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Authentic Texts – The Key to Professional Competence

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Abstract
This article highlights the scientific and methodological foundations for selecting and using authentic texts in the educational process for students majoring in Plant Protection. The study analyzes the role of authentic texts in developing professional competence and identifies five main criteria for their selection: content relevance, scientific reliability, language and comprehensibility level, topicality, and orientation toward didactic objectives. The article presents the stages of text selection, the methodology for integrating authentic texts into the educational process, and their effectiveness in developing students' professional competence. The conclusion provides practical recommendations for teaching through authentic texts and identifies directions for future research.

Keywords: Authentic texts, professional competence, plant protection, text selection criteria, teaching methodology, terminology, didactic integration.

Introduction

The professional competence of students studying Plant Protection is developed not only through theoretical knowledge but also through practically oriented teaching resources. Among such resources, authentic texts are of particular importance. An authentic text is generally understood as a source used in real production, scientific research, monitoring, technical instruction, or professional communication and not specifically adapted for educational purposes. In Plant Protection, authentic texts help students understand the dynamics of pests and diseases, interactions within agroecosystems, preventive and control measures, and the logical sequence of phytosanitary control.

Today, updating educational content, strengthening the competency-based approach, and teaching students to work independently have become increasingly important. In this context, it is necessary to clearly define the criteria for selecting authentic texts relevant to the field. An incorrectly selected text may reduce students' motivation, create difficulties in comprehension, and, in some cases, lead to inaccurate scientific perceptions. In Plant Protection practice, errors in information concerning pesticide application rates, principles of biological control, monitoring methods, and quarantine and sanitary requirements may increase practical risks as well as negatively affect learning outcomes.

Texts related to Plant Protection often contain complex terminology, such as entomological terms, pathogen life cycles, indicator species, and phenological stages, as well as various forms of

information, including tables, diagrams, evidence-based arguments, and regulatory indicators. Therefore, text selection requires consideration not only of content relevance but also of scientific reliability and didactic suitability. In teaching, an authentic text should not be presented merely as a source of ready-made answers; rather, it should serve as an educational object that develops analysis, comparison, problem-solving, inference, and communication skills.

The aim of this article is to scientifically and methodologically substantiate and systematize the requirements for selecting authentic texts relevant to students majoring in Plant Protection. The research objectives include assessing: (1) relevance to the field, (2) scientific reliability, (3) language and comprehensibility level, (4) topicality, and (5) orientation toward didactic objectives. The practical aim is to strengthen students' skills in taking notes, using terminology correctly, understanding cause-and-effect relationships based on texts, interpreting monitoring results, and developing professional reasoning.

Methods

The article employs pedagogical analysis, selection of documents and scientific-popular and methodological materials, and approaches aimed at observing learning outcomes as methodological foundations for developing criteria for selecting authentic texts relevant to the field. Applying these methods consistently ensures systematicity in identifying appropriate texts and integrating them into the educational process.

The first stage is determining the relevance of the text to the field. The authentic source should correspond to the main components of Plant Protection: pest morphology and biology, disease etiology, sources of infection, mechanisms of spread, monitoring methods, agrotechnical measures, preventive measures, ecological factors such as climate, humidity, and phenology, as well as stages of phytosanitary control. For example, sources limited exclusively to general entomology or plant physiology may not fully correspond to the teaching objectives. Therefore, it is important to determine whether the topic represents a central topic or an interdisciplinary topic within Plant Protection.

The second stage is checking scientific reliability and source quality. Authentic texts should provide scientific evidence, observation results, and logically substantiated recommendations. The author's expertise, publication type, origin of the information, and the accuracy of figures and standards should be examined. Methods and recommendations used in Plant Protection may change over time. Therefore, the date of updating the text, experimental conditions, including regional climatic conditions and crop type, and the context of application should also be considered. This ensures that the information provided to students is well-founded.

The third stage is evaluating language, terminology, and comprehensibility. Authentic texts are often rich in professional terminology. Students may have different levels of preparation. Therefore, the number of terms, complex grammatical structures, sentence length, and degree of abstraction should correspond to the educational objective. If the terminology is unfamiliar, the teacher may provide students with a pre-prepared glossary or brief explanations. However, excessive simplification may reduce authenticity, so an appropriate balance should be maintained.

The fourth stage is determining topicality and suitability for the educational context. When selecting an authentic text, it is necessary to examine which crops, regions, and periods it concerns. In Plant Protection, the seasonality of pests and diseases is highly significant, while climatic

factors strongly influence the development of pathogens and pests. Therefore, topical texts help students understand real professional situations. The teacher should also plan in advance which semester or practical lesson the text will be connected with.

The fifth stage is linking the text to didactic objectives and learning tasks. An authentic text should not merely be an object of study; it should serve as a resource for organizing learning activities. After selecting a text, appropriate tasks should be developed, such as identifying the main idea, extracting and defining terminology, explaining cause-and-effect relationships, writing conclusions based on monitoring results, identifying problems in the text, and justifying possible solutions. The tasks should correspond to students' levels and connect theory with practical situations.

The results of the study are discussed in the following section through a practical interpretation of the criteria. In particular, students' activities, the influence of the criteria on educational outcomes, and a recommended process scheme for teachers are considered.

Results

The requirements for selecting authentic texts for students majoring in Plant Protection can be systematized into several main blocks. These requirements cover not only the content of the text but also characteristics related to teaching methodology. As a result, students are prepared to acquire professional knowledge through real sources, learn scientific language, conduct logical analysis, and make decisions in practical situations.

The first requirement is content relevance to the field. An authentic text should be directly related to Plant Protection. This relevance can be determined through the following indicators: (1) whether the text addresses a pest or disease topic; (2) whether it provides information about monitoring, prevention, or control measures; and (3) whether it is connected with agroecological factors such as humidity, temperature, and the vegetation period. If a text provides general biological information but lacks a practical Plant Protection component, its use in the educational process may be limited.

The practical result is that relevant texts strengthen the formation of a professional context among students. When reading, students perceive not only a theoretical concept but also a strategy appropriate to a professional situation. For example, texts on monitoring help students answer the questions "What indicators should I monitor and why?" Thus, content relevance increases learning motivation because students recognize the connection between the knowledge they acquire and their future professional activities.

The second requirement is scientific reliability and evidence-based content. When an authentic text is selected, its scientific validity should be examined. The results indicate that reliable sources contain observation methods, analytical logic, criteria for drawing conclusions, or justified practical recommendations. In contrast, texts limited to unsupported general recommendations or one-sided opinions may lead to misconceptions.

Scientific reliability is particularly important in Plant Protection because incorrect interpretation may result in an inappropriate practical decision. Therefore, figures, application rates, and explanations concerning impacts on crops or agroecosystems should be supported by sources. As a result, students do not merely "read" scientific texts but also learn to analyze the evidence presented in them.

The third requirement is linguistic and terminological adaptability. Because authentic texts contain many professional terms, they should be sufficiently comprehensible for students' level of preparation. The results show that when the number of terms is excessively high, students may lose the overall meaning and focus only on translation or memorization. However, an overly simplified text may not adequately contribute to the development of professional language.

Therefore, a methodological solution is to provide a mini-glossary, brief explanations, or pre-reading questions after selecting the text. This enables students to acquire complex terminology systematically and understand the content more fully. The results also indicate that learning terminology in context, that is, through the sentences in which terms are used, improves retention.

The fourth requirement is topicality and relevance to current conditions. Technologies and recommendations in Plant Protection are continuously updated. The results show that up-to-date texts help students understand real professional problems more quickly. Since pests and diseases have seasonal and regional characteristics, crop type, climatic conditions, and vegetation period should be considered when selecting texts.

Topicality activates students' thinking about "why this is important." Consequently, the reading process is directed not only toward acquiring theoretical knowledge but also toward developing practical thinking. While reading a text, students try to identify ways of adapting its recommendations to real conditions in their own region.

The fifth requirement is orientation toward didactic objectives and integration with learning tasks. The value of an authentic text lies not only in the text itself but also in the educational activities organized around it. The results show that if a text is not accompanied by appropriate tasks, students may read it passively and fail to identify the main idea. Therefore, after selecting a text, relevant tasks such as analytical questions, note-taking plans, table completion, cause-and-effect chains, and conclusion writing should be planned.

As a result, students develop the following skills: (1) identifying key information; (2) using terminology correctly; (3) drawing logical conclusions from textual information; (4) interpreting situations related to monitoring and prevention; and (5) scientific communication through a short scientific report or presentation. Didactic integration ensures students' active participation in the learning process.

Discussion

The criteria for selecting authentic texts for students majoring in Plant Protection help address a number of important pedagogical and methodological problems. The results indicate that the five requirements discussed above—content relevance, scientific reliability, language suitability, topicality, and didactic integration—are closely interconnected and produce effective results only when applied comprehensively. Each criterion alone may be insufficient. For example, a scientifically reliable text may be too difficult for students or may lack topical relevance, thereby reducing its educational value. Therefore, the criteria should be assessed in a coordinated manner.

An important methodological aspect of selecting authentic texts is determining their role and timing within the educational process. Because Plant Protection is a practice-oriented field, using an authentic text immediately after a theoretical lecture does not necessarily make a lesson effective. Instead, students should first master relevant terminology, basic concepts, and theoretical foundations. The authentic text can then serve as a "real-life situation" through which

theoretical knowledge is connected with practice. Thus, the timing and place of authentic texts in the educational process should be methodologically justified.

There are various types of authentic texts in Plant Protection, and they can serve different didactic purposes. Scientific articles teach students about research methodology, evidence-based argumentation, and drawing conclusions. Technical instructions develop skills in working with regulatory documents, analyzing numerical indicators, and planning preventive measures. Monitoring reports improve students' ability to analyze observation results, draw conclusions, and develop practical recommendations. Therefore, teachers should alternate or combine different types of texts according to their objectives.

Another important finding of the study is that using authentic texts through group work can be particularly effective. Students discuss texts in small groups and express their individual viewpoints. As a result, they gain a deeper understanding of the content, develop communication skills, and benefit from peer teaching. In this process, the teacher observes and guides the groups, provides additional explanations when necessary, and organizes comparison and evaluation among groups.

The assessment of authentic-text activities and monitoring of student outcomes also require special attention. Assessment should consider the accuracy of completed tasks, depth of analysis, correctness of terminology, and justification of conclusions. Attention should also be paid to whether students' oral and written reflections are presented in a scientific style and logical sequence. Assessment rubrics and descriptors developed by the teacher can help ensure fair and systematic evaluation.

The results indicate that working with authentic texts develops not only cognitive but also metacognitive skills. By reading and analyzing a text, students learn to check their understanding, identify areas of difficulty, and manage their own learning activities accordingly. This improves independent learning, self-assessment, and self-development. Since solving existing problems in Plant Protection requires a research-oriented approach, these metacognitive skills are also highly valuable for students' future professional activities.

The methodological preparation of teachers is a decisive factor in selecting and using authentic texts in Plant Protection. Teachers need to be competent in selecting texts, developing appropriate tasks, and managing the learning process. Therefore, it is recommended that professional development programs for teachers include special training on technologies for working with authentic texts. Such training should develop practical skills in analyzing texts, evaluating them according to established criteria, designing tasks, and monitoring student performance.

Practical Recommendations

1. At the text-selection stage: It is recommended that each authentic text be evaluated separately according to the five criteria described above. A simple checklist can be used for this purpose. Each criterion can be assessed as "appropriate," "partially appropriate," or "not appropriate." Only texts assessed as "appropriate" should be recommended for use in the educational process.

2. When developing tasks: Considering students' initial level of preparation, tasks with different levels of difficulty should be designed. At the initial stage, reproductive questions may be used, for example, "What protective measures are mentioned in the text?" This can be followed by analytical questions, such as "Why are these particular protective measures recommended?" At

the next stage, creative and problem-based tasks may be introduced, for example, “If the climatic conditions in this region were different, how would the protective measures change?”

3. In lesson planning: A separate stage of the lesson may be devoted to working with an authentic text, or an entire practical session may focus on the text. In either case, text-based work should include the following stages: (1) familiarization with the text through individual or group reading; (2) identifying and clarifying unfamiliar terms and expressions; (3) rereading the text and identifying its main ideas; (4) completing written or oral tasks; and (5) discussing the results and drawing conclusions.

4. Organizing student activities: Interactive methods are recommended to increase student engagement when working with authentic texts. These may include “cluster” activities for grouping related terms around a key concept, “Venn diagrams” for comparing two different protection methods, “problem-based dialogues” for discussing the content of the text, and “role plays,” in which, for example, a student acts as a phytosanitary inspector and prepares a report based on the text.

5. Assessment: The following criteria may be used to assess students’ work with authentic texts: (1) accurate understanding of the text content; (2) correct use of terminology; (3) ability to analyze information in the text; (4) ability to identify cause-and-effect relationships; (5) ability to draw practical conclusions; and (6) ability to express oral or written reflections based on the text. Each criterion may be assessed using points or a rating scale. Students should also receive written or oral feedback.

Conclusion

Selecting and using authentic texts relevant to students majoring in Plant Protection is a complex and multi-stage methodological process that requires pedagogical preparation, subject-specific knowledge, and continuous methodological inquiry. The five main requirements developed in this study—content relevance, scientific reliability, language suitability, topicality, and didactic integration—serve as a scientific and methodological basis for selecting authentic texts and provide guidance for their effective use.

Authentic texts selected according to these criteria make a significant contribution to the development of students’ professional competence. Through such texts, students acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also professional language, analytical and inferential skills, the ability to plan monitoring and preventive measures, scientific communication skills, and teamwork abilities. In Plant Protection practice, where logical thinking and evidence-based reasoning are essential for making correct decisions, authentic texts serve as an indispensable tool for developing these skills.

The study emphasizes the important role of the teacher in using authentic texts. Teachers should take an active methodological position in selecting texts, designing tasks, organizing student activities, and assessing outcomes. They should also adapt texts and tasks according to students’ level of preparation, interests, and curriculum requirements, modifying or updating them when necessary. Therefore, continuous development of teachers’ methodological knowledge and skills in working with authentic texts is highly important.

Future research in this area may focus on integrating authentic texts with digital technologies, using them interactively in virtual and experimental laboratories, and encouraging students to

create authentic texts themselves, for example, by preparing mini-reports based on field data. Comparative studies of the educational effectiveness of different types of authentic texts, including scientific articles, technical instructions, monitoring reports, legislative documents, and others, may also enrich methodological theory by identifying which types are more effective for developing particular competencies.

In conclusion, authentic texts are an important and integral component of preparing Plant Protection students for professional activity. A scientifically and methodologically grounded system for selecting and using such texts not only improves the quality of education but also prepares students to solve real professional problems and become independent and responsible specialists. Active cooperation between teachers and students, consistency in methodological approaches, and regular updating of educational resources ensure the effectiveness of this process and contribute to preparing competitive and highly qualified specialists capable of addressing contemporary challenges.

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