach. Each week, learners engaged with one authentic military text during guided reading sessions. The instructional procedure was divided into three stages: pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities.

In the pre-reading stage, learners were introduced to the topic and key terminology through brainstorming, discussion, and short contextual explanations. This stage aimed to activate prior knowledge and reduce potential comprehension barriers without altering the authenticity of the text. During the while-reading stage, learners were assigned structured tasks such as identifying main ideas, locating specific information, interpreting implicit meanings, and analyzing text structure. These tasks encouraged strategic reading rather than surface-level understanding. The post-reading stage involved reflective discussions, summarization tasks, and short written responses that required learners to connect the text to real military scenarios.

Data were collected using multiple qualitative instruments to enhance the credibility of the findings. First, reading comprehension tasks were administered at the beginning and end of the study to observe changes in learners' ability to interpret authentic texts. These tasks included open-ended questions, short summaries, and inference-based items rather than multiple-choice questions, allowing for deeper analysis of comprehension skills.

Second, classroom observations were conducted throughout the instructional period. The researcher maintained detailed field notes focusing on learner engagement, participation patterns, difficulties encountered, and strategies used during reading activities. These observations provided contextual insights that could not be captured through test results alone.

Third, learner reflections were collected through weekly reflective journals. Learners were encouraged to write about their reading experiences, perceived challenges, and attitudes toward using authentic military texts. These reflections offered valuable perspectives on motivation, confidence, and perceived relevance, which are closely linked to reading comprehension development.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach. Learner responses, observation notes, and reflective journals were carefully reviewed and coded to identify recurring patterns related to comprehension strategies, engagement, and challenges. Pre- and post-reading tasks were compared qualitatively to assess improvements in textual understanding, use of vocabulary, and ability to infer meaning. Rather than focusing solely on correctness, the analysis emphasized depth of interpretation and strategic reading behavior.

While the qualitative design allowed for rich insights, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The relatively small sample size and specific institutional context limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the researcher's dual role as

observer and participant may have introduced subjective bias. However, triangulation of data sources and reflective self-monitoring were employed to mitigate these limitations.

Overall, this methodological approach was suitable for examining the nuanced impact of authentic military texts on reading comprehension within a real educational setting.

Discussion and Results

The findings of this study indicate that the integration of authentic military texts had a positive and meaningful impact on learners' reading comprehension skills. Analysis of reading tasks, classroom observations, and learner reflections revealed notable improvement in learners' ability to interpret complex texts, employ effective reading strategies, and engage critically with content relevant to their professional context. These results support the central thesis of this paper: that authentic military texts, when appropriately scaffolded, enhance reading comprehension more effectively than simplified instructional materials.

Comparison of pre- and post-instruction reading tasks demonstrated a clear improvement in learners' comprehension performance. At the beginning of the study, many learners struggled to identify main ideas, interpret implicit meanings, and navigate dense technical language. Responses were often surface-level, relying heavily on word-by-word translation rather than strategic reading. By the end of the instructional period, learners showed increased ability to summarize key points accurately, infer meaning from context, and distinguish between essential and supporting information. These developments suggest that repeated exposure to authentic military texts helped learners adapt to the linguistic and structural features characteristic of professional military discourse.

Classroom observations revealed a shift in learners' reading behavior over time. Initially, learners expressed frustration with unfamiliar terminology and complex sentence structures. However, as the course progressed, they increasingly employed strategies introduced during instruction, such as skimming for general understanding, scanning for specific details, and using contextual clues to infer meaning. Learners became less dependent on dictionaries and more willing to tolerate ambiguity, which aligns with Grabe's (2009) assertion that strategic competence is essential for effective reading comprehension. This shift indicates that authentic texts encouraged learners to read more purposefully and efficiently, reflecting real-world reading demands.

One of the most significant findings emerged from learner reflections and post-reading discussions, which highlighted increased motivation and engagement. Many learners reported that authentic military texts felt more relevant and meaningful than textbook-based materials. They expressed a sense of professional connection, noting that the texts mirrored documents they expected to encounter in real military contexts. This perceived relevance appeared to enhance persistence when facing difficult passages, supporting previous research that links authenticity to increased learner motivation (Gilmore, 2007). From a student-researcher perspective, this finding underscores the importance of aligning instructional materials with learners' identities and future professional roles.

Despite these positive outcomes, the results also revealed persistent challenges. Some learners continued to struggle with dense information, especially texts containing extensive acronyms or culturally embedded references. Without sufficient pre-reading

support, these features occasionally hindered comprehension and slowed reading speed. This finding supports concerns raised by Day and Bamford (1998) regarding the potential difficulty of unadapted materials. However, learner feedback suggested that structured guidance, collaborative tasks, and post-reading reflection significantly reduced these difficulties over time.

Overall, the findings are consistent with existing literature on authentic materials in ESP contexts. The improvement in comprehension skills supports Nation's (2013) claim that meaningful input in relevant contexts enhances language development. Similarly, the observed increase in strategic reading aligns with Dudley-Evans and St John's (1998) emphasis on authenticity as a bridge between language learning and professional practice. Importantly, this study extends these insights to a military educational setting, where reading comprehension is not only an academic skill but also a professional necessity.

From a critical standpoint, the results suggest that authentic military texts should not replace pedagogical materials entirely, but rather complement them within a structured instructional framework. The success of authenticity in this study depended heavily on careful text selection and instructional scaffolding. When these conditions were met, authentic texts fostered deeper comprehension, greater autonomy, and increased learner confidence.

In conclusion, the discussion of results demonstrates that integrating authentic military texts can significantly enhance reading comprehension while also promoting engagement and professional relevance. These findings reinforce the argument that authenticity, when thoughtfully implemented, is a powerful tool in military education.

Results

The results of this study indicate that integrating authentic military texts into reading instruction positively influenced learners' reading comprehension, engagement, and use of reading strategies. Analysis of pre- and post-instruction tasks, classroom observations, and reflective journals provided a comprehensive understanding of how learners interacted with authentic materials and how their comprehension abilities evolved over the eight-week period.

Comparison of pre- and post-reading tasks revealed a noticeable improvement in learners' comprehension skills. Initially, many participants struggled to identify main ideas, infer implicit meanings, and navigate technical terminology. Responses often relied on literal translation and isolated word recognition, reflecting a limited ability to synthesize information from context. By the conclusion of the study, learners demonstrated enhanced abilities to summarize key points accurately, extract relevant information, and make inferences based on contextual clues. This shift suggests that repeated exposure to authentic texts helped learners internalize the structural and linguistic patterns characteristic of professional military discourse. Classroom observations indicated a significant change in learners' reading behaviors. Early in the course, learners frequently relied on dictionaries and exhibited hesitation when encountering unfamiliar vocabulary or complex sentence structures. Over time, learners increasingly employed strategies such as skimming for general understanding, scanning for specific details, and using contextual inference to interpret meaning. They also became more willing to engage with ambiguity, demonstrating growing confidence

in handling challenging texts. This evolution aligns with existing research that emphasizes the role of strategic reading in effective comprehension (Grabe, 2009).

Learner reflections and discussions highlighted a marked increase in motivation and engagement. Many participants reported that authentic military texts felt directly relevant to their professional experiences and future responsibilities, which encouraged sustained attention and persistence despite difficult passages. Several learners noted that working with real-world materials enhanced their sense of professional identity and responsibility, supporting previous studies linking authenticity with increased learner motivation (Gilmore, 2007).

While overall results were positive, challenges persisted, particularly with texts containing dense technical terminology, acronyms, and culturally specific references. Some learners experienced initial difficulty in comprehension and slowed reading pace. However, the combination of pre-reading support, guided tasks, and reflective discussions mitigated these issues, suggesting that scaffolding is essential when using authentic materials.

In summary, the results demonstrate that authentic military texts contributed to improved reading comprehension, more effective use of reading strategies, and heightened learner engagement. These findings underscore the pedagogical value of carefully selected authentic materials in military education, highlighting their role in bridging classroom learning with professional application.

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