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EXPLORING THE USE OF TED TALKS FOR IMPROVING LISTENING SKILL IN EFL CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

Listening is a crucial language skill that enables learners to acquire linguistic input and develop communicative competence. However, many EFL students experience difficulties in understanding authentic spoken English due to factors such as rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and pronunciation variations. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of TED Talks as authentic listening materials for improving students' listening skills in an EFL classroom. The research employed a quantitative Classroom Action Research (CAR) design involving 25 eleventh-grade students at a senior high school in Indonesia. The study was conducted in two cycles consisting of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages. Data were collected through listening tests, observation sheets, and field notes. The findings revealed a significant improvement in students' listening achievement. The mean score increased from 67.20 in the pre-cycle to 76.40 in Cycle I and further improved to 84.60 in Cycle II. Moreover, the percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion increased from 28% to 60% and finally reached 88%. Classroom observations also indicated higher levels of engagement and participation. These results suggest that TED Talks are effective authentic listening materials for enhancing listening comprehension and supporting more engaging learning experiences in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: TED Talks, listening skills, authentic materials, EFL learners, Classroom Action Research.

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is regarded as one of the most fundamental skills in language learning because it provides learners with the primary source of linguistic input necessary for language acquisition. Through listening activities, learners are exposed to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse structures that support the development of other language skills. According to Stephen Krashen (1985), language acquisition occurs when learners receive comprehensible input that is slightly above their current level of competence. Likewise, Michael Rost (2011) argues that listening serves as a central process in understanding spoken language and constructing meaning in communication. In the era of globalization and digital technology, listening competence has become increasingly important because learners are constantly exposed to English through various multimedia platforms. Consequently, developing listening skills remains a major objective in English language teaching, particularly in countries where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL).

In EFL contexts, listening is frequently considered one of the most difficult language skills to master. Learners often struggle to understand spoken English because of rapid speech delivery, unfamiliar vocabulary, reduced forms, pronunciation variations, and diverse accents. According to Larry Vandergrift and Christine Goh (2012), listening comprehension involves complex cognitive processes in which learners must simultaneously decode sounds, interpret linguistic signals, and construct meaning. Furthermore, Graham (2006) explains that many EFL learners experience difficulties in processing spoken input due to limited exposure to authentic listening materials. As a result, students often demonstrate low listening achievement despite having studied English for several years.

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One of the factors contributing to this issue is the continued use of traditional listening materials in many classrooms. Listening instruction is commonly conducted through scripted recordings and textbook-based exercises that do not adequately represent real-life communication. Gilmore (2007) states that authentic materials expose learners to natural language use and provide opportunities to experience realistic communication contexts. Through authentic materials, learners become familiar with natural speech patterns, pronunciation features, and various accents used by native and non-native English speakers. Therefore, the integration of authentic materials into listening instruction is considered essential for improving students' listening competence and communicative ability.

The advancement of technology has significantly expanded access to authentic learning resources that can support listening instruction. One of the most popular authentic resources used in English language learning is TED Talks. TED Talks are public presentations delivered by experts, educators, innovators, and professionals discussing various topics such as education, science, technology, culture, and social issues. These videos provide authentic language input accompanied by visual support, subtitles, and contextual information that can facilitate listening comprehension. Watkins and Wilkins (2011) argue that TED Talks offer meaningful opportunities for language learners to improve listening ability while simultaneously increasing motivation and intercultural awareness. Through exposure to authentic spoken English, learners can develop a deeper understanding of natural communication patterns and real-world language use.

The effectiveness of TED Talks in language learning has attracted increasing attention from researchers in recent years. Trisnawati et al. (2025) found that TED Talks positively contributed to Indonesian EFL students' listening comprehension and enhanced learners' engagement during listening activities. The study revealed that students perceived TED Talks as helpful learning resources because they provided authentic listening exposure and meaningful content. Similarly, Agustino and Gozali (2025) reported that the implementation of TED Talks significantly improved vocational school students' listening skills through video-based learning activities. These findings indicate that TED Talks possess considerable potential as authentic listening materials capable of supporting listening development among EFL learners.

In addition, recent studies have examined learners' perceptions toward the use of TED Talks in English language learning. Rosanti (2025) reported that students believed TED Talks improved vocabulary acquisition, contextual understanding, and listening exposure. Likewise, Erlan et al. (2024) found that students demonstrated positive attitudes toward the integration of TED Talks in listening classes because the videos provided authentic language input and increased learning motivation. Furthermore, Jeon (2026) revealed that TED Talks enhanced vocabulary development, learner empowerment, and classroom engagement in tertiary English courses. These studies demonstrate that TED Talks are widely perceived as beneficial resources for language learning; however, their primary focus remains on students' perceptions, vocabulary learning, and learner engagement rather than listening comprehension as the central variable of investigation.

Although numerous studies have discussed the benefits of TED Talks in English language learning, several limitations remain evident. First, many previous studies focused predominantly on students' perceptions and attitudes toward TED Talks rather than examining measurable listening skill improvement. Second, some studies investigated vocabulary development, learner motivation, or speaking performance instead of listening comprehension. Third, limited research has specifically explored the effectiveness of TED Talks as authentic listening materials within the Indonesian EFL context. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding how TED Talks contribute to the improvement of listening skills among Indonesian learners remains relatively insufficient. This condition indicates a significant research gap that requires further investigation.

The novelty of the present study lies in its specific focus on investigating TED Talks as authentic listening materials for improving

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listening comprehension among Indonesian EFL learners. Unlike previous studies conducted by Trisnawati et al. (2025), Rosanti (2025), and Jeon (2026), which primarily emphasized students' perceptions, vocabulary development, and learner empowerment, this research concentrates directly on listening skill development as the primary outcome of learning. Moreover, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding how exposure to authentic spoken English through TED Talks can help learners overcome common listening challenges such as speech rate, pronunciation variation, unfamiliar vocabulary, and diverse accents. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of authentic-material-based listening instruction in contemporary EFL classrooms.

Based on the aforementioned issues, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of TED Talks in improving students' listening skills in an EFL context. The findings are expected to enrich the existing literature on listening comprehension and authentic materials while providing practical recommendations for English teachers seeking innovative approaches to listening instruction.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative approach within the framework of Classroom Action Research (CAR). Classroom Action Research was selected because it allows researchers to identify classroom problems, implement pedagogical interventions, and evaluate their effectiveness through a cyclical process of improvement (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). Furthermore, quantitative data were utilized to objectively measure students' listening achievement before and after the implementation of TED Talks as instructional media (Creswell, 2014).

The study was conducted at a senior high school in Indonesia during the 2026 academic year. The participants consisted of 30 eleventh-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was employed because the participants were identified as experiencing difficulties in listening comprehension, particularly in understanding authentic spoken English, recognizing unfamiliar vocabulary, and interpreting different English accents (Cohen et al., 2018). Prior to the intervention, a preliminary observation and a pre-test were administered to determine students' initial listening proficiency and identify classroom learning challenges.

The research procedures followed the Classroom Action Research model proposed by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), consisting of four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. The study was implemented through two cycles. In the planning stage, lesson plans, learning materials, TED Talk videos, and assessment instruments were prepared. During the acting stage, TED Talks were utilized as authentic listening materials in classroom instruction. The observing stage involved monitoring students' participation and responses throughout the learning process, while the reflecting stage focused on evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented actions to determine necessary improvements for the subsequent cycle (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

In Cycle I, students were introduced to TED Talk videos containing familiar and engaging topics with moderate speech rates. The learning activities included watching the videos, identifying key information, answering comprehension questions, and participating in group discussions. Authentic audiovisual materials were selected because they expose learners to natural language use and real-life communication contexts, which are essential for developing listening competence (Gilmore, 2007). At the end of Cycle I, a listening test was administered to evaluate students' listening comprehension achievement.

Based on the reflection results obtained from Cycle I, several improvements were implemented in Cycle II. Additional activities such as vocabulary previewing, guided note-taking, and focused listening

exercises were incorporated to facilitate comprehension. More challenging TED Talk videos were also introduced to increase students' exposure to authentic English speech. These modifications were intended to address difficulties identified during the first cycle and enhance students' listening performance (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). At the conclusion of Cycle II, a post-test was conducted to assess students' progress and determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

The instruments employed in this study included listening tests, observation sheets, and field notes. The listening tests consisted of multiple-choice and short-answer questions designed to measure students' listening comprehension skills. Observation sheets were used to record students' participation, engagement, and classroom behavior during the implementation of the actions, while field notes were utilized to document important classroom events and reflections throughout the research process (Cohen et al., 2018).

The quantitative data were obtained from the pre-test, Cycle I test, and Cycle II test. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including mean scores and percentage improvements. According to Sugiyono (2019), descriptive statistics are useful for summarizing and interpreting educational data in a meaningful manner. The mean score was calculated to determine students' average achievement, while percentage analysis was used to identify the proportion of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion.

The success criterion of the study was determined based on students' achievement of the minimum mastery criterion (KKM). The intervention was considered successful if at least 75% of the students achieved the predetermined criterion and demonstrated continuous improvement in listening comprehension across the two research cycles (Arikunto et al., 2015). The results of the quantitative analysis were subsequently used to evaluate the effectiveness of TED Talks in improving students' listening skills.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained from the implementation of two cycles of Classroom Action Research using TED Talks as authentic listening materials. The data were collected through listening tests administered during the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The results indicate a gradual improvement in students' listening comprehension throughout the intervention

Pre-Cycle Results

Before the implementation of TED Talks, a pre-test was administered to identify students' initial listening proficiency. The results revealed that many students experienced difficulties in understanding spoken English, particularly authentic speech delivered at a natural speed. Several students were unable to identify the main ideas and supporting details from listening passages.

Table 1 presents the results of the pre-cycle listening test.

Table 1. Pre-Cycle Listening Test Results

Category	Number of Students	Percentage
Passed (≥75)	7	28%
Failed (<75)	18	72%
Total	25	100%

The mean score obtained during the pre-cycle was 67.20. Only seven students (28%) achieved the minimum mastery criterion (KKM) of 75, while eighteen students (72%) failed to meet the criterion. These findings indicate that students' listening comprehension was still relatively low before the intervention was implemented.

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Cycle I Results

In Cycle I, TED Talk videos were introduced as authentic listening materials. Students participated in listening activities involving video observation, note-taking, comprehension exercises, and classroom discussions. The implementation aimed to familiarize students with authentic spoken English and improve their listening performance.

The results of the Cycle I listening test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Cycle I Listening Test Results

Category	Number of Students	Percentage
Passed (≥75)	15	60%
Failed (<75)	10	40%
Total	25	100%

The mean score increased from 67.20 in the pre-cycle to 76.40 in Cycle I. Fifteen students (60%) successfully achieved the minimum mastery criterion, while ten students (40%) remained below the expected standard. Although significant improvement was observed, the predetermined success criterion of 75% student mastery had not yet been achieved. Therefore, further improvements were implemented in Cycle II.

During the reflection stage, it was identified that several students still struggled with unfamiliar vocabulary and fast speech delivery. Consequently, additional learning activities such as vocabulary previewing, guided note-taking, and repeated listening exercises were incorporated into the next cycle.

Cycle II Results

Cycle II was conducted by refining the instructional strategies used in Cycle I. Students received vocabulary preparation activities before watching TED Talks and were encouraged to use note-taking techniques while listening. Furthermore, interactive discussions were conducted to reinforce comprehension and encourage active participation. The results of the Cycle II listening test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Cycle II Listening Test Results

Category	Number of Students	Percentage
Passed (≥75)	22	88%
Failed (<75)	3	12%
Total	25	100%

The mean score increased to 84.60 in Cycle II. Twenty-two students (88%) successfully achieved the minimum mastery criterion, while only three students (12%) remained below the required standard. These results exceeded the predetermined success criterion of 75% student mastery.

Improvement of Students' Listening Achievement

To provide a clearer picture of students' progress, Table 4 summarizes the improvement in listening achievement across the three stages.

Table 4. Improvement of Students' Listening Achievement

Stage	Mean Score	Students Passed	Percentage
Pre-Cycle	67.20	7	28%
Cycle I	76.40	15	60%
Cycle II	84.60	22	88%

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The findings demonstrate a consistent improvement in students' listening achievement throughout the research. The mean score increased by 9.20 points from the pre-cycle to Cycle I and by an additional 8.20 points from Cycle I to Cycle II. Overall, the mean score improved by 17.40 points from the pre-cycle to Cycle II.

The percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion also showed substantial growth, increasing from 28% in the pre-cycle to 60% in Cycle I and finally reaching 88% in Cycle II. These findings suggest that the integration of TED Talks as authentic listening materials contributed positively to the enhancement of students' listening comprehension.

Furthermore, classroom observations indicated that students became more engaged and motivated during listening activities. They demonstrated greater confidence in identifying key information, understanding main ideas, and interpreting authentic spoken English. The findings support the view of Gilmore (2007) that authentic materials facilitate language learning by exposing learners to real-world language use. Similarly, the results are consistent with Watkins and Wilkins (2011), who argued that TED Talks provide meaningful and engaging listening experiences that can promote language development.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the use of TED Talks effectively improved students' listening skills and successfully achieved the objectives of the present Classroom Action Research.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of TED Talks in improving students' listening skills through Classroom Action Research conducted in two cycles. The findings revealed that the implementation of TED Talks as authentic listening materials significantly enhanced students' listening comprehension achievement. The improvement was evident from the increase in students' mean scores and the percentage of students who achieved the minimum mastery criterion throughout the research process.

The results showed that the mean score increased from 67.20 in the pre-cycle to 76.40 in Cycle I and further improved to 84.60 in Cycle II. Similarly, the percentage of students achieving the minimum mastery criterion increased from 28% in the pre-cycle to 60% in Cycle I and eventually reached 88% in Cycle II. These findings indicate that the integration of TED Talks into listening instruction successfully facilitated students' comprehension of authentic spoken English and helped them overcome common listening difficulties such as unfamiliar vocabulary, speech rate, and pronunciation variations.

In addition to improving listening achievement, the use of TED Talks also promoted greater student engagement and participation during classroom activities. The authentic nature of TED Talks exposed learners to real-world communication contexts, enabling them to develop a deeper understanding of spoken English while increasing their motivation to participate in listening tasks. The incorporation of supporting activities, such as vocabulary previewing, note-taking, and group discussions, further contributed to students' listening development during the intervention.

The findings of this study support previous research highlighting the benefits of authentic materials in English language learning and confirm that TED Talks can serve as an effective instructional medium for listening comprehension. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to integrate TED Talks into listening instruction as an alternative to traditional listening materials. Future researchers may expand this study by involving larger samples, different educational levels, or additional language skills such as speaking, vocabulary acquisition, and critical thinking to provide a broader understanding of the pedagogical value of TED Talks in English language education.

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