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# METHODOLOGY OF USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO DEVELOP LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN GRADES 7–8

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**Abstract**: Developing listening comprehension and speaking skills is one of the primary objectives of English language teaching in lower secondary education. However, many Grade 7–8 learners experience difficulties in understanding authentic spoken English and participating confidently in oral communication because classroom instruction often relies on simplified textbook materials. The research employed a quasi-experimental design involving an experimental and a control group over a sixteen-week instructional period. Data were collected through classroom observations, listening tests, speaking assessment rubrics, and learner questionnaires. The study also proposes a practical methodological framework for English teachers working in lower secondary schools.

**Keywords:** authentic materials, listening comprehension, speaking skills, communicative competence, English language teaching, Grade 7–8 learners, EFL, learner motivation, oral communication, listening strategies.

## Introduction

The growing role of English as an international language has transformed the objectives of foreign language education across the world. Modern English language teaching no longer focuses exclusively on grammar instruction and vocabulary memorization but aims to develop learners' communicative competence, enabling them to use English effectively in authentic situations **[1]**. Consequently, listening comprehension and speaking have become central components of English language curricula because they form the basis of successful interpersonal communication **[5]**.

Despite curriculum reforms, many lower secondary school learners continue to experience considerable difficulties in understanding naturally spoken English and expressing their ideas confidently. One of the major reasons is the continued dependence on adapted textbook dialogues and artificially simplified listening exercises, which rarely reflect authentic communication outside the classroom **[2; 6]**. As a result, students often perform satisfactorily in written grammar-based assessments but encounter difficulties when interacting with authentic spoken English.

Authentic materials have therefore become an important element of communicative language teaching. Gilmore defines authentic materials as spoken, written, or visual texts originally produced for native speakers rather than for educational purposes **[2]**. These materials expose learners to natural pronunciation, real speech rate, discourse markers, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references that cannot always be represented in conventional textbooks **[2; 7]**.

Listening comprehension is a complex cognitive process requiring learners to identify sounds, interpret meaning, activate background knowledge, and understand speakers' communicative intentions simultaneously **[8]**. According to Rost, successful listening involves not only recognizing linguistic forms but also constructing meaning through interaction between linguistic input and prior knowledge **[8]**. Authentic listening materials provide learners with opportunities to develop these higher-order listening strategies in realistic communicative contexts.

Similarly, speaking competence requires learners to integrate grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, pronunciation, fluency, and interactional skills during spontaneous communication **[5]**.

Brown and Lee argue that speaking develops more effectively when learners participate in meaningful communicative tasks rather than repetitive memorization activities **[9]**. Authentic communicative situations encourage students to negotiate meaning, solve problems collaboratively, and express personal opinions using language creatively.

The integration of authentic materials is also supported by constructivist and sociocultural theories of learning. Vygotsky emphasizes that knowledge develops through meaningful social interaction and collaborative learning experiences **[10]**. Authentic resources create opportunities for learners to engage with real language while interacting with classmates through pair work, discussions, role plays, and problem-solving tasks. Such interaction strengthens both receptive and productive language skills.

Rapid technological development has further increased access to authentic English-language resources. Educational podcasts, TED-Ed lessons, YouTube educational channels, online interviews, documentaries, news broadcasts, and digital storytelling platforms provide teachers with unlimited opportunities to incorporate authentic language into classroom instruction **[11]**. These resources not only improve language proficiency but also increase learners' motivation because classroom activities become more relevant to their everyday experiences **[6; 12]**.

For Grade 7–8 learners, authentic materials are particularly valuable because adolescents demonstrate increasing curiosity about global culture, technology, sports, entertainment, and international communication. Carefully selected authentic resources corresponding to learners' cognitive level encourage active participation and meaningful communication while reducing dependence on mechanical language practice **[7; 12]**.

Although numerous studies confirm the effectiveness of authentic materials, many teachers continue to experience difficulties in selecting appropriate resources, adapting authentic input to learners' proficiency levels, and designing communicative classroom activities **[2; 11]**. Consequently, there remains a need for a systematic methodological framework specifically designed for lower secondary school English instruction.

Research aim. The study aims to develop and evaluate a methodology for using authentic materials to improve listening comprehension and speaking skills among Grade 7–8 English language learners.

Scientific novelty. The novelty of this research lies in proposing an integrated methodology that combines authentic audio-visual materials with scaffolded listening and speaking activities specifically designed for Grade 7–8 learners. Unlike traditional approaches that treat listening and speaking separately, the proposed framework develops both skills simultaneously through communicative tasks supported by digital authentic resources **[3; 10]**.

**Materials and Methods**

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to evaluate the effectiveness of authentic materials in improving listening comprehension and speaking skills among Grade 7–8 learners. The research was conducted during one academic semester (16 weeks) in two secondary school English classes. One class served as the experimental group, where authentic materials were systematically integrated into English lessons, while the other functioned as the control group, receiving instruction through conventional textbook-based activities **[3; 11]**.

Participants. The study involved 60 Grade 7–8 students aged between 13 and 14 years. Thirty students were assigned to the experimental group and thirty to the control group. Before the experiment, both groups completed a placement test to ensure comparable English language proficiency. The pre-test results indicated no statistically significant differences between the groups, allowing a reliable comparison of instructional outcomes **[5]**.

Instructional Materials. The instructional materials for the experimental group consisted of carefully selected authentic English-language resources appropriate for adolescent learners. The

selection criteria included linguistic accessibility, communicative relevance, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the national English curriculum **[2]**.

The authentic materials included:

- short educational videos;
- podcasts for teenagers;
- interviews with native speakers;
- weather forecasts and news reports;
- songs and film excerpts;
- restaurant dialogues and travel conversations;
- digital storytelling videos;
- advertisements and public announcements.

Unlike adapted textbook recordings, these materials exposed learners to natural pronunciation, authentic vocabulary, discourse markers, reduced forms, and different English accents, thereby preparing them for real-life communication **[2; 8]**.

Before each listening activity, unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural references were introduced through short pre-listening tasks to reduce comprehension difficulties. During listening, students completed information-gap activities, note-taking exercises, and prediction tasks. Post-listening activities included pair discussions, role plays, debates, presentations, and problem-solving tasks designed to transform receptive input into productive language use **[6; 9]**.

Research Instruments. Several research instruments were employed to ensure the reliability of the findings.

The first instrument was a Listening Comprehension Test, administered both before and after the experiment. The test measured learners' ability to identify main ideas, understand specific information, infer meaning, and recognize speakers' intentions **[8]**.

The second instrument was a Speaking Performance Rubric, which assessed five criteria:

- pronunciation;
- fluency;
- grammatical accuracy;
- vocabulary use;
- interactional competence.

Each criterion was evaluated on a five-point scale adapted from communicative language assessment frameworks **[9]**.

The third instrument consisted of classroom observation checklists**.** Throughout the experiment, the researcher observed students' classroom participation, willingness to communicate, collaborative interaction, and engagement with authentic tasks.

Experimental Procedure. The instructional intervention consisted of four consecutive stages.

During the orientation stage, students became familiar with authentic listening materials and communicative classroom procedures. Teachers explained lesson objectives and demonstrated listening strategies such as predicting content, identifying keywords, and inferring meaning from context **[8]**.

The implementation stage occupied the largest portion of the experiment. Each lesson followed a three-phase instructional sequence:

1. pre-listening activities;
2. while-listening tasks;
3. post-listening speaking activities.

This sequence enabled learners to activate background knowledge before listening, process authentic input during listening, and consolidate learning through oral communication afterward **[6]**.

The communicative practice stage focused on transforming listening input into meaningful spoken interaction. Students completed role plays, interviews, pair discussions, information-gap activities, problem-solving tasks, and group presentations based on the authentic materials they had listened to. These communicative activities encouraged spontaneous language production rather than memorized dialogues **[1; 9]**.

Finally, during the assessment stage, learners completed post-tests identical in structure to the pre-tests. Their speaking performance was evaluated using the same assessment rubric to ensure consistency and objectivity **[5]**.

Data Analysis. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods. Mean scores, percentage gains, and comparative analyses were used to determine differences between the experimental and control groups. Qualitative classroom observations and questionnaire responses were analyzed thematically to identify changes in learners' motivation, confidence, classroom participation, and speaking behavior **[3; 12]**.

To ensure validity, identical testing procedures were applied to both groups. The same teacher conducted all speaking assessments using standardized evaluation criteria, thereby minimizing subjective judgment. The triangulation of test results, classroom observations, and learner questionnaires further strengthened the credibility of the research findings **[11]**.

The methodology adopted in this study provided a comprehensive framework for evaluating not only linguistic improvement but also the pedagogical effectiveness of authentic materials in developing communicative competence among lower secondary school learners.

**Results and Discussion**

The purpose of the experimental instruction was to determine whether the systematic use of authentic materials could significantly improve Grade 7–8 students' listening comprehension and speaking skills. Comparative analysis of the pre-test and post-test results demonstrated noticeable differences between the experimental and control groups. Although both groups showed some progress after sixteen weeks of instruction, learners who were taught through authentic materials achieved substantially higher improvements in all assessed language skills **[3; 9]**.

The experimental group's listening performance improved because authentic audio materials familiarized learners with natural pronunciation, connected speech, intonation patterns, and different speaking styles. At the same time, communicative follow-up activities enabled students to transform receptive language into meaningful oral production. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies emphasizing the effectiveness of authentic input in communicative language teaching **[2; 6]**.

**Table 1**

**Comparison of Listening and Speaking Achievement Before and After the Experiment**

| Language Skill | Experimental Group (Pre-test) | Experimental Group (Post-test) | Control Group (Pre-test) | Control Group (Post-test) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Listening comprehension | 61.8 | 86.9 | 62.1 | 73.8 |
| Speaking fluency | 59.7 | 84.5 | 60.4 | 71.6 |
| Pronunciation | 63.2 | 87.3 | 63.5 | 75.2 |
| Vocabulary use | 60.8 | 85.4 | 61.2 | 73.9 |

**Source:** Author's experimental results.

As shown in **Table 1**, both groups started with relatively similar proficiency levels. However, the experimental group demonstrated considerably greater progress after authentic materials had been incorporated into classroom instruction. Listening comprehension increased by approximately **25**

**percentage points**, while speaking fluency improved by nearly **25 points**, indicating the effectiveness of authentic communicative activities **[1; 8]**.

One explanation for these results is that authentic materials exposed learners to realistic spoken English rather than carefully controlled textbook dialogues. Students gradually became accustomed to natural speech rate, connected speech, hesitation markers, and authentic vocabulary. Consequently, they developed greater confidence when participating in communicative speaking activities **[2]**.

The findings also revealed qualitative changes in learners' communication strategies. During the first weeks of the experiment, many students relied heavily on translation into their first language before responding in English. By the end of the intervention, however, most learners attempted to express ideas directly in English using contextual clues, paraphrasing strategies, and collaborative problem-solving. Such behavioral changes indicate the gradual development of communicative competence rather than simple memorization of linguistic forms **[1; 5]**.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the systematic integration of authentic materials into English language instruction has a significant positive impact on the development of listening comprehension and speaking skills among Grade 7–8 learners. Unlike conventional textbook-based resources, authentic materials expose students to natural language use, realistic pronunciation, contextualized vocabulary, and genuine communicative situations, thereby creating meaningful opportunities for language acquisition and interaction [2; 8]. The experimental results revealed that students who learned through authentic audio-visual resources achieved higher levels of listening comprehension, oral fluency, pronunciation accuracy, vocabulary use, and communicative confidence than those receiving traditional instruction [3; 9].

In conclusion, authentic materials represent an effective pedagogical resource for improving communicative competence in lower secondary English classrooms. Their regular and methodologically sound implementation can contribute to more engaging, learner-centered, and communicative English language instruction. Future research may examine the long-term effects of authentic materials on other language skills, including reading, writing, intercultural competence, and digital literacy, as well as their integration into technology-enhanced learning environments [2; 11].

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