Evaluating the benefits and challenges of using authentic materials in EFL context for listening purpose

Wafa Alamri*

Applied Linguistics, University of Bisha, Bisha, Saudi Arabia

Learning a second language through listening skills is not an easy task, as learners have to consume content and linguistic knowledge at the same time during listening. Utilization of authentic materials is much more convenient and easier with the advancements of modern communication tools like videos, podcasts, and TED talks, thereby leaving a positive impact on the learner. This study addresses the research gap in using authentic listening materials by focusing on the challenges and benefits associated with authentic materials when used in, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. A narrative literature review was carried out using articles from various databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC. The findings showed that although authentic materials support motivation and real-life communication, these authentic materials can be uncomfortable to use for reasons of cultural differences, background knowledge, and cognitive load. The study concludes that despite the limitations of authentic materials, these resources can be pedagogically valuable when implemented carefully and considerably.

KEYWORDS

authentic listening materials, English as a foreign language (EFL), language learning, listening comprehension, EFL learners, motivation

1 Introduction

Listening is considered an essential skill for effective communication. It is among the four foundational language skills and plays a vital role in the development of other language skills. Before learning to respond, students listen first. In the same manner, students must actively and attentively listen to the class lectures and discussions to gain and retain information (Ghaderpanahi, 2012). In language classrooms, listening helps students to build vocabulary and language proficiency and enhances language use. However, listening is neglected in foreign language learning and teaching settings, due to which many students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms struggle to understand audio or spoken texts, which impacts their level of proficiency to continue their pathway through language. In particular, struggles often arise during listening due to the speed, accent, and overall vocabulary difficulty level (Nozimakhon, 2024). The challenges associated with listening are generally due to the gap between the real-life contexts and the tasks taught in the classroom settings (Zahro and Mohijamol, 2024). This is because listening is practiced in classrooms with the help of speeches and audio recordings however in real life, it includes accent, intonation, and layers of sound, making it much more unpredictable to understand (Gulasal and Feruza, 2025). Moreover, listening is ignored partially due to misconceptions regarding listening skills being developed naturally through active engagement (Yenkimaleki and van Heuven, 2021). The lack of attention to listening education highlights the need for more overt, direct, and structured listening instruction to develop teaching that can meaningfully and purposefully allow learners

to process and interpret spoken language. Traditional approaches to teaching listening usually do not engage students in significant ways, and they tend to overlook the student's actual learning. Therefore, listening may require alternative, new, and various strategies.

Listening in an individual's native language develops much more naturally than listening in a foreign or second language. Due to this factor, students face difficulties with listening comprehension in terms of unfamiliar patterns of words, uncertain English sounds, redundancy and noise, lack of understanding of environmental clues, and much more (Hilly and Hasan, 2024). Also, the challenges related to teaching listening are many. Firstly, the curriculum does not emphasize listening skills, which creates difficulty for the students to comprehend the words and to respond to them appropriately (Hilly and Hasan, 2024). Secondly, the time duration is restricted for this skill, as due to insufficient time, learning skills are not built effectively because these skills are perfected with time and thorough learning (Gogoi and Sultana, 2024). Lack of resources also adds to these challenges, which further complicates the teaching and learning of listening (Panthee, 2024). Besides that, the teachers neglect listening skills for teaching reading and writing. This impacts the quality of listening instruction and creates a gap in communication skills among the students (Saleem, 2023). Further, the lack of motivation from students also adds to this challenge (Sabir and Hammad, 2022).

The challenges associated with listening skills can be overcome through the use of appropriate and authentic materials, which will help them to practice and continue with their learning. Materials play a vital role in developing and learning language skills as they cater to the diverse needs of the students, facilitate skill development along with maintaining student's attention (Christison and Murray, 2021). Authentic materials are considered pivotal for language learning as they represent real, authentic language use while offering meaningful learning experiences (Shukurdinovna, 2024). Using authentic materials allows the students to understand the cultural context along with the usage of the English language in real-life conversations and communications (Iroda, 2024). While often delivered through computers, audio recordings, and video screens, authentic materials expose learners to real language use, natural language, idiomatic expressions, and cultural references, thus helping to build their language competence and cultural understanding. The role of an English teacher is of great importance in fostering students to learn by providing them with effective materials that fit their social life, language level, and financial situation. Currently, English teachers have the choice to use particular methods that best fit their students to deliver meaningful expressions through the use of language (Husnawati et al., 2024). Moreover, to meet the requirements of learning objectives, English teachers can use multiple activities such as problem-solving, interactive, and creative tasks to impart and push the students in terms of auditory engagement. The overall listening proficiency can also be enhanced by providing listening opportunities outside the classroom to overcome any instructional limitations (Newton and Nation, 2020).

Despite the numerous advantages of authentic materials for teaching listening in the EFL context, a significant gap exists in the literature for providing a wide understanding of authentic materials encompassing the benefits and drawbacks in various contexts. While the existing literature focuses only on the advantages of authentic materials, limited studies have examined the disadvantages of these materials, such as cognitive overload, mismatched proficiency levels, or pedagogical problems. Moreover, little research has been conducted on the effect of authentic materials impacting learning outcomes, engagement, and language development over time, across EFL contexts. Therefore, the review study aims to investigate the benefits and drawbacks of using authentic materials in teaching listening in EFL classrooms. Moreover, this review focuses on providing a multifold perspective with evidence-based practical insights regarding the use of authentic materials to teach listening skills in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms.

2 Authentic listening materials

In recent years, the use of authentic listening materials in EFL classrooms has been a subject of interest for many language educators. The term 'authentic' can be defined as 'known to be true or genuine'. Many scholars have defined authentic materials as resources created for native speakers and not language learners (Ur, 1996). While the need to integrate authentic materials in the EFL curriculum has been highlighted, it is still debatable depending on the features required for sources to be considered authentic (David and Şerban-Oprescu, 2019). The goal of these materials is to recreate the language and cultural context for the learners to deal with outside the classroom. Some examples of authentic materials include movies, advertisements, magazines, and TV shows. The usage of authentic materials in EFL classrooms has exposed learners to authentic language use, boosted motivation, and enhanced language proficiency (Treve, 2023). It is popularly believed that authentic materials benefit the learner's motivation through the display of communicative situations in real language, providing authentic cultural information, along with experiencing the emotions that enable one to gain confidence (Kulakhmetova and Daulbaeva, 2024). A significant effect of authentic materials has been seen on language use and proficiency as it exposes the students to real discourse and closely relates to the needs of the learners with a creative approach (Danansooriya, 2022). Further, the authentic materials encompass rich vocabulary and allow students to efficiently benefit from the useful words naturally and good grammar knowledge (Sadam, 2022).

Utilization of authentic materials has been considerably successful in learning any foreign language (EFL). This practice not only helps students to understand the language but also provides an opportunity for sustainable and effective learning (Mitrulescu and Negoescu, 2024). Based on the notion of authenticity, researchers have differentiated materials into two types presented as authentic and non-authentic (Huda, 2017). The non-authentic materials are also used for class purposes as they are mostly scripted. Traditional listening materials tend to focus on one specific process, like the bottom-up processing, which includes recognizing specific words or grammatical structures. Moreover, this is meaningful in building the foundation of listening skills however the learners are unprepared for real-life complex and uncertain situations. Contrastingly, authentic materials equip learners with both top-down and bottom-up processing to create a comprehensive understanding of the language (Zahro and Mohijamol, 2024).

Using authentic materials in an EFL context has been known to exhibit great potential for improving listening comprehension when combined with certain pedagogical approaches. Research by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) found that metacognitive instruction

facilitates learners processing of authentic materials through both top-down and bottom-up approaches. For example, TED Talks have been utilized to educate learners in understanding the global meaning comprehension following the top-down approach. Meanwhile, the transcripts of podcasts facilitate decoding of phonemes and vocabulary using the bottom-up approach (Mirza Suzani, 2021; Mohammed and Khadawardi, 2024). Researchers have also used authentic materials to implement task-based listening activities. A study by Kamaruddin et al. (2024) employed structured tasks incorporating English films and included structured tasks such as predicting, comprehension checks, and reflective summaries, with positive outcomes for vocabulary learning and reduced anxiety. A similar approach was utilized with scaffolded listening tasks using authentic radio segments by Badri and Salehi (2017). It was observed that the incorporation of such materials leads to an increase in Iranian EFL students' motivation and listening comprehension. These studies highlight that the tasks need to be structured and specified to suit the learner's needs and proficiency level.

On the contrary, Gilmore (2007) states that the complexity of authentic input would point to the possible cognitive overload with regard to the student's proficiency level. Therefore, it is necessary to maintain the task differentiation. A feature of differentiated design involves providing pre-listening support of vocabulary, graded listening sections, and graded comprehension questions across a continuum of difficulty based upon the same authentic input (Susanto, 2021). Furthermore, teachers should be aware of the learner's background knowledge, cultural references, and the purpose of the listening, while communicating the passage's material meaning and key ideas when sequencing the tasks.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1998), authentic materials in the language classroom are materials that result in the production of the genuine use of language instead of materials that are modified to be used for language teaching. Similarly, Lynch (2009) states that the common definition of authentic materials is samples of language used for real communication among native speakers that are not recorded for teaching purposes. These definitions are criticized by Widdowson (1979, 1998) as cited in Lynch (2009) and Richards (2007), who state that the authenticity of certain materials lies in their interpretation, and what is authentic for native speakers can never be authentic for learners. They both emphasize the importance of authenticity as the aim of language teaching and that teachers should focus on helping their learners to get to the point where they can respond to the listening input as original speakers would, whether the listening input is original or modified for teaching use (Husnawati et al., 2024).

With the advancements in technology, access to authentic materials has greatly increased. This has notably enriched language learning by offering varied and engaging resources. The creation and incorporation of relevant and authentic resources upgrade learning outcomes (Seven, 2020). With the help of efficient teaching materials, learning can be enhanced, while ineffective materials can contribute to the hindrance of progress. Thus, teachers who are responsible for developing materials must evaluate, adapt, understand, and use materials for effective classroom usage.

Using authentic materials in EFL classrooms has been known to benefit in various aspects, whereas on the other hand, multiple challenges are also present. The findings section highlights these advantages and benefits in depth to provide a more nuanced understanding of authentic materials in a classroom setting.

3 Method

The current study adopted a narrative review methodology to explore the role of authentic materials in the EFL context for teaching listening skills. A systematic search was conducted, which included studies published between 2000 and 2025 to identify relevant literature. The studies were searched across databases including Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC using keywords such as "authentic materials," "authentic materials for teaching listening," and "authentic materials in EFL context." Furthermore, the studies were narrowed down to studies related to EFL, listening skills, and the use of authentic listening materials. The relevant studies were screened based on their titles and abstracts after removing the duplicates. Studies were excluded if they focused on L1, discussed language skills without referencing listening skills, or were non-peer-reviewed studies. A total of 54 articles were included following the study's characteristics, such as articles published in reputable journals, focusing on English language learning, and addressing listening skills in EFL contexts.

4 Findings

The study has reviewed studies examining the use of authentic materials in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) listening instruction. The findings of the study demonstrate that authentic materials have significant pedagogical advantages and challenges in the context of EFL listening instruction. A qualitative thematic analysis of the studies recognized four themes. Each of the themes outlined in the study represents recurring themes of concern and practice from the studies, along with the obstacles associated with the use of authentic materials in EFL learning classrooms.

4.1 Advantages of using authentic listening materials in a language classroom

The review analysis of the selected studies identified four major themes that addressed the use of authentic materials in the context of EFL listening. These themes include 1. the availability of authentic materials, 2. the motivational benefits, 3. real-world language use, and 4. cultural context. These themes were highlighted through reviewing the findings of the studies, the methodology, and the pedagogical implications of the studies. These themes underscore the pedagogical possibilities and the practical considerations of teaching EFL listening with authentic materials. The rest of this subsection explores and elaborates on the pedagogical implications of each of the thematic areas.

4.1.1 The availability of authentic listening materials for the teacher

The use of authentic materials such as audio-visual and written resources has been a recent practice with a growing emphasis on it to offer learners meaningful experiences. As the world becomes technologically advanced, numerous amounts of authentic listening materials are available that teachers can use in their classrooms. Gilmore's (2007) definition of authenticity is used to describe materials that were created to serve those for whom the language was originally spoken. Field (2010) suggests that with the technology

we have today, including materials from TV, radio, and the Internet, it is easier for teachers to use authentic listening materials of a high standard and download them without losing the sound quality.

However, there are some difficulties associated with the availability of authentic materials. Countries that are non-native speakers of English will find it tough to access the native speaker materials (Chang and Millett, 2020). As Field (2010) points out, this wide range of materials raises the issue of choosing the materials that will best suit learners and their needs. He suggests that teachers should consider the main goal of using authentic listening materials, which is exposing the students to the rhythms of everyday communication and offering them a chance to understand input that might only partially make sense. McGrath lists a few principles that teachers can follow when choosing authentic materials that can be applied to authentic listening materials. He suggests teachers consider the relevance to learners' needs, the interest as a topic or theme, cultural appropriateness, and whether the linguistic and cognitive demands are appropriate to the learners' level of proficiency and quality.

When implemented constructively, these materials lead to positive impacts on the learners' listening efficiency through podcasts and other materials (Mohammed and Khadawardi, 2024). Kamaruddin et al. (2024) reported that significant improvements were observed in the student's language skills with the use of English movies. This mode helped the students to reduce anxiety, enhance their vocabulary, and improve their oral communication skills. Wijaya (2024) explains that the integration of digital resources into the framework of EFL learning, such as TED talks, can effectively enhance the speaking proficiency of the learners by encouraging linguistic and cognitive development. Brown and Brown (2011) give interesting examples of these materials, such as the websites of major news organizations (CNN, BBC, ABC) that usually include segments from their programs, news, and interviews. The study also includes YouTube and TV commercials, which can be clever and clear at the same time. In addition, Harmer (2001) explains that recorded materials are not the only materials that can be used for listening and that students can listen while they watch film clips. This study argues that listening while watching is a great way of getting students to see language in use and the 'paralinguistic behaviors 'that accompany certain situations.

Although authentic audio and visual listening materials are more accessible due to advanced technology, their potential and relevance are closely linked to the selection and use of these materials. However, teachers cannot completely rely on the abundant availability of materials as an opportunity. Instead, they have to ensure that the choice and use of materials match the learners' linguistic level, cultural background, and learning goals. This allows for equitable access to these resources, which has the potential to improve listening comprehension. This will significantly enhance the learning outcomes for language learning in EFL contexts.

4.1.2 Authentic listening materials and motivation

Motivation serves as an influential characteristic in the context of a teaching-learning environment. Currently, with the growing prominence of English as a second language across the world, motivation is considered one of the major factors influencing English learning and the learning process (Seven, 2020). Through the use of authentic materials, learners become motivated to implement the newly learned language in their learning environment, which is crucial for EFL processes. There has been a growing awareness of the

important role these authentic listening materials play in maintaining and increasing students' motivation for learning. This awareness is widespread in the literature (Dörnyei, 2001; Gilmore, 2007; O'Brien and Hegelheimer, 2007; Brown and Brown, 2011). Within the context of language learning, intrinsic motivation may arise from many different stimuli, such as extrinsic rewards like grades, exams, and career advancement, or intrinsic rewards like having an interest in the subject or enjoying the process of learning the subject. Fishbach and Woolley (2022) highlighted that in the process of language learning, extrinsic motivation, including rewards, and intrinsic motivation, including personal interests, play a key role in driving the desire to learn. Learners who were motivated in the language-learning context displayed curiosity, persistence, and deeper cognitive engagement with the language tasks. These types of learning tasks have been shown to result in better long-term impacts (Wang et al., 2022). A study conducted on Iranian EFL learners revealed that through the use of oral authentic materials, the learners' listening comprehension skill was enhanced, along with their motivation development (Badri and Salehi, 2017). Other than that, it is the responsibility of the educator to provide the learner with a supportive environment and timely feedback to retain and boost their motivation. One such approach is scaffolding, which probably enhances the motivation of EFL learners, in which the teacher provides support after the task is accomplished, maintaining the curiosity of the students and motivating them to complete the task (Mitrulescu and Negoescu, 2024).

According to Dörnyei (2001), teachers can help students generate motivation and positive attitudes toward learning by enhancing the learners' language-related values. He classifies these values into three types: 'intrinsic value', which refers to the learning process, 'integrative value', which refers to the target language and its speakers, and 'instrumental value', which refers to the benefits of learning the target language. Authentic listening materials represent all these values because they provide a variety of topics to choose from and represent real cultural products from the community of the target language, and learners can use the contents of these materials in their daily lives. Gilmore (2007) states that authentic materials are more interesting than artificial materials that were designed for teaching language purposes because they attempt to communicate a message instead of explaining the target language. Hassan and Hassan (2018) examined that with the help of authentic materials, such as video content, the motivation of students toward EFL learning significantly increased, which helped the students to retain the information more appropriately. Dörnyei (2001) agrees that these materials connect learners with the target language culture, and as a result, the learning process becomes enjoyable and more motivating.

Many of the previous studies focused on motivation in Western or higher educational frameworks thus, there is a need to investigate motivation theories relevant to EFL learners in non-English dominant or secondary education programs. The studies of Mirza Suzani (2021) on motivation using podcasts in Iranian EFL learners studying at university and Khan and Takkac (2021) who examined the motivation of Canadian high school ESL students, demonstrate that neither a Western cultural nor an educational institution determines the motives of the learners. Also, many of the studies are heavily grounded in self-reported survey data or short-term intervention studies that do not explore how motivation develops over time (Chen et al., 2022). Generally, using authentic materials can support intrinsic motivation to listen by placing the activities that students engage in in the

classroom within real-life contexts (Kochkorova, 2025). Further empirical research is required to use authentic listening materials in ways that are carefully aligned with learners' interests and at their level, to facilitate motivation with listening proficiency in different contexts.

4.1.3 Authentic listening materials and real-life language use

With the help of authentic materials, learners are provided with real-life contexts that help them to communicate efficiently in informal face-to-face situations. The teachers should strike a balance between the student's language level and the difficulty of the language texts. The utilization of authentic materials allows the learners to step out of their comfort zones to understand the language (David and Şerban-Oprescu, 2019). However, their research utilized qualitative data mainly from teacher feedback, lacking any empirical data to describe student outcomes effectively, and thus does not have much generalizable power. The use of real materials in learning EFL captivates the interest of the learner by exposure to real and everyday situations, thus making it more complex than those simplified materials found in textbook language (Iroda, 2024). Findings from Iroda (2024) support Gilmore's (2007) earlier argument that authentic materials will have more difficulty, but will provide more richness in terms of the linguistic input. Regardless of how useful this type of input may be, a continuing issue is how much cognitive overload is effective pedagogically, especially for learners at a lower proficiency level. A study on junior high school students showed that 60% of the students find authentic materials more engaging and productive as they reflect the utilization of real-life English use (Husnawati et al., 2024). Furthermore, the study did not measure retention over time or look at gains when comparing gains in a control group of learners using conventional materials, so the scope of conclusions is limited. Martinez (2012) stated that the larger benefit of these authentic materials is that they keep the learners informed of the real-world happenings and encourage them to read through exposure to real discourse. Likewise, another study by Sabir and Hammad (2022) mentioned that using authentic materials helps the learners to connect with the outside world apart from the classroom.

Inappropriate materials can make it difficult for the students to learn efficiently. With the help of authentic materials, learners are placed in a context that is closely related to their real lives. This helps them to focus on facts and familiar which is known to them, thus equipping them with factual information and facts. An overarching idea in all these studies is the difficulty of authentic materials that need to be aligned with learners' language development stage. If the materials are too difficult, there is a risk of demotivating the learners, if the learners have a limited vocabulary, or experience listening. Harmer (2001) points out that such exposure allows learners to hear other voices besides that of a teacher and to improve their speaking habits as a result of absorbing the target language. Students choose what they want to listen to; thus, their motivation is obvious. Harmer presents an interesting viewpoint that learning to listen leads to learning to speak, and that the two skills cannot be separated in a language classroom.

Furthermore, the authentic listening materials and tasks used in the classroom must connect the students with the real world. Crabbe (2007) and Field (2010) explain that the tasks in the classroom are not the end; instead, teachers should help students apply the experience

of these tasks to their daily lives. Authentic listening materials help to prepare learners and give them the skills needed to communicate with others in the real world. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) suggest that the teacher can guide the students by planning more systematic listening to real listening materials outside the classroom. It includes exposing them to different sources of listening to texts, which will help them when they encounter a similar listening type in real life. Also, following a planned daily or weekly schedule for listening between 5 min to an hour, depending on the student's level, helps them monitor their progress and make adjustments when they need to. The above mentioned studies have varied significantly in terms of outcome clarity, but most of it is based on self-reported measures or subjective impressions, rather than actual measurable improvement measures in listening comprehension or oral fluency. Future studies should focus on long-term duration and performance-based measures to specifically examine the effects of authentic materials, designed to strengthen real-world communicative ability.

4.1.4 Authentic listening materials and cultural context

Authentic listening materials help the students to become familiar with the cultural context of different parts of the world as they provide relevant cultural information. The integration of authentic materials in EFL classrooms helps learners to understand the cultural subtleties associated with the language. Understanding the nuances of a cultural context, such as dialects, phrases, idioms, language, and accents, can reveal a significant amount of cultural information that can be applied to navigate the difficulties faced outside the classroom (Adger et al., 2014). Additionally, Kim (2000) states that authentic materials are beneficial for overcoming cultural barriers while learning the language. This allows the learner to understand the cultural context and aspects while learning the language. As mentioned by Norton and Pavlenko (2019), while learning a language, you not only develop a skill by cultivating new words and grammar but also learn about the customs, traditions, and perceptions of the people who speak that language. Salzmann et al. (2014) emphasized the need to understand the cultural background of the study to understand the language appropriately. Various studies showed that the influence of English cultural content had a positive impact on grammar acquisition in EFL learners (Mashudi et al., 2022; Menacho-Vargas et al., 2021; Hernandez et al., 2021).

Learning a language with authentic materials provides a wider perspective, serving as a window to a worldly outlook. For this purpose, the teachers must choose those materials and activities that meet the requirements of the students' cultural backgrounds. Many researchers have agreed on the fact that cultural relatability should be considered while learning a language. Like Norris (2011), adapted authentic listening materials through a combination of audio-visual elements appropriate for beginners to display cultural awareness and development. Moreover, it was found that this approach was effective and focused on cultural themes as well, which helps the learners as beginners with EFL. Ghaderpanahi (2012) highlighted that cultural differences can cause communication problems and misunderstandings, as cultural differences exist, so without understanding the cultural context, the message can be misinterpreted at times.

Despite the advantages, most of the studies have cited cultural gains as anecdotal or qualitative observations rather than

employing performance-based evaluations to demonstrate conclusions. There are not many studies that have compared cultural learning outcomes resulting from using authentic materials to those from using adapted or scripted content. Although the above studies have attempted to address cultural comprehension in a beginner context, there is still a lack of understanding of how cultural learning develops over time with developmental stages and different educational contexts.

4.2 Disadvantages of using authentic listening materials in a language classroom

Although there are many advantages of authentic listening materials, several drawbacks are also associated to authentic materials when using in EFL classrooms. The disadvantages can arise from issues of accessibility and understanding, cultural unfamiliarity, and pedagogical limitations. This section highlights the main disadvantages of authentic listening materials, which are grouped into three main areas, based on the literature review.

4.2.1 Authentic listening materials accessibility and difficulty for learners

As in the previous section, the paper highlighted the various benefits of authentic listening materials, which can motivate students much more than artificial ones. However, there are some drawbacks and challenges connected to the use of these authentic materials. For instance, the books and materials used for EFL are often expensive and have limited availability. Furthermore, at times, the educator and the teacher need adequate training to use the authentic materials appropriately (Temizyürek and Birinci, 2016). This Turkish study by Temizyürek and Birinci (2016) revealed that many of the EFL instructors were not trained adequately on the proper utilization of authentic materials. Nevertheless, this study highlighted questions on the willingness of EFL teachers, but it was a self-reported study, which limits the generalizability and indicates more robust studies.

Many researchers argue that the difficulties associated with authentic listening materials can hurt learners' attitudes toward learning (Gilmore, 2007; Brown and Brown, 2011; Guariento and Morley, 2001). These difficulties can be traced to many factors, as listed by Susanto (2021), including different spoken genres that vary in difficulty, the different elements of materials and how to distinguish them, the speed and the accent that is used, the content and the visual support presented that is connected with the listening materials. The Indonesian questionnaire-based study revealed the difficulties faced by the students while trying to understand the authentic materials. Participants described speed, lack of vocabulary, and listening strategies as the major barriers to having difficulty understanding the information. Despite these findings, the study sample was very small, limited to six participants, and completely dependent on descriptive analysis only. Studies have reported difficulty in understanding the suitable level for the learners (Zulfikar et al., 2020; Tursunboevna, 2023). The study conducted on university students by Zulfikar et al. (2020) was based on a closed-ended questionnaire that stated similar results regarding students' difficulties, such as complex pronunciation, different accents, and inability to make inferences. Additionally, the study lacked a proper listening evaluation with no quantitative analysis.

Comparatively, the study by Ghafar et al. (2023) illustrated the differences between authentic and generated materials, with both the materials exhibiting advantages to the students in terms of exposing them to real language use outside the classroom, while the generated materials seem to be easier to learn and adapt. Thus, the study suggests combining both strategies for effective learning however this study was purely based on a literature review with no involvement of participants and any student data. Moreover, low-level skill students find it difficult to grasp and comprehend the material due to challenging vocabulary, complex diction, and sophisticated language patterns (Ghafar et al., 2023). Correspondingly, all the available material may not be suitable for some learners due to the sensitivity of the content. Due to the presence of unneeded vocabulary and complex language structures, the authentic materials might not be able to meet the immediate needs of the learners. This can also lead to frustration and demotivation of the learners. The listenability of the text also plays a prominent role in effective comprehension of the language. However, if not designed adequately according to the learner's level can give rise to major comprehension challenges (Rahman and Suryati, 2018).

4.2.2 Authentic listening materials and the unfamiliarity of their cultural content

Another disadvantage of using authentic listening materials is the unfamiliarity of the cultural content or the cultural bias to learners. Authentic listening materials present real products that include the culture of the community of the target language. Language and culture are inseparable entities, and learning about one requires learning about the other. Simultaneously, it is widely established that exposure to foreign cultural content is very important for developing intercultural competence and preparing learners for global communication. However, teachers still struggle to find the best way to balance the two aspects (Uzakbaevna, 2025). The study by Ekawati and Yusuf (2019) was carried out on high school students based on a 12-week experiment and found that the teacher failed to consider cultural appropriateness in the teaching-learning process while using authentic materials.

Moreover, the authentic listening materials used in EFL classrooms always have cultural references that people from other countries cannot understand because they are associated with Western culture, particularly American or British culture. Furthermore, a descriptive survey was performed on intermediate learners by Mohammed (2021), which concluded that authentic materials offered rich cultural content and natural language use, they may not always be accessible for learners, particularly those with low proficiency or limited exposure to intercultural circumstances. In addition, he noted the importance of providing contextualization, offering language assistance, and choosing materials that matched students' current levels as ways to mitigate the challenges of using authentic materials. Without sufficient knowledge of these cultures, it is difficult to achieve listening comprehension. An example of a cultural reference that learners may encounter is the term 'red-letter day', which means a day written in red letters, but it really means any memorable or happy day, such as Christmas or any other holiday. Gilmore (2007) explains that the lack of understanding of the target culture can lead to 'serious misunderstandings' within the teaching context and is much more difficult in the English language because of the wide variety of cultures that call the language their own.

Culture significantly affects communication, which can raise challenges for language learners. By understanding the cultural

norms, learners can effectively communicate to avoid any misunderstandings. A Vietnamese study conducted on 120 students expressed that authentic materials helped the students to comprehend real-life language, but they faced difficulties in understanding the cultural meanings. This required support from the teachers to interpret them appropriately. The study suggested combining both authentic materials and textbooks into the curriculum to give a comprehensive communicative experience that allows the learners to gain confidence and competence for communicating interculturally (Ngan and Dan, 2025). Through an understanding of the cultural context, one can create authentic relationships with native speakers and enhance language learning. A more detailed context and meaning are provided while understanding the context. Such as a study on Jordanian EFL learners demonstrated that the teachers do not focus on the social context while learning English. Without understanding the context, the learning is incomplete, and students miss out on important linguistic paradigms that are simply ignored by the teachers (Almajali, 2022). The absence of socio-cultural competence can make the learner less involved and demotivated in learning the target language.

The above findings demonstrate that authentic materials offer invaluable opportunities to be exposed to the language as used in the real world, but on the contrary, the language and cultural complexity of authentic materials may become too overwhelming for learners when they are not provided the scaffolding necessary to understand what they are reading. Educators must strive to avoid demeaning their students while still providing challenges that will help the students learn, and balancing those challenges with the student's abilities.

4.2.3 Authentic listening materials and teaching-related challenges

In teaching authentic materials in an EFL classroom, educators, instructors, and teachers also face great hurdles while teaching listening materials. First and foremost, connectivity issues such as the Internet, LED, and electricity like important tools if they are not provided or unavailable, then they will surely fail the teaching purpose (Mandarsari, 2023). Secondly, while using and implementing authentic materials, the teachers have to pay proper attention to multiple aspects and strategies before choosing the authentic material. This includes evaluation of the materials in terms of language appropriateness, culturally relevant and pedagogically appropriate. To make such decisions professional judgment and design is required for which many teachers are not formally trained. Further, time constraints make it further challenging (Rusmawaty et al., 2018). Besides that, conflicting ideological beliefs can be present between the publisher and the teacher's perspective such as competing views on gender representation, religion, and political discourse, thare illustrated in news, ads, or films (Huda, 2017).

According to a study by Aryana and Apsari (2018), several factors are involved that contribute to teaching difficulties, such as the teacher feeling difficulty in preparing the listening material and choosing the strategy or method for the student's proficiency level. The study's research, through interviews and reflective journals, demonstrated that teachers spend an inordinate amount of time modifying or complementing materials, and, like many other teachers, the vast majority stated that it takes time to fix materials, leading to a sense of teacher exhaustion and less recorded teaching time. The restrained

time duration also appears to be another obstacle faced by the teachers. This is in alignment with other studies, as one such study performed on the participants of Palestine demonstrated that the majority of the teachers faced the challenge of putting in extra effort and demands for a distinct approach (Orooq and Hussein Abdel Razeq, 2023).

These studies exhibit the need for greater institutional support around training to support material selection, design lesson plans, and promote culturally responsive pedagogy. The overarching theme was that while authentic materials can provide rich pedagogical opportunities, their use requires considerable time and context-relevant skills. This underscores the need for more empirical research focused on ways structured training courses might overcome these challenges, and acknowledge how that may enhance the effectiveness of authentic listening instruction. Without these types of strategies, the pedagogical opportunities using authentic materials may remain undeveloped, specifically in less privileged educational contexts.

5 Conclusion and future recommendations

In conclusion, the paper has discussed the benefits of authentic listening materials along with their drawbacks in the context of EFL learners. The present study takes into account how authentic listening materials have a wide range of possibilities, and with such advanced technology, particularly the Internet, teachers can choose the materials that interest their learners and that suit their levels and needs. These materials highly motivate learners because they represent interesting topics from the culture of the target language that students can use in their daily lives. Furthermore, the materials introduced to learners in the classroom open unlimited sources of learning in the real world, such as TV programs, radio, music, and movies. Nevertheless, authentic listening materials can have a negative impact on students, whether as a result of their difficulty or the unfamiliarity of their cultural content. Moreover, the advantages of authentic materials in EFL classrooms significantly outweigh the challenges associated with them. Thus, the challenges can be overcome through effective approaches implemented by educators and instructors to simplify the task, create interactive strategies, and effectively select content with real-life and culturally context-based notions.

Future recommendations may include the incorporation of AI tools to customize the listening processes in EFL classrooms, hence increasing the learner's exposure level. Furthermore, this study can help educators in curriculum design to maintain a perfect balance between cultural knowledge, real-life context, and traditional learning. To equip teachers with constructive training programs and workshops to mitigate the obstacles and prevent any misunderstanding. Moreover, future studies should emphasize student-designed content to enhance motivation, which can add to the learning process.

Author contributions

WA: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Resources, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

Funding

Acknowledgments

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The author declares that no Gen AI was used in the creation of this manuscript.

Any alternative text (alt text) provided alongside figures in this article has been generated by Frontiers with the support of artificial intelligence and reasonable efforts have been made to ensure accuracy, including review by the authors wherever possible. If you identify any issues, please contact us.

Publisher's note

References

Adger, C. T., Wolfram, W., and Christian, D. (2014). Dialects in schools and communities. New York: Routledge.

Almajali, C. (2022). The effect of authentic material on the cultural awareness and motivation of Jordanian EFL learners. *Bull. Transilv. Univ. Brasov, Ser. IV: Philol. Cult. Stud.* 15, 9–30. doi: 10.31926/but.pcs.2022.64.15.1.1

Aryana, S., and Apsari, Y. (2018). Analysing Teacher's difficulties in teaching listening. *Eltin J.* 6, 100–106. doi: 10.22460/eltin.v6i2.p100-106

Badri, L., and Salehi, M. (2017). The effect of oral authentic materials on Iranian EFL learners' motivation and listening comprehension ability. *Technol. Educ. J.* 11, 313–322. doi: 10.22061/jte.2017.730

Brown, S., and Brown, S. R. (2011). Listening myths: Applying second language research to classroom teaching. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Chang, M. M., and Millett, S. (2020) The effect of authentic materials on reading comprehension in English as a foreign language. *Reading in a Foreign Lan-guage*, 32, 227–247.

Chen, M. P., Wang, L. C., Zou, D., Lin, S. Y., Xie, H., and Tsai, C. C. (2022). Effects of captions and English proficiency on learning effectiveness, motivation and attitude in augmented-reality-enhanced theme-based contextualized EFL learning. *Comput. Assist. Lang. Learn.* 35, 381–411. doi: 10.1080/09588221.2019.1704787

Christison, M., and Murray, D. E. (2021). What English language teachers need to know volume III: designing curriculum. New York: Routledge.

Crabbe, D. (2007). Learning opportunities: adding learning value to tasks. *ELT J.* 61, 117–125. doi: 10.1093/elt/ccm004

Danansooriya, M. (2022). The importance of authentic materials and their integration in teaching German as a foreign language. *Int. J. Sci. Res. Publ.* 12:56. doi: 10.29322/IJSRP.12.03.2022.p12310

David, I., and Şerban-Oprescu, A. T. (2019). The use of authentic materials in ESP: benefits and drawbacks. *Dialogos* 20:27345424. Available at: https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=810067

Dörnyei, Z. (2001). Motivational strategies in the language classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ekawati, D., and Yusuf, F. N. (2019). Authentic materials in fostering EFL students listening comprehension. In Eleventh Conference on applied linguistics (CONAPLIN 2018) (pp. 422–426). Netherlands: Atlantis Press.

Field, J. (2010). Listening in the language classroom. *ELT J.* 64, 331–333. doi: 10.1093/elt/ccq026

Fishbach, A., and Woolley, K. (2022). The structure of intrinsic motivation. *Annu. Rev. Organ. Psych. Organ. Behav.* 9, 339–363. doi: 10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-012420-091122

Ghaderpanahi, L. (2012). Using authentic aural materials to develop listening comprehension in the EFL classroom. *Engl. Lang. Teach.* 5, 146–153. doi: 10.5539/elt.v5n6p146

Ghafar, Z., Jalal, S. M., Bakr, M. M., Omar, S. Y., Muhamad, A. A., and Sadun, B. F. (2023). A comparative study of the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials and created materials for English language teaching. *Canadian J. Lang. Literat. Stud.* 3, 43–57. doi: 10.53103/cjlls.v3i2.88

Gilmore, A. (2007). Authentic materials and authenticity in foreign language learning. *Lang. Teach.* 40, 97–118. doi: 10.1017/S0261444807004144

Gogoi, N., and Sultana, Y. (2024). Problems in developing listening skills: voices of secondary school teachers. *J. Eng. Lang. Teach.* 66, 3–12. Available at: https://journals.eltai.in/jelt/article/view/JELT660102

Guariento, W., and Morley, J. (2001). Text and task authenticity in the EFL classroom. *ELT J.* 55, 347–353. doi: 10.1093/elt/55.4.347

Gulasal, X., and Feruza, X. (2025). The role of authentic materials in listening instruction. In Interdiscipline innovation and scientific research conference (pp. 90–91). ISOC: Switzerland

Harmer, J. (2001). The practice of English language teaching. Harlow: Longman, 401–405.

Hassan, S. E. H., and Hassan, Z. H. (2018). Using TED talks as authentic videos to enhance students' listening comprehension and motivation. *Internet TESL J.* 4, 33–45. Available at: https://scholarsbank.uoregon.edu/items/dfbb2a16-4066-4309-9c78-0df8524b6b2c

Hernandez, R. M., Garay-Argandoña, R., Alberto Núñez Lira, L., Fuster-Guillén, D., Paola Palacios Garay, J., and Ocaña-Fernandez, Y. (2021). Investigating instructors' and students' attitudes towards the effectiveness of having target cultural knowledge on learning English as a foreign language. *Int. J. Soc. Cult. Lang.* 9, 64–72. Available at: https://www.ijscl.com/article_246248_f123bd1e404538b81302ab76878699b1.pdf

Hilly, S. F., and Hasan, J. (2024). Scrutinizing the strategies of EFL teachers in instructing listening skills in the classroom. *J. English Teach. Linguist. Issues* 3, 61–71. doi: 10.58194/jetli.v3i22024.1832

Huda, M. (2017). The use of authentic materials in teaching English: Indonesia teachers' perspective in EFL classes. *People* 3, 1907–1927. doi: 10.20319/pijss.2017.32.19071927

Husnawati, N., Puspitasari, M., and Yundayani, A. (2024). Enhancing intrinsic motivation and listening skills through integrating authentic learning materials. *Engl. Rev.* 12, 559–566. doi: 10.25134/erjee.v12i2.9761

Iroda, R. (2024). The importance of using authentic materials in EFL classes. *Int. J. Pedagog.* 4, 96–105. doi: 10.37547/ijp/Volume04Issue06-17

Johnson, K., and Johnson, H. (1998). Encyclopedic dictionary of applied linguistics. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Kamaruddin, R. K., Azizul, A. F., and Roslim, N. (2024). Postgraduate students' perceptions towards using subtitled movies in improving English language. *J. Creat. Pract. Lang. Learn. Teach.* 12, 31–48. doi: 10.24191/cplt.v12i3.2579

Khan, S. S., and Takkac, M. (2021). Motivational factors for learning English as a second language acquisition in Canada. *High. Educ. Stud.* 11, 160–170. doi: 10.5539/hes.v11n1p160

Kim, D. K. (2000). A qualitative approach to the authenticity in the foreign language classroom: a study of university students learning English in Korea. *Texas Pap. For. Lang.*

Educ. 5, 189–205. Available at: https://scispace.com/pdf/a-qualitative-approach-to-the-authenticity-in-the-foreign-15o46rvnsr.pdf

Kochkorova, Z. (2025). Developing EFL students' listening comprehension through the use of authentic materials. *Pub. Soc. Sci. Hum.* 2:11. doi: 10.47134/pssh.v2i4.381

Kulakhmetova, M. S., and Daulbaeva, K. M. (2024). Authentic media materials by increasing motivation in foreign language teaching. *Bull. Shokan Ualikhanov Kokshetau Univ. Philol. Ser.* 2, 248–259. doi: 10.59102/kufil/2024/iss2pp248-259

Lynch, T. (2009). Teaching second language listening. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mandarsari, P. (2023). Online authentic materials in teaching English for EFL students. *Int. J. Res. Engl. Teach. Appl. Linguist.* 4, 65–78. doi: 10.30863/ijretal.v4i1.5013

Martinez, A. G. (2012). Authentic materials: an overview. Thailand: Karen's Linguistics.

Mashudi, M., Nurmansyah, A., Saenko, N. R., Nurjamin, A., and Sharifullina, S. R. (2022). The impact of English cultural awareness on Indonesian advanced EFL learners' grammar knowledge. *Int. J. Soc. Cult. Lang.* 10, 99–108. doi: 10.22034/ijscl.2021.246709

Menacho-Vargas, I., Garcia, U. C., Rojas, M. L. R., Wong-Fajardo, E. M., and Saavedra-López, A. (2021). The effect of culturally-based conversations on developing speaking skill among Peruvian upper-intermediate EFL learners. *Int. J. Soc. Cult. Lang.* 9, 109–118. Available at: https://www.ijscl.com/article_246052_f687ee448a8250cc0aed70f0e2acd1ef.pdf

Mirza Suzani, S. (2021). Investigating the effect of podcasting on Iranian senior undergraduate TEFL students' listening comprehension improvement and motivation. *Asia Pac. Educ. Res.* 30, 395–408. doi: 10.1007/s40299-020-00526-w

Mitrulescu, C. M., and Negoescu, A. G. (2024). The role of authentic materials in EFL education: maximizing student engagement and language acquisition. *Int. Conf. Knowl. Based Organ.* 30, 160–165. doi: 10.2478/kbo-2024-0069

Mohammed, F. G. (2021). The effects of teaching through authentic material on EFL learners. *Docens Ser. Educ.* 1, 73–86. Available at: https://core.ac.uk/download/497899867.pdf

Mohammed, F. G., and Khadawardi, H. A. (2024). Investigating EFL students' perspectives of the influence of podcasts on enhancing listening proficiency. *J. Educ. Learn.* 13, 177–191. doi: 10.5539/jel.v13n3p177

Newton, J. M., and Nation, I. S. (2020). Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking. New York: Routledge.

Ngan, T. H., and Dan, T. C. (2025). EFL students 'perceptions of using teachers authentic materials to develop intercultural communicative competence in English learning. *Eur. J. Alt. Educ. Stud.* 10:5940. doi: 10.46827/ejae.v10i1.5940

Norris, R. N. (2011). Using authentic videos to enhance language and culture instruction in a formal English language learning setting: Ten videos and accompanying lessons. Arkansas: University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Norton, B., and Pavlenko, A. (2019). "Imagined communities, identity, and English language learning in a multilingual world" in Second handbook of English language teaching. ed. X. Gao (Cham: Springer International Publishing), 703–718.

Nozimakhon, N. (2024). Teaching strategies for improving listening skills in EFL classrooms. *J. Int. Sci. Res.* 1, 323–325. Available at: https://bestpublication.net/index.php/jiser/article/download/902/850/1659

O'brien, A. N. N. E., and Hegelheimer, V. (2007). Integrating CALL into the classroom: the role of podcasting in an ESL listening strategies course. *ReCALL* 19, 162–180. doi: 10.1017/S0958344007000523

Orooq, G., and Hussein Abdel Razeq, A. (2023). Use of authentic materials in english as a foreign language classroom: Challenges, reasons, types and frequency. *J. Educ. Sci.* 20, 160–175. doi: 10.29117/jes.2022.0092

Panthee, D. (2024). Teachers' perspectives on teaching listening skills in secondary level English language classes. *J. NELTA Gandaki* 7, 56–66. doi: 10.3126/jong.v7i1-2.70185

Rahman, H., and Suryati, N. (2018). Authentic texts used by EFL vocational teachers in listening classes: Are they suitable with learners' needs? Indonesia: State University of Malang.

Richards, J. C. (2007). "Materials development and research: Toward a form-focused perspective" in Form-focused instruction and teacher education: Studies in honor of Rod Ellis. eds. S. Fotos and H. Nassaji (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 147–160.

Rusmawaty, D., Atmowardoyo, H., Hamra, A., and Noni, N. (2018). Teachers' beliefs of authentic materials for teaching reading in Indonesian EFL classrooms. *J. Lang. Teach. Res.* 9, 608–613. doi: 10.17507/jltr.0903.21

Sabir, G., and Hammad, F. A. (2022). The effects of using authentic materials on motivating EFL (English as a foreign language) learners. *Spr. J. Arts. Humanit. Soc. Sci.* 1, 40–48. doi: 10.55559/sjahss.v1i12.75

Sadam, M. (2022). Learning English as a foreign language through authentic materials. *Int. J. Adv. Acad. Stud.* 4, 24–27. doi: 10.33545/27068919.2022.v4.i1a.676

Saleem, A. J. (2023). Challenges and problems in teaching listening skill in the local schools. Iraq: Koya University.

Salzmann, Z., Stanlaw, J., and Adachi, N. (2014). Language, culture, and society: An introduction to linguistic anthropology. Colorado: Westview Press.

Seven, M. A. (2020). Motivation in language learning and teaching. *Afr. Educ. Res. J.* 8, 62–71. doi: 10.30918/AERJ.8S2.20.033

Shukurdinovna, S. O. (2024). Choosing authentic materials in english teaching: a comprehensive framework for effective language acquisition. *Int. J. Pedagog.* 4, 105–111. doi: 10.37547/ijp/Volume04Issue03-18

Susanto, A. I. (2021). The students' difficulties in understanding the authentic news items materials in the listening class. *Engl. Lang. Educ. Spect.* 1, 28–38. doi: 10.53416/electrum.v1i2.24

Temizyürek, F., and Birinci, F. G. (2016). Yabancı Dil Öğretiminde Otantik Materyal Kullanımı (using authentic materials in foreign language teaching). *Bartın Üniv. Eğit. Fak. Derg.* 5, 54–62. doi: 10.14686/buefad.v5i1.5000158999

Treve, M. (2023). Examining the impact of using authentic materials on ESL/EFL learners. *Int. J. Emp. Res. Methods* 1, 40–50. doi: 10.59762/ijerm20527579112023100515152352

Tursunboevna, N. Z. (2023). The usege of authentic materials in the language classroom. *International Journal Of Literature And Languages* 3, 68–73. doi: 10.37547/ijll/Volume03Issue02-13

Ur, P. (1996). A course in language teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge university press.

Uzakbaevna, U. Z. (2025). The influence of cultural context on the effectiveness of authentic materials. *Hamkor konferensiyalar* 1, 629–634. doi: 10.5281/zenodo.15179012

Vandergrift, L., and Goh, C. (2012). Teaching and learning second language listening: metacognition in action. New York: Routledge.

Wang, J., Zhang, X., and Zhang, L. J. (2022). Effects of teacher engagement on students' achievement in an online English as a foreign language classroom: the mediating role of autonomous motivation and positive emotions. *Front. Psychol.* 13:950652. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.950652

Widdowson, H. G. (1979). The acquisition and use of language system. *Stud. Second. Lang. Acquis.* 2, 15–26. doi: 10.1017/S0272263100000929

Widdowson, H. G. (1998). Context, community, and authentic language. *TESOL Q.* 32, 705–716. doi: 10.2307/3588001

Wijaya, R. K. (2024). TED talks as learning resource: an alternative independent learning to improve EFL learners speaking skills. *Educ. Track.* 3, 39–46. doi: 10.58660/educationtracker.v3i1.84

Yenkimaleki, M., and van Heuven, V. J. (2021). Effects of attention to segmental vs. suprasegmental features on the speech intelligibility and comprehensibility of the EFL learners targeting the perception or production-focused practice. *System* 100:102557. doi: 10.1016/j.system.2021.102557

Zahro, M., and Mohijamol, A. (2024). Teaching listening skills through authentic materials. *J. Innov. Sci. Educ. Res.* 7, 51–55. Available at: https://bestpublication.net/index.php/jiser/article/download/902/850/1659

Zulfikar, Z., Aulia, C. T., and Akmal, S. (2020). Exploring EFL students problems in listening to English news broadcasts. *Lang. Liter.* 4, 340–352. doi: 10.30743/ll.v4i2.2940