

**TEACHERS' CONCEPTIONS TOWARDS THE USAGE OF
AUTHENTIC MATERIALS TO TEACH
LISTENING COMPREHENSION
IN THE ESL CLASSROOM**

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ABSTRACT

Listening, the most frequently used form of language skill, plays a significant role in daily communication and educational process. In spite of its importance, listening ability development has received only slight emphasis in language instruction. The fundamental purpose of this study was to examine the teachers' conception towards the usage of authentic materials to teach listening comprehension skills in ESL classroom. This descriptive study examined how the use of authentic input in an ESL classroom eased and/or impeded students' learning in English-language listening. In conjunction with the primary objective, the study also determined the influences of the use of authentic materials on listening ability in students of English as a second language and the influences of using authentic materials on ESL students' attitudes towards learning English. The analysis of data obtained from interviews with teachers revealed that the use of authentic listening materials in the ESL classroom helped increase students' comfort level and self confidence to listen to the target language. The study also discovered that implementing authentic materials in ESL classroom heightened the students' attitudes towards language learning. The use of authentic listening materials in ESL classroom had a positive effect on ESL students' motivation to learn the language. The major findings of this study suggested that authentic materials helped significantly to enhance the learners' listening comprehension skill and their motivation toward learning English. Based upon the conclusions drawn from the study, authentic materials were thus recommended to be integrated into the teaching of listening comprehension in ESL classroom. Pedagogical implications for the application of authentic materials in ESL teaching, especially suggestions for teaching listening comprehension were proposed. Finally, suggestions for future research were recommended.



**PENDAPAT GURU- GURU MENGENAI PENGGUNAAN ALATAN MENGAJAR
YANG ASLI/ SEBENAR UNTUK PENGAJARAN KEFAHAMAN MENDENGAR DI
DALAM KELAS BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA KEDUA**

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ABSTRAK

Kemahiran mendengar merupakan kemahiran yang asas yang sering digunakan dalam komunikasi dan pembelajaran. Walaubagaimanapun penguasaan kemahiran kefahaman mendengar dikalangan para pelajar tidak memerangsangkan. Tujuan utama kajian ini ialah untuk mengkaji penggunaan alatan mengajar yang asli/sebenar dalam pengajaran kefahaman mendengar didalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Disamping itu, objektif kajian ini juga ialah untuk mengkaji kesan penggunaan alatan asli/sebenar dalam pengajaran kefahaman mendengar dan pengaruh alatan asli/ sebenar terhadap tingkahlaku para pelajar dalam menguasai kemahiran berbahasa Inggeris. Hasil temubual dengan para pendidik menjelaskan bahawa penggunaan alatan sebenar/asli dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran kefahaman mendengar memotivasi dan menggalakkan para pelajar untuk belajar dan menguasai kemahiran mendengar. Tambahan, ia juga memberi keyakinan kepada pelajar untuk belajar Bahasa Inggeris. Rumusannya, kajian ini membuktikan bahawa penggunaan alatan asli/sebenar mendorong para pelajar bersikap positif dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris dan menunjukkan peningkatan dalam kemahiran kefahaman mendengar. Beberapa cadangan dikemukakan untuk menanam sikap keyakinan diri dan menggalakan pelajar supaya menjadi pengguna yang akan menggunakan Bahasa Inggeris secara aktif, untuk itu juga, guru perlu mematuhi garis panduan yang telah ditetapkan. Akhirnya, kajian lanjutan juga dicadangkan untuk mendalami hasil penggunaan alatan sebenar/ asli dalam kelas kemahiran mendengar.

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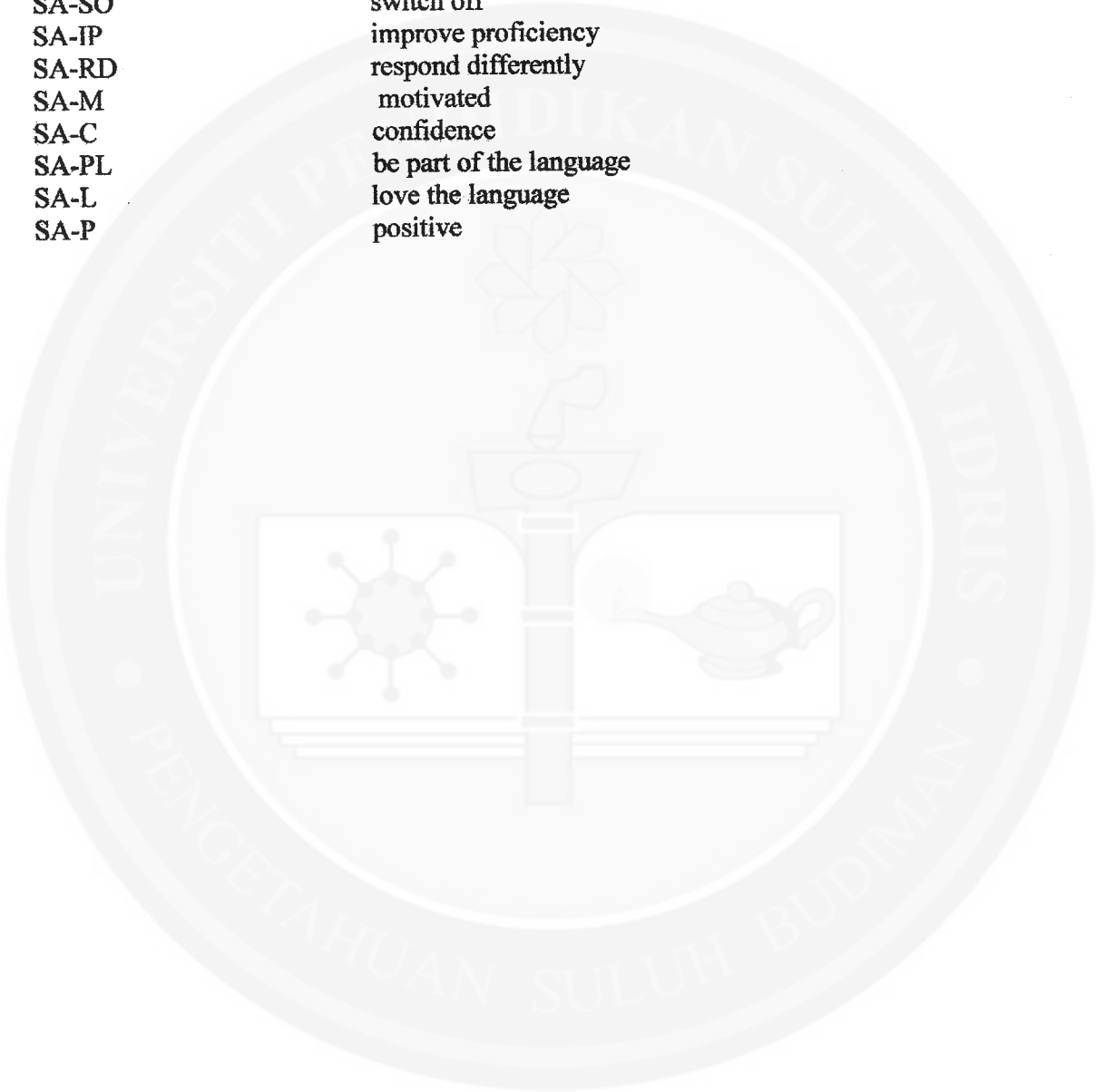
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ABBREVIATIONS:

PMR	Penilaian Menengah Rendah
KBSM	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
MOE	Ministry of Education
ESL	English as Second Language
L2	Second Language
CD	Compact Disc
T1	Teacher 1
T2	Teacher 2
T3	Teacher 3
T4	Teacher 4
T5	Teacher 5
T6	Teacher 6
TC	Teachers' conceptions
TC-G	good
TC-AS	attract students
TC-SS	students not sleeping
TC-SAM	stimulate/arouse/motivate
TC-EU	enhance understanding
TC-CL	class lively
TC-I	interesting
TC-HCL	helps to conduct listening activities
TC-EL	enjoy the lesson
TC-CLE	create conducive learning environment
TC-LS	less stress
I	Influences
I-DE	deal listening easily
I-P	be positive
I-C	cheerful
I-AC	answer very carefully
I-A	active
I-M	motivated
I-PW	perform quite well
I-RP	respond differently
I-E	enjoy
I-L	love the lesson
I-FR	feel relax
I-PA	pay attention

I-DT	develop thinking skills
SA	Students' attitudes
SA-I	inspired
SA-SO	switch off
SA-IP	improve proficiency
SA-RD	respond differently
SA-M	motivated
SA-C	confidence
SA-PL	be part of the language
SA-L	love the language
SA-P	positive



CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Listening plays a significant role in the lives of people. Of the four major areas of communication skills and language development-listening, speaking, reading, and writing-the one that is the most basic is listening. It is evident that children listen and respond to language before they learn to talk. When it is time for children to learn to read, they still have to listen so that they gain knowledge and information to follow directions. In the classroom, students have to listen carefully and attentively to class discussions in order to understand and to retain the information for later recall. Listening is not only the first of the language arts skills developed, it is also the skill most frequently used in both the classroom and daily life.

Listening is important because the ability to understand what others say is essential for communicative interaction. Moreover, as pointed out by *Flyod (1985)*, listening is definitely the communication skill used most often. *Morley (1984)* has reported that an average time spent in communicating can be divided into approximately 50 percent listening, 25 percent speaking, 15 percent reading and 10 percent writing. *Wilt (1950)* also pointed out that 57.5 percent of the daily classroom time is spent on listening.

According to *Bowen, Madsen and Hilferty (1985)*, listening skills are important to any language learner who will be involved with the spoken language, but they are especially important to students. Success in school work is crucially dependent on the student's ability to understand the explanation given by the teacher and other class activities.

In spite of the importance of listening, this skill has been often called the 'step-child of the language learning'. Focus has always been on reading and there is concern over why a child cannot read, but there is little attention given as to whether a child is an efficient listener. *Wilkinson and Atkinson (1965)* stated that oral expression has often been left to the speech and drama teacher, listening comprehension has usually been left to nobody at all.

Furthermore, *Eastman (1987)* describes listening as the most difficult of four skills the beginner of a second language has to develop. *Bulletin (1952)* added that listening is one of the most fundamental language skills. It is a medium through which children, young people and adults gain a large portion of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and of human affairs, their ideas, sense of values and their appreciation. In this day of mass communication it is of vital importance

that our pupils are taught to listen effectively and critically he says. Listening is a behaviour and thus can be learned or improved like any other behaviour.

Due to this, the fundamental objective of the present study was to examine the teachers' conception towards the usage of authentic materials to teach listening comprehension skills in lower secondary schools. This descriptive study examined how the use of authentic input in an ESL classroom eased and/or impeded students' learning in English-language listening. In conjunction with the primary objective, the study also determined the influences of the use of authentic materials on listening ability in students of English as a second language and the influences of using authentic materials on ESL students' attitudes towards learning English.

1.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although Bahasa Malaysia is the National language, spoken English has largely been used for social, entertainment and Business purposes, and in institutions of higher learning. The English Language communication syllabus has already taken a major step forward in making the listening skill an important aspect of the syllabus.

In an electronic world where the aural, together with the visual, is gaining importance over the printed word, listening cannot be ignored. The teaching of listening comprehension especially with the use of authentic resource materials are not been utilized fully by most of the language teacher in the ESL classroom. This study was an attempt to provide evidence for suggesting the wider use of authentic materials to teach listening comprehension skills in lower secondary schools.

It is hoped that this study provides realistic evidence to show that time spent on the preparation of instructional materials geared to the development of the listening skill is invaluable. This does not imply that lessons which deal with speech production, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary are important. There should be exercises especially devised to help students to increase their skill in processing in comprehending auditory information. It is hoped that teaching listening will eventually become more meaningful and interesting so that students may use the language competently in real – life situations. For language teachers, this study hopes to indicate strategies in teaching so that the potential students are developed to the full.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The teaching and learning of listening comprehension has long been considered a boring subject. This problem will be discussed under 2 broad areas:

- a) the different factors that have contributed to the neglect of teaching listening skill
 - b) the case for using authentic materials for teaching listening skill
- a) Looking at the English Language syllabus for Malaysian schools, listening as a language skill does not seem to be neglected. In lower secondary school English syllabus, it is stated that listening is a skill to be developed. As in the primary school syllabus, there is also an accompanying Teacher's Handbook and some section headed '*Developing the unit through Aural/Oral practice*' recommends exercises and tests in these two modes. In

the aural mode, dictation, read passages with questions following and taking notes of talks given by the teacher are suggested.

In practice, however very little is done to teach listening skills. This is an opinion arrived by the author after 11 years of teaching experience and through observations. Furthermore, according to *Paulston and Bruder (1976)* comprehending the spoken form of the target language is one of the most difficult tasks for the language learner, yet it is probably the most neglected skill in language teaching. The focus in English lessons is on reading, writing and speaking. Development of listening skills is incidental when dialogue or some other oral skills are practiced. The nearest exercise to listening practice is spelling and dictation. Teachers generally concentrate too much on skills which are tested in public examinations and do not treat listening as the foundation of language learning. It is deemed that children will learn listening skills when they are exposed to situations where listening takes place. In this sense, it can be said that no direct teaching of listening is done by most of the teachers.

Another factor is the method used to teach listening skill does not attract student's attention. The traditional way of teaching listening such as introducing some of the difficult words, listening to the tape again and again and then giving correct answer, makes the listening lesson bored. Students are tired of listening to tape from the beginning to the end with some mechanical exercise. As a result, the passive attitude kept students from making much progress in listening comprehension.

b) The question of how to help learners develop effective listening skills brings attention to the methods we use and the type of materials we introduce our learners

to. *Widdowson (1978)* has emphasized that if students are expected to learn how to use and comprehend a language, they must be exposed to real language which is used to fulfill real communication.

Pupils should be exposed to real live language so that they will understand people outside the classroom. Right now, pupils are only being exposed to formal classroom style. The use of authentic listening materials is thus essential for the teaching of communicative listening skills for it provides learners with real language experiences which are likely to be quite similar to those which will eventually have to experience and participate in.

Peacock (1997) asserts that using appropriate authentic materials in ESL classroom may increase the learners' level of on – task behavior, concentration and involvement in the target activity more than artificial materials. *Brown and Gonzo (1994)* also draw attention to the need of using authentic materials to teach listening comprehension skill. They suggest authentic texts not only will enhance comprehension in teaching listening but also to promote acquisition of the language.

This research focused on the relevance of using authentic materials to develop students listening comprehension.

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The fundamental purpose of this study was to explore the teachers' conception towards the usage of authentic materials to teach listening comprehension skills. The secondary purposes of the study were to determine the influences of authentic materials on listening

ability in students of English as a second language and examine the influences of authentic materials on ESL students' attitudes towards learning English and

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question asked in the present study was the following:

1. What are the teachers' conceptions towards the usage of authentic materials to teach listening comprehension skills?

The secondary research questions addressed in the study were:

1. What are the influences of authentic materials on the listening comprehension in students of English as a second language?
2. What are the influences of authentic materials on ESL students' attitudes towards learning English?

1.6 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

For this research, the following terms are defined:

a) Definitions of listening comprehension

There are many definitions on listening. *International Listening Association, 1996* has defined listening as the psychological process of receiving (hearing) attending to, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken or nonverbal messages. *Pflaumer (1971)* defined listening as the process of using and synthesizing combinations of perceptive sense of modalities (interacting) to facilitate communication.

In reviewing the area of listening comprehension in the teaching of ESL, it is necessary to define what listening comprehension entails. There are numerous definitions for listening comprehension. *Good (1945)* attempted to distinguish between listening and listening comprehension. He defines listening as the art of paying close attention to the conversation of other person or persons order to obtain selectively verbal and non-verbal clues to behavioural patterns, explicit or implicit. Listening comprehension, on the other hand was defined as the understanding of material heard with respect to the listener's grasp of the meaning of the words and phrases, of main ideas and of supporting or illustrating details.

Howatt and Dakin (1989) define listening comprehension as the ability to identify and understand what others is saying and this involves understanding a speaker's accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and meaning. *Wolvin and Coakley (1985)* approach listening comprehension from the perspective of cognitive processes and they define listening as the process of receiving, attending to and assigning meaning to aural stimuli.

b) Definitions of authentic materials

According to *Widdowson (1978)* authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between the text and the receiver and it has to do with appropriate response. He added that authenticity is a function of the interaction between the reader and hearer and the text which incorporates the intention of the writer/ speaker.

David Forman (1986) says any text is 'authentic' if it was produced in response to real life communication needs rather than as an imitation of real life communicative needs. *Riley (1978)* defines authentic materials as those that are 'produced in a real

communication situation, not produced for didactic purposes'. He was supported by *Morrow (1977)* who says that an authentic material is a stretch of real language produced by a real speaker or writer for real audience and designed to convey a real message. In other words it is not made-up text produced for an imaginary speaker or writer.

1.7 SUMMARY

Listening comprehension is more than just a decoding activity. It is a process in which there is interplay between experience and the skills of language. Listening is one side of speaking – listening behaviour in language used as communication and needs to be seen in its proper perspective in relation to the other aspects of language that one prescribes in the school curriculum.

Of course, listening comprehension is a complex activity involving a large number of different skills. Therefore, listening should be taught with motivation, interest and variation. Using authentic materials is one of the solutions to develop listening comprehension skill among the secondary school students. Authentic materials help to bring the real world into the classroom and significantly enliven the ESL class.

This study therefore attempts to provide a rationale for the use of authentic materials in ESL classroom to develop students' motivation to learn the language.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a review of relevant literature and within it consider the controversial issue of editing authentic materials, using authentic materials authentically and simulating authentic materials for teaching. Some types of authentic source materials and their uses also are reviewed.

2.2 DEFINING LISTENING COMPREHENSION

In reviewing the area of listening comprehension in the teaching of English, it is necessary to define what listening comprehension entails. There are numerous definitions

for listening comprehension. *Howatt and Dakin (1989)* define listening comprehension as the ability to identify and understand what others are saying and this involves understanding a speaker's accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and meaning. *Wolvin and Coakley (1985)* approach listening comprehension from the perspective of cognitive processes and they define listening process as the process of receiving, attending to and assigning meaning to aural stimuli.

Rost (2002) indicated that comprehension has been regarded as the most essential aspect of listening. The definition of comprehension is 'the process of relating language to concepts in one's memory and to the references in the real world' this means a listener understands what he or she hears and connects what is heard to the real world. Following *Brown and Yule (1983)*, *Rost (1990)* suggested that the teaching of listening could include several aspects. The first one is selective listening in which students are given a task with enough information from which students derive some specific knowledge. The second is global listening which aims to help students construct a whole sense and a main point of the given content and texts.

Underwood (1989) simplified the definition of listening to "the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear". *Purdy (1997)* defined listening as "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal), needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings". Listening is not simply hearing or perceiving speech sounds. It can be concluded, from reviewing a number of proposed definitions, that listening is an active process.

For the purpose of my study, listening is examined in the context of teaching of English as second language. The study hinges on a definition of listening comprehension as the student's ability to comprehend the speaker's language, identify key points of content and put them down in the written form.

2.3 ASPECTS OF AUTHENTICITY AND GENUINENESS

According to Widdowson (1978) authenticity is distinct from genuineness:

"Genuineness is a characteristic of the text itself and is an absolute quality. Authenticity is a characteristic of the relationship between appropriate responses."

And,

"Authenticity is a function of the interaction between the reader/hearer and the text which incorporates the intentions of the writer/speaker. It is achieved when the reader realizes the intentions of the writer by reference to a set of shared conventions. Thus it makes no sense simply to expose learners to genuine language unless they know the conventions which would enable them to realize it as authentic."

For Widdowson (1979), authenticity has to do with an appropriate response on the part of the hearer/reader. If he is able to ascertain the speaker/writer's intentions, which have to be conveyed through certain convention, there is an exchange of a piece of authentic spoken/written discourse. In the case of spoken discourse, it is easier to ascertain the author's intentions because there is the possibility of 'negotiating' meaning. Furthermore, authenticity depends on a congruence of the language producer's intentions

and the language reviewer's interpretation. *Sinclair (1981)* refers to authenticity of procedure. In it the text, as well as the use to which it is put, must be authentic. This is supported by *Maley (1980)* as well when he observes:

"Are the tasks he is asked to perform ones in which he can lose himself sufficiently to react authentically as an individual? The use of an authentic document does not in itself guarantee this".

This also underscores *Widdowson's (1979)* important point that a text may be genuine but if it is not "*authentically utilized*" by its users, it fails to benefit the learner.

Another viewpoint in this discussion on authenticity is that of *Candlin and Breen (1979)*. They say there are three ways of achieving authenticity in materials: first by getting authentic texts which the learner will eventually deal with in the target language; second, choosing texts which contain those features which require the competence of the learner in the target language; third, developing materials which encourage the learning process itself. Again this viewpoint underscores *Widdowson's (1979)* idea of '*authentication*'. To illustrate this, *Candlin and Breen* give the example of data that can be authentic to a text type (say a poem) but if it is read not as a poem but as a source of grammatical information, then it is not treated authentically.

Another aspect to be considered is genuineness. For *Widdowson* as was stated above, the term authenticity is different from "*genuineness*". A piece of discourse is genuine if it conforms to the particular conventions – syntactic, stylistic, rhetorical and so on – that are associated with that type of discourse in that language. Genuineness is therefore a feature intrinsic to the text. Therefore genuineness by itself is insufficient for