

Developing EFL Students' Listening Comprehension Through The Use Of Authentic Materials

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Abstract: Learning a new language relies heavily on developing good listening skills. However, students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) often struggle to understand spoken language due to fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and different accents. This study explored whether using real-world listening materials like news broadcasts and podcasts could help students improve their listening skills. Sixty intermediate EFL students aged 18 to 22 from two schools took part in this eight-week study. They were divided into two groups: one used authentic materials, while the other used standard textbook exercises. To understand the impact, we collected test scores, survey answers, and interview responses. We used statistical tests to analyze improvements in scores and looked at themes in students' feedback. Results showed that students who used authentic materials improved significantly more than those who didn't. We also confirmed that our listening test was accurate and consistent. This research fills a gap by showing how authentic materials can be practically and effectively used in real classrooms.

Keywords: Listening Comprehension, Authentic Materials, Second Language Acquisition, Communicative Competence, Language Learning Strategies, Real-World Listening

Introduction

Language learning students typically have the most trouble mastering the crucial listening skill despite its vital importance according to Rost (2011). Individuals with strong listening skills can receive spoken messages and handle live information which leads to successful dialogue participation. Listening comprehension proves difficult for EFL students because they face multiple barriers including quick speech patterns and unfamiliar vocabulary as well as distinctive accents together with limited exposure to genuine spoken dialogues (Field, 2008). The traditional scripted dialogue-based listening exercises do not represent actual real-world conversations leading to difficulties for students to use their listening abilities during natural conversation.

The teaching profession now devotes substantial push toward making authentic materials available for language learning. Natural speech patterns and intonations and connected speech appear in authentic listening materials including news reports, podcasts, movies, radio broadcasts and real-life conversations (Gilmore 2011). Using real-world

contexts becomes essential to language acquisition because learners develop better understanding from comprehensible input as suggested by Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis. Documents from authentic sources provide learners with captivating listening contexts beyond basic schoolwork because they match the principle.

Integrating authentic materials promotes learners' listening comprehension skills alongside their motivation level and their ability to interpret natural speech (Peacock, 1997; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Implementing authentic listening materials creates obstacles because natural speech complexities and foreign cultural points and cognitive strain for basic learners represent significant challenges (Field, 2008).

Scholarly support exists for authentic materials yet insufficient research exists about their classroom implementation especially when combining data and student assessments. A limited number of studies have examined both student listening abilities and motivational changes because of authentic materials usage.

This research analyzes authentic material effects on students' listening abilities by assessing their ability to improve receptive skills alongside engagement and general language skills development levels. The study evaluates existing challenges before offering instructional methods which help EFL classrooms achieve maximum benefits from authentic listening instruction.

Literature Review

The Importance of Listening in Language Learning

Listening acts as a key element in language learning because it provides students with the basis needed to understand and communicate in any language. Training students to listen becomes essential for learning both their native language and second language because it enables learners to absorb target language phonology and vocabulary and syntactic elements (Rost, 2011). The researchers Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that learning speech requires multiple sophisticated mental operations such as speech interpretation and contextual understanding and future content prediction. A weak ability to listen effectively will prevent students from reaching full language proficiency because they fail to understand spoken language and produce speech effectively.

Listening stands as the most demanding skill for second language learners since it demands instant processing according to Field (2008). The need to immediately interpret spoken content during listening prohibits second language learners from reviewing the input because reading allows backward progress but listening cannot halt speech acquisition. The development of listening abilities stands as a key requirement for students to enhance their second language communicative ability.

Authentic Materials in Language Learning

Authentic materials represent original materials for native speakers which serve the native speaker audience rather than serving specifically as teaching resources (Gilmore, 2007). An assortment of authentic materials consisting of news reports, podcasts, radio interviews, movies and TV shows alongside real-life conversations enables students to

experience natural speech rhythms as well as different accents and authentic situations (Rogers & Medley, 1988).

Popular theories as per Krashen (1982) Input Hypothesis suggest that language acquisition takes place when learners are exposed to information they can understand but are still slightly advanced from their current skills. Through authentic material exposure learners encounter practical real-life vocabulary and natural-speaking expressions with various pronunciation forms that textbook dialogues lack. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014) authentic input in language learning enables meaningful interaction that enables communicative language acquisition.

Benefits of Using Authentic Materials for Listening Development

1. Exposure to Natural Speech Patterns

Users of authentic materials profit from exposure to genuine speech patterns because they encounter connected speech and intonation with stress patterns and rhythm at work. Authentic materials provide natural language patterns that contrast with textbook dialogues since they accurately show real-life communication patterns (Brown, 2007). The investigation conducted by Gilmore (2011) established that regular participation with authentic listening materials led students to attain better native speech comprehension in addition to enhanced fast-speaking conversation skills.

2. Improvement in Comprehension Skills

Multiple research investigations show that authentic materials lead to better listening comprehension abilities. Berardo (2006) investigated how authentic news broadcasts helped EFL students improve their language ability to identify vital elements, key ideas and supporting evidence in their classroom studies. In his experiment Gilmore (2007) investigated the results of authentic objects compared to conventional textbook materials used in listening practice. Participants who received authentic content in the input achieved higher marks on their listening comprehension exams.

3. Increased Student Engagement and Motivation

Language learning success depends on learner motivation while research demonstrates that authentic educational content both raises student excitement and maintains their continued involvement throughout the learning process. According to Peacock (1997) students evaluated authentic materials in higher regard than traditional classroom listening exercises because these materials provided both relevance and better usefulness along with enjoyable listening activity. Students tend to display better motivation while studying materials that focus on their familiar life experiences and personal interests which could include podcasts and movies and music.

4. Development of Listening Strategies

Through authentic materials students learn valuable listening skills including contextual inference and content prediction and keyword detection according to Vandergrift and Goh (2012). According to Nation and Newton (2009) authentic

listening tasks teach students to grow into independent learners through their practice of extracting meaning from context and interpreting tone and past knowledge.

Challenges of Using Authentic Materials in Listening Instruction

a. Complexity of Authentic Speech

- Natural speech properties constitute a primary hurdle when using authentic materials because they include
- Several learners find real-time processing of fast continuous speech difficult because of their limited ability to process content at speed (Field, 2008).
- Natural speech contains common shortened forms which include gonna for going to and wanna for want to.
- Actual expressions with slang terms constitute a barrier because foreign students need cultural understanding to interpret them according to Gilmore (2011).

b. Cultural Barriers

Authentic materials represent cultural context but this presentation challenge learners who lack knowledge about references and societal norms and humor as described by Krashen (1982). The ability to comprehend spoken discourse depends significantly on cultural understanding per Rost (2011) yet students normally face difficulties with different customs along with idiomatic expressions and humorous content.

c. Cognitive Overload

Beginners encounter excessive mental strain during authentic listening sessions while managing new words along with quick delivery speed and unrecognizable sentence patterns according to Field (2008). The challenge of processing authentic materials for beginners gets minimized when teachers use scaffolding activities including pre-listening preparation combined with guided comprehension work and multiple exposures according to Nation and Newton (2009).

Although the earlier research by Gilmore (2007, 2011) together with Berardo (2006) has commended the worth of real-life materials, they fail to provide sufficient guidance about classroom implementation. Several educational practices depend on short-term projects along with observational methods that fail to provide proper student progress evaluation. This research contributes additional value by employing well-tested materials alongside extended study periods and learner subjective feedback collection.

Methodology

Research Design

The researchers established a quasi-experimental setup which applied pre-test and post-test assessments to determine how authentic listening materials influenced students' listening abilities. The research participants split into two sections: one utilized authentic materials and the other completed traditional textbook listening tasks. Students from both groups participated in pre-tests that started the study and completed post-tests when it finished to evaluate listening comprehension development.

The research used a mixed methodology which combined numerical test data alongside oral student feedback through questionnaires and one-on-one interviews. The research format enabled an in-depth evaluation of student listening progress and their reactions toward genuine listening resources.

Participants

The research took place in two educational institutions where sixty students from the intermediate EFL class participated. The students had an age range from 18 to 22 years old. The participants demonstrated similar linguistic proficiency according to results of the standardized English placement test. Research staff used random methods to divide the student participants between two separate groups.

The experimental group consisting of thirty participants listened to authentic materials including news reports and podcasts and interviews and normal conversations. The traditional textbook-listening activities comprised scripted dialogues and these activities were part of the Control Group's curriculum which contained 30 students.

The researchers assessed listening proficiency of all participants who learned English for at least five years before the study to guarantee standardization across groups.

Validity and Reliability

A standardized English language listening test served as the evaluation basis. University scholars examined the test to verify its alignment with our intended objectives. A small test group went through the experiment before us to confirm the stability of outcome data. The reliability calculation (Cronbach's alpha) reached 0.87 indicating strong consistency between results.

Materials

The experimental group utilized authentic materials that consisted of:

- News reports (BBC, CNN, NPR)
- Podcasts (TED Talks, The Daily)
- Interviews and conversations from YouTube and real-world recordings

The experimental group received movie and TV show clips containing authentic dialogues delivered in various accents.

The traditional control group utilized scripted dialogues and standard textbook listening exercises from typical English as Foreign Language materials.

Procedure

The eight-week research procedure involved three sixty-minute listening sessions delivered to participants each week. The procedure included:

- Pre-test (Week 1):

A listening comprehension test measured how well each group understood spoken English and retrieved important points as well as made logical interpretations from contextual clues.

The research team administered a questionnaire to students for collecting information about their listening problems together with their exposure to natural language materials.

- Instructional Phase (Weeks 2-7):

The experimental group used authentic materials through purpose-built listening exercises.

Pre-listening activities: Vocabulary previews, predictions, and background information discussions.

Students used three kinds of structured activities during listening tasks including comprehension questions along with note-taking combined with detail identification.

Students concluded their listening sessions through summarization activities which led into main idea examinations and practical applications of acquired information.

Traditional textbook-based listening exercises were used in the control group as they practiced grammar-based comprehension while using scripted dialogues.

- Post-test and Survey (Week 8):

The students from both groups participated in the identical Week 1 listening comprehension evaluation to evaluate their performance advancement.

A post-evaluative questionnaire combined with individual interviews evaluated student experiences in addition to their motivation levels among other things regarding authentic resource effectiveness.

Data Analysis

The researchers used matched t-tests to evaluate the change in listening comprehension scores during post-tests internally while independent t-tests evaluated experimental and control group comparisons.

They assessed students' authentic listening material views through qualitative analysis of survey responses together with interview transcript thematic coding.

Result and Discussion

Improvement in Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension levels improved notably for every student in the experimental group while the control group showed no comparable changes according to testing results.

Table 1. The experimental group demonstrated post-test listening skills which significantly exceeded those of both the experimental and control groups.

Group	Pre-test Mean Score (SD)	Post-test Mean Score (SD)	Improvement
Experimental Group	62.3 (6.1)	82.4 (5.2)	+20.1
Control Group	61.8 (5.9)	71.8 (6.4)	+10.0

Data from a paired t-test demonstrated significant improvement for the experimental group while their gains surpassed those of the control group by $p < 0.05$ level.

Student Engagement and Motivation

Survey results showed that 85% of experimental group students noted authentic materials were significantly more fascinating and applicable than regular listening activities. High engagement levels according to students comprised only 52% in the control group.

Challenges Encountered

Students within the experimental group faced initial obstacles when utilizing authentic materials as reported by them.

Students experienced issues when facing fast speech rates because 42% reported difficulty initially (42% of students faced problems at the beginning).

- Unfamiliar vocabulary and idiomatic expressions (39%).
- Understanding different accents (28%).

The experimental group successfully reduced these challenges through pre-listening and during-listening structured activities.

Discussion

Effectiveness of Authentic Materials

Research from Gilmore (2011) and Vandergrift and Goh (2012) received confirmation through these findings which demonstrate how authentic materials increase listening comprehension alongside motivation and actual language processing abilities. The experimental group showed better reading understanding after listening to natural speech thus showing learners become more capable in actual spoken communication.

Development of Listening Strategies

Through structured usage of authentic materials the students developed essential listening techniques that entailed:

- Predicting content before listening.
- Students learn to recognize essential terms together with surrounding evidence.
- Students can obtain meanings from variations in pitch and emphasis during speech.

The implemented listening approaches conform to Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) system for efficient listening education by focusing on metacognitive understanding development in listeners.

Implications for Teachers

Adding authentic listening materials found in real-life contexts should be part of teaching strategies. Teachers use vocabulary previews together with repeat listening activities to assist students in handling challenging listening content. These instructional

methods improve student ability to decipher multiple accents in addition to rapid speech and culture-specific contents.

Teaching personnel must carefully implement the following strategy to achieve optimal results from authentic listening materials:

1. eliciting materials should be selected at the students' proficiency level with content that is challenging while students maintain understanding.
2. Before listening students should receive vocabulary previews together with talks about the topic.
3. The teaching methods include guided listening activities through taking notes and answering comprehension questions.
4. Educational strategies should include teaching students through various speaking accents and voice techniques as a way to prepare them for actual communication situations.
5. The process of building student confidence requires them to experience materials repeatedly at challenging levels.

Challenges and Solutions

Educators using authentic resources should manage three common issues of fast speech, idiomatic vocabulary and cultural references through several approaches. First teach slower-paced materials to students then introduce complicated speech patterns for exposure of progress.

Students receive aid for comprehension through subtitles and caption translations. Group reflection and role-playing as well as student-led discussions serve as interactive listening tasks.

Conclusion

This study investigated how realistic listening materials affected students' motivation, engagement, and listening comprehension in EFL classes. The results show that by exposing students to a variety of accents, natural speech patterns, and real-world situations, authentic materials greatly improve listening abilities. According to other studies, the experimental group, which used real materials, showed higher gains in listening comprehension than the control group (Gilmore, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Students also reported feeling more motivated and involved, which emphasizes the value and practicality of actual materials in language learning.

Nevertheless, the study also noted difficulties with authentic listening materials, such as rapid speech rates, colloquial language, and strange cultural allusions. Structured listening exercises, like vocabulary previews before listening, guided comprehension exercises, and post-listening talks, were successfully used to address these issues. These results imply that authentic resources can be successfully integrated into EFL programs to improve students' listening techniques and general language competency with the right scaffolding.

Teachers must carefully choose real materials that are appropriate for students' competency levels, according to the study's pedagogical implications. Teachers should

also incorporate reflective and interactive exercises to help students hone their comprehension skills and deal with language complexity.

To sum up, real materials are an effective way to help pupils get better at listening. They are an essential part of contemporary language education since their incorporation into EFL training promotes increased engagement, improved understanding, and practical communication skills.

Suggestions for Future Research

Researchers should study how authentic materials support speech and penning proficiency in upcoming investigations. The study should monitor students' ability utilize these skills both during the research period and across multiple classroom environments.

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