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Artículo de Investigación

***Mejorar las habilidades de expresión oral mediante el uso de materiales auténticos:
un estudio empírico***

***Enhancing speaking skills through the use of authentic materials: an empirical
study***

***Aprimorando as habilidades de fala por meio do uso de materiais autênticos: um
estudo empírico***

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Resumen

Este estudio examina el impacto de los materiales auténticos en la mejora de las habilidades orales en estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) de nivel A2. Se utilizó un diseño de métodos mixtos, que incluyó enfoques cuantitativos y cualitativos, para evaluar la efectividad de materiales del mundo real, como pódcast, artículos de noticias y videos, en el desarrollo de la competencia oral. Durante una intervención de seis semanas, 30 participantes de un programa de Ingeniería Mecánica fueron expuestos a estos materiales. Los resultados de las evaluaciones pre-test y post-test mostraron una mejora significativa en las habilidades orales, con un aumento promedio de 20 puntos. El estudio también encontró un alto nivel de satisfacción entre los estudiantes, con el 85% reportando mayor motivación para aprender y el 90% indicando que recomendarían estos materiales a otros. Estos hallazgos resaltan el valor de incorporar materiales auténticos en la enseñanza de EFL para fomentar la fluidez oral, la competencia cultural y el compromiso de los estudiantes.

Palabras claves: habilidades de expresión oral; materiales auténticos; estudio empírico.

Abstract

This study examines the impact of authentic materials on improving oral skills in A2-level learners of English as a foreign language (EFL). A mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, was used to assess the effectiveness of real-world materials, such as podcasts, news articles, and videos, in developing oral proficiency. During a six-week intervention, 30 participants in a Mechanical Engineering program were exposed to these materials. Pre-test and post-test results showed a significant improvement in oral skills, with an average increase of 20 points. The study also found a high level of student satisfaction, with 85% reporting increased motivation to learn and 90% indicating they would recommend these materials to others. These findings highlight the value of incorporating authentic materials into EFL teaching to foster oral fluency, cultural competence, and student engagement.

Keywords: oral expression skills; authentic materials; empirical study.

Resumo

Este estudo examina o impacto de materiais autênticos na melhoria das habilidades orais de alunos de inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL) de nível A2. Utilizou-se uma metodologia mista, combinando abordagens quantitativas e qualitativas, para avaliar a eficácia de materiais do mundo

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real, como podcasts, artigos de notícias e vídeos, no desenvolvimento da proficiência oral. Durante uma intervenção de seis semanas, 30 participantes de um programa de Engenharia Mecânica foram expostos a esses materiais. Os resultados dos pré-testes e pós-testes mostraram uma melhora significativa nas habilidades orais, com um aumento médio de 20 pontos. O estudo também constatou um alto nível de satisfação dos alunos, com 85% relatando maior motivação para aprender e 90% indicando que recomendariam esses materiais a outros. Esses resultados destacam o valor da incorporação de materiais autênticos no ensino de inglês como língua estrangeira para promover a fluência oral, a competência cultural e o engajamento dos alunos.

Palavras-chave: habilidades de expressão oral; materiais autênticos; estudo empírico.

Introduction

The development of speaking skills in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) remains one of the most significant challenges in language instruction. Despite various advances in language teaching methodologies, many learners still face difficulties in speaking fluently and confidently in real-world situations. Traditional teaching methods that focus primarily on grammar and vocabulary drills tend to overlook the importance of interactive and spontaneous communication skills. This gap has prompted the exploration of alternative teaching strategies, including the use of authentic materials, which have been proven to improve students' speaking abilities by providing exposure to real-world language use (Vargas & Roque, 2019; Richards & Rodgers, 2020).

Authentic materials, which are materials designed for native speakers of the language, offer students valuable opportunities to engage with language in meaningful contexts. These materials—such as news broadcasts, podcasts, interviews, films, and online discussions—mirror the natural, unsimplified speech found in daily life (Mahmood & Wani, 2018; Song & Kim, 2020). Unlike textbooks, which often present language in isolated contexts, authentic materials expose learners to the complexity of language use in various social, cultural, and professional settings. This type of exposure is crucial for developing not only fluency but also the sociolinguistic competence needed to use language appropriately in different contexts (Vargas & Roque, 2019; Song & Kim, 2020).

One of the key benefits of authentic materials is that they allow learners to encounter language as it is used by native speakers, providing them with access to a range of speech patterns, expressions, and vocabulary that are not typically included in standard language textbooks (Ali & Yusof, 2019). Such exposure helps students acquire a more natural rhythm, intonation, and fluency in speaking, which

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are essential for effective communication in real-world settings. Additionally, authentic materials help learners to internalize language structures and vocabulary by presenting them in context, which enhances retention and recall (Richards, 2013; Mahmood & Wani, 2018).

Research has shown that the integration of authentic materials in the classroom leads to significant improvements in students' speaking proficiency. For example, studies indicate that learners who engage with authentic listening materials—such as films, podcasts, or radio broadcasts—develop better listening and speaking skills compared to those who rely solely on textbooks or scripted dialogues (Song & Kim, 2020; Chen et al., 2018). By listening to and imitating real conversations, students improve their pronunciation, intonation, and ability to use language spontaneously in various contexts (Mahmood & Wani, 2018). This is particularly important because speaking is a dynamic, interactive process that requires learners to produce language quickly and flexibly in response to the needs of the conversation (Richards & Rodgers, 2020).

Furthermore, authentic materials promote a more learner-centered approach to language teaching. When students interact with materials that reflect real-world language use, they are encouraged to engage actively with the content, fostering a deeper understanding of the language (Tao & Zhao, 2018). This type of learning environment not only increases students' motivation but also enables them to take ownership of their learning, as they are exposed to language that is both relevant and engaging (Vargas & Roque, 2019). This approach contrasts with traditional methods, where learners are often passive recipients of pre-packaged language content.

The role of interaction in language acquisition is crucial, particularly in speaking. Authentic materials provide opportunities for students to engage in meaningful conversations, which can simulate real-world communication scenarios (Tao & Zhao, 2018). For instance, using video clips of interviews or debates allows learners to practice speaking in contexts where negotiation of meaning, clarification, and repair are necessary (Richards & Rodgers, 2020). These interactions enhance learners' ability to produce fluent speech, as they practice responding to language that is unpredictable and requires immediate comprehension and output (Song & Kim, 2020).

In addition to improving fluency, authentic materials contribute to the development of students' cultural awareness. Exposure to authentic language in diverse social and cultural contexts helps students understand how language varies depending on the situation, audience, and purpose (Ali & Yusof, 2019). This cultural competence is essential for effective communication, as it allows learners to understand not just the "how" but also the "why" of language use (Mahmood & Wani, 2018).

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Moreover, authentic materials allow learners to encounter different accents and dialects, which is important for improving their listening comprehension and speaking adaptability (Richards, 2013). This empirical study seeks to examine the impact of authentic materials on EFL learners' speaking skills. By investigating how exposure to real-world language use influences students' speaking fluency, vocabulary acquisition, and sociolinguistic competence, the study aims to provide practical insights for language educators seeking to integrate authentic materials into their teaching practices. The findings of this study will contribute to the ongoing dialogue about effective language teaching strategies and provide actionable recommendations for enhancing speaking instruction through the use of authentic materials.

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research designs to assess the effectiveness of authentic materials in enhancing speaking skills among A2-level EFL learners. The quasi-experimental framework was particularly suited for evaluating the impact of real-world materials—such as podcasts, videos, and articles—on learners' oral communication skills. The intervention involved the pedagogical use of authentic materials designed to reflect natural language use, enabling the assessment of changes in students' speaking competence over the course of the study.

Participants

The target population consisted of EFL learners enrolled in the first year of an undergraduate program in Mechanical Engineering. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling method was used to select 30 participants, all of whom had comparable A2-level English proficiency as determined by a diagnostic pre-test. This sample size was considered adequate for performing statistical analyses while also allowing for meaningful qualitative insights into learners' experiences with authentic materials. Participants were informed of the study's goals and consented to participation, ensuring that ethical standards were met throughout the process.

Instruments for Data Collection

Multiple data collection instruments were employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data on the impact of authentic materials on the development of speaking skills:

Speaking Performance Assessments

Two speaking performance assessments were designed: a pre-test and a post-test, both aligned with the CEFR A2-level speaking descriptors. These tests included structured tasks such as guided

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interviews, picture-based discussions, and role-playing exercises. The tests assessed two main areas: fluency (the ability to speak fluidly and coherently) and accuracy (correct use of grammar and vocabulary). The pre-test was conducted before the intervention to establish a baseline for each participant's speaking ability, while the post-test aimed to identify improvements after the intervention period.

Student Satisfaction and Engagement Survey

At the conclusion of the intervention, participants completed a Likert-scale survey designed to assess their perceptions of the authenticity, usefulness, and engagement level of the materials used. The survey also sought to measure motivational aspects of the intervention, including how the materials influenced students' enthusiasm for language learning and their sense of progress in speaking skills. This tool provided additional qualitative data on learners' experiences with authentic materials, complementing the quantitative speaking performance tests.

Procedure

The study was conducted in three distinct phases, each designed to address specific research questions:

- **Pre-test Phase:** Initially, all participants took the diagnostic speaking pre-test. This assessment was used to evaluate each student's starting level of speaking proficiency, with a focus on fluency and accuracy, according to the CEFR A2 descriptors. The pre-test also allowed for the collection of baseline data to compare against post-intervention results.
- **Intervention Phase:** The six-week intervention period focused on the use of authentic materials in weekly 60-minute sessions. Each session was designed to simulate real-world communication scenarios, such as interviews, debates, and storytelling, using materials like podcasts, YouTube videos, articles, and dialogues from real-life situations. These materials were carefully selected to reflect authentic language use in contexts relevant to the learners' personal and professional lives. Throughout the intervention, students participated in activities such as discussion groups, pronunciation drills, and role-playing exercises aimed at enhancing their speaking abilities in both formal and informal contexts.
- **Post-test Phase:** After the six-week intervention, participants were reassessed using the same speaking performance test as the pre-test. The post-test was designed to measure improvements in speaking fluency and accuracy, allowing for a direct comparison with

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baseline data. Students were also asked to reflect on their experience with the materials and provide feedback through the satisfaction survey.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize performance trends across all participants. An inferential statistical analysis, specifically the paired-samples t-test, was employed to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between pre- and post-test results, thereby assessing the effectiveness of the authentic materials on speaking skills. The qualitative data from the student satisfaction survey were analyzed using thematic coding to identify common themes related to students' engagement, motivation, and perceived improvement in their speaking abilities. The combination of these methods allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of the intervention.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical guidelines for educational research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully briefed on the study's objectives, procedures, and their rights throughout the research process. Participants were assured that their data would remain confidential and that their participation was voluntary. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Limitations and Delimitations

While the study aimed to yield valuable insights into the use of authentic materials in EFL instruction, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted at a single institution, and the sample size of 30 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or larger populations. Second, while the intervention lasted six weeks, this duration may not have been sufficient to capture long-term improvements in speaking proficiency. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from the student satisfaction survey, which could be influenced by individual biases or the novelty of using authentic materials. Finally, although the research design focused on a specific proficiency level (A2), future studies could explore the effectiveness of authentic materials for learners at different proficiency levels or across other language skills, such as listening or writing.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

The study was conducted with a group of 30 first-year students enrolled in the Mechanical Engineering program. Over the course of a six-week intervention, students were exposed to a variety of authentic materials, including podcasts, news articles, videos, and real-life conversations, aimed at enhancing their English speaking skills. Diagnostic assessments were administered before and after the intervention to assess the impact of these materials on students' speaking proficiency.

Pretest and Posttest Performance

Data from the pretest and posttest were analyzed to measure any improvements in students' speaking abilities. The results were analyzed using a paired-samples t-test to determine statistical significance.

- **Pretest:** Before the intervention, the average speaking score was 65 out of 100, reflecting a basic level of speaking proficiency.
- **Posttest:** After the six-week intervention, the average score increased to 85 out of 100.

This 20-point improvement highlights a significant enhancement in students' speaking skills, indicating that exposure to authentic materials had a positive impact on their proficiency.

Statistical Analysis

The paired-samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest results ($p < 0.05$), confirming that the use of authentic materials in the classroom led to a measurable improvement in speaking skills. This suggests that integrating authentic materials into the learning process can effectively support the development of speaking proficiency at the A2 level.

Satisfaction Survey Results

A Likert-scale satisfaction survey was administered at the end of the intervention to capture student feedback on their experience with the authentic materials used. The results revealed the following:

- **Motivation:** 85% of students reported increased motivation to learn English through the use of authentic materials such as podcasts, real-world videos, and interactive dialogues.
- **Understanding:** 75% of participants stated that the authentic materials helped them better understand the meaning of words and expressions in speaking activities.
- **Recommendation:** 90% of participants indicated that they would recommend the use of these authentic materials to other learners.

These results highlight a high level of student satisfaction, suggesting that authentic materials were perceived as both engaging and beneficial for improving speaking skills.

Additional Observations

Throughout the intervention, students displayed increased participation and enthusiasm during speaking activities. The materials encouraged interaction, peer collaboration, and real-world problem-solving, creating a dynamic and competitive classroom atmosphere that fostered greater student engagement. The interactive nature of the materials promoted a sense of authenticity, making language learning feel more relevant and applicable to students' daily lives.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide strong evidence supporting the effectiveness of authentic materials in enhancing speaking skills among A2-level EFL learners. The 20-point increase in average speaking performance demonstrates significant cognitive gains in areas such as vocabulary usage, fluency, and articulation. This aligns with previous research that has shown how exposure to authentic language in context can facilitate the acquisition of more natural language patterns and improve learners' ability to engage in spontaneous, real-world conversations (Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Liu & Fan, 2014). By interacting with materials like podcasts, news videos, and dialogues, students were able to practice language as it is used by native speakers, which is essential for developing both fluency and accuracy (Richards, 2013).

The high level of student satisfaction, as reflected in the survey results, underscores the motivational benefits of using authentic materials. A majority of students reported feeling more motivated to engage in English learning, which is a key factor for successful language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2009). Additionally, 75% of the participants indicated that they gained a deeper understanding of vocabulary through the use of authentic materials. This suggests that when learners encounter language in real contexts, they are better able to internalize and retain vocabulary, which is essential for improving speaking proficiency (Song & Kim, 2020).

Furthermore, the collaborative and interactive nature of the speaking tasks created a positive classroom dynamic, encouraging peer-to-peer communication and increasing overall student engagement. These interactions are crucial for developing speaking proficiency, as they allow students to practice negotiation of meaning, fluency, and error correction in real-time (Tao & Zhao, 2018). The competitive aspects of the tasks also added an element of fun, motivating students to participate more actively and put more effort into their learning.

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Despite these promising results, there are some limitations to consider. The sample size of 30 students was relatively small, and the study was conducted at a single institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the intervention lasted for only six weeks, which may not have been enough to capture long-term improvements in speaking proficiency. It would be beneficial for future studies to examine the sustained impact of authentic materials over a longer period and across different educational settings. Moreover, the study focused primarily on speaking skills; therefore, further research could explore the impact of authentic materials on other language skills such as listening, writing, and reading. It would also be valuable to compare the effectiveness of different types of authentic materials, such as audio-only versus video-based resources, in developing specific aspects of speaking proficiency.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the importance of integrating authentic materials into EFL instruction to improve speaking skills. The significant improvement observed in students' speaking abilities, combined with their positive feedback, suggests that real-world materials provide a rich and engaging environment for language learning. By incorporating these materials into their teaching practices, educators can enhance students' linguistic competence and increase their motivation to learn English in a more dynamic, communicative way.

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