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On the Relationship among Teacher Talk, Authentic Material, and Listening Comprehension Ability of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

As second language (L2) teachers and language scholars acknowledge the unique characteristics of the listening skill and the vital role it plays in language learning and communication, they underscore more and more the significance of teaching listening comprehension in L2 classes. Given this, the present study was an attempt to empirically investigate if the teacher talk and the authentic material had any positive effect on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, 60 male and female EFL learners were selected via double sampling and after administrating a pre-test they were assigned to two experimental groups (the Teacher Talk and the Authentic Group) and a control group. One group received authentic material and the other group was taught based on the characteristics of the Teacher Talk. After the treatment, a post test was given to the sample study. The thorough analysis of data using one-way ANOVA indicated that the authentic materials had a more prominent effect on learners' listening comprehension. The paper ends with some recommendations for further research.

Key Words: Teacher Talk, Authentic, ANCOVA, Second Language

Introduction

Listening is a challenging skill for many second language learners (Goh, 2014). According to Oxford (1993) listening is a complex problem-solving skill which does not only involve the recognition of sounds, but also the ability to understand words, phrases, clauses and connected stretches of discourse. Therefore, in making sense of spoken language a single process is not involved and it is more accurate to conceive a cluster of related processes (Mendelsohn, 1984). Listening is an active, goal-driven process of making sense of spoken language (Brown, 2001). Listening, along with reading, is a receptive skill. That is, it requires a person to receive and understand given information. Therefore, it is understandable why people consider listening as a passive skill (Chastain, 1989). However, contrary to traditional belief, listening requires an active engagement. Listeners are required to connect what they hear to other information they already have. Given the fact learners combine what they hear with their own ideas and experienc, listening can be envisaged as the creation of meaning in listeners' minds (Nunan, 2003).

To help learners develop their listening skill, teachers should understand how comprehension is achieved and identify factors which might influence successful comprehension (Goh, 2014). Another equally important issue is the concept of *teacher talk*. Teacher talk can be

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defined as the kind of language used by the teacher for instruction in context of classroom (Yanfen &Yuqin, 2010). According to Richard and Schmidt (2002) teacher talk refers to "variety of language sometimes used by teachers when they are in the process of teaching. In trying to communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many of the characteristics of foreigner talk and other simplified styles of speech addressed to language learners" (p, 471).

Ellis (1985) defines teacher talk as:

Teacher talk is the special language that teachers use when addressing L2 learners in the classroom. There is systematic simplification of the formal properties of the teacher's language… studies of teacher talk can be divided into those that investigate the type of language that teachers use in language classrooms and those that investigate in the type of language they use in subject lessons (p. 145).

During the past 20 years, teacher talk has evoked a great deal of research in second language acquisition. Pioneered by Gaies (1977) and Henzle (1979), the research on teacher talk began in the 1970s. In recent years, teacher talk has captured attention of scholars and researchers worldwide, majority of which has focused mainly on classroom conversation features, talk turns between teachers and learners, and what sort of language teacher could rely on to manage the class well (Wright, 2005).

The question of how to help learners develop effective listening skills brings attention to the type of material we introduce our learners to (Tomlinson, 2013). The underlying goal for development of all listening material should be built around fostering students' independence when they confront listening in a real world context which underscores the importance of using authentic material (Miller, 2003). Nunan (1987) defines authentic material as "spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of genuine communication and not specifically written for the purpose of language teaching" (p. 22). Therefore, authentic material comprises any oral or written language material used in daily conversation by native speakers (Rodgers & Medly, 1988). One way to help learners better cope with the real language outside of classroom context is to apply real language or authentic material in the ESL/EFL classroom (Rodgers & Medly, 1988). A major advantage of presenting authentic material at the initial stages of language learning is to make students familiar with the target language (Field, 1998). There is a growing body of research on the role of authentic materials on FL teaching. Studies, such as Miller (2005) and Thanajaro (2000), revealed that incorporating authentic materials lead to aural language development.

Significance of the Study

Listening skill is regarded as the most frequently used language skill (Morley, 1999), and plays a vital role in communication (Mendelsohn, 1984). "Listening is probably the least explicit skill of the four language skills, thus, making it the most difficult skill to learn" (Vandergrift, 1998, p. 1). Likewise, Oxford (1990) states "listening is perhaps the most fundamental language skill" (p. 205). The significance of listening in learning a second/foreign language has been highlighted by scholars in the field (Ferris, 1998).

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In classroom context, listening ability plays a pivotal role in the ultimate development of other language skills (Nunan, 2003). In the beginning stages of language learning, language learners first have to consciously listen to the words several times before they are able to recognize and pronounce those words (Thanajaro, 2000). Listening can also help students build vocabulary, develop language proficiency, and improve language usage (Barker, 1971)

As stated by several scholars (Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift, 2007), listening comprehension is regarded an essential means of communication and an indispensable part of oral language competence, and is usually regarded as a difficult skill to master even in one's own mother tongue, let alone in acquiring a foreign/second language. Thus, taking the above-mentioned significance into account, it is essential to develop learners' listening competence in foreign/second language acquisition.

Another equally important issue is the role of teacher's talk in second language teaching. Teachers pass on knowledge and skills, organize teaching activities and help students practice through teacher talk (Xiao, 2006). According to Yanfen andYuqin (2010) teacher talk is: "an indispensable part of foreign language teaching in organizing activities, and the way teachers talk not only determines how well they make their lectures, but also guarantees how well students will learn" (p. 21).

The results of the current study might prove beneficial for EFL teachers in general and both Iranian English teachers and learners in particular, making them aware of which materials (materials provided by teacher or authentic materials) has beneficial effects on listening comprehension. The study can also give insights to materials developers and course books writers and help them to design the kinds of listening materials which lead to autonomous learning on the side of learners.
Following the objectives of this research, the following questions were proposed:

1. Does teacher talk method have a positive effect on the development of Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?
2. Do authentic materials (audio-visual materials) have a positive effect on the development of Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?
3. Is there any significant difference between the effect of teacher talk and listening to authentic materials on the development of Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?

Based on the proposed questions the following directional- hypotheses are formulated:

1. Teacher talk has a positive effect on the development of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension.
2. Authentic recordings (audio-visual materials) have a positive effect on the development of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension.
3. Teacher talk and authentic recordings affect the listening comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners differently.

Review of the Related Literature
What is Listening?

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For many years, listening skill did not receive the due attention in language teaching. Teaching methods were concerned with the relationship between receptive and productive skills and attention was mostly placed on productive skills (Richards & Renandya, 2002). To our surprise, even until recently, the role of listening in second language was ignored and it was believed that listening skill could be acquired by its own (Brown, 2001).

Among the four language skills, listening plays probably the most vital role in communication. It is claimed that listening accounts for 40-50% portion of communication, with speaking at 25-30%, reading at 11-16%, and writing at 9% (Nunan, 2003). In spite of such a high frequency outside of the classroom, listening has received scant attention in many EFL programs (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

It was Asher's (1970, as cited in Brown, 2001) Total Physical Response which for the first time illuminated the role of listening as a major area in language learning and teaching. Before this language teaching methodology was mainly preoccupied with spoken language (Brown, 2001).

Now, as teachers and scholars have become aware of the unique features of listening skill and the fundamental role it plays in learning a second language, they come to acknowledge the importance of teaching listening comprehension in the second language classroom (Rubin, 1994). This recognition has paved the way for integration of more listening activities in students' textbooks.

Teacher Talk vs. Authentic Material

There is no learning without teaching (Incecay, 2010). One indispensible part of foreign language teaching is the concept of 'teacher talk' (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2012). Until recently, teacher talk in the EFL classes was considered to be counterproductive, or even a danger which must be carefully taken care of. Young teachers were advocated to make a little use of it since there was an adage that "good teacher talk meant little teacher talk" (Cullen, 1998, p. 179). It was believed that too much teacher talking time (TTT) denied students of opportunities to speak (Nunan, 1987).

Many definitions of *teacher talk* have been proposed over the last decade. One common definition perceives *teacher talk* as the language used by teachers in the classroom context which usually takes up a major portion of class time to provide direction, explain activities, and check students understanding (Yanfen & Yuqin, 2012).

But nowadays teacher talk is not seen as something which must be minimized; rather, a shift of interest has occurred which is not mainly concerned with quantity but quality of teacher talk (Cullen, 1998). This means that, not only the question 'how much teachers talk' is important, but also 'how effectively they are able to facilitate learning and promote the communicative interaction in their classrooms' has gained extraordinary attention.

The question of authenticity in the language classroom is an ambiguous one. In part because there are different types of authenticity, and they are not always clearly recognized (Tomlinson, 2013). In many discussions it is not clear whether we are dealing with authenticity of language, authenticity of task, or authenticity of situation (Sabet & Mahsefat, 2012). The question of authenticity emerged as an important issue within Communicative Language Teaching and in relation to Notional/Functional Syllabuses, where emphasis was placed on

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ensuring that the classroom contained natural language behavior, with content identified as relevant to the learner through the process of need analysis (Richards & Rodgers, 2010).

Weche and Ready (1985) conducted a study and attempted to describe the common features of teacher talk in second or foreign language classrooms. They explored the discourse of lecturers in a Canadian University. To this end, a comparison was made between psychology classes presented by lectures (in English and French) to first and second language speakers. They found significant differences, whether the instructions were given in French or English. Five main features were identified: (a) speech rate, (b) the number and duration of pauses, (c) frequency of tensed verbs and number of clauses and T units, (d) percentage of imperative sentences and self-repetition, and (e) amount of non-verbal information use (such as gestures, facial expressions, pictures, and visual aids).

Otte (2006) investigated the impact of aural authentic material on listening comprehension ability of four adult ESL students at an American university. He concluded that authentic material bolsters students' listening comprehension and increase their motivation. In a similar vein, Herron and Saey (1991) reported that those students who were exposed to authentic radio tape as a frequent component of classroom activity demonstrated better listening comprehension than those students for whom authentic radio program was not part of teaching curriculum.

Sabet and Mahefat (2012) examined the effect of authentic listening materials on elementary EFL learners' listening skill. To this aim, 60 university students were randomly assigned to two groups. The experimental group was exposed to authentic material and the control one was exposed to simplified listening material. A proficiency test (comprised of two sub-tests; listening comprehension and listening perception) was used as a pretest to measure the students' potential differences at the outset of the study. After the intervention program, the same proficiency test was administered for both groups. Furthermore, students' attitudes in experimental group regarding the materials were amassed. Careful analysis of reported results showed that student in experimental group outperformed students in control group. Also the analysis of feedback revealed that student held positive attitude toward authentic listening material.

Method

Participants

In order to conduct this study, 60 male and female EFL learners within the age range of 14 to 18 were selected out of 100 participants via double sampling in Pardis and Marefat Language Institutes in Hamadan, Iran. All the participants in the study were from Hamadan and Persian was their native language. First, they were selected conveniently and then they were homogenized based on their scores on the Nelson test. Nelson is designed to measure global language abilities (i.e., overall English language proficiency) (Brown, 2005). Through Nelson Test, 60 students whose scores fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were chosen to be intermediate level and other participants were omitted because they had extremely high, or extremely low scores on the test.

Therefore, to meet homogeneity considerations, 40 learners whose proficiency test results were significantly different from the mean score were excluded, meaning the study ultimately went on with 60 participants. Participants of the study were then randomly assigned to two experimental groups (Teacher Talk versus Authentic) and one control group.

Instruments

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In this study, three different tests were carried out at three different points: one Proficiency test (Nelson Test, 400 A) for determining the level of participants; two listening tests which were used as the pre-test and the post-test.

The pre-test consisted of 20 multiple choice, completion, and dictation listening items selected from Tactics for Listening by Jack C. Richards (2011). In order to establish the reliability of the pre-test, it was piloted prior to the main administration. In doing so, 30 young EFL learners who were different from the main sample learners but whose proficiency level were the same as the main sample were asked to take the test. Having amassed the data of the study, Cronbach alpha formula was employed to calculate the reliability which turned out to be 0.76. This, in turn, indicates the high reliability of the test. The post-test consisted of 20 multiple choice, completion, and dictation listening items selected from materials covered throughout the course.

Procedures

First of all, a Nelson general proficiency test (400 A) was administered to the participants before the treatment to compare their proficiencies and make sure that there was no significant difference between the participants. By administrating a Nelson test, 60 students whose scores were between one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected. Then the participants were assigned to three groups equally: two experimental groups (Teacher Talk versus Authentic) and one control group. In the first session, a pre-test, which was piloted in advance, was given to the participants to capture their initial differences regarding listening comprehension ability.

Students in Teacher Talk group were exposed to selected passages from their course book. Here, session two is explained below and the rest of the sessions were the same as this example session but with different topics.

There were about 20 students in the classroom seated at individual desks, facing the teacher at the front of the class. The teacher was giving the guidelines and preparing the students for a reading passage in their textbooks about the “Blind Date”. The classroom interaction was heavily teacher-led. Teacher read aloud the text carefully and clarified the key words in an interactive way. To bolster students’ comprehension, two teachers were instructed to use key features of teacher talk identified in empirical studies. To this end, teachers were taught to actively utilize questions (a request for information), invitations (using the presiding language, act as a chairperson or a host, or using imperative and interrogative sentences to ask students to do activities), directions (authoritative direction to be obeyed), and follow-up (an interactive exchange which aims to give feedback to students’ responses). Here is an example:

T: All right, who can tell me what a ‘blind date’ is?

S1: date? What a date is?

Ss: (Indistinct reply)

T: Who knows what a date is?

S2: Shall I say?

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T: sure, go on!

S2: A day when u go with a person you like!

T: great, what else?

S3: invite her to a restaurant.

T: Yes, that's right. It is an occasion, or let's say, a day, you go out with someone you like in a *romantic* way! So what is a blind date?

S4: go to a date when your eyes closed?

T: Come on! How is it possible! Erfan, do you have any idea?

S: No, I'm not sure.

T: A blind date is an arranged meeting between a man and woman who have not met each other before!

Ss: (some students laugh, some try to stop their laughing!)

T: To spend a romantic evening with someone you have never met before is now usual, even now in Iran!

S: but teacher it is not suitable, my parents will never like that!

T: I know, it was an example. Now I'm going to read the text, listen carefully!

Students in the authentic class were exposed to authentic material. As was explained in the previous chapter, authentic materials are produced by native speakers for non-pedagogic purposes. A series of video and audio tracks were selected. The rationale for selecting these materials was that it fulfills two conditions cited in the definition of authentic material. First it is produced by native speaker and then enjoys non-teaching oriented purposes. Therefore, authentic materials are not graded to reflect learners' level of English and offer a listening experience much closer to real-life. An example of authentic class is as follows:

Teacher first set the context. The topic was 'climate change warning', a short BBC report. Teacher attempted to activate students' background knowledge and reviewed the topic of the listening text. Then, he played the listening text twice. However, the gentle point to be mentioned is that comprehension questions must be presented. If students are unsure if they will be asked, they cannot judge the level of the detail that will be required of them.

Authentic materials are challenging not only for students, but also for some teachers. To prevent students from being daunted or discouraged, students must be told in advance that they are not expected to understand everything. Students had difficulty in adjusting to authentic materials after hearing scripted ones. They were told to make guesses to link what they know with fragmented pieces of text. They were advocated to make inferences based on the words they have managed to identify. After checking students' comprehension, the teacher wrote the key

words on the board and explained them. He helped students to extract information from the passage. Finally, he plays the text for the last time to reflect on any functional language.

Students in control group were taught based on the conventional listening techniques in traditional classes. That is, a listening material was played twice. The teacher would call some students randomly and would ask to recite the oral material word-by-word. Some key words were written on the board and some definitions were given for it.

This was practiced for 8 sessions, each an hour long for all groups. After the treatment, the post-test was administered to all participants.

Data Analysis

Checking the Homogeneity of the Slope of Regression Lines

The homogeneity of the slope of regression lines, as an important requirement of ANCOVA, was checked and the results are shown through Table 1.

Table 1

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for the Homogeneity of the Slope of Regression Lines

Dependent Variable: posttest

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	Hypothesis	110.759	1	110.759	8.894	.096
	Error	24.963	2.005	12.453[a]		
group	Hypothesis	25.091	2	12.546	7.521	.001
	Error	90.074	54	1.668[b]		
pretest	Hypothesis	15.074	1	15.074	9.037	.004
	Error	90.074	54	1.668[b]		
group * pretest	Hypothesis	19.816	2	9.908	5.940	.005
	Error	90.074	54	1.668[b]		

a. .991 MS(group) + .009 MS(Error)

b. MS(Error)

Table 3 shows that the slope of regression lines is **NOT** homogeneous for all groups [$F_{(2,54)} = 5.940$, $p < 0.05$]. Since this important requirement of ANCOVA was not held,

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ANCOVA was put aside and the researcher run One-way analysis of variance (One-way ANOVA).

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Groups' Gain Scores

group	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Skewness	Kurtosis
authentic material	3.6750	20	2.29000	.00	7.50	.231	-1.126
teacher talk	2.7500	20	1.48235	.00	6.00	.478	.140
control group	1.8000	20	1.39925	-1.00	4.00	-.246	-.678
Total	2.7417	60	1.90337	-1.00	7.50	.603	.111

Table 2 depicts various descriptive parameters (mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores, skewedness and kurtosis) of the groups' gain scores.

Equality of Error Variances

Table 3

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances
Dependent Variable: diff

F	df1	df2	Sig.
4.769	2	57	.012

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + group

Table 2 shows that the error variances of the groups' gain scores were not equal. However, this inequality of variance may be ignored because the number of participants in all groups is equal (Pallant, 2007).

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The Results of One-Way ANOVA

Table 4

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent Variable: diff

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	35.158[a]	2	17.579	5.611	.006	.164
Intercept	451.004	1	451.004	143.948	.000	.716
group	35.158	2	17.579	5.611	.006	.164
Error	178.587	57	3.133			
Total	664.750	60				
Corrected Total	213.746	59				

a. R Squared = .164 (Adjusted R Squared = .135)

Table 2 shows that that the main effect of the treatment was significant [$F_{(2,57)} = 5.611$, $p < 0.05$, Eta = 0.164].That is, authentic supplementary material and teacher talk both had positive effect , to the extent of o.164%, on the Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. Since there were three study groups, using Bonferroni Test, multiple comparisons were also done and the results are shown in Table 3 below.

Multiple Comparisons

Table 5

Multiple Comparisons
Diff Bonferroni

(I) group	(J) group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound

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authentic material	teacher talk	.9250	.55974	.312	-.4557	2.3057
	control group	1.8750*	.55974	.004	.4943	3.2557
teacher talk	authentic material	-.9250	.55974	.312	-2.3057	.4557
	control group	.9500	.55974	.285	-.4307	2.3307
control group	authentic material	-1.8750*	.55974	.004	-3.2557	-.4943
	teacher talk	-.9500	.55974	.285	-2.3307	.4307

Based on observed means.

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 3.133.

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As it is evident in Table 3, the difference between the authentic material group's mean score and that of teacher talk group was not significant ($p > 0.05$); the difference between the authentic material group's mean score and that of the control group was significant at the level of 0.004 ($p < 0.05$) so that the authentic material group's mean score was higher than that of the control group to the extent of 1.8750; and the difference between the teacher talk group's mean score and that of the control group was not significant ($p > 0.05$). These comparisons imply that authentic supplementary material was more effective than teacher talk as far as Iranian EFL learners' listening development was concerned.

Discussion and Conclusion

Introducing Findings

Regarding the first research question, which aimed at seeing if teacher talk has a positive effect on the development of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learner s' listening comprehension, the findings of this study revealed that teacher talk had a positive impact on listening comprehension of language learners [$F(2, 57) = 5.611$, $P<0.005$, Eta= 0.164]. To come up with a more precise result, Bonferroni Test was run. Its results revealed that teacher talk group's mean score on the listening posttest was a little higher, to the extent of 0.95, than that of the control group. Hence, the difference was not significant ($p>0.05$).

Considering the second research question, which aimed at seeing if authentic supplementary material has a positive effect on the development of Iranian upper-intermediate EFL learner 's listening comprehension, the findings of this study showed that authentic supplementary material had a positive impact on students' performance in listening posttest [$F(2, 57)=5.611$, $P<0.05$, Bta=0.164). The results of Bonferroni Test further revealed that the

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difference between the authentic material group's mean score on the posttest and that of the control group was significant ($p<0.05$). This means that authentic material group outperformed control group in listening posttest. Regarding the third research question, whether there is any significant difference between the effect of teacher talk and listening to the difference was not significant ($p>0.05$). However, the mean score of the authentic supplementary was to the extent of 0.92 higher than that of the teacher talk group.

Explaining the Findings and Comparing the Results with Those of the Others

The findings of this study revealed that teacher talk had a positive effect on students' listening comprehension. One explanation, perhaps, is that teacher talk facilitates learners' comprehension. Furthermore, the characteristics of the teacher's language use (e.g., direct error correction, content feedback, prompting) facilitate learners' involvement and hence their comprehension and retrieval (Incecay, 2010). Also Gray (1997) held the similar view and stated that there are different roles for teacher talk and it is beneficial for learners to have optimal teacher talk since it provides them with a specific opportunity to have more learning, questions and answers, and other activities. This kind of teacher encouraged students to participate actively in classroom process and required them to engage in high-level thinking. The result is in line with Chaudron and Richards (1986) who observed that discourse markers in teacher talk influenced students' listening comprehension.

The finding of this study also revealed that authentic materials had a significant positive impact on learners' listening comprehension. It was further revealed that students in authentic group outperformed students in teacher talk group on listening posttest. This is because of the fact that authentic materials are more beneficial than simplified listening materials in enhancing students' listening skill. Exposing learners to graded materials which are fitted in their levels (e.g., teacher talk and control group), lead to their disqualification from the constructive exposure to real language (Sabet, 2012). Moreover, incorporating authentic materials helped students to focus on a wider range of real life features than it was normally possible in simplified texts, and this noticing had a facilitative effect on learners' development of listening comprehension. Students' superior performance in authentic group can also be interpreted based on this common wisdom that authentic materials exposed students to language in the real world and this improved their overall listening comprehension. Authentic material is useful in another way. Less proficient students benefited from such materials and their limited linguistic competence did not short-circuit their ability to comprehend the text with the support of their classmates and instructor. The results were in line with Gilmore (2007), Herron and Seay (1991), Sabet (2012) who concluded that incorporating authentic materials facilitate students' listening comprehension.

It was also revealed that conventional teaching techniques employed in control group did not have any significant effect on listening comprehension. This can be attributed to the fact that conventional approach to listening comprehension tend to test students rather than actually teach them. Teachers might have overlooked the fact that there may be many ways of achieving the correct answer. Instead of focusing on the process, teachers were interested in the process. Students were not instructed based on the kind of listening that takes in real life. They were not on how to use strategic listening activities to cope with the types of listening that occurs in a real-life situation. This is not surprising to know that their performances were not improved

significantly on post-test (Brown, 2001). This finding is in line with Sabet (2012) who warned teachers of the conventional teaching techniques which hardly have any facilitative impact on students' listening comprehension.

As recommendations for further research, this research study was conducted with only a small group of EFL students. As a result, the interpretation and the generalizability of the findings are limited. Further work is required to confirm and validate these findings with a larger group of students. Further studies are needed to investigate the impact of authentic listening materials on other aspects of language acquisitions such intonation, stress patterns, vocabulary proficiency, incidental learning, extra linguistic factors, grammar, establishing speaking and so forth. Further studies will need to be undertaken to test students' motivation, self-regulation, and second language attitude after they have been exposed to authentic material for an extended period of time.

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