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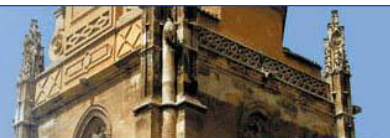
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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of integrating authentic materials into English as a foreign language (EFL) classes to improve the students' listening skills. Authentic materials are derived from real-life sources such as newspapers, podcasts, films and videos offer learners exposures to natural language use and cultural context. A questionnaire is administered to 40 middle school teachers to optimize the use of authentic materials in EFL classrooms. The findings revealed that incorporating authentic materials can significantly improve students' listening proficiency and foster a deeper understanding of a language.

Keywords: Authentic Materials, Listening Skills, Improvement, EFL Classes, Integration.

INTRODUCTION

In the area of English language teaching, the improvement of listening skills stands as a fundamental pillar for learners aiming to achieve proficiency. Within the context of EFL classrooms, the use of authentic materials has garnered increasing attention as a means to enhance students' listening comprehension abilities (Rost, 1994).

The acquisition of proficient listening skills holds undeniable importance as a cornerstone of communicative competence (Nunan, 2002). For this aim, educators are continually exploring innovative methodologies to enhance students' listening abilities. One such methodology gaining traction is the strategic integration of authentic materials into EFL classes.

Authentic materials encompass a wide range of resources drawn from real-life contexts, including but not limited to newspapers, radio broadcasts, films and online media (Richards& Schmidt, 2002). Unlike contrived materials often found in textbooks, authentic materials offer learners exposure to genuine language use, authentic speech patterns and cultural nuances reflective of native speaker communication.

The objective of the current study is to spot light on the role of authentic materials in enhancing the listening skill. In this respect, the research question raised is: Does the integration of authentic materials in teaching a foreign language improve the students' listening skills?

This study seeks to elucidate the potential benefits and challenges associated with incorporating authentic materials in EFL listening instruction. Through this exploration, educators can gain insights into effective strategies for utilizing authentic materials to cultivate students' listening abilities and foster a deeper appreciation for language and culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Authentic materials in EFL contexts

Using authentic materials in teaching listening is an important way to acquire a foreign language because they are powerful motivating factors and they provide a close contact with the language while introducing life into the classroom. According to Garder and Miller (1999), authentic materials can effectively used in teaching the target language because it will be better allow them to hear voices produced by native speakers. In this context, studies by Brown (2007) and Richards(2015) highlight the pedagogical significance of authentic materials in providing learners with language input, thereby facilitating the development of listening skills. Authentic materials offer learners the opportunity to engage with diverse language varieties, accent, and registers, better preparing them for real-world communication situations. Furthermore, exposure to authentic materials contributes to the development of cultural competence by fostering an understanding of socio-cultural norms, customs and perspectives embedded within language use (Tomlinson, 2012).

In the realm of EFL instruction, researchers such as Nunan (2004) and Harmer (2007) advocate for the integration of authentic materials as a means to create meaningful and communicative learning experiences. By incorporating materials that reflect learners' interests, preferences and real-life experiences, educators can enhance learners' motivation and engagement in language learning activities. Moreover, authentic materials

provide a rich context for language acquisition, promoting the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar and discourse features in a meaningful and memorable manner (Peacock, 1997).

Despite the myriad benefits associated with authentic materials, challenges exist in their effective classrooms. Issues such as text difficulty, cultural appropriateness, and time constraints pose obstacles for educators seeking to incorporate authentic materials in their teaching practice (Lee, 2010). Additionally, concerns, regarding the availability and accessibility of authentic materials in resource-limited contexts underscore the need for innovative approaches and strategies to overcome these challenges (Saricoban & Metin, 2000).

By providing learners with exposure to real-life language use and cultural contexts, authentic materials offer invaluable opportunities for language acquisition and cultural understanding. However, the effective integration of authentic materials necessitates careful consideration of pedagogical principles, learner needs, and contextual constraints.

Listening skills in EFL classes

Listening is an essential skill in language teaching, as it is crucial for communication and understanding in real-life situations. In the context of EFL classes, developing listening skills is important for students to be able to comprehend spoken language and participate in conversations effectively. Research has shown that focusing on listening in EFL classes can improve students' overall language proficiency. In a study by Yoshida (2018), it was found that using listening materials with various accents and speeds can help students become more accustomed to different ways of speaking English. This can enhance their ability to understand and communicate with native speakers. Additionally, Cakir(2015) highlights the importance of using authentic listening materials in EFL classes to make the learning experience more engaging and effective. In the listening comprehension, Nunan(2002) suggests the bottom-up and the top-down models which play an important roles in teaching listening. The bottom-up model emphasizes decoding individual sounds, words and grammar to understand the meaning. It starts from the smallest units (sounds, letters) and builds up to larger ones (phrases, sentences, discourse). On the other hand, the top-down model focuses on using prior knowledge, context and expectations to comprehend. It starts with larger units (context, background knowledge) and narrows down to smaller ones (words, sounds) as needed for understanding. These models often work together, with listeners using a combination of both approaches to comprehend spoken language.

According to Rost (1994) , listening is vital in language classroom because it provides input for learners. Also, spoken language provides a means on instruction for the learner. Listening can also provide enjoyment and stimulate cultural interests. It provides participation in the target language via movies, videos, songs and plays. Moreover, listening also the fulfillment of social needs such as the development of relationships, confidence and gathering information for every day needs.

Harmer (2001) claims that students can improve their listening skills and gain valuable language input through the combination of extensive and intensive listening. The former helps students to acquire vocabulary and grammar because it takes place outside the classroom. It exists in various situations such as home, car or personal stereo as they travel from one place to another. The value of such type of listening is obvious when students make their own choice and be aware of what are going to listen. While the second type is often with the intervention and the help of the teacher who provides students with different live listening situations. In this vein, Harmer (ibid) suggested various listening activities such as reading aloud, story-telling, conversations and interviews. Also, Celce-Murcia(2000) offers other forms of listening activities which can help in improving the students' listening abilities. These activities include recording a short segment such as news item from radio or TV, recording someone telling an anecdote or a story that is completely new to the non-native speakers, preparing a listening task for an intermediate class or prepare three different tasks that would help young learners develop good listening strategies.

In other sense, Field (2008) and Rahimi & Abedini (2009) highlight the main factors that influence listening comprehension in EFL learners including linguistic factors (e.g.vocabulary knowledge, grammatical competence) , affective factors (e.g., motivation, anxiety), cognitive factors(e.g., attention, memory) and socio-cultural factors(e.g., familiarity with cultural context, exposure to authentic materials).

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive studies aim to describe characteristics, behaviors, attitudes or phenomena as they naturally occur, without manipulating variables or attempting to establish causation (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the questionnaire would provide a snapshot of current practices and perceptions related to the use of authentic materials in EFL teaching, offering valuable insights into the target topic without seeking to explain why certain practices are employed or how they impact learning outcomes (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

In the present study, a questionnaire is designed for middle school teachers in order to investigate the teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of listening skills through the use of authentic materials. The questionnaire consists of 12 questions, 6 of them contain yes/no questions and the other ones are multiple choice questions. The questionnaire was distributed to 40 teachers from different middle schools in Ouargla.

RESULTS

The percentage technique is used in the analysis of findings.

Q1: Do you think that teaching listening skills in EFL classes is important? Why?

Table 1: The importance of teaching listening skills

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes	39	97.5 %
NO	01	2.5%
No answer	00	00%
Total	40	100%

Table (1) shows that the majority of teachers (97.5%) are interested in teaching listening skills. Thus, they differ in their reasoning though they agree on the importance of teaching listening skills in EFL classes. Because pupils are attracted by listening rather than other skills on one hand and are improving their pronunciation on the other hand. By contrast, only (2.5%) of teachers think that teaching listening skills is not important because of the large number of pupils in classes which can be the most difficult challenge to teach listening in such large size classes.

Q2: Do you find any challenges to teach listening skills in EFL classes? Cite them.

Table 2: The challenges in teaching listening skills

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes	37	92.5 %
NO	03	7.5%
No answer	00	00%
Total	40	100%

Most of teachers (92.5%), as shown in table (2), face challenges in teaching listening in EFL classes including the large number of learners this leads to make noise and troubles, the lack of educational tools that can facilitate the teaching process. While, (7.5%) of the teachers do not find any difficulties I teaching listening skills because their pupils pay attention to the lesson and try to understand.

Q3: do you use listening activities in your class?

Table 3: the perception of teachers towards the use of listening activities.

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes	23	57.5 %
NO	17	42.5%
No answer	00	00%
Total	40	100%

It is noticed from table (3) that (57.5%) of the teachers are interested in using listening activities in their classes but (42.5%) have negative attitude towards the use of listening activities.

Q4: what kind of listening activities do you prefer to apply in your class?

A -Extensive activities B-Intensive activities

Table 4: The preferred kind of listening activities to be applied in classes.

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
A	13	32.5 %
B	22	55%
No answer	05	12.5%
Total	40	100%

As it is indicated in table (4), only (32.5%) from teachers opt for extensive activities because they deal with young learners. For that, they focus on the elementary listening activities because this kind of activities makes pupils more motive and active. By contrast, (55%) of the teachers prefer intensive activities for the following

reasons: the teacher can evaluate the learners' level much better which gives pupils the chance with real-life situations. And 05 teachers have no answer to this question.

Q5: which of these listening activities do you apply in class?

A-Reading aloud B-Story-telling C-Conversations D-Interviews

Table 5: The listening activities applied in Classrooms

	Number of teachers
A	06
B	05
C	25
D	04

Table (5) indicates that (06) teachers opt for reading aloud activities in their classes, (05) teachers use story-telling activities and only (04) teachers apply interviews with their learners. While, 25 teachers think that conversations are the best type of listening activities especially with young learners.

Q6: Which kind of authentic materials from the list below is used in your classes?

A-authentic audio materials B-authentic visual materials C-authentic printed materials

Table 6: Kinds of authentic materials used in the classroom

	Number of teachers
A	07
B	04
C	29

It is clear from table (6) that most of teachers(29) use printed authentic materials in teaching listening for their young learners. While, (07) teachers use audio authentic materials and the rest of them (04) choose visual authentic materials in the listening class.

Q7: What is the feature focused on when using authentic materials?

A-Accessibility and cost B- Applicability C-Learners' interests
D-Diversity and variety E-Age, maturity and learners' abilities

Table 7 : features focused on when using authentic materials

	Number of teachers
A	00
B	04
C	06
D	02
E	28

From table (7) , one can notice that no teacher focuses on accessibility and cost and only 02 teachers focus on diversity and variety; while, most of teachers take into consideration when using authentic materials the learners' age, maturity and abilities. Besides, other teachers (06) think that the learners' interests should be the most important feature when using authentic materials. And only (04) teachers focus on applicability as a main feature in incorporating authentic materials.

Q8: Which of the following tool do you use to integrate authentic materials to improve listening?

A-Language Laboratory B-Tape recorder C-Radio
D-Videos E-TV F-Internet

Table 8: The useful tool which better present the chosen authentic material

	Number of teachers
A	03
B	11
C	05
D	10
E	02

F	08
No answer	01

Through table (08), it is noticed that most of teachers use tape recorder (11) and videos (10) to present the target authentic materials, some of them (08) emphasize on the internet sources as a tool to integrate their authentic materials. Concerning language laboratory (03) and radio(05) are less consider as useful tools to present the authentic materials, while only one teacher has no answer to the given question.

Q9: Do you prefer to use original materials (authentic materials) or adapted materials (non-authentic materials) in teaching listening?

Table 9: The teachers' preference to use original materials or adapted ones

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Original materials	25	62.5 %
Adapted materials	02	5%
Both of them	09	22.5%
No answer	04	10%
Total	40	100%

It is obvious from table (09) that most of teachers (62.5%) prefer the use of original materials (authentic), but only (5%) of them focus on the use of adapted materials (non-authentic). Also, there are some teachers (22.5%) vary between the original and the adapted materials in teaching listening, and few of teachers (10%) have no answer.

Q10: Do you think that the integration of authentic materials improves the listening skills in EFL classes ? Why?

Table 10: The role of authentic materials in improving the listening skills

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes	39	97.5 %
NO	01	2.5%
No answer	00	00%
Total	40	100%

Most of teachers (97.5%) , as it is shown in table (10), say that authentic materials have a great role in improving the learners' listening skill because they help teachers to work easily and to gain time in explaining new words but one of teachers(2.5%) thinks that the use of authentic materials in teaching listening has no role in the improvement of the listening skill because this has no relationship with the materials but with the teachers' skills.

Q11: Do you think that the use of non-authentic materials improves the students' listening skills? Why?

Table 11: the use of non-authentic materials improves the students' listening skills

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes	10	25 %
NO	28	70%
No answer	02	5%
Total	40	100%

It is mentioned in table (11) that only (25%) of the teachers answer that the use of non-authentic materials improve the listening skills because some teachers perform their competences through these materials which should be chosen carefully. By contrast, the majority of teachers (70%) believe that the use of non-authentic materials cannot develop the students' listening skills because they focus in using original materials. And, two teachers (5%) have no answer.

Q12: Does the use of authentic materials make the listening activities more effective? Why?

Table 12: The use of authentic materials and the effectiveness of listening activities

	Numbers	Percentages (%)
Yes	37	92.5 %
NO	01	2.5%
No answer	02	5% %
Total	40	100%

Table (12) indicates that most of teachers (92.5%) think that the more teachers use authentic materials the more listening activities are effective, because they make the learning interesting and active. Only one teacher (2.5%) sees that there is no relationship between both of them because pupils do not know authentic materials. And (5%) of the teachers have no answer to the given question.

DISCUSSION

As far as the aim of this study is concerned, the results and the findings are completely refereed to the answers of middle school teachers. Through the answers of the question about the importance of listening skills (97.5%) of teachers agree that listening is very important; however (92.5%) of them encounter several challenges and difficulties when teaching it. Moreover, most of middle school teachers confirm that their learners are very much interested in listening activities notably the intensive ones as long as its application in the classroom is more dynamic.

Further, teachers prefer to use conversations rather than story-telling, reading aloud...etc. also, they adopt authentic printed materials in teaching listening as they are more successful to convey the message.

More important, most of teachers focus on some features when using authentic materials such as age, maturity, the learners' abilities and interests. They are in favor of applying tape recorder, videos, and internet to present their chosen authentic materials in order to develop listening skills. That is to explain their focus on using original materials, in that (97.5%) they claim that the frequent use of them will lead to the improvement of the students' listening skills. Generally, (70%) of teachers agree that the use of non-authentic materials will not ameliorate the listening skills. At last but not least, (92.5%) confirm that there is a strong relationship between the use of authentic materials and the effectiveness of speaking activities.

Recapitulation

The interpretation of the questionnaire results revealed that:

- a- Most of middle school teachers are in favor of integrating authentic materials to teach listening in EFL classes.
- b-They agree that the tools which present authentic materials, especially tape recorder and videos.
- c-Some of middle school teachers teach listening though they face many obstacles and challenges in their classrooms.
- d- Most of middle school teachers need to vary the listening activities in order to reach its effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The emphasis is of this study is to shed light on the integration of authentic materials in fostering the learners' listening skills. Some middle school teachers of English from different schools of Ouargla are taken as a sample to carry out the target investigation. Through the research findings, it can be said that the listening skill is so much important and must be developed and improved. However, authentic materials are indeed the best way for improving listening. The questionnaire's results confirm the hypothesis that authentic materials are important in fostering listening because they make the learners feel that they are in a foreign language context. Authentic materials provide learners with a native speaker's way of pronunciation in addition to the recognition of the different dialects and getting the communicative competence. Also, non-authentic material can help in improving the listening skill because it makes learners focus on the correct pronunciation. And the use of simplified materials has also substantial role in the fostering of listening. So, teachers should make use of the various materials available to them, but they must give authentic materials its due importance.

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