

THE EFFECT OF WATCHING AUTHENTIC VIDEOS ON IMPROVEMENT OF IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

In this study the effect of frequent exposure to authentic visual materials on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension ability was investigated. In order to conduct the study, 60 Iranian intermediate students were selected out of a pool of 300, based on their result in a placement test. The selected participants were randomly assigned into two groups of experimental and control, each containing 30 participants. The listening ability of the participants was tested by a pretest before starting of the treatment and no significant difference was observed. After a period of two months, in which the experimental group received treatment of exposure to authentic visual material, a posttest was administrated and the scores obtained from two groups were compared using a *t*-test. It was observed that the experimental group that received the treatment achieved significantly better scores. It was concluded that frequent exposure to authentic videos has a positive impact on improvement of learners' listening ability.

Keywords: *EFL, Authentic Videos, Listening Ability, EFL Learners, Teaching*

INTRODUCTION

Although, the significance of listening for second or foreign language acquisition is recognized (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996), there is a lack of understanding on how to develop listening skill between learners and teachers (Chambers, 1996; Graham, 2006). Listening has also received less research attention than other skills (Vandergrift, 1997). Considering this issue, this field seems to require many more exploratory studies which might give us informative principles about pedagogy and research in relation to listening. Listening plays a crucial role in communication. It is believed that, from the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9% (Mendelsohn, 1994).

Although teaching of listening comprehension has long been somehow ignored and poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs (Mendelsohn, 1994), listening is now considered as a much important skill in EFL classes and also in SLA research. Listening is an active process of comprehending and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages (Nunan, 1998). Thus, it should not be labeled as a passive skill.

This assumption may be rooted in the fact that superficially learners seem to only sit in a language lab quietly, listen to some pre-recorded dialogues, and write the answers to some questions related to the oral stimulus. It is evident, then, that listening is not as passive as it has been claimed to be as it demands a number of complicated processes on the part of the learners. In normal listening laboratory classes, students listen to some educational listening tapes adopted for their level. Although these materials are valuable, it seems to be a gap between what learners listen to in the lab and what they really listen in normal conversations in real life. There must be a solution to bridge this gap.

The current study analyzed one possible way of overcoming listening problem of students. One specific research question was addressed in this study:

Does frequent exposure to authentic audio visual materials affect Iranian EFL learners listening ability?

And the following null hypothesis was proposed:

Frequent exposure to authentic audio visual materials does not affect Iranian EFL learners' listening ability.

Review of Literature

When it comes to authentic materials there are different definitions with a slight difference between them. However, there is one common ground in all these definitions which is 'exposure to real language and its use in its own community' (Kilickaya, 2004). Goals, objectives, learners' needs and interests are natural and appropriate quality factors that are taken into consideration in Rogers' (1988) definition, when dealing with real life and meaningful communication. Jordan (1997) highlights that, authentic texts are not written for the aim of language teaching. According to Peacock (1997), the definition of authentic materials is the materials which have been designed in order to fulfill social purposes in the language communities. Martinez (2002) suggested that "an authentic material would be a material designed for native speakers of English, used in the classroom in a way similar to the one it was designed for". Widdowson (1987) defined that "Authenticity... is a term that creates confusion because of a basic ambiguity".

Little (1988, as cited in Guariento & Morley, 2001) gives a definition for authentic material as: "an authentic text...is created to fulfill some social purposes in the language community in which it was produced". Bacon & Finnemann (1990) put authentic materials as texts "produced by and for native speakers of the target language". According to Schulz (1991), teachers' use of authentic materials in the FL classrooms is highly supported by Krashen's affective filter hypothesis for SLA. He further explains that in EFL settings in which authentic materials are used, affective and attitudinal factors such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety change learners' receptivity to the target language. Krashen (1987, cited by Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) believes that a high affective filter prevents acquisition, whereas a low affective filter promotes it. Regarding this claim, Krashen (1989) identifies materials which tend to lower the affective filter as "comprehensible input on topics of real interest", that is, by and large, a hint if not direction, to authentic materials.

Moreover, Mishan (2005) believed that the main highly important pedagogical reason for using authentic materials in FL teaching context originates from what is called 'the 3 C's', that is to say, culture, currency, and challenge. He clarifies that: "Culture, in that authentic texts incorporate and represent the culture/s of speakers of the target language; currency, in that authentic texts offer topics and language in current use, as well as those relevant to the learners; challenge, in that authentic texts are intrinsically more challenging, yet can be used at all proficiency levels".

In recent years, there has been a growth in interest on conducting different studies on the role authentic materials in FL teaching context. Researchers and teachers have increasingly acknowledged the need for, as well as the usefulness of authentic materials in the field of language teaching. Empirical studies have proved right the positive impact of authentic material taken by learners who have chance to interact with them. Studies, such as Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000), revealed that using authentic materials in classes lead to a significant aural language development. Furthermore, Otte (2006 cited in Al-Musallam, 2009) investigated the effect of aural authentic texts on listening comprehension ability of four adult ESL students at an American university. He claimed that exposure to authentic materials would lead to improvement of students' listening comprehension ability as well as motivation.

In addition, a research done on intermediate-level students, Herron and Seay (1991) claimed that those students who listened to authentic radio program recording as a substitute for regular classroom activities demonstrated a significantly better listening comprehension ability than those for whom this type of task was not included in the semester's curriculum. Their research also confirmed that, the more the learners were exposed to authentic materials, the more improvement was observed in learners' listening-comprehension skill.

Conducting a comparative study on the impact of authentic versus textbook materials on developing learners' communicative competence, by Gilmore (2007) at a Japanese university, he observed that those learners who received authentic input, outperformed those who received textbook input, on six out of eight tests designed to measure different types of competence. He further claimed that: "This result was attributed to the fact that the authentic input allowed learners to focus on a wider range of features than it is normally possible ... and that this noticing had beneficial effects on learners' development of communicative competence".

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In the same strand of thought, Weyers (1999) examined the impact of exposure to authentic video material on the language acquisition process of Spanish university students. The results retrieved from the study indicated that those learners who were exposed to authentic videos showed a significant improvement in their listening comprehension skills as well as in some component parts of the communicative competence.

Hadley (2001) concluded that the “use of real or simulated travel documents, hotel registration forms, biographical data sheets, train and plane schedules, authentic restaurant menus, labels, signs, newspapers, and magazines will acquaint students more directly with real language than will any set of contrived classroom materials used alone”.

Therefore, it seems completely wise to base students' reading practice on a variety of authentic texts as well. Moreover, Morton (1999) suggested that developing strategies in comprehending authentic texts can lead students to improve writing proficiency in the target language. He explicates: “Students ... need to learn the register that is appropriate for their own essays. For this, there is no substitute for authentic academic texts which can develop students' ability to master basic rhetorical devices”. In this regard, Carter and Nunan (2001) also claim that the use of authentic materials leads to learners' awareness rising of both grammatical and lexical and also stylistic features. Furthermore, professionals who favor authentic materials, strongly suggest that exposure to authentic materials can be introduced to the learners in the earliest stages of language learning (Bacon, 1989; McNeil, 1994; Miller, 2005), they assert that an early exposure to such material can help learners to develop essential strategies for dealing with more complex tasks in later phases of their language development. Herron and Seay (1991) stated using authentic materials facilitates language for learners. Authentic materials can also be beneficial from another point of view: empirical studies have shown that less proficient learners can benefit from such materials.

In a study conducted on a group of high school students studying German as a FL, Bernhardt and Berkemeyer (1988) found that all students of all levels have the capacity to use authentic texts. Maxim (2002) concluded that: “The students' limited linguistic competence did not short-circuit their ability to read authentic texts in class with the support of their classmates and instructor”. The findings of the aforementioned studies have indicated that authentic materials can be useful in many different ways. Such materials show learners how language is used in the real world and indirectly improve their general language proficiency as well as reading and listening comprehension abilities, communicative competence, and lexical and stylistic knowledge. However, there are arguments claiming that the use of authentic materials at early stages of language learning hinders the language learning process. Nevertheless, using authentic materials in teaching a FL brings with itself more than just linguistic advantages. In this regard, scholars argue for the motivating power of authentic materials (Gilmore, 2007; Sherman, 2003), which obviously, is a crucial factor in successful language learning (Keiko Komiya, 1992; Krashen, 1981; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003). As Gilmore (2007) point out, “Claims that authentic materials are a motivating force for learners, are widespread through the literature”.

McNeil (1994) and Kilickaya (2004) claim that since authentic texts create in the learners the feeling that they are learning the real language -i.e. the language as it is used by native speakers- they can enhance students' motivation for learning. Rivers (1987) claimed that the learners, who work with authentic materials, had a practical objective in mind and dynamic interest in the language. Kim (2000) asserted that authentic materials provide a means for learners to deal with certain cultural barriers in language learning. Sherman (2003) states: “One reason why [authentic material] is so important for language learning is that it is a window into culture”.

Despite the aforementioned ideas, there are some scholars who rarely see any worth for incorporating authentic materials. For instance, Clark (1983) argued that, learning through media has no effect under any conditions; therefore, the question of authentic versus non-authentic has no value to discuss (as cited in Miller, 2005). Kienbaum *et al.*, (1986) also pointed out that there is no significant difference in the language performance of learners using authentic materials compared with those in a more traditional classroom context.

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Authentic materials, however, according to Martinez (2002), may be too culturally biased and therefore, difficult to understand outside the language community. Nostrand (1989) argued that “Authentic texts from one culture may give a false impression to a student from another culture, unless they are presented in an authentic context which makes it clear precisely what they exemplify”. However, cultural understanding is an inseparable part of communicative competence.

In conclusion, the idea of authenticity in language teaching has been debated overtly in the past three decades. However, the benefits that authentic materials bring to the FL classroom can be claimed to greatly outweigh the obstacles they may give rise to. In other words, it is worth taking the risk. Moreover, a creative task design can help language teachers to overcome such challenges. According to Field (1998, cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002), “instead of simplifying the language of the text, simplify the task that is demanded of the students. With the text above the language level of the class, one demands only shallow comprehension”. Guariento and Morley (2001) stated that problems of this kind can be remedied by designing tasks in which learners are required only to have partial comprehension. In conclusion, it is clear from the abovementioned review that using authentic materials in the language classrooms is worthwhile.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Design

This study is a quasi-experimental one. The main variables of the study are exposure to audio material and listening comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. This study was conducted with 60 Iranian students of Hermes Institute of Science and Technology in Tehran, Iran. Participants of the study were selected out of a pool of 300, based on an administration of an OPT exam, which is a standardized test. After calculation of the mean and the SD, participants with the score of 1 SD above and below the mean ($1SD \pm \text{mean}$) were selected to conduct the study. After selection of the participants, they were randomly assigned in two groups of equal number each class containing 30 participants.

Instruments

Proficiency Test:

In order to make sure of the homogeneity of the participants, they were selected based on their results in an OPT exam. As OPT is a standardized test, standardization process was not necessary to be done.

Listening Test:

An intermediate level listening test adopted from the books *Tactics for Listening*, by Richards (2011) was designed by the researchers. To validate the obtained scores from test, three professional test designers checked the test and validated it. Reliability of the test was also estimated 0.69 through Chronbach Alpha coefficient. This test was used as pretest and posttest.

Data Collection Procedure

A listening pretest was administrated on both groups in order to testify their listening ability at the beginning of the study and to make sure they were at the same level in both groups. In the control group, the learners received instruction as they always did. It means the teacher followed the material in the textbook. However, in experimental group, the classes were extended for one hour in each session and in which participant watched an authentic series. A popular series was selected to conduct the study. An important reason was that in series normally the same characters play in many episodes. So, learners can make emotional connections with the characters and that makes it easier and less stressful for them to watch the material. Another reason to use series is the common belief on using an up-to-date material so that the content of material would not be old-fashioned. Since the language used in old movies may not be usable in modern English, in order to make sure of the appropriacy of the material used, three raters rated the movie to confirm that the dialogues in the selected series were of standard English and also the content of the material was culturally appropriate for Iranian adult learners.

In this study, classes were held 3 days a week. The course consisted of 20 sessions, and participants received 40 hours of input. The participants were asked to watch the series for an hour in each session.

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They were asked to watch the material for pleasure and no task was given to them. The reason was the aim of this task which was for participants to have exposure to material. By the end of the term, participants had received 20 hours of treatment. Their listening comprehension ability was tested again in a posttest.

Data Analysis

The scores of control and experimental group were analyzed via an independent t test. As there were two independent groups and the elicited data from the study was interval data, and also normally distributed around a mean, t test was a suitable test. The results are discussed as follow:

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The summary of descriptive analysis for the data related to the posttest of the experimental and the control group of the study is presented as follow in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Scores Comparison

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Score	Control	30	13.6500	1.72520
	Experimental	30	15.8500	1.81442

As it can be observed in Table 1, the mean score of experimental group is significantly higher than that of control group. So, it can be assumed that the treatment has been effective. In order to have more comprehensive understanding of the results of the study, the table below is presented in which the t score is discussed with much more details.

Table 2: The Summary of t test Between the Posttest Scores of Experimental and the Control Group of the Study

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					
		<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Score	Equal Variances	.048	.828	-	38	.000	-2.20000
	Assumed			3.930			-2.20000
	Equal Variances not			-			
	Assumed			3.930	37.904	.000	

According to Table (2), the result of t test ($t_{\text{obs}} = 3.93$, $p < .05$) yielded significant difference between the control and experimental groups. The retrieved sig from the study (.000) is smaller than the pre-determined value (0.05), so it can be inferred that the difference between the groups is significant.

Discussion and Conclusion

The results are in accordance with Weyers' (1999) who found exposure as an effective way to improve learners' listening ability. As mentioned by Gilmore (2004), using technology such as audio-visual materials can help the students develop their listening comprehension ability. The results of this study are consistent with the previous studies which found out that using authentic videos could be beneficial for improving the listening comprehension of learners. Gilmore (2004) also found that learners enjoy and subsequently learn more when watching videos for leisure. In addition, they provided evidence for the

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positive effect of authentic material on enhancing the learners' vocabulary recognition. The findings of this research are also in line with the study of Graham (2006) who found that using audio visual aids can significantly affect the listening comprehension of the learners. In addition, the results of this study confirms the findings of Markham (2003) research project which indicated that using English TV programs can improve the learners' listening word recognitions skills. The present study provides evidence for the positive effect of exposure to audio visual material in improving EFL students' listening comprehension.

The results are in line with other studies which have confirmed the beneficial effect of combining captions with audio-visual materials to enhance the listening comprehension of a foreign language (Garza, 1991; Markham, 2003). To put it in a nutshell, the results indicates that, exposure to authentic visual aids will lead to a deeper processing of input and increase the intake accordingly.

One of the most beneficial uses of technology is providing a multimodal learning environment in which learners are exposed to different modes of presentation. According to Rogers and Scaife (1996), Learners who have access to multiple representations, enhance their comprehension, learning, memory, communication and inference.

Using videos provide multiple modes of presentations (visual, auditory) simultaneously and can thus lower the cognitive load on the part of the learners. In other words, as pointed out by Hadley (2001), simultaneous use of different modes leads to a lower cognitive demand. Furthermore, multimedia can be used to develop a more inclusive curriculum that appeals to visual, aural and kinaesthetic learners and overcome differences in student performance that may result from different learning styles. Presenting material in a variety of modes has been used to encourage students to develop a more versatile approach to learning. The findings of this study are also consistent with studies done by Graham (2006) and Hadley (2001) which found that dual channel presentation resulted in better recognition memory, implying that the more input, the better the processing of input will be.

It is found out the ESL/EFL teachers should incorporate listening activities into their learners' aural skills with a focus on the students' needs, along with their level of proficiency and also their ability. In this study, the results of data analysis from the posttest administration showed that the experimental group who received enough amount of exposure to authentic videos had a significantly better performance in their listening posttest than that of control group who did not.

Therefore, the findings of the current study indicate that frequent exposure to authentic videos will help learners in learning to comprehend English language listening better. It can be said that if English learners are exposed to authentic materials, their listening ability can significantly be improved. Teachers can ask their learners to watch English TV programs as frequently as they can. English institutions can provide opportunities for their learners to watch original videos together in the class and enjoy the benefits of it as well.

This study explored the effect of exposure to authentic videos and it could show how learners improved their listening comprehension ability. This study was aimed at classroom teachers who are willing to make a change in their classes and help their learners improve by applying innovative ways, teachers who do not tend to sticking to old methodologies and procedures and those who are open-minded enough to accept and face challenges and are also willing to bring new version of teaching listening comprehension ability to their learners. These kinds of teachers can assist their learners to become better listeners as well as better speakers. In fact, exposure to sufficient amount of authentic material can help learners improve their listening skill (Ahangari *et al.*, 2015).

The current study is also significant for English learners as well, as it can teach them how to be better listeners. Learners can watch some videos in their free time out of the classroom context. This is a very good way to improve their English without formal studying. In fact, they just enjoy the activity they do in their spare time and simultaneously learn subconsciously.

Obviously one of the most significant reasons that learners cannot comprehend listening texts is not learners' lack of knowledge on the content of material but is in recognizing what they listen to. Therefore, ear training is an important aspect of being a good listener. In this way, there is a chance for learners to

pick up some new vocabulary and the learners may learn some new vocabulary items without formal studying and apparently their speaking ability also improves indirectly. This issue is a very suitable area of research. There is still a great room for further research on this matter. Researchers can conduct different studies on other effects that frequent exposure to videos has on other aspects of English language learning such as vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation or speaking ability.

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