

Utilizing Authentic Materials to Improve Listening and Speaking Skills: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

This study explores the role of authentic materials in enhancing the listening and speaking skills of English learners, focusing on the researcher's own journey of language improvement. Authentic materials—such as video games, YouTube videos, and movies—offer real-life contextual exposure to language use, which is essential for developing practical communication skills in English. By employing a self-reflection narrative inquiry methodology, this study provides an introspective account of how the researcher engaged in self-directed learning over several years to improve listening and speaking proficiency. The findings of the study indicate that consistent interaction with authentic materials significantly contributed to the enhancement of the researcher's speaking skills. These materials stimulated more natural language acquisition processes by exposing the learner to genuine conversational scenarios, varied accents, idiomatic expressions, and cultural nuances that are often absent in traditional textbooks. Additionally, regular application and practice of the language skills acquired through these resources reinforced learning and led to measurable progress. Based on these results, the study recommends that English learners and educators integrate diverse authentic materials into language learning curricula and self-study routines to foster more effective listening and speaking abilities. Furthermore, it encourages learners to maintain frequent and purposeful usage of these materials to maximize language retention and fluency. To build on these insights, the study also advocates for further empirical research involving a broader range of authentic material types and different learner populations, which could provide more generalized and comprehensive evidence on the efficacy of authentic resources in language education.

Keywords: *authentic materials, narrative inquiry, EFL learning*

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1. Introduction

Authentic materials cater to students' needs to learn a language in a new way. Tomlinson (2012) mentioned that authentic texts range from fiction or nonfiction texts to interviews, instructions, and songs. Utilizing authentic materials to enhance students' listening and speaking proficiency motivates the learners to use their preferred materials. Alfonso Vargas & Romero Molina (2023) explained that the benefit of internet access allows teachers to find a variety of authentic digital materials that challenge and motivate EFL students. Most students have relied on their gadgets for both academics and pleasure, learning from the available technology might give them insight into their learnings and satisfying outcomes.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in utilizing authentic materials with easy access to digital literacy. However, authentic materials were recognized in communicative

learning teaching (CLT). The introduction of CLT for EFL teaching brings attention to the authenticity of the communicative classroom (Peker & Acar, 2024 p.1). Communicative approaches covered with CLT deal with common principles including authentic materials, active learning and interaction, and activities (Pemberton, 2024). Huda (2017) mentioned that the need for real communication in CLT is provided in authentic materials as the activities with authentic materials mirror the real world.

Previous studies have reported the benefits of using authentic materials in the EFL classroom. Toshnazarovna and Shakhobiddinovich (2024) stated that teaching language by integrating authentic materials proves to stimulate real-world language skills and cultural understanding. Castillo Losada et al. (2017) mention that implementing authentic materials in the language classroom should be encouraged as they have a positive impact on the linguistics and affective domain of students. Another study conducted by Mirqodirova (2024) also mentioned similar things that using authentic materials in language teaching is crucial to accommodate real-world language input and exposure to students. From the teachers' perception, Huda (2017) found that the teachers have positive attitudes toward providing authentic input in their classes.

The use of authentic materials in listening and speaking has an impact on EFL students. The study by Dewi (2018) found that the students who were taught by using authentic materials in listening comprehension achieved better results than those who did not. Mandasari (2016) found that the concept of authentic materials has shaped their belief in teaching listening and their use should be conformed to students' needs. However, a study by Hartatik and Rahmah (2016) found that authentic materials have to be selected carefully although it is beneficial in speaking learning. Another finding by Sahboun et al. (2024) recommends the implementation of authentic materials in teaching as it increases fluency, enhances accuracy, develops pronunciation, increases vocabulary competencies, and improves confidence.

While studies on authentic materials have been significant, the longitudinal application of authentic materials as a self-learning process has not been addressed. To verify the previous findings, a longitudinal study is needed as a prove of the significance of authentic materials. Thus, this study aims to contribute to this growing area of research by exploring the impact of authentic materials to improve listening and speaking proficiency. This research seeks to address the following questions:

1. What experiences of learning listening and speaking English using authentic materials have been important to me?
2. How do these experiences of utilizing authentic materials construct my current proficiency in listening and speaking skills?

The reader should bear in mind that the study is based on the phenomenology of the researcher's self-reflection throughout her English learning. The proficiency achievement researcher might not be similar to other data sources with different circumstances. Nonetheless, this study gives a contribution to EFL listening and speaking teaching strategies.

2. Method

The design of this research is a narrative inquiry on the researcher's self-reflection throughout learning and teaching with videos and video games to improve her listening and speaking skills throughout the years. As data is collected from the perspective of study participants' experiences and within their context, thinking, attitudes, and behaviors, narrative inquiry is highly beneficial when examining research issues (DeLong, 2014). Clandinin (2006) emphasized that narrative inquiry is a commonplace to note the live stories of human beings which functioned in methodology in social science research. Narrative inquiry in qualitative

research is a process of studying and understanding experience through narrative writing that can be a method and phenomenon of study as a way of thinking about and making sense of experience. The researcher is the sole data source of the study. The data were collected through self-reflection during her experience in English learning (focus on speaking and listening proficiency). The data was then analyzed and tabulated based on the experiences and contributions to the researcher's proficiency level at the particular time referring to the CEFR framework in oral comprehension. For practical use, a first-person point of view will be used in the results and discussions.

3. Findings and Discussion

To answer the first and second research questions, the results were tabulated as in Table 1 to point out the authentic materials experiences and their contribution to my speaking and listening proficiency.

Table 1. First stage self-reflection

Stage	AM used	AM utilization	Speaking contribution	Listening contribution
5-8 years old	Games Songs	I could understand short vocabulary and being able to use specific words. I could understand the words and able to use it in a sentence without proper grammatical features. I was able to arrange the words into phrases and sentences by their translation (incorrectly).	-	Pre-A1 overall oral comprehension
9-10 years old	Songs Movies		Pre A-1 overall oral production Pre A-1 overall oral interaction	Pre-A1 overall oral comprehension Pre-A1 understanding media

I started learning English in grade four once a week with limited knowledge but my curiosity had grown as I engaged in songs, games, and movies in my early years. Growing up in the music interest family led me to listen to English songs at a very young age (5-8 years old, elementary school year one to year three) with the lack of English education at school at that time, I could only repeat and mimic the words that were easy to listen without understanding the meaning. For example, the words 'start', 'win', 'lose', 'yes', 'no', and 'pause' from video games, the easy-to-listen words from the nursery songs 'star', 'little', 'diamond', and 'sky'. I did not know the written form of the words back then, but I could repeat and tell what the words refer to. English exposure keeps growing but with non-English speaker parents, I could not elaborate on what I played or heard until English subject was introduced in year 4 where I learned more basic vocabulary and learned how to use a dictionary. However, because we did not learn phonics I had trouble finding meaning from the words that I heard in the songs I listened to. At this level, my overall comprehension CEFR proficiency was pre-A1 for I only knew the words without understanding how to elaborate it further.

Table 2. Second stage self-reflection

Stages	AM used	AM utilization	Speaking contribution	Listening contribution
11-13 years old	Songs Games Movies YouTube videos	I began to transcribe the lyrics and conversation I heard. I translated the words I found in the dictionary. Due to the lack of phonology skills, I still have trouble finding the right words in some songs. I used the words	Overall oral production A2 Describing experience A1 Overall oral interaction A2 Conversation A2 Giving information A2	Overall oral comprehension A2 Understanding conversations between other people A2 Understanding announcements and instructions A2

I could find in English class and English club at school as conversation and information exchange.	Understanding media A1
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During middle school (11-13 years old), I began improving my English due to the pressure of the school and a great teacher who provided an English club where we could participate in conversations. My will to learn English grew more as I started my music and video games hobby. I listened to bands such as Muse, Linkin Park, My Chemical Romance, and Evanescence, while listening to the CD I wrote the lyrics and translated them with an English-Indonesian dictionary. Since I did not have anyone to practice English with me during my middle school years, I immersed myself in video games (Dynasty Warrior, Guitar Hero, Tekken, and online games) and I tried to comprehend and mimic the dialogue. Some video games require you to be the main character that interacts with the NPC (non-playable character) and I found that amusing to speak out my lines at the time. With support from the English teachers, I honed my skills in listening and speaking at school and I could elaborate on some new words and phrases from the songs and video games in my implementation. I represented my school in many activities that involved English (drama and storytelling), and my teachers engaged the students well despite my lack of grammar skills. At that time, YouTube was introduced to me in the ninth grade, I had full internet access to authentic materials on YouTube. I began watching tutorial videos in English as I was interested in art. With English learning taught twice a week, everything began to make sense to me how the tense in grammar could change for the same words or how the subject and object pronouns should be placed. I finally understood what I had been listening to and how it should be answered. I started to get used to understanding the conversations in the game, the instructions, and the lyrics I heard; by that time I could use those phrases in class when I spoke in the class. At this level of learning my overall comprehension CEFR proficiency reached the A2 level where I could comprehend enough to be able to address actual instructions, given that people speak slowly and clearly, and I was able to comprehend words and expressions related to topics that are most crucial as long as speakers speak slowly and clearly.

Table.3 Third stage self-reflection

Stages	AM used	AM utilization	Speaking contribution	Listening contribution
14-16 years old	Songs Games Movies Youtube videos	I got used to English and watching, and mimicking the language became easier. I could use the new vocabulary more spontaneously. English became more often spoken on many occasions, yet I knew how to converse and deliver a speech without much preparation.	Overall oral production B1	Overall oral comprehension B1
			Describing experience B1	Understanding conversations between other people B1
			Giving information B1	Understanding announcements and instructions B2
			Overall oral interaction B2	Audio-visual comprehension in watching TV, film, video B2
			Understanding an interlocutor B1	
			Conversation B2	
			Informal discussion B1	
			Information exchange B1	

In senior high school (14-16 years old), my activities were almost the same as learning English independently however I could elaborate more on the lexicogrammatica. I could speak with more accuracy in grammar and expanded my vocabulary during my senior year. With the same routine of authentic materials in songs, movies, and YouTube videos, I began to use fewer subtitles in the videos and movies I watched although I was aware I might not be able to

understand it clearly. At this level, I was confident and comfortable to start speaking in English on any given occasion. What should be noted is that I was involved in many activities dealing with English such as storytelling, and speeches whose practices were not implemented through authentic materials however my habits of immersing myself in English through my daily hobbies boosted my speaking skills and confidence. At this level, my CEFR proficiency was B1 as I can comprehend simple, factual information about everyday or work-related subjects, distinguishing between broad themes and specifics, as long as the speakers speak clearly and in a range of well-known tones. I can comprehend brief stories as well as the major points presented in plain, standard language or a familiar variety of topics frequently met at work, school, play, etc.

Table 4. Fourth stage self-reflection

Stages	AM used	AM utilization	Speaking contribution	Listening contribution
17-20 years old	Songs Games Movies Youtube videos Books	My vocabulary expansions were more varied. With English spoken more often, I became more confidence in expressing myself in English. However, authentic materials here were not learned thoroughly as in previous stages.	Overall oral production C1	
			Describing experience C1	
			Giving information B2	Overall oral comprehension C1
			Putting a case B2	Understanding conversations between other people
			Overall oral interaction C1	C1
			Understanding an interlocutor C1	Understanding announcements and instructions C1
			Conversation C1	Watching TV, film, video C1
			Informal discussion C1	Overall mediation B2
			Formal discussion B2	Note-taking B2
			Goal-oriented co-operation B2:	
Obtaining goods and services B2				
Information exchange B2				
Interviewing and being interviewed B2				

I enrolled in an English education study program for my bachelor's degree (1-20 years old). At this level, I used English almost every day and learned it from the smallest linguistics aspects (phonics) to the biggest ones (pragmatics). Due to the complexity of the study I rarely involved authentic materials in English as I felt a mundane habit of the learning process dealt with English instead, I used them in other languages as an escapism. Nevertheless, watching YouTube videos, playing video games, and watching movies were my daily activities at that time and I picked up reading hobbies. At this level, my proficiency had reached the B2 to C1 level as I learned English thoroughly in the university. However, this achievement did not personally involve self-learning with authentic materials as at this stage I learned English as a study major.

Table 5. Fifth stage self-reflection

Stages	AM used	AM utilization	Speaking contribution	Listening contribution
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			Overall oral production C2	
			Describing experience C2	
			Giving information C1	
			Putting a case C1	Overall oral comprehension C2
			Overall oral interaction C2	Understanding conversations between other people C2
			Understanding an interlocutor C2	Understanding announcements and instructions C1
			Conversation C2	Watching TV, film, video C1
			Informal discussion C2	Overall mediation C1
			Formal discussion C1	Note-taking C1
			Goal-oriented co-operation C1	
			Obtaining goods and services C1	
			Information exchange B2	
			Interviewing and being interviewed C1	

After I graduated, I became an English teacher (21-now) at an elementary school for three months before moving to an English course I was affiliated with for the last seven years, and I am currently enrolled in a graduate degree with the same major. At this point, I speak more English than I do in my native language. As a teacher and a student myself, I still need to learn and play; the authentic materials I utilize are movies, YouTube videos, books, and video games. The movies and videos I watched back then and now tend to use British English and naturally by the time I can pick up the accent, however, I still cannot pick other English accents yet. Most of the time, for the last three years after work and study, I played games for hours almost every day. The games I played were RPG (role-playing games) like Genshin Impact, Star Rail, Wuthering Waves, and some others. There will always be new colloquial phrases I learned. The interaction between characters is smoother and livelier than in the games I played previously; these games gave me confidence in speaking eloquently. At this stage, my proficiency has reached C1 to C2 level in oral comprehension and production for I can understand with ease virtually any kind of language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast natural speed. The benefits of authentic materials are also presented in my teaching. The students are interested and more active during speaking practice when the theme ranges across their hobbies as in games or movies. They tend to speak up more with the topics or input of their interests.

These findings show how my experiences using songs, videos, novels, and games as authentic materials for my self-learning. I began to pick up vocabulary, phrases, and dialogues, in English and apply it in my daily life, especially my speaking and listening proficiency. These experiences of utilizing authentic materials construct my current proficiency in listening and speaking skills as by the time English is introduced and taught, I begin to make sense of how it can be applied as a non-native learner. These findings are in line with some studies. Winaldo and Oktaviani (2022) found that vocabulary and pronunciation can be helped through video games. A study conducted by Nuriyah et al. (2024) found that playing the Genshin Impact game enhances students' vocabularies and allows them to apply it to contexts. Another study conducted by Jimmi et al. (2024) found that narrative video games provide a compelling and relaxed way for individuals to practice and enhance their listening skills. Last, Siregar (2024) found that there is a significant difference between students utilizing English songs from YouTube indicating that they are effective for the students' listening skills. The results of my self-learning through authentic materials significantly bring out satisfaction in my oral proficiency as this reflection is written.

4. Conclusion and suggestion

This study set out to determine how the experiences of learning listening and speaking English using authentic materials have been important and how these experiences of utilizing authentic materials construct my current proficiency in listening and speaking skills. The study has shown that utilizing authentic materials such as songs, video games, and YouTube videos plays an important part in the researcher's listening and speaking skills for they improve her proficiency. These two decades of self-learning using authentic materials shape her current proficiency from the unaware witness to the proficient user. Starting from vocabulary, phrases, and conversation in the authentic materials affects the researcher's oral proficiency significantly.

The current study was limited by the researcher as the sole data source in this study. These results may not apply to different people with different circumstances. It would be interesting for further studies to examine the utilization of authentic materials as a comparison or with different data sources. The findings of this study have several important implications for future practice.

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