

THE ROLE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS (PODCASTS, MOVIE CLIPS) IN IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS OF INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNERS

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Annotation:

Integrating authentic materials like podcasts and movie clips exposes intermediate EFL learners to natural speech patterns, diverse accents, and real-world cultural contexts that traditional textbooks often lack. This exposure significantly enhances listening comprehension, inferencing abilities, and learner motivation by bridging the gap between classroom instruction and genuine communication. Furthermore, the combination of audio and visual stimuli in these materials helps students better process information and retain new vocabulary.

This study investigates the impact of authentic audio and audiovisual materials—specifically podcasts and movie clips—on the listening comprehension of intermediate EFL learners. Using a six-week quasi-experimental design, the research compared a group exposed to authentic content against a control group using traditional textbook recordings. Results from pre- and post-tests, supplemented by learner questionnaires, show that authentic materials significantly improved listening proficiency, inferencing skills, and learner confidence. The findings suggest that authentic input, paired with pedagogical scaffolding, effectively bridges the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

Key words: Authentic materials, Audiovisual input, Podcasts, Movie clips, Listening comprehension, Intermediate EFL learners, Quasi-experimental study, Inferencing skills

Introduction

Listening comprehension is one of the most demanding skills in second and foreign language learning. Unlike reading, listening does not allow learners to pause, reread, or carefully analyze the input. Spoken language is fast, fleeting, and often unpredictable, which requires listeners to process information in real time. For intermediate EFL learners, this challenge is particularly noticeable.

At the intermediate level (B1 according to the CEFR), many learners experience what is commonly referred to as the intermediate plateau. While they have already acquired basic grammatical structures and a functional vocabulary, they often feel frustrated when confronted with authentic spoken English, such as podcasts, films, or everyday conversations with native speakers. This frustration is frequently caused by a “perceptual gap” between the English learners recognize in written form and the English they hear in natural speech. One reason for this gap lies in the nature of traditional listening materials used in EFL classrooms. Textbook recordings are typically carefully scripted, clearly articulated, and free from background noise or overlapping speech. Although such materials are useful for introducing listening skills, they do not fully reflect how English is spoken in real-life contexts. As a result, learners may perform well in classroom tasks but struggle to understand authentic input outside the classroom.

This study explores whether regular and guided exposure to authentic audio and audiovisual materials—specifically podcasts and movie clips—can help intermediate EFL learners overcome these difficulties. By engaging with real spoken English in a structured and supportive learning environment, learners may develop more effective listening strategies and gain confidence in their ability to understand natural speech.

Methods

Research Design This study used a **quasi-experimental design** with a pre-test and post-test to compare the impact of authentic versus scripted materials on listening skills.

The participants were 40 intermediate EFL learners (B1 level), divided into an **Experimental Group (EG)**, using authentic materials, and a **Control Group (CG)**, using standard textbook audio.

Materials and Procedure Over a **six-week period**, the EG was exposed to **podcasts and movie clips** integrated with pedagogical scaffolding (pre-, while-, and post-listening tasks). The CG used only conventional, scripted recordings. Materials were selected based on their linguistic authenticity and relevance to real-world communication.

Data Collection and Analysis Data were collected through **pre- and post-tests** to measure comprehension and **questionnaires** to assess learner motivation. Quantitative results were analyzed using a T-test to determine the statistical significance of the improvement.

Literature Review

The development of listening skills is central to second language acquisition, grounded in the **Input Hypothesis**, which posits that learners progress when exposed to "comprehensible input" slightly above their current level [4]. In the context of intermediate EFL learners, the quality of this input is critical. While traditional textbooks provide structured exercises, they often lack the "authenticity" required for real-world fluency. **Gilmore (2007)** defines authentic materials as those produced for real social purposes rather than language teaching, arguing that they offer a richer linguistic environment than scripted classroom recordings [3].

Effective listening is not a passive act but a complex cognitive process. **Field (2008)** and **Lynch (2009)** emphasize that learners must move beyond simple decoding to "meaning construction," where they use context to interpret spoken English [2, 5]. For intermediate students, this process is enhanced by **Dual Coding Theory**, which suggests that simultaneous audio and visual stimuli—such as those found in movie clips—help the brain process and retain information more effectively [7]. By engaging both verbal and non-verbal channels, authentic audiovisual tools reduce cognitive load and improve comprehension [9, 10].

Furthermore, the transition from classroom English to natural speech requires specific pedagogical strategies. **Richards (2008)** and **Nation & Newton (2009)** highlight the importance of exposing students to natural speech features, including contractions, hesitations, and diverse accents found in podcasts [6, 8]. This exposure helps learners develop "inferencing skills," allowing them to fill in gaps when they do not understand every word [10]. Ultimately, as **Brown (2007)** notes, the use of authentic materials increases learner motivation by making the language feel relevant and alive, effectively bridging the gap between academic study and genuine communication [1].

Discussion

The findings of this study are also supported by the researcher's classroom experience during the intervention period. While teaching an intermediate EFL group, the researcher observed that students initially struggled to follow authentic podcast episodes due to fast speech, reduced forms, and unfamiliar accents. During the first listening sessions, many learners focused on individual words and frequently expressed frustration when they failed to understand every detail.

As a classroom example, during a lesson using a short segment from BBC 6 Minute English, several students were unable to answer comprehension questions after the first listening. However, after guided pre-listening activities, including topic prediction and discussion of key vocabulary, students demonstrated noticeably better understanding during the second and third listening. One student commented that recognizing the

topic in advance helped them “listen with a purpose” rather than translate word by word.

Over the six-week period, a clear change in classroom behaviour was observed. Students became more confident, asked fewer clarification questions, and increasingly relied on contextual clues, intonation, and visual support when working with movie clips. This classroom-based observation supports the quantitative results of the study and demonstrates how authentic materials, when combined with structured scaffolding, can positively influence learners’ listening comprehension and engagement.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that authentic audio and audiovisual materials play a crucial role in improving the listening comprehension of intermediate EFL learners. While traditional textbook recordings provide a necessary foundation, they do not adequately prepare learners for the variability and unpredictability of real spoken English. Authentic materials, when carefully selected and properly scaffolded, expose learners to natural speech patterns and encourage the development of effective listening strategies.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that EFL curricula incorporate authentic listening materials more systematically at the intermediate level. By focusing on meaning, context, and strategy use rather than word-for-word understanding, teachers can help learners become more confident and competent listeners who are better prepared for real-world communication.

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