ENHANCING LISTENING COMPREHENSION THROUGH AUTHENTIC VIDEO MATERIALS IN EFL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *Listening comprehension is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in higher education. Traditional audio recordings often fail to represent the complexity and variability of real-world communication, leaving students underprepared for authentic interactions. This article explores the impact of authentic video materials (AVMs)—including documentaries, TED Talks, interviews, news clips, and vlogs—on enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis, and Vandergrift's metacognitive model of listening, the study integrates research evidence with pedagogical practice. The paper outlines practical implementation strategies, including pre-, while-, and post-viewing tasks, subtitling regimes, and micro-transcription activities, and discusses their measurable outcomes in listening micro-skills such as inference-making, segmentation, and discourse comprehension. Results from previous studies, combined with classroom evidence, indicate that AVMs significantly improve learners' ability to process authentic speech, recognize reduced forms, and interpret pragmatic cues. The article concludes with recommendations for integrating AVMs into higher education curricula, emphasizing accessibility, equity, and teacher training.*

Keywords: *authentic video materials; EFL; listening comprehension; multimodal input; higher education; subtitles; micro-skills; pedagogy*

Introduction

Listening comprehension is a cornerstone of communicative competence, yet it is often considered the most difficult language skill for EFL learners. Unlike speaking or writing, listening involves real-time processing of spontaneous and often unpredictable language input. Learners face challenges such as fast speech rate, varied

accents, reduced forms, background noise, and pragmatic ambiguity. In higher education, where English functions as a medium for academic discourse, professional training, and intercultural communication, developing strong listening skills is crucial.

Traditional audio materials—scripted dialogues, textbook CDs, or simplified recordings—do not capture the dynamic and multimodal nature of authentic communication. Authentic video materials (AVMs), however, provide real-world spoken input enriched by visual cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and situational context. By combining auditory and visual channels, AVMs reduce cognitive load, enhance comprehension, and allow learners to engage with language in more meaningful ways.

The purpose of this article is to investigate the role of AVMs in enhancing listening comprehension for EFL learners in higher education. It will review theoretical perspectives, synthesize empirical research, propose pedagogical strategies, and identify challenges and opportunities for effective integration.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Krashen (1985) posits that comprehensible input is essential for second language acquisition. AVMs provide input slightly above learners' current proficiency (i+1) in authentic communicative contexts, facilitating acquisition. Visual scaffolds such as gestures and images increase comprehensibility and reduce anxiety. Schmidt (1990) argues that input must be noticed to become intake. AVMs aid noticing by combining auditory input with visual cues that highlight discourse markers, pragmatic signals, and paralinguistic features. Subtitles further enhance noticing of lexical and grammatical forms.

According to Vygotsky, learning occurs through social mediation. AVMs, as cultural artifacts, expose learners to authentic communicative practices, pragmatic norms, and cultural references. Collaborative tasks around AVMs (e.g., group discussions or peer analysis) provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning and co-construction of knowledge. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) propose that listening development requires metacognitive awareness of planning, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension. AVM-based instruction, with guided tasks before, during, and after viewing, supports learners in applying these strategies systematically.

Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning emphasizes dual coding: learners process verbal and visual information simultaneously. AVMs leverage multimodality, providing redundancy and reinforcement that enhance comprehension.

Pedagogical Strategies for Using AVMs

1 Pre-viewing Activities

Pre-viewing tasks activate background knowledge, set listening purposes, and reduce cognitive load. Examples include:

- Predicting content from titles, screenshots, or key vocabulary.

- Brainstorming related experiences or knowledge.
- Pre-teaching essential lexical chunks or discourse markers.

2 While-viewing Activities

During viewing, tasks should direct attention to key features of input:

- Selective listening for main ideas or supporting details.
- Segmenting longer clips into 1–3 minute chunks.
- Using graphic organizers (e.g., mind maps, timelines) to structure comprehension.
- Caption toggling: L2 subtitles for first pass, no subtitles for second pass.

3 Post-viewing Activities

Post-viewing tasks consolidate comprehension and encourage deeper processing:

- Retelling the video's main points in pairs or groups.
- Inferring speaker attitudes or intentions.
- Micro-transcription of short excerpts to analyze reduced forms, linking, or intonation.
- Discussion or debate tasks using video content as a springboard.

4 Subtitling Regimes

Research (Winke, Gass & Sydorenko, 2010) shows that L2 captions enhance lexical uptake, while L1 captions aid global comprehension. A progressive regime—L1 captions for preview, L2 captions for focused study, and no captions for assessment—supports both comprehension and autonomy.

5 Task-based Integration

AVMs align well with task-based language teaching (TBLT). Tasks such as problem-solving based on news reports, simulating interviews, or role-playing documentary scenarios integrate listening comprehension with meaningful communication.

Evidence of Listening Gains from AVMs

AVMs strengthen learners' ability to decode phonological features such as reduced forms (*gonna*, *wanna*), elision, assimilation, and connected speech. Micro-transcription exercises reveal these features explicitly. Visual context and background information allow learners to make predictions and inferences, facilitating gist comprehension. Documentaries and TED Talks provide structured discourse that supports top-down processing. Non-verbal cues in AVMs assist learners in interpreting pragmatic meaning, such as irony, politeness, or emphasis. This develops intercultural communicative competence and prepares learners for real-life interactions. Exposure to multiple English varieties (American, British, Australian, Indian, Nigerian) through AVMs prepares learners for global communication. This reduces the risk of accent shock and increases listening adaptability. Studies (Gilmore, 2007; Muhtarova, 2024) confirm that learners exposed to AVMs demonstrate significant improvements in

comprehension accuracy, inference-making, and tolerance of ambiguity compared to those using scripted audio materials.

Implementation in Higher Education

1 Curriculum Design

Institutions should integrate AVMs systematically, not sporadically. Courses can dedicate weekly sessions to AVM-based tasks, aligning them with course objectives and CEFR descriptors.

2 Assessment

Assessment should target micro-skills:

- Multiple-choice or short-answer comprehension questions.
- Dictation of reduced forms.
- Inference tasks based on intonation or gesture.
- Reflection journals on listening strategies applied.

3 Teacher Training

Educators require training in selecting appropriate AVMs, designing tasks, and managing classroom technology. Workshops can focus on scaffolding strategies, captioning options, and assessment rubrics.

4 Accessibility and Equity

To address digital divide issues, institutions should provide downloadable video/audio packs, transcripts, and offline resources. AVMs should include captions and, where possible, sign language interpretation.

Challenges and Limitations

1. **Technical Barriers:** Limited internet access or outdated classroom technology may restrict AVM use.
2. **Cognitive Overload:** Overly long or linguistically dense videos can overwhelm learners.
3. **Cultural Barriers:** Learners may struggle with culturally specific references.
4. **Teacher Readiness:** Some instructors may lack training or confidence in using AVMs effectively.
5. **Assessment Validity:** Traditional comprehension tests may not capture pragmatic and multimodal gains.

Conclusion

Authentic video materials offer unique advantages for developing listening comprehension in EFL higher education. By integrating multimodal input, scaffolding both bottom-up and top-down processes, and providing exposure to real-world pragmatic cues, AVMs address limitations of traditional materials. Effective implementation requires thoughtful curriculum design, appropriate task sequencing, and teacher training. While challenges exist, the potential benefits of AVMs in

preparing learners for global communication are substantial. Future research should continue to refine methods, explore new technologies, and expand inclusive practices

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