

***The Effectiveness of Authentic Material Application to Enhance EFL Students'
Listening Comprehension***

Surachai Rodngam, Thammasat University, Thailand
Monnipha Somphong, Thammasat University, Thailand

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Abstract

Up to now, there has been a variety of factors influencing on Thai EFL students who are learning English for their survival in the competitive societies, especially when Thailand becoming one of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) members. One of the most influential factors is that Thai students still lack English communicative competence which is considered a key tool for communication. Listening, the most frequently used skill, plays a vital role in daily communication and seems to be the most problematic skill which needs urgent improvement. It is therefore, significant to prepare Thai EFL students for successful listening comprehension. In order to help them improve their listening comprehension skill more effectively in the real world, authentic listening materials are implemented in the English teaching class. This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of authentic material application to enhance EFL students' listening comprehension. The study was conducted with forty students who were studying in the Bilingual Program at a private school in Thailand. The instruments were pre-and post-tests which a dependent sample t-test was applied to test equality of means between the two-test scores. The finding indicates that the use of authentic listening materials has a positive effect and enhanced Thai EFL students' performances. Authentic materials enable them to interact with the real content and language used in the real world more efficiently. The finding of the study also implies that EFL teachers can promote their EFL students' listening ability by providing materials and activities that meet the needs of students' goals.

Keywords: Authentic Material, Bilingual Program, Listening Comprehension, EFL

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Introduction

In the 21st century, it is obvious that the trend of globalization seems to lead to closer relationship among countries around the globe. It is the process of international integration for the interchange of world view, goods, attitudes, and other aspects of cultures and religions. In South East Asia nowadays, there is an outstanding, big movement towards the establishment of Asian Economic Community (AEC) among the ten nations: Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Brunei, Cambodia, and Laos. Not only are Economic issues highly stimulated but also other aspects such as educational, agricultural, or industrial societies. Consequently, as one of the main sources of this world movement, Thailand needs some effective readiness and changes.

There are various factors affecting this purposive alteration, especially for Thai people. Of all those vital factors which need more special attention, Communication is considered a key for all various doors. How can Thai people, who typically own a Thai language, communicate with those different languages speaking people? English, a Lingua Franca, is used as a tool for a communication among the countries around the world. The English language is spoken and has spread and developed globally which leads to a fact that Thai people cannot take it for granted or overlook this important feature.

To develop Thai students' communicative competence, which skill should teachers and students concentrate first? Among the four communication skills, listening is acknowledged one of the fundamental skills all human beings use to acquire a language. Listening takes place prior to the other skills. What's more, it is considered the most frequently used language skill in the English language. Listening plays a significant role in people's lives. Listening is almost everywhere, especially in daily communication or educational processes. A good mastery of listening skill is extremely important for ESL/EFL students who wish to acquire an advanced level in listening. There are several means to help EFL students enhance their listening comprehension. One of the most effective ways presented in this research refers to authentic materials, such as news broadcasts, announcements, and conversations. Learners are expected to develop their listening skills through these kinds of authentic materials (Berardo, 2006; Field, Kilickaya, 2004; 2008; Miller, 2006; Mousavi, 2012; Thanajaro, 2000).

Statement of the Problems

Up to now, there has been a variety of factors influencing on Thai students who are studying English for their survival in the competitive societies, especially when Thailand is getting ready for the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015. If Thai students still lack English communicative competence, they may encounter both crises and opportunities when the AEC is implemented in a couple years. The English language is considered a key tool for communication among people in the countries. Unless Thailand or Thai students are ready or well-prepared thoroughly, especially on the language for the change, it seems the country and people lag behind other countries rather than be able to grasp the opportunities.

At a famous private school in Lopburi province, there is a special program for English intermediate proficient learners named a "Bilingual Program". This program is

specially initiated and designed for the learners who desire to develop their English skills for their further education and profession. However, it seems students still find some difficulties in listening, especially when they need to utilize this skill while studying, following the instructions, completing some assigned tasks, or taking the tests.

Objective of the study

To probe whether authentic material application, to what extent, can enhance EFL students' English listening comprehension.

Research question

To what extent, do authentic materials enhance EFL students' listening comprehension?

Research Procedure and Methodology

The population referred to 110 Mathayomsuksa three EFL students in the Bilingual Program in Lopburi province. The samples of the study consisted of 40 EFL students. The average age of the samples was 15 years. The samples, linguistically, had to learn English as a foreign language in the Bilingual Program, and be EFL students whose English was not their second language or their mother tongue, enroll in a program in English as a foreign language and study in Mathayomsuksa three (Grade nine) Aside from the aforementioned criteria of participant selection, each of the research participants were not eligible if he or she had stayed or studied in the countries where English is used or spoken as a second or native language for more than one year, including those whose parents or relatives were English native speakers living together with the participants since birth. This was to assure the researcher that each research participant would have obtained minimal experience with authentic materials implemented in his or her EFL classrooms.

The participants attended the listening class from 10:10 to 11:10 in the morning twice a week, each class took 60 minute or an hour. One was on Tuesday and the other was on Wednesday. The participants were provided a research treatment for a total of 9 weeks, or 18 hours and pre-posttests were distributed after the treatment process.

The researcher conducted the study based on experimental research using a standardized test to investigate learner's proficiency whether they were in an intermediate level before each participant was selected. The pre-test, together with the post-test was also used to probe the significant differences between the pre-test and post-test scores. The selected tests were carefully analyzed and approved by the researcher advisor and listening specialists so as to achieve test reliability, content validity, appropriateness, clarity and conciseness or accuracy of the instructions. The tests were piloted before used in order to meet the learner's proficiency level, reliability and validity. Implemented authentic materials were opted from the internet such as CNN, BBC, and YouTube. Those authentic listening materials purposively selected were generally created for everyone worldwide, not for any pedagogical purposes. This meant that they all were originally authentic materials. The questions purposively used for the classroom pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening

process were created, checked, and analyzed by specialists and native speakers in order to avoid errors or confusions while being used. However, all instruments were systemically piloted among other learners who had more or less the same language ability before implemented.

During the first week, the participants were asked to complete their demographic questionnaire and informed about the research procedures. Also, they were required to take a pre-test in the following day. The test was administered before the process of authentic materials application which started in the second week. The researcher gave the students an hour to complete the 30-item listening test. The researcher acted as a test controller and proctor. The researcher also invited another three teachers to help proctor during the test. In the following weeks, the participants are presented various authentic listening materials through the treatment process for 9 weeks or 18 hours; the participants were in the treatment procedure 2 hours per week. The contents or language used in the presented materials were somewhat close to what appeared in the pre-test, but involved a variety of events and situations. The researcher, for instance, made use of the announcement made by the school principal about the school conference in the pre-test and post-test, but the researcher provided the listening clip by the school director about the annual parent meeting. The researcher believed that each participant seemed to get familiar with the related contents or language used in those presented authentic materials. Meanwhile, other authentic materials such as news broadcasts and conversations were similarly presented. After the authentic material application for 18 hours, the participants were required to complete the post-test which was similar to the pre-test as aforementioned. The participants did not realize or aware that the tests would be the same as the researcher did not tell the participants that they had to do the same test once again at the end of the research session. According to some scholars such as Field (2008), Nemati (2011), and Thanajaro (2000), the time duration, approximately 6 weeks, between pre-posttests in listening was considered long enough for the participants to forget what they had been tested earlier. After they completed their post test, the researcher selected 6 representatives from the research participants for the interview session. These 6 representatives were chosen based on their score levels; 2 from high-score level, 2 from mid-score level, and 2 from low-score level respectively.

Data Analysis

This researcher utilized a pre-posttest as a means to investigate whether or not there were any statistically significant differences between the scores gained from the test assessment in the experimental group towards authentic material application for EFL students' listening comprehension. The researcher made use of pre-post test scores to figure out means, and standard deviations. After that, the scores from both pre-test and post-test were systemically compared by T-test in order to find out the t-value. The t-value indicates whether or not there were any significant differences between the pre-test and the post-test. In addition, the interview from the selected participants were made and coded as well as carefully analyzed to triangulate with other means.

Research Results

The results regarding the effects on the use of authentic materials on EFL student's listening comprehension are described in the table below.

Table 1 Results of Listening Comprehension Pre-test and Post-test

Test	N	Max	Min	X	S.D.
Pre-test	40	21	10	16.42	2.68
Post-test	40	26	16	20.08	2.57

According to the results from table 1, there were 40 participants in this research study. On average, their pre-test scores on listening comprehension were 16.42 ($X=16.42$, $S.D.=2.68$) out of 30. The maximum score which the participants achieved was 21 and the minimum pre-test score was 10. Furthermore, on average, the participants' listening comprehension post test scores were 20.08 ($X=20.08$, $SD.=2.57$) out of 30. The highest post-test score was 26 whereas the lowest score was 16.

To probe whether there was any significant difference between pre and post- tests, a dependent sample t-test was utilized in order to test equality of means between the two-test scores gained from their listening tests. In this research study, the SPSS/PC Version 22 was applied to analyze mean (X), standard deviation ($S.D.$), t-value, and significance level between the listening comprehension pre-test and post-test.

Table 2 Differences between Scores from Listening Comprehension Pre-test and Post-test.

Listening comprehension	Mean difference	Standard deviation	df	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-test & Post-test	3.65	1.657	39	-13.930*	.001

* $p \leq 0.05$.

Table 2 indicates that $0.5 t_{39} < -13.930$ and significance level $t = 0.001$, $p \leq 0.05$. Consequently, on average, the pre-test on listening comprehension ($X=16.42$, $S.D.=2.68$) and the post-test on listening comprehension ($X=20.08$, $SD.=2.57$) were significantly different ($p \leq 0.05$). The listening comprehension post-test scores, on average, were 3.65 more than those of the pre-test. It reveals that, on average, the post-test scores on listening comprehension the participants achieved were higher than those of the pre-test scores.

Research Discussion

Building on the findings revealed in the previous chapter, this part focuses on the principle research purposes and questions, in the pursuit of which the researchers probed whether authentic material application, to what extent, can enhance EFL learners' listening comprehension, and also investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards learning English listening comprehension through authentic materials.

For the research question: To what extent, do authentic materials enhance EFL learners' listening comprehension?

It reveals that the research participants who were EFL students and involved with authentic material application could enhance their listening comprehension now that the average score of their listening comprehension post-test was higher than that of their pre-test.

From the result mentioned above, it was associated with other scholars' research results such as Ghaderpanahi (2012), Miller (2005), and Thanajaro (2000) supporting the positive effects of the use of authentic materials on the learners' listening comprehension. However, the researchers should consider the levels of the learners, the difficulties of the material itself, and the researchers' varied treatment processes.

According to the results gained from the interviews, the research participants had positive attitudes towards learning English listening comprehension through authentic materials. They enjoyed learning from authentic materials. They also mentioned that they felt more comfortable and confident when listening to the authentic materials. What's more, they gained more knowledge and strategies to improve their listening comprehension through authentic materials implemented in class which matched what they confronted in the real world. Not only did they prefer to learn their English for listening comprehension through authentic materials but they also supported that authentic listening materials had positive effects and helped them understand more texts outside their classroom. However, there were still a few participants mentioned that some types of authentic materials such as English news broadcasts or announcements were still difficult for them to comprehend because of the real language used in the texts including the natural speed of the speech from the texts. Some participants required more time and strategies to practice their listening through authentic materials.

From the results, the research participants seemed to better improve their listening comprehension and had positive attitudes towards learning English listening through authentic materials. Consequently, it could be summarized that authentic material application in EFL class promoted positive effects towards EFL learner's attitudes. This result was associated with the findings conducted by most of the scholars, namely Bacon & Finneman (1990), Dornyei (2006), Field (2008), Ghaderpanahi (2012), Miller (2005), Otte (2006), and Thanajaro (2000). They mentioned in their research that learners had positive attitudes and felt motivated when they were learning their English listening comprehension through the use of authentic materials implemented in class. They asserted that the learners preferred to study through authentic materials because those materials helped them increase not only their listening skills, but also their lexical items including idioms, slang, and cultural issues. They also got familiar with the natural speed of the speaker's speech as well as their various accents. It helped them achieve their listening tasks more effectively, both in their class and in the real world. Once they could accomplish their listening tasks, they felt more confident and comfortable to deal with various situations. This finding also supports Bacon & Finneman (1990), Dornyei (2006) and Harmer (2007) stating that learners had positive attitudes towards the use of authentic materials when they could comprehend and achieved the tasks, especially when they could use the language in their daily lives in the real world. For the disadvantages and obstacles the

participants found during the research process, the results gained from them matched the previous research findings mentioned by some scholars. Martinez (2002), Peacock (1997) and Kim (2000) mentioned in their research findings that authentic materials often contained difficult language, unneeded lexical items or vocabulary, grammar, and too many structures. Consequently, it was not too surprised that the lower level learners might have a hard time decoding the texts. These factors might also demotivate the learners. Berardo (2006) and Madden (2007) also asserted that interpreters recorded on the listening materials might consist of a variety of accents which might affect the listeners who were not familiar with them. Dumitrescu (2000), Ghaderpanahi (2012) suggested that some authentic materials could be used only with the older age group, but for the younger age group they could be inappropriate because of unfamiliar words, phrases, and idioms. However, those scholars confirmed the positive effects on the use of authentic materials implemented in EFL classroom when those material were appropriate, relevant to the learner's needs, interests, and preferences as well as suitable to their ability and language proficiency.

Conclusion

According to the research findings, it indicates that average scores from EFL learners' listening comprehension post-test were meaningfully higher than those of the pre-test. Moreover, the findings reflect that EFL learners had positive attitudes towards the use of authentic material to enhance their listening comprehension. Consequently, it could be summarized that the effects of the use of authentic materials could enhance EFL learners' listening comprehension as well as promote positive attitudes towards learning English listening towards authentic materials. In addition, the effects of the use of authentic materials could motivate EFL learners and increase their comfort level and self-confidence to accomplish their listening tasks in the target language.

Recommendations for further research

This research was empirically conducted with only a small number of EFL students who were studying English as a foreign language in the Bilingual program in a private school located in Lopburi province. Therefore, the interpretation as well as the generalizability of the findings should be limited. It is recommended for the future research that it should be administered to a larger scale or a larger group of EFL learners, or to EFL learners from various programs or higher educational levels so that the effects of the use of authentic materials could be widely interpreted. Furthermore, it would be really interesting to investigate the effects of authentic materials on various skills; writing, reading, or speaking. To my personal suggestion, the future research should be conducted focusing on the effects of the use of authentic materials on EFL learner's speaking skills. This is because a lot of EFL learners lack of oral communicative skills. Plus, the majority of the research participants desire to develop their speaking skills. They mentioned that speaking was one of the most important skills to improve for learning their target language. Also the research should be conducted with different kinds of research instrumentation, for example, it should be probed from different pre-test and post-test.

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