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THE IMPACT OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS ON IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS OF B2-LEVEL ENGLISH LEARNERS

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Abstract. Listening is an important skill in foreign language learning because it helps students understand spoken language and communicate with others; but many English learners cannot understand native speakers, accents and natural speech. This article looks at how authentic materials improve listening skills among B2 level English learners — who are the target learners? What listening skills should be developed? How to teach them? Podcasts, interviews, news reports, films and educational videos are used also in ESL classrooms. Academic studies were reviewed to find out benefits and challenges of authentic materials. Authentic materials can improve listening comprehension, increase motivation of students and prepare learners for real life communication.

Keywords: authentic materials, listening skills, B2-level learners, EFL students, listening comprehension, English language teaching.

Introduction.

Listening is one of the most important skills to learn when learning English as a foreign language because students need spoken information in order to respond (communication). But many learners cannot understand natural English due to different accents, fast speech, connected speech and unfamiliar vocabulary.

One solution could be to use authentic materials in English language teaching. Authentic materials are resources created for real communication (not specifically for language learners) – podcasts, YouTube videos, interviews, films, television programmes and news reports.

The main purpose of this article is to look at how authentic materials can be used to improve listening skills in B2-level English learners.

The main research question is: How do authentic materials contribute to listening skills development among B2-level English learners?

Theoretical Background

2.1. Who to Teach? The target group of this article are B2 university students studying English as a foreign language (EFL). According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) B2 learners understand main ideas in complex texts and follow extended speech on familiar topics.

Even if these students have an upper-intermediate level of English they may still struggle with understanding native speakers, different accents, informal expressions and fast conversations.

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University students need listening skills for academic and professional purposes (e.g. to listen in lectures, discuss groups, watch educational videos etc.) or international speakers (e.g. Skype).

So B2 level learners are the target group for using authentic materials because they already have a good language foundation and need more exposure to natural spoken English.

What to Teach? The main teaching content of this article is listening comprehension. The purpose is to train students' ability to understand natural spoken English and recognize important information.

The following listening skills should be developed:

1. Listening for gist: Students learn what the main idea of an audio or video recording is.
2. Listening for specific information: Students find particular details (names, dates, numbers and important facts).
3. Different accents: Students learn British, American and other international English accents.
4. Recognising natural speech: Students learn to recognise contractions, connected speech, pauses and natural pronunciation.
5. Context understanding: Students learn to understand what people think, feel and intend.

These skills can result in students being more confident and independent listeners. How to Teach? Authentic materials can be introduced through CLT (meaningful communication and practical use of language).

Teachers can use different authentic resources:

· Books and other reading materials;
· Songs and rhymes;
· Movies and videos;
· Games and puzzles;
· Art work (drawing, painting);
· Music (singing);
• Podcasts.
• TED Talks
• YouTube videos
• Interviews with native speakers
• News reports
• Films and TV series

These materials should be chosen according to students' proficiency levels, interests and learning needs. Listening lessons can be divided into three stages.

Pre-listening: Teachers introduce topic, activate students' background knowledge and explain unfamiliar vocabulary.

While-listening: Students listen to the material chosen and perform tasks (e.g. answer questions; identify main idea; take notes).

Post-listening: Students talk about the content, express their opinions and summarize what they have heard.

A teacher might use a short TED Talk on technology for example. First the students talk about the topic and predict what they will hear; then watch video and answer comprehension questions; finally in pairs or groups discuss speaker's main ideas.

This makes listening lessons more interactive and helps students to develop practical communication skills.

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Literature Review

Several researchers have looked at the role of authentic materials in foreign language learning.

Gilmore (2007) looked at the role of authentic materials in foreign language education. He talked about what authentic language is and textbook materials, why learners need to be exposed to real communication.

Ghaderpanahi (2012) investigated the effect of authentic aural materials on listening comprehension in university students. The results showed that after using authentic material students' listening ability improved.

Mousavi and Iravani (2012) investigated the effects of authentic and non-authentic listening materials on upper intermediate EFL learners. They found that students working with authentic radio recordings performed better in terms of listening comprehension.

Vandergrift (2007) reviewed developments in second and foreign language listening comprehension research. He emphasized that listening is an active process with cognitive as well as social factors involved; his research showed how listening strategies are important for language development.

These studies show that authentic materials can provide opportunities for developing listening comprehension but teachers need to choose materials based on students' proficiency levels and learning needs.

Methodology

The article is based on a literature review. It reviews previous academic studies and theoretical discussions about authentic materials and listening comprehension.

The teaching approach used here is for B2 level university students and uses authentic listening resources in communicative classroom activities.

Podcasts, interviews, educational videos and news reports can be used to develop different listening skills. Teachers can organize individual, pair and group activities to promote active participation.

Materials should be selected according to students' interests, language ability and learning goals.

Discussion

Authentic materials have several benefits for B2-level English learners: first, they expose students to natural spoken English and get them used to different accents and speaking speeds.

Second, they provide opportunities for developing listening strategies: students learn to recognise main ideas; specific information; speakers' opinions.

Third authentic materials can increase motivation because they often contain interesting and real-life topics. Students may find podcasts, interviews and videos more interesting than textbook recordings. But authentic materials are also problematic.

Fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary and cultural differences may make listening hard. Teachers can overcome these challenges by teaching important vocabulary before listening; recording appropriate material; and allowing students to listen more than once. Therefore, authentic materials should be used together with appropriate classroom activities so that listening lessons are more effective.

Conclusion. So, in conclusion authentic materials can be used to improve listening skills of B2 level English learners because they give them experience of natural spoken English, understand different accents and develop listening comprehension. Podcasts, interviews, news reports, films and educational videos can make listening lessons more interesting and practical.

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Teachers should take into account students' language levels, interests and learning needs when selecting materials. Authentic resources combined with pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities can make a more effective learning environment. Generally speaking, regular use of authentic materials can make B2 level learners more confident listeners and prepare them for real life communication.

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