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Integrating Digital Authentic Materials in ESP Classrooms: Effects on Kazakh Students' Language Proficiency and Student Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of selected task-design strategies for integrating digital authentic materials into ESP instruction. It mainly focuses on how teachers navigated this alternative learning environment and the challenges they experienced. A mixed-methods approach was employed, gathering quantitative data through standardized tests and qualitative data through interviews and classroom observations. The study involved thirty-five language instructors from the English language departments of two leading Kazakh universities. The results revealed that critical media literacy instruction to use authentic materials in language learning significantly enhances language proficiency and engagement and effectively equips students with the necessary skills to navigate and assess the digital information landscape. These findings underscore the potential of digital authentic materials in language instruction, paving the way for a promising future in language education. The research highlights the importance of integrating digital literacy

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into the curriculum to prepare students for the demands of the digital age. The research findings provide vital insights for policymakers and stakeholders to deliberate on effective professional development programs. These programs can assist educators in addressing challenges and acquiring essential content knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and technological competence.

Keywords: English for specific purposes; Digital authentic materials; Language proficiency; Student engagement; Media literacy; Instructions

1. Introduction

In an information-saturated world, proficiency in English has become necessary for professionals and academics in non-English-speaking countries. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses are crucial in equipping learners with the skills to communicate effectively within their domains (Hyland, 2018; Tomlinson, B., 2016; Widdowson, 2020). However, traditional ESP materials often fall short of fully reflecting the dynamic nature of language use in real-world professional contexts, depending on the purpose of language usage (Widdowson, 2020). This gap between classroom learning and actual language use can hinder students' ability to effectively apply their language skills in their careers (Hyland, 2019). However, technological evolution has introduced a solution to this gap by using digital resources to enhance students' motivation and critical language skills in ESP classrooms. These digital resources play a crucial role in bridging the gap between classroom learning and real-world language use, offering authentic, real-life language examples. It is achieved by connecting language learning with current professional settings, utilizing industry-specific vocabulary and discourse patterns reflecting the latest digital trends (Martin et al., 2021; Stickler et al., 2020), and exposing students to various professional cases and communication styles through digital platforms (Pegrum, 2019).

Kazakhstan has recognized the increasing importance of English proficiency in its education. It has prioritized English language education as part of broader educational reforms to enhance its competitiveness in the global market by assigning it as a mandatory school subject (Hajar et al., 2024; Seitova et al., 2021; Yelubayeva et al., 2016). However, the challenge of English learning in vocational programs is unique, as it is expected to meet the professional demand in various occupations and the needs of industries, which is challenging (Reid & Horvathova, 2023). Even though the ESP programs at Kazakh institutions have been developed in close collaboration with industry experts to meet the diverse needs of students in various professional fields, they still focus on textbook materials lacking real-world context and emphasize general language skills and theory (Hajar et al., 2024). Additionally, given Kazakhstan's complex geographical position, ESP programs frequently integrate elements of Kazakh and Russian cultures and language structures, which do not provide a comprehensive learning experience in an English-speaking environment (Yelubayeva et al., 2023). This research aims to enhance English language learning by using digital authentic materials (DAM) that provide context-rich resources to prepare students for the specific linguistic demands of their careers. The primary task of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of selected task-design strategies for integrating DAM into ESP instruction. Specifically, *the study examines whether Critical Media Literacy Instruction (CMLI) task-design strategies enhance students' abilities to navigate and critically evaluate the digital landscape and enhance their professional communication within their respective domains*.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definitions and importance of digital authentic materials

In modern education, digital materials have become essential for facilitating learning and engagement. These educational resources are created, distributed, and accessed through digital platforms such as e-books, online articles, videos, and interactive simulations. They enable dynamic, personalized, and interactive learning experiences, supporting various learning styles, enhancing engagement and comprehension (Colwell & Reinking, 2016; Nicholas & Ng, 2019), promoting digital literacy, requiring users to evaluate and synthesize information critically (Gilster, 1997), and facilitating access to diverse resources and perspectives,

fostering global and inclusive education (Warschauer, 2013). Based on the comprehensive literature review, *digital materials refer to electronically formatted educational resources that augment learning through interactivity, accessibility, and critical engagement, thereby equipping students to meet the challenges of the digital era.*

Several definitions have been associated with 'authenticity' and 'authentic materials' in language teaching for decades. Conventionally, authenticity is defined as the degree to which something is true to its character, spirit, or source (Peacock, 1997). In language education, authenticity pertains to materials or tasks that reflect real-world language use and provide learners with practical communication opportunities (Gilmore, 2007; Juita, 2023). From a digital perspective, authenticity involves using genuine, real-world content in digital formats, ensuring learners encounter realistic language and cultural nuances (Hafner, 2014; Hafner et al., 2015).

Authentic materials have long been disputed for their ability to expose learners to the language used in real-world situations. Nunan (2004) states that authentic spoken or written materials are not intended for language-teaching purposes. Hedge (2000) agrees that authentic materials are not produced for language teaching purposes and do not have "*contrived or simplified language*," while for Larsen-Freeman (2011), they are one of the characteristics of communicative language teaching. Similarly, Tomlinson and Masuhara (2017, p. 27) advocate that *"authentic materials are designed not to transmit declarative knowledge about the target language but to provide an experience of the language in use."* They argue that all learning texts should be authentic; otherwise, learners will not be prepared for the realities of language use. Furthermore, Gilmore (2007) claims that authentic materials provide learners with examples of natural language use, improving their linguistic and pragmatic competence. The author believes that this exposure to real-life language makes students understand how language functions in various contexts and enhances their ability to use language appropriately and effectively.

Though there are some differences of opinion in defining authentic materials, all these researchers claim that authentic materials are produced and designed to convey a real message. In contrast to textbook material, authentic one is intrinsically more active, exciting, and motivating (Yelubayeva, 2017) because it prepares learners to use the natural language for interpersonal and professional communication (Yelubayeva & Mustafina, 2020; Huang et al., 2024). Thus, *authentic materials in teaching incorporate social and contextual dimensions, acknowledging the need for relevance to 'real' language use while simultaneously validating classroom interactions.*

The integration of digital resources in language education has gained significant traction in recent years, offering several advantages over traditional materials, including accessibility, flexibility, and the ability to provide immediate feedback (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2018; Selwyn, 2016; Stickler et al., 2020). They enhance learner engagement and provide diverse, up-to-date content by updating it quickly to reflect current trends and developments, ensuring students are exposed to the most relevant language (Hafner et al., 2015), and provide instant feedback on exercises and quizzes, facilitating rapid learning and correcting mistakes (Stickler et al., 2020). The most crucial benefit of real-world language use is providing learners with opportunities to interact with authentic materials and contexts. This includes using language in practical, everyday situations, which enhances learners' ability to apply language skills in real-life communication (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2018; Shehadeh, 2024). *Thus, digital authentic materials are learning resources intended to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application, making language learning more meaningful and effective*.

3. Materials and methods

3.1 Strategies to integrate digital authentic materials to ESP classrooms

While digital authentic resources have significant benefits, their integration also poses challenges. One major issue in language education is the abundance of materials with non-educational content available on the internet, potentially disrupting the learning process and making it difficult for students to focus on the most relevant content (Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2018; Mishan, 2022). Excessive reliance on digital materials can reduce face-to-face interaction and communication practice, which are crucial for language development (Stickler et al., 2020). The abundance of digital resources makes it essential to offer methodical solutions for carefully

selecting strategies to ensure they meet language education standards and are relevant to the ESP context, which is also challenging. Selecting appropriate strategies to integrate digital authentic resources for ESP instruction is crucial for enhancing teaching effectiveness and ensuring that materials are relevant, engaging, aligned with students' learning needs for their professional development and provide "*an appropriate use of the resources of English for a whole range of globalized purposes*" (Seidlhofer, 2009, p. 237). This approach directly confronts the specific challenges encountered by Kazakhstani ESP programs and resonates with the nation's overarching educational objectives. Kazakh scholars and practitioners are concerned about the didactic approach to utilizing DAM to equip students with the necessary skills for professional communication in their respective fields, addressing their specific linguistic and professional needs in a more engaging, relevant, and pragmatic learning experience.

The digital era has evolved how we access and consume information and introduced significant challenges related to bias and credibility (Pegrum et al., 2022; Tisdell, 2008). As the number of language learners who rely on online resources for their studies and work is increasing, it is crucial to learn how to identify and avoid biased or propagandistic content. One major obstacle is the overwhelming volume of online information, making filtering challenging. Content creators are adept at manipulating users' behavior to elevate the visibility of their material, regardless of its accuracy or quality, leading to the dissemination of false or misleading information, commonly called 'fake news' (Tisdell, 2008). Furthermore, the digital landscape is characterized by 'filter bubbles,' where individuals are primarily exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs and biases (Pegrum et al., 2022). This can perpetuate stereotypes and prejudices, challenging language learners striving to develop a more nuanced understanding of the target culture and language (Yelubayeva et al., 2024). This cross-disciplinary approach of "*language acquisition, digital literacy, and learning with technology*" (Gee, 2018, p.107) seeks the attention of scholars. To address these challenges, it is crucial to employ a framework for classroom instructions that enhances students' literacy to critically evaluate digital content from various media resources and engage with practical, relevant language use or, in other words, critical media literacy instructions. Under Critical Media Literacy Instructions (CMLI), we understand a set of instructions, including critical media literacy activities, diverse perspectives and source evaluations, and debate and discussion instructions intended to augment students' ability to critically evaluate online sources, identify bias and propaganda, and seek diverse perspectives within ESP classrooms. The primary aim of the CMLI is to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world application by developing the ability to navigate and interpret media content relevant to their professional fields. In an information-saturated society, teaching students how to evaluate media content critically is essential to become skilled at discerning credible and relevant information vital for professional success (Cooke, 2017, 2021; Esparrago-Kalidas, 2021; Hobbs, 2020, 2021; Kellner, 2021). Developing critical media literacy equips students to navigate the vast online information landscape, differentiate between credible and biased sources, and make informed decisions. According to McGrew et al. (2018), mastering students' critical media literacy enhances their ability to assess online information's credibility, which is especially crucial in an era of information overload and misinformation in the workplace.

Critical Media Literacy (CML) has been defined in various ways. CML involves analyzing media representations, understanding how media influences culture and society, and developing the skills to critically engage with media content (Kellner and Share (2007). For Buckingham (2007), CML is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication. This definition expands the concept of literacy to include all forms of media, focusing on critical thinking and the ability to make informed decisions about media consumption and production (Hobbs, 2020). Potter (2013) refers to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that allow individuals to critically analyze the messages that inform, entertain, and sell to us daily. In the context of our research, *CML is an ability to critically evaluate, analyze, and utilize media content relevant to their specific professional fields. It encompasses the skills to discern credible sources, understand media biases, and apply information effectively in professional contexts.*

Since our research explores strategies for integrating materials into ESP instruction to equip students with the skills needed to navigate the digital information landscape, distinguish between credible and biased sources, and make well-informed decisions in their professional environments,

we propose strategies that prioritize the relevance and engagement of instructions while working with real-world context (**Table 1**). The significance of instructional materials that align with students' professional contexts is paramount for motivating and engaging them (Yelubayeva, 2016). ESP instruction should personalize the specific needs and objectives of the learners, focusing on the language and skills relevant to their professional domains (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This relevance ensures that students can see how their learning directly applies to their professional lives, increasing their motivation and commitment to the educational process. With authentic materials, students engage in meaningful tasks that mirror real-world challenges, fostering deeper learning and retention of information (Yelubayeva, 2017).

In a CMLI framework, an essential strategy for assigning instructions for digital authentic resources involves fostering *Critical Media Literacy* among students. This means selecting diverse and challenging tasks that empower students to assess the credibility of information, a crucial aspect of making informed decisions. This skill is pivotal in today's information-rich world, enabling students to identify reliable sources and make well-informed choices (Kellner, 2021). Therefore, educators should provide instructions encouraging students to critically engage with the content, including evaluating digital materials' authority, accuracy, and purpose. Activities such as media analysis projects, critical discussions, and reflective writing can be utilized to assist students in developing these essential skills. By fostering CML, students will be better equipped to identify and rely on reputable sources, enhancing the reliability of their professional and academic work. Furthermore, they will be able to recognize and analyze biases in media, leading to more informed and balanced perspectives, and engage with various viewpoints, thereby promoting a deeper understanding of global and cultural contexts within their domains.

Relevance to Professional Contexts is another essential strategy. Instructional materials that represent real-world professional situations can help students understand the practical application of their learning, which can increase their motivation and engagement. This connection to real-life situations ensures that the language and skills learned directly relate to their careers, making the instruction more meaningful and effective (Gilmore, 2007). To achieve this, educators should consider consulting with industry experts or utilizing professional networks to access materials that reflect the latest practices and trends. These activities include cases with real-world scenarios, technical reports, and professional talks.

The third strategy involves assessing the *Authority and Credibility* of the instructional materials. An essential aspect of CML is critically assessing sources' credibility. Reliable sources enhance the trustworthiness of the information, which is crucial for professional and academic integrity. This strategy helps students develop the skill to recognize and depend on reputable sources, which is vital in professional environments (Esparrago-Kalidas, 2021). To accomplish this, instructions should call students to evaluate the authors' credentials and the reputation of the publication or platform.

Another critical strategy is *Engagement and Interactivity*, which aims to improve student motivation and participation. Interactive instructions align with the principles of CML by encouraging active engagement and critical thinking. They appeal to diverse learning styles and can make learning more enjoyable and effective, maintaining student interest and promoting active participation (Peacock, 1997). Educators should include working with multimedia resources like videos, podcasts, interactive simulations, and online exercises in the assignments. These instructions should be visually appealing and designed to foster active learning.

These strategies can be applied to the ESP curriculum together with core strategies required by educational standards, such as *Alignment with the Learning Objectives* of the course to ensure that students develop the skills and knowledge relevant to their professional fields, *Collaboration, and Peer Learning* to foster communication and teamwork skills; *Cultural and Contextual Appropriateness* to understand learning material within cultural and contextual frameworks; *Feedback and Adaptability* to reflect on their learning and improve and others. This alignment fosters targeted learning, making it easier for students to apply what they learn in real-world contexts and enhancing language proficiency and critical thinking skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The next stage is designing instructions for digital authentic resources in ESP classrooms based on the suggested strategies. Building on this foundation, *Digital Literacy Instruction* is crucial for integrating DAM into ESP classrooms,

Table 1. Critical Media Literacy Instruction components.

Strategies			
Critical media literacy	**Relevance to professional contexts**	**Authority and credibility**	**Engagement and interactivity**
Developing critical thinking and evaluation skills.	Ensuring practical application and increasing motivation.	Teaching critical evaluation of sources.	Maintaining interest and promoting active learning.
Instructions			
Digital literacy instruction	**Media literacy instruction**	**Diverse perspectives and source evaluation**	**Debate and discussion instruction**
Hands-on activity for applying digital tools to complete various tasks (producing media content, doing projects, and gamification).	Hands-on activity where students evaluate a set of preselected articles.	CRAAP Test for Evaluation and justification of the assigned sources for trustworthiness and credibility.	Group discussion on findings with a focus on identifying bias and propaganda techniques.
Critical media literacy instruction			

especially within the CMLI framework. This instruction equips students with the technical skills to understand and use digital platforms and tools relevant to their future careers and the critical thinking skills to assess digital content. The dual focus on technical skills and critical thinking is essential for navigating the digital landscape of professional fields. Digital literacy encompasses technical proficiency and the ability to critically analyze and evaluate digital content regarding credibility, relevance, and bias (Hobbs, 2021). Critical evaluation is critical in professional settings, where the capacity to discern reliable information from misinformation significantly impacts decision-making processes. Engaging in hands-on activities, such as creating media content and participating in gamified projects, fosters practical skills and boosts engagement (Gee, 2018; Nicholas & Ng, 2019). Additionally, digital literacy instruction promotes the development of critical media literacy, enabling students to evaluate the credibility and bias of digital information crucial for professional decision-making (Hobbs, 2020; Keller, 2021; Kellner & Share, 2007). By integrating these elements, educators prepare students for their career's linguistic and analytical demands, ensuring they become well-informed and effective digital citizens.

The Diverse Perspectives and Source Evaluation instruction is integral to developing critical media literacy. This approach exposes students to various perspectives using global news sources. It encourages them to compare how different cultures report the same events and teaches them to differentiate between credible and biased sources (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). By seeking diverse perspectives, students develop a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of global issues, enhancing their critical thinking skills and empowering them to shape their personal and professional futures (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2023). An essential component of this type of instruction is the CRAAP Test, a tool designed to help students assess the credibility and reliability of information sources based on five criteria: Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, and Purpose (Blakeslee, 2004). This is particularly important for ESP students, who must discern credible information relevant to their fields (Appendix A). According to Blakeslee (2004), the CRAAP Test provides a practical framework that helps students develop critical thinking skills for navigating vast amounts of online information. Esparrago-Kalidas (2021) highlights that the CRAAP Test's structured approach makes it accessible for students at various educational levels, enhancing their ability to discern credible sources. Thus, since authentic materials are often derived from actual professional environments, including industry-specific documents, reports, case studies, and multimedia content, the CRAAP Test focuses on ensuring that the information they use is up-to-date, making their knowledge relevant and current. Appendix A provides a sample assignment to develop critical evaluation skills in language classrooms.

Developing analytical skills through *Debate and Discussion* instructions involves organizing classroom debates on controversial topics. Students are required to use credible sources to support their arguments. Additionally, facilitat-

ing group discussions to challenge biased viewpoints and promote collaborative learning is integral to this process. Engaging students in debates and discussions can foster their analytical skills as they learn to evaluate evidence and construct well-reasoned arguments critically. This approach also encourages active learning and the ability to articulate and defend their views. According to Tuzlukova et al. (2017), debates and discussions enhance students' critical thinking and communication skills, essential for academic and professional success. Hosting a classroom debate on a current event, with students citing reliable sources and identifying biases in their materials, helps them practice evaluating information critically and presenting their findings effectively.

Media Literacy Instruction is crucial in fostering critical thinking by encouraging students to question the reliability of digital information. This type of instruction equips students with the skills to critically assess industry-specific media sources, enabling them to discern credible information and avoid misinformation. This, in turn, allows them to apply language skills in practical contexts, ultimately enhancing both language proficiency and professional skills (Hobbs, 2021).

These strategies and instructions were selected because they collectively address the research's core objectives: enhancing language proficiency, increasing student engagement, and developing critical media literacy skills. Each strategy complements the others, creating a comprehensive approach to utilizing DAM in ESP instruction with context-specific content (Hafner et al., 2015; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2018).

3.2 Participants

Thirty-five (n = 35) English language instructors aged between 25 and 61 (M = 43) were voluntarily recruited as research subjects. There were twenty-one participants aged 25-44 and fourteen aged 45–61. Participants were selected through their direct connection to the researchers representing al-Farabi Kazakh National University (al-Farabi University) and Atyrau University named after Kh. Dosmukhamedov (Atyrau University). **Table 2** provides demographic information about participants. Overall, there were twenty-eight female and seven male participants.

All participants, ten with PhD degrees and twenty-five with Master's degrees, have experience delivering teaching ESP using authentic materials in various training programs. All participants utilized CMLI at their ESP sessions to enhance language proficiency and increase engagement among their undergraduate second-year students. Although 11 participants (31%) expressed moderate interest in integrating DAM into their classrooms, they agreed to join the research experience. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and voluntarily consented to participate. This study followed institutional research ethics protocol and ensured participants' anonymity and information confidentiality.

3.3 Data collection

The study findings were presented in two stages to gather the data for this study. The first stage reviewed teachers' satisfaction with CMLI after they experienced it in their ESP classrooms (Appendix B). First, a questionnaire survey was conducted to collect general data from participants. The questionnaire consisted of four questions to determine the participants' attitudes toward applying the CMLI model to ESP instructions and the benefits and difficulties they encountered when exposed to authentic materials.

The second stage employed interviews to capture the insights from participants with personal experiences, beliefs, and attitudes regarding the CMLI in ESP classrooms. This method was chosen to comprehensively understand the subject under investigation (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview protocol encompassed two main areas: background information and central questions. The background information section included the teachers' names, affiliations, genders, ages, designations, years of teaching experience, majors where ESP is being taught, educational qualifications, and the use of authentic materials in class. The central questions section was divided into four subsections (Boelens et al., 2017): (a) promoting flexibility, which inquired about the time, place, path, and pace of learning; (b) stimulating interaction, which asked about the verbal or non-verbal, spoken or written, and strategies that teachers employed; (c) facilitating learning processes, which asked about orienting/planning, monitoring, adjusting, and evaluating strategies; and (d) fostering affective learning climate, which asked about how teachers used affective strategies, promoted a positive attitude towards learning, and engaged students. Each subsection explored how teachers facilitated their classes with

Table 2. Demographic information about participants.

Gender	Al-Farabi university		Atyrau university		Total
Total	**21**		**14**		**35**
	MA	PhD	MA	PhD	
Female	10	7	9	2	28
Male	4	-	2	1	7
Aged 25–44	*9*	*3*	*8*	*1*	*21*
Aged 45–61	*5*	*4*	*3*	*2*	*14*

CMLI and the challenges they encountered. The interview protocol was validated by two experts with doctoral degrees, multiple publications in reputable journals, and at least ten years of teaching experience in higher education.

All interviews (online and offline) lasted approximately three hours. Online interviews were chosen due to the interviewer's proximity to the participants. The interviewer ensured that participants felt at ease and could speak openly during the interview to minimize social desirability biases (Bergen & Labonté, 2019). For example, participants were assured that there were no incorrect responses and that their identities and answers would be kept confidential. With the participants' consent, all interviews were recorded to guarantee the accurate capture of all relevant information for transcription and analysis.

4. Results & data analysis

Question One asked students to fill out a closed question form on a five-point Likert scale, where '1 – very effective,' '2 – quite effective,' '3 – somewhat effective,' '4 – ineffective,' and '5 – no difference' concerning CMLI. The recipients' answers were mixed. The survey revealed that 43% of the participants felt unsatisfied with the suggested framework, finding it ineffective, whereas 19% thought it was very effective. Almost 13% said it was quite effective, 16% thought there was no difference, and 9% said it was somewhat effective (**Figure 1**).

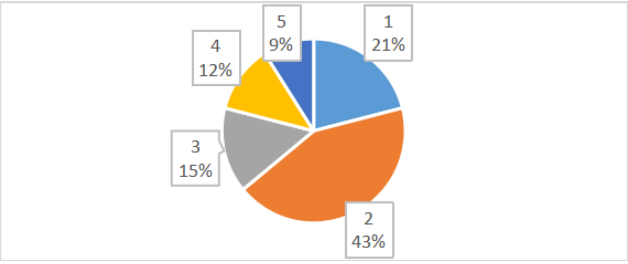

Figure 1. Satisfaction with CMLI.

Question two, "Does the CMLI Effect on Students' Participation in ESP Classes?" was designed to anticipate students' engagement in ESP classroom activities when DAMs were used. **Table 1** shows a high level of students' participation in ESP classes. Thus, 28 (80%) interviewers responded "Yes," claiming that using digital authentic resources in ESP courses fosters heightened engagement by allowing students to interact with content that mirrors their evolving fields. Five (14%) respondents answered "No," stating that some students prefer the conventional approach, while two (6%) expressed their uncertainty with "Not sure" (**Figure 2**).

Question three, "Do digital authentic materials offer various learning paths (e.g., individual projects, group work)?" was aimed at determining the effectiveness of using DAM for various learning paths in ESP classes. The results demonstrate that one-fourth of the respondents (80%) considered them effective in offering various learning paths, while four students, representing 11%, expressed uncertainty about utilizing various learning paths with DAMs, and three participants (9%) responded 'No' (**Figure 3**).

Question four, "Do digital authentic materials help you adjust the pace of lessons based on student feedback?" aimed to determine DAMs' effectiveness in teaching English and developing students' communication and collaboration skills. The results revealed that 29 respondents (83%) believed DAMs were suitable to adjust lesson pace to improve their students' communicative skills. None of the respondents doubted the improvement in communication skills, while six students (17%) did not find the exposure to 'real' language beneficial (see **Figure 4**).

The transcribed interviews were thoroughly analyzed using predetermined categories based on the conceptual framework and research questions. Multilevel coding was employed to classify the codes from the transcripts (Birks & Mills, 2011). Initially, the responses were grouped into two general classifications: (1) Facilitating Learning and (2)

Other Challenges with CMLI practice. Further classification was conducted within each general category, utilizing the four subcategories outlined by Boelens et al. (2017): promoting flexibility, stimulating interaction, facilitating learning processes, and fostering an effective learning climate. To examine responses within each of the four subcategories about facilitating learning, we developed more detailed classifications based on the Boelens framework. Subsequently, we extracted the relevant codes from each participant's responses and categorized them based on their similarities and relationships. To analyze responses within the "Other Challenges" subcategories, we compared them across the four categories related to facilitating learning.

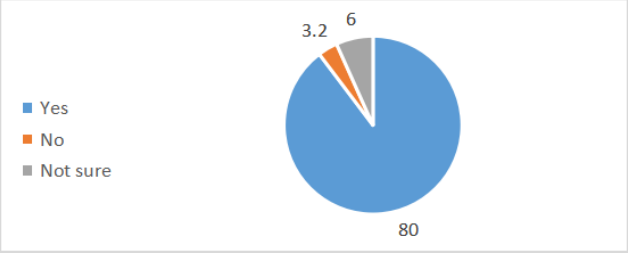

Figure 2. The Effect of CMLI on Students' Participation in ESP Classes.

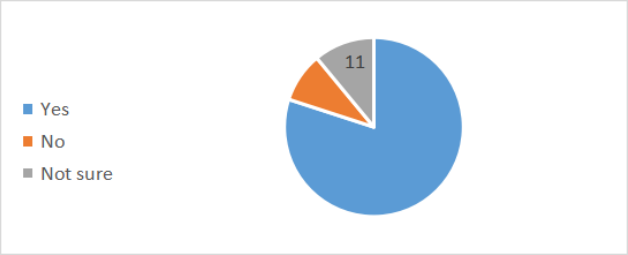

Figure 3. Efficiency of Digital Authentic Materials to offer various learning paths in ESP Classrooms.

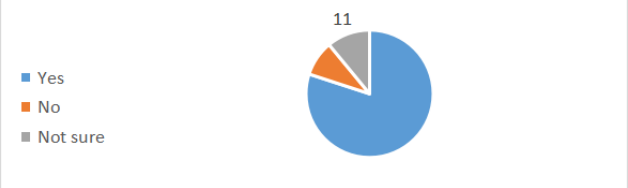

Figure 4. The Effect of DAM to adjust the pace of the lesson based on student feedback.

We performed a constant comparative and progressive analysis of cases to allow the initially identified subcategories to emerge and take shape while remaining open to the possibility of new categories, subcategories, or fine-grained classifications arising from the data. We also conducted a thorough and ongoing analysis of cases to let the initially identified subcategories develop and evolve. We remained open to the potential of new categories, subcategories, or detailed classifications emerging from the data. To ensure reliability, we independently analyzed each response in the order of the interview.

The research delved into how educators in higher education integrate DAM into ESP classrooms. It focused on cultivating an environment that enhances students' language proficiency and engagement with authentic materials and the challenges they encounter during the teaching process.

Figures 5 and **6** summarize teachers' strategies to support learning within Boelens' four categories (incorporating flexibility, facilitating interaction, facilitating students' learning process, and fostering an effective learning climate). Overall, teachers most frequently discussed practices related to promoting an effective learning atmosphere; second, followed by facilitating learning; third, incorporating flexibility and facilitating interaction were mentioned the least.

Figure 5 indicates that teachers emphasized flexibility in four critical areas outlined in our conceptual framework, including resource format (paper-based, computer-based, and gamification). This involved giving students choices in the lesson process, setting flexible topics for student discussions, and utilizing paper-based and computer-based materials.

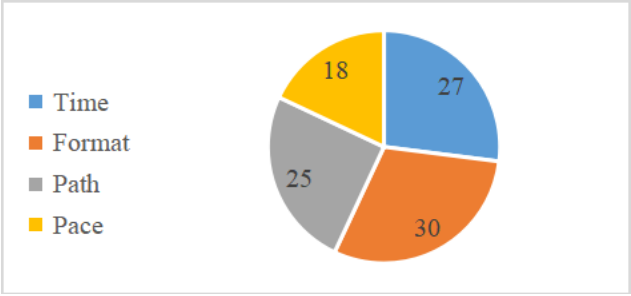

Figure 5. Teachers' Responses on Incorporating Flexibility.

Teachers demonstrated flexibility in allowing students to produce digital content, such as blogging, microblogging, vlogging, podcasting, and digital storytelling. One teacher allowed her students to choose their learning space based on context. Some teachers adjusted the syllabus content or the course requirements to accommodate the order in which the content was provided. However, less than half of the teachers adjusted their teaching based on students' progress. These teachers allowed students to select study materials and change discussion topics to suit their needs. While many

teachers practiced flexibility, some balanced it with inflexibility. One-fifth of participants reported that some teachers strictly followed the course outline and teaching strategies to meet school requirements. These findings suggest a continuum of teaching flexibility that requires further investigation.

Boelens' framework suggests that practices to encourage interaction include questioning, collaboration, feedback, and learning activities. According to **Figure 3**, questioning was a popular approach among our teachers. For example, almost one-half of respondents mentioned that they devoted less time to discussion and more time to questions and answers, while others incorporated interactive and gamified learning. Additionally, some teachers employed the Socratic method, engaging in cooperative dialogue with students through asking and answering questions. Meanwhile, one-fourth of the participants facilitated collaborative discussions and debates, allowing students to express their thoughts and engage in learning activities. Furthermore, some teachers allowed students to utilize affordable social media platforms to promote interaction, using video tools and instant messaging, among other affordances.

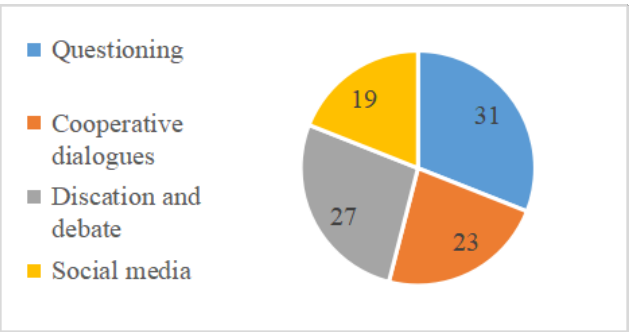

Figure 6. Teachers' Responses on Facilitating Interaction.

In the study, teachers utilized various regulatory strategies such as adjusting, monitoring, and evaluating. Many teachers made adjustments based on their students' needs, providing remediation for struggling students or adapting content and activities to suit their students' abilities. They also closely monitored student progress through assessments like quizzes, writing tasks, and reflective essays, as well as by tracking attendance. To assess student learning, teachers employed various methods, including interactive exams, research papers, collaborative video projects, portfolio assessments, and objective tests.

Addressing students' emotions is the most frequently utilized strategy for fostering an affective learning climate (**Figure 4**). To achieve this, teachers made themselves available to students outside regular class hours and prioritized open communication. Many teachers emphasized the positive impact of open communication, calling students to put more concentration and effort into submitting assignments and encouraging them to participate actively in group activities. Another strategy they employ to address students' emotions involves demonstrating empathy and consideration toward students. Some teachers highlighted their commitment to being considerate and attentive to their students' needs and concerns. Additional strategies used by teachers when addressing students' emotions included acknowledging students' efforts and work, promoting optimism, engaging students in reflective activities, discussing mental health, and incorporating humor and background music.

Another crucial aspect contributing to an effective learning climate is motivating students, nurturing a willingness to learn, and establishing clear expectations about the course and its learning outcomes. To accomplish this, teachers provided positive feedback and reinforcement, used motivational language, implemented personalized teaching methods, clarified learning outcomes, and encouraged peer learning. Regarding concentration and effort, more than half of the responses focused on setting deadlines. The teachers used different methods to engage their students. Half of them used a Socratic method, where they reviewed the previous session, reminded students to focus on learning, and explained the learning tasks. All teachers agreed that self-assessment helped students understand their learning outcomes and develop self-awareness. Additionally, five teachers incorporated appraising into their teaching by explaining the relevance of the learning tasks. For example, one teacher emphasized the importance of completing the assigned task, while another asked her students to write a reflection paper to understand the value of the learning activities.

5. Discussion

The questionnaire results showed that students were highly engaged in ESP classroom activities. The data indicated that almost all students attended all classes when authentic materials were used. Teachers had a positive attitude towards using authentic materials, with the majority

expressing strong enjoyment. Students reported improved reading, communication, and writing skills using authentic materials. They found these materials effective as they allowed them to engage with the actual language used by native speakers in authentic contexts (see Jacobson et al., 2003). While most students found the authentic materials beneficial, a few encountered difficulties understanding new vocabulary and complex texts. We discussed those challenges during the interview.

The findings confirm the severe challenges experienced in technical proficiency, access to resources, time constraints, curriculum compatibility, and enhancing media literacy skills by practicing the CMLI framework (**Table 3**). During the interview, the participants were asked to choose from a list of suggested options the difficulties they encountered when integrating DAM into ESP instruction and provide arguments and justification for their choices. Most educators have claimed that learner-related and teaching delivery (46% and 51%, respectively) challenges internet connection availability, decreasing student enthusiasm for class engagement. According to Gee (2018), limited access to high-quality DAMs, especially in under-resourced educational settings, poses a significant barrier for teachers to find appropriate and relevant digital content that meets their students' needs. Regarding teaching challenges, teachers expressed concern that some needed more technical skills (43%) to effectively integrate digital tools and resources into their teaching practice. Varying levels of digital literacy among teachers may hinder the effective use of DAMs in the classroom, causing underuse or reliance on these materials based on less effective traditional methods (Stickler et al., 2020). As a result, teachers have to spend extra time developing their digital skills, which can distract them from lesson preparation. Some teachers (34%) faced challenges due to time constraints. The preparation and integration of DAMs demand significant time and effort, which can be daunting for many teachers, considering their workload (Kessler, 2018). This can lead to inadequate integration of digital resources into the curriculum, impacting the overall quality of ESP instruction. In terms of teaching delivery and assessment, teachers needed help with curriculum compatibility (37%), developing critical thinking skills (29%), and providing appropriate guidance and support (9%). Most respondents highlighted the difficulty of ensuring that DAMs align with the curriculum and learning objectives. According to Cookes (2017), misalignment can result in ineffective teaching and learning experiences, diminishing the potential benefits of digital integration. Encouraging students to analyze DAMs critically can be challenging, mainly if students are accustomed to passive learning styles (Borucinsky & Čolakovac, 2023). Students may initially resist or need help with tasks that require higher-order thinking skills, such as evaluation and synthesis. It is essential to ensure that students receive adequate guidance and support when using DAMs. Teachers must effectively apply scaffold learning to help students navigate and critically assess digital content (Pegrum, 2019). More support can lead to student satisfaction and reduced engagement. Another major challenge for teachers was enhancing media literacy, which involves their exposure to complex content and the nuanced meaning of the text based on the CRAAP test (51%). This challenge was most common when promoting flexibility. Teaching students to identify bias, propaganda, and misinformation in digital materials demands specialized knowledge and skills that some teachers may need to possess (Tisdell, 2008). Therefore, with proper media literacy instruction, students can differentiate between credible and unreliable sources, potentially perpetuating misinformation.

Instructors commonly expressed the challenge of inflexibility in their instructional delivery due to various technicalities. Some also acknowledged their struggle to manage their emotions, actions, and thoughts to achieve teaching goals, particularly when implementing new strategies. Few comments addressed issues related to the teaching environment, physical well-being, and technological literacy (26% each). Regarding school policy challenges, some instructors felt restricted by institutional policies, impacting their flexibility with deadlines and course requirements. However, policy creators expressed ownership and trust in their effectiveness, indicating that teachers who trusted the guidelines were likelier to adhere to them.

Addressing these challenges will allow teachers to integrate digital materials more effectively, enhance ESP instruction, and engage students with real-world content. This is an issue for further research to explore strategies to support teachers in overcoming these barriers and maximizing the benefits of digital resources in language education.

Table 3. Teachers' Challenges During CMLI Practice.

Strategies	Incorporating flexibility	Facilitate interaction	Facilitating learning process	Fostering an affective learning climate	Total
Internet quality	4	3	4	3	40%
Learner-related	4	4	3	5	46%
Teaching delivery	4	3	5	6	51%
The CRAAP test	4	4	4	6	51%
Technological complexity	2	3	2	4	31%
Time constraints	3	3	3	3	34%
Guidance and Support	4	3	3	4	40%
School policy	2	0	0	2	11%
Technical literacy	4	3	4	4	43%
Teaching environment	2	2	3	2	26%
Health condition	2	2	2	3	26%
Curriculum compatibility	4	3	3	3	37%
Critical thinking skills	3	2	2	3	29%

6. Conclusions

This study investigated the effectiveness of the CMLI for integrating DAM into ESP instruction, particularly how teachers navigated this alternative learning environment and the challenges they experienced. The questionnaire and interview represented the data collection instruments. The questionnaire sheets referred to the students' attendance in classroom activities while using DAM to teach ESP. The study revealed that these strategies equip learners to navigate the complexities of the digital information landscape, fostering a more informed and discerning generation of language users. Overall data indicated that they promoted flexibility and interaction, facilitated learning processes, and fostered an affective learning climate as much as possible. However, these teachers faced challenges related to technical proficiency, access to resources, time constraints, curriculum compatibility, and enhancing media literacy skills. Their varying experience was linked to their unique context by several factors: available tools, institutional policies, pedagogical goals, teaching delivery, and learner-related factors. Our findings provide several implications. First, this study shed light on the challenges that language instructors face. It highlighted the importance of their readiness to embark on the authenticity of teaching materials, particularly within a digital learning context. Higher education institutions with similar learning contexts could use these findings to enhance efforts toward a more efficient learning environment. This study would also provide critical information to policymakers, school administrators, and teacher trainers to reflect on the viable professional development programs that allow teachers to overcome these challenges and equip them with the necessary content knowledge and pedagogical and technological competence (Martin et al., 2021). Finally, the findings gave us a nuanced understanding that interrelated factors and interdisciplinary approaches shaped teachers' navigation strategies and challenges. As such, addressing the issues requires a systemic approach.

Study Limitations and Future Research

This study acknowledges several limitations that provide opportunities for future research. Firstly, the research primarily examined short-term effects without assessing long-term impacts on language proficiency and professional readiness. Secondly, the sample was restricted to thirty-five instructors from two Kazakh universities, potentially constraining the generalizability of the findings to a broader range of ESP programs. Additionally, the study did not consider variations in technological infrastructure, which could influence the effectiveness of DAM use.

In future studies, we aim to employ objective measures such as direct observations and student performance data and conduct longitudinal research to evaluate sustained impacts. Comparative studies across different educational contexts, incorporating student feedback and interdisciplinary approaches, will deepen our understanding of the efficacy of DAM in ESP instruction.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Zh.G., Y.N., and P.Y.; methodology, Zh.G., Y.N., P.Y., and K.K.; software, Zh.G.; valida-

tion, Zh.G., Y.N., and P.Y; formal analysis, Zh.G., Y.N., P.Y., K.K., and G.K.; investigation, Zh.G., and P.Y.; resources, Zh.G., Y.N. and G.K.; data curation, Y.N., P.Y. and G.K.; writing—original draft preparation, Zh.G.; writing—review and editing, Zh.G., Y.N., P.Y. K.K. and G.K.; visualization, Zh. G.; supervision, Y.N., and P.Y.; project administration, Y.N., and P.Y.; funding acquisition, Zh.G., Y.N., P.Y., and K.K.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article; further inquiries can be directed to the author.

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Appendix A

Sample Activity on Practicing the CRAAP test

Appendix B

QUESTIONNAIRE

Background Information

Participant Details:

Name (Optional) _____

Affiliation _____

Gender: [ ] Male [ ] Female [ ] Other

Age: [ ] 20–29 [ ] 30–39 [ ] 40–49 [ ] 50–59 [ ] 60+

Designation: [ ] Lecturer [ ] Assistant Professor [ ] Associate Professor [ ] Professor

Years of Teaching Experience: [ ] 0–5 [ ] 6–10 [ ] 11–15 [ ] 16–20 [ ] 20+

Major where ESP is being taught: _____

Educational Qualifications: _____

Experience using authentic materials in class: [ ] Yes [ ] No

1) To what extent do you find the CMLI framework effective?

- ☐ 1 – very effective
- ☐ 2 – quite effective
- ☐ 3 – somewhat effective
- ☐ 4 – ineffective
- ☐ 5 – no difference

2. Does the CMLI Effect on Students' Participation in ESP Classes?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

3. Do digital authentic materials offer various learning paths (e.g., individual projects, group work)?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

4. Do digital authentic materials help you adjust the pace of lessons based on student feedback?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

INTERVIEW CENTRAL QUESTIONS

1) Can you provide examples of allowing flexibility in your lesson plans using CMLI for DAMs?

2) How do you encourage student collaboration when using CMLI with authentic resources?

3) How do you ensure DAMs are effectively integrated into your teaching practices?

4) Can you provide examples of how digital authentic ma-

Instruction classification and assignment	
Assignment for teachers	**Assignment for students**
Research Assignment: Assign 2–3 sources summary report justifying the credibility of each source based on the CRAAP Test.	Individually find 2–3 sources on the assigned topic. Evaluate each source using the CRAAP Test. Write a brief report summarizing the evaluations and justifying the credibility of each source.
Peer Review and Feedback: Pair students to exchange reports.	Provide feedback based on CRAAP test criteria (Appendix B). Fill out the evaluation worksheet for each source.
Class Discussion: Assign each to present their findings briefly and discuss the evaluations as a class.	Discuss common findings and challenges faced during the evaluations as a class. Highlight key points about source credibility and reliability; focus on identifying bias and propaganda techniques in the sources.

CRAAP test evaluation worksheet		Response
Currency:	When was the information published or updated? Is the information current or outdated for your topic?	
Relevance:	Does the information relate to your topic or answer your question? Who is the intended audience? Is the information at an appropriate level?	
Authority:	Who is the author/publisher/source/sponsor? What are the author's credentials or organizational affiliations?	
Accuracy:	Does evidence support the information? Has the information been reviewed or refereed? Are there spelling, grammar, or typographical errors?	
Purpose:	What is the purpose of the information? Is the information fact, opinion, or propaganda? Does the point of view appear objective and impartial?	

terials have engaged your students and fostered a positive learning environment?

5) What challenges have you encountered integrating DAMs into your ESP classes?

6) How have you addressed these challenges to ensure effective teaching and learning?

7) Do you want to share any additional feedback or insight regarding using CMLI in ESP?

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