



Optimizing EFL Listening Proficiency Through Technology-Mediated Instruction

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Abstract

Listening comprehension remains a persistent challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, often hindered by complex phonological features, unfamiliar vocabulary, varied speech rates, and diverse accents. This study investigates the effectiveness of technology-enhanced instructional approaches in improving listening skills among university-level EFL students. Two primary strategies were examined: (1) the use of authentic listening materials integrated with communicative tasks, and (2) the implementation of technology-assisted tools, including language learning applications, podcasts, and multimedia resources. Employing an experimental design with control and treatment groups, data were collected via pre- and post-tests, learner questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. Results indicate significant improvements in listening comprehension across both interventions. Authentic materials foster contextual and cultural awareness, while communicative activities promote engagement and active listening. Technology-supported tools enable flexible, self-paced practice and increased exposure to diverse spoken input. The study highlights the pedagogical value of integrating context-rich, learner-centered, and technology-mediated strategies in EFL listening instruction.

Keywords: EFL Listening Comprehension, Technology-Assisted Language Learning, Authentic Listening Materials, Communicative Language Teaching, Language Pedagogy.

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1. Introduction

Listening comprehension is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as it requires the real-time decoding of sounds, vocabulary, and contextual meaning. Unlike reading or writing, listening involves immediate processing, leaving little time for reflection or correction. At the university level, these challenges are further intensified by factors such as varied accents, rapid speech, cultural references, and limited exposure to authentic oral input outside the classroom (Soomro et al., p. 233). Despite its crucial role in effective communication, listening remains difficult to master, and traditional rote exercises often fail to prepare learners for real-world interactions. According to Dien et al. (2023), “listening comprehension can be defined as understanding the meaning of what listeners hear, but the definition is a sophisticated, unconscious and mental process in which the listener must actively acquire meaningful knowledge spoken in their communication context by utilizing their language areas [...] and background knowledge.”

In response to these challenges, this study explores the effectiveness of two instructional approaches for improving EFL listening proficiency: (1) the integration of authentic listening materials—such as podcasts and real-life conversations—paired with communicative tasks, and (2) the use of technology-assisted tools that offer flexible, interactive practice opportunities. By examining their impact on learners’ comprehension, engagement, and contextual understanding, the research aims to provide practical insights for instructors and contribute to the development of more effective, context-based EFL pedagogy. Both groups were previously taught the same theoretical information, namely strategies for listening comprehension skills.

2. Literature Review

Listening is widely considered a dynamic and active process in foreign and second language acquisition. Vandergrift (2007) articulates it as requiring prediction, monitoring, and evaluation, rather than passive reception. Rost (2011) further underscores its foundational role, affirming that listening supports other language competences such as speaking and reading. Recent studies have extended these insights, particularly highlighting learner autonomy and strategy instruction.



Safa and Motaghi (2024) examined cognitive versus metacognitive scaffolding in improving EFL learners' listening comprehension, revealing that structured strategy support significantly enhances understanding. Zhang and Zou (2024) similarly advocate for metacognitive self-regulation in language learning, underscoring its effectiveness across skills, including listening. In the context of EFL classrooms, motivation and interaction remain pivotal. Ibna Seraj and Hadina emphasize the necessity of innovating traditional methods to foster sustained oral practice both in and out of the classroom. They call for research into how technological integration—despite its rapid adoption and learner challenges can effectively support listening and assessment.

A 2025 literature review reveals that digital tools like podcasts, AI-powered platforms, and multimedia significantly enhance listening skills through interactive, self-paced, and contextually rich experiences. However, challenges such as digital literacy and infrastructure persist. Complementary findings show that digital multimedia environments—including immersive VR and AR—can heighten learner engagement and retention. For example, VR-based simulations in Taiwan yielded notably higher listening comprehension and immersion compared to traditional video environments. Moodle and mobile-assisted listening tools have also shown effectiveness. In one study, Moodle-based activities for first-year students significantly improved listening proficiency by extending the classroom's reach through varied communicative exercises. Similarly, mobile learning platforms and podcast-based exercises have been shown to boost motivation and listening performance, particularly when integrated with learner-centered and interactive design. The use of authentic materials, such as podcasts, news broadcasts, interviews, and conversations from native speakers, has been widely advocated in the literature. Gilmore (2007) argues that authentic materials provide exposure to the natural rhythm, stress, and intonation of the language, thereby enhancing learners' ability to comprehend real-world spoken English. Similarly, Berardo (2006) states that authentic materials help bridge the gap between the classroom and the real world. Communicative language teaching (CLT) emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Brown (2001) suggests that through group discussions, role plays, and listening-focused tasks, learners become more



engaged and active in their learning process. These activities provide immediate feedback and opportunities for students to practice listening in meaningful contexts. The advent of technology has revolutionized language teaching, especially in the domain of listening. Mobile applications, language learning platforms, and multimedia content allow for interactive and flexible learning experiences. In addition, the Moodle platform enables students to stay on track by practicing listening assignments outside the class. Dien et al. (2023) remind us that “the Moodle management system allows students to be motivated and familiar with suitable technological features in teaching and learning English and enables teachers and students to convey not only their ideas but also learning tasks rapidly.”

3. The Study

Despite consistent exposure to English courses, many EFL learners continue to face persistent challenges in developing listening comprehension. These difficulties are particularly evident among students with limited prior exposure to authentic spoken English. Research indicates that the use of blended pedagogical approaches can enhance listening proficiency by addressing learners’ cognitive, linguistic, and motivational needs. Successful listening instruction often involves raising learners’ awareness of their own difficulties, fostering sound recognition and grammatical tracking, and providing opportunities to engage with real-world communicative input.

In light of these considerations, this study explored the effectiveness of two instructional approaches designed to enhance EFL learners’ listening comprehension: (1) the integration of authentic listening materials supported by communicative activities, and (2) the use of technology-assisted tools that enable individualized and flexible listening practice.

4. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods design to allow for both quantitative measurement of listening gains and qualitative exploration of learners’ experiences. This triangulation



strengthened the validity of findings by combining outcome-based evidence with participants' perceptions and behaviors. The study was conducted with 14 intermediate-level EFL learners enrolled in a Romanian university program. Romanian was the participants' mother tongue, but they had studied English formally since primary school.

Students were divided into two groups of seven. The first group (Authentic and Communicative Activities) was exposed to authentic listening materials, including podcasts, news segments, dialogues, and video interviews. Lessons followed a pre-, while-, and post-listening structure, complemented by interactive tasks such as role plays, group discussions, and peer feedback. The second group (Technology-Assisted Tools) engaged with digital platforms such as Moodle, Duolingo, BBC Learning English, and TED-Ed. Learners completed interactive exercises, pronunciation drills, and self-paced quizzes, and tracked progress through app-based analytics.

Data Collection

To thoroughly assess the impact of both approaches, several instruments were employed. Students completed pre- and post-assessments using standardized listening comprehension tests to measure their progress throughout the semester. To gain a broader understanding of both performance outcomes and learner engagement, the instructor gathered data on students' perceptions, attitudes, and reported challenges. Additionally, participant interviews were conducted to explore their experiences and reflections in greater depth, providing clearer insights into their attentiveness and participation during lessons.

Findings

Both instructional approaches yielded significant improvements in listening comprehension. Post-assessment scores indicated that the first group improved by 18% on average, while the second improved by 21%. Although the second group demonstrated a slightly higher gain, the difference was not substantial, suggesting that both strategies were comparably effective in enhancing learners' listening skills. On the one hand, the group experiencing authentic and communicative activities reported that exposure to real-world English through podcasts, dialogues, and news segments improved their ability to understand different accents and speech



rates. They emphasized that role plays, group discussions, and peer-based feedback reduced listening anxiety and fostered confidence. Learners also appreciated the social dimension of communicative tasks, which made learning more interactive and meaningful. On the other hand, the group using technology-assisted tools valued the flexibility of technology-based learning. Many highlighted the convenience of practicing on mobile devices during commutes or in free time. The built-in analytics, instant feedback, and adaptive exercises allowed learners to progress at their own pace, increasing motivation and perceived autonomy. However, a few participants noted occasional distractions when using mobile applications, pointing to the need for structured guidance in technology use.

While participation among students in the first group was highly interactive, with active discussion, question asking, and role-play engagement, learners in the second group demonstrated independence and consistency in self-paced practice. However, some instances of off-task behavior were recorded during app use. Overall, both groups displayed a high level of commitment to their respective instructional approaches.

5. Discussion

The results of this study confirm that both authentic communicative activities and technology-assisted tools play vital roles in improving EFL listening comprehension. Authentic materials provide learners with exposure to real-life speech, varied accents, and natural discourse patterns. This aligns with Gilmore (2007) and Berardo (2006), who emphasize that authentic input enhances contextual understanding and prepares learners for actual communicative encounters. At the same time, communicative activities grounded in the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) foster learner engagement, collaboration, and immediate practice opportunities (Brown, 2001). Findings from the first group demonstrate that such activities reduce anxiety, increase confidence, and promote active learning. Meanwhile, technology-assisted tools offer flexible, personalized learning experiences that cater to diverse learner needs. As Jones (2008) observed, digital tools can adapt to individual learning styles, and the present study confirms that learners appreciate features such as feedback, progress tracking,



and anytime accessibility. The second group's strong performance suggests that mobile and web-based platforms can effectively supplement classroom instruction, though they require careful monitoring to minimize distractions. Overall, the study demonstrates that neither approach should be viewed as exclusive. Instead, the findings suggest that a blended approach—integrating authentic communicative input with technology-supported practice—may provide the most effective pathway for enhancing EFL listening comprehension in higher education.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study offer significant pedagogical implications for EFL instructors seeking to enhance listening instruction. The results demonstrate that authentic listening materials expose learners to natural speech and realistic communication contexts. They enhance comprehension and better equip learners for real-world communication. Moreover, the integration of communicative tasks forms a core component of listening pedagogy, as such interactive activities promote active engagement, reduce listening anxiety, and strengthen learners' confidence in oral comprehension. The study also emphasizes the value of technology-assisted tools, including mobile applications, Moodle, and online platforms, which extend learning beyond the classroom by providing flexible, self-paced opportunities for practice—provided that instructors guide learners in their effective and focused use. Ultimately, a blended approach that combines authentic input, communicative interaction, and technology-based learning offers the most comprehensive benefits, enabling institutions to design curricula that balance classroom-based and digital experiences, address diverse learner needs, and effectively develop listening proficiency for academic and professional communication.



6. Conclusion

Listening remains a vital yet often underemphasized component of foreign language acquisition. This study demonstrated that both the use of authentic listening materials with communicative activities and technology-assisted tools significantly enhance EFL learners' listening comprehension. Each approach offers unique advantages: authentic materials foster contextual understanding and confidence in navigating diverse accents, while technology provides flexible, personalized practice opportunities. Importantly, the findings highlight that a blended approach yields the most comprehensive benefits, creating a rich and supportive learning environment.

The study further indicates that learners' prior exposure to English, their motivation, and their cognitive capacities play crucial roles in their listening development. These insights underscore the value of adopting evidence-based, learner-centered practices that address both "the cognitive and affective dimensions of listening" (Vandergrift, 2007). As English continues to function as a global lingua franca, the ability to understand spoken English in diverse contexts is increasingly essential. By refining listening instruction through the integration of authentic, interactive, and technology-driven methods, educators can better equip EFL learners to become competent and confident communicators in academic, professional, and intercultural settings.

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