

**STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO THE USE OF AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ESL
LISTENING LESSONS: THE CASE OF UPPER SIX FORM STUDENTS
IN SMK BATU LINTANG, KUCHING**

by

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Abstract

Students' responses to the use of authentic materials in ESL listening lessons: The case of Upper Six Form students at SMK Batu Lintang, Kuching.

Helena Bulan Apoi

In the last twenty years, the use of authentic listening materials has become common in ESL classroom teaching that the aim is to increase the students' interest in the lesson, participation in the task, enjoyment in the lesson and persistence with the task throughout the whole lesson. In this study, the aim is to investigate the students responses to the use of authentic listening materials in ESL listening lessons in terms of their interest in the lesson, persistence to the learning task, enjoyment and participation in the learning task. The data was collected over a two-week-observation (ten times on ten different days) for a thirty minute listening lesson. This involved 40 Upper Six form students at SMK Batu Lintang. The class used authentic materials and non-authentic materials. The data was collected on alternate days when the students were performing the tasks related to the listening materials.

The findings suggest to some extent, students reported authentic listening materials such as the song to be significantly more interesting, exciting, absorbing and increase their enjoyment, persistence to the learning task and participation in the learning task among the other listening materials. However, the overall finding revealed that the students' interest in the lesson, persistence to the learning task, enjoyment and participation in the learning task increased significantly when non-authentic listening materials were used compared to the other authentic listening materials such as the news broadcast, the telephone conversation, the interview and the announcements.

Abstrak

Reaksi pelajar terhadap penggunaan bahan pengajaran yang asli dalam aktiviti pendengaran di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris: Kajian kes pelajar Tingkatan Enam Atas di SMK Batu Lintang, Kuching.

Helena Bulan Apoi

Sejak dua puluh tahun kebelakangan ini, penggunaan bahan pengajaran yang asli di dalam aktiviti pendengaran di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Kedua telah menjadi lazim dengan tujuan untuk meningkatkan minat pelajar di dalam aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran, penglibatan, keseronokan dan ketekunan dalam tugas mereka sepanjang aktiviti dijalankan. Tujuan kajian ini dijalankan adalah untuk menyelidiki reaksi pelajar-pelajar terhadap penggunaan bahan pengajaran yang asli untuk aktiviti pendengaran di dalam kelas dari segi minat mereka terhadap pengajaran dan pembelajaran, ketekunan di dalam melakukan tugas mereka sepanjang aktiviti dijalankan, keseronokkan serta penglibatan mereka di dalam aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran di dalam kelas. Pemerhatian telah dijalankan untuk mengumpul data selama dua minggu (10 kali pada 10 hari yang berbeza) dalam jangka waktu tiga puluh minit untuk aktiviti pendengaran di dalam sebuah kelas yang seramai 40 orang pelajar Tingkatan Enam Atas di SMK Batu Lintang, Kuching. Kelas ini telah menggunakan bahan pengajaran yang asli semasa aktiviti pendengaran di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris dan selang-seli dengan penggunaan bahan pengajaran yang bukan asli. Data telah dikumpulkan semasa pelajar-pelajar sedang melakukan tugas yang berkaitan dengan aktiviti pendengaran mereka di dalam kelas. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam kajian ini ialah dua jenis borang pemerhatian serta satu borang soal selidik untuk diisi oleh para responden.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa ketekunan pelajar di dalam kelas, minat terhadap pembelajaran, kesungguhan, keseronokan dan penglibatan dalam melakukan aktiviti di dalam kelas telah meningkat apabila bahan pengajaran asli seperti lagu digunakan berbanding dengan bahan pengajaran yang lain. Mereka menyatakan bahawa bahan pengajaran yang asli seperti lagu Bahasa Inggeris lebih menarik, melekakan, meningkatkan minat mereka untuk belajar, menyeronokkan dan menggalakkan mereka untuk lebih tekun lagi dalam melakukan aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran di dalam kelas. Tetapi, secara keseluruhannya, hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa minat pelajar terhadap pembelajaran, kesungguhan, keseronokan dan penglibatan mereka di dalam aktiviti pengajaran dan pembelajaran sepanjang aktiviti telah berkurang apabila bahan pengajaran yang asli digunakan dalam aktiviti pendengaran berbanding dengan penggunaan bahan pengajaran yang bukan asli seperti berita, perbualan telefon, pengumuman dan temuduga.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. EAP: English for Academic Purposes
2. EFL: English as Foreign Language
3. ESL: English as Second Language
4. ESP: English for Social Purposes
5. MUET: Malaysian University English Test
6. SLA: Second Language Acquisition
7. SMK: Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan
8. SPM: Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the background of the study. It is then followed by the statement of the problem, the research objectives, the research questions, the significance of the study, the definitions of key terms and the limitations of the study.

1.2 Background of the study

In my seven years of experience teaching English as a Second Language in one of the rural schools in Sarawak, I found that most of my students were unable to understand what is being said in English Language in spite of years of learning the language in school compared to those studying in the urban schools. Why does this happen? Many view this problem as due to the lack of exposure to the use of English Language from outside the classroom, specifically the use of authentic listening materials in the listening lessons. So, this scenario proved to me that the lessons conducted in the classroom do not seem to have adequate preparation for the 'real world'. The 'real world' refers to the ability to understand what is being said in English, both inside and outside the classroom. Carter and Nunan (2001) claim that "in second language acquisition (SLA) research, it is the 'linguistic environment' that serves as the stage for SLA" (p.8). The environment such as listening to authentic materials in the target language provides the linguistic input. The input is in the form of listening opportunities, which are embedded in the social and academic events. In order to acquire the language, learners must come to understand the language in those

events. This accessibility is made possible by accommodating the use of authentic listening materials in ESL listening lessons.

It is now generally accepted that students need to listen to the kind of authentic English materials as the same kind that they will actually encounter in real life. This is important so that they will be able to understand and respond in English. In other words, communicate in English. According to Bloomfield (1942) cited in Carter and Nunan (2001), “one learns to understand and speak a language primarily by hearing and imitating native speakers” (p.7). However, this idea can be argued as it is not really true that one learns to understand and speak a language primarily by hearing and imitating native speakers. Why should learners imitate native speakers? There are other factors that influence one’s learning to understand and speak a language. For example, through communication with others using English. Besides that, listening to authentic materials exposes the learners to the real language, as how it would be used in the real world. Therefore, the use of authentic listening materials in English as a second language classroom is essential to expose the learners to the target language as how it is used outside the classroom.

Wong et al. (1995) point out that “most language teachers find authentic material as a rich source for planning and conducting teaching and learning activities to enrich students’ experience in the learning and using of English in the real world and helping them to generate learning strategy for learning English and other subjects” (p.318). Little, Devitt and Singleton (1989) further supported the idea that “authentic texts bring learners closer to the target language culture such as foreign culture, making learning more enjoyable and therefore more motivating” (p.26).

1.3 Statement of problem

Most ESL teachers are aware that there is a need to use authentic materials in ESL classroom to motivate the learners to learn the language. However, several studies (e.g. Wong et al., 1995; Peacock, 1998), have shown that the success of the use of authentic materials in ESL classroom rests on a large extent on how well it is received by the students. Some learners response positively to the use of authentic materials in ESL classroom, for example the use of authentic listening materials in listening lessons may increase the learners interest in the lesson, participation in the task, enjoyment of the lesson and persistence with the task throughout the whole lesson while others response negatively.

Many researchers however, claim that authentic materials have a positive effect on learner motivation in English as a second language classroom. Allwright (1979), Freeman and Holden (1986) cited in Peacock (1997) claim that “authentic materials motivate learners because they are intrinsically more interesting or stimulating than artificial or non-authentic materials” (p.144). Whereas, some researchers (e.g. Williams, 1983 & 1984; Freeman and Holden, 1986; Morrison, 1989) cited in Peacock (1997) maintain that “authentic materials reduce learner motivation because they are too difficult” (p. 144). They are too difficult because the sentences and grammatical structures used are more complex as well as the words, which may be unfamiliar to most learners and not suitable to the students’ level of language ability.

As such, there is a need to find out more on the use of authentic listening materials in the context of ESL classroom in Malaysia in order to create an awareness and provide more exposure to the teachers of English Language in schools on matters related to students' responses to the use of authentic listening materials in ESL listening lessons. Thus, in this study, the focus is to find out what are the effects of using authentic listening materials in ESL listening lessons in the context of ESL in Malaysia, specifically the Form Six students of SMK Batu Lintang, Sarawak.

1.4 Research objectives

The aim of this study is to find out the ELS students' responses to the use of authentic listening materials in terms of their

- i. interest in the lesson
- ii. participation in the task
- iii. enjoyment in the lesson
- iv. persistence with the task throughout the whole lesson

1.5 Research questions

The following questions will be used as the focus of the study:

- i. Does the use of authentic materials in ESL listening lessons increase students' enthusiasm?
- ii. Does the use of authentic materials in ESL listening lessons encourage students' participation in the teaching and learning activities?
- iii. Does the use of authentic materials in ESL listening lessons increase the students' enjoyment in the lesson?

- iv. Does the use of authentic materials in ESL listening lessons increase students' persistence with the task given?

1.6 Significance of the study

The findings from this study will contribute to the teachers of ESL's understanding of the students' responses to use of authentic listening materials in ESL listening lessons. The teachers need to select authentic listening materials to suit their students' level of language proficiency, age, interests, students' schemata and activity for listening activities in ESL classroom. Those criteria are important to enable the students to learn better or to make the lesson successful.

Besides that, this study reports the direct responses of a group of ESL learners towards the use of authentic materials in the listening lessons. So, the findings can be used as a guideline specifically in selecting authentic listening materials for the English teachers in schools.

This study also highlights some of the strengths and weaknesses of the use of authentic materials in listening lessons. Thus, the results will form the basis for the suggestions and recommendations for teachers to improve their strategies in selecting and using authentic listening materials in ESL listening lessons.

1.7 Definitions of key terms

1.7.1 Response

According to Richards, J. et al. (1992), "A response is the behaviour, which is produced as a reaction to a stimulus" (p.354). Hornby (2000) defines reaction as

“what someone does, says or thinks as a result of something that has happened” (p.1096). In this study the stimulus used is the authentic materials. The responses to the use of the authentic materials refer to the reactions to the materials being used in the classroom. This is indicated by the students’ behaviour in classroom (as reflected in their interest and enthusiasm for materials used in the classroom); their persistence with the learning task (as indicated by levels of attention or action for a specified duration) and levels of concentration and enjoyment (as shown through non-verbal actions). In this study, their responses to the use of the materials can be obtained in written form through their answers given on the structured questionnaires and worksheet as well as by observing the person’s behaviour towards the stimulus. There are many kinds of responses given by listeners such as verbal and non-verbal response. According to Ur (1984) these may be “some kind of overt, immediate response to what has been said such as either verbalizing the answer to a question or non-verbal action in accordance with instructions or the nod of the head, facial expression, eye-contact, interruptions and note taking” (p.24). In this study, the responses are the learners’ written work based on the listening exercises such as filling in the blanks, stating whether true or false for statements and answering multiple-choice questions as well as students’ discussion in groups of four based on the listening exercises. Non-verbal responses refers to the nod of the head.

1.7.2 Authentic Materials for the Listening Skills

In this study, the authentic material as mentioned by David Forman (1986) cited in Underwood (1989) is “...it is produced in response to real life communicative needs” (p.98). Nunan (1988) refers the term “authentic” materials to describe those that “reflect the outside world,” and “have been produced for purposes other than to

teach the language” (p.99). This means that the materials are not produced for language teaching purposes. Some examples of authentic listening materials are radio broadcasts, music, television, videos, recordings of authentic interactions and poems. For the purpose of this study, the authentic materials used are a pop song entitled “Sleeping Child” taken from The Best of Michael Learns To Rock cassette disc (see Appendix 1b), a radio news broadcast (see Appendix 2b), a telephone conversation from the radio (see Appendix 3b), an interview from the radio (see Appendix 4b) and some announcements made at the Kuching International Airport (see Appendix 5b). These materials have been produced not for pedagogic purposes.

1.7.3 Non-authentic Materials

According to David (1986) cited in Underwood (1989),

“Authentic material or text is considered as not authentic if it (materials) was produced - however skilfully – for some other purposes, e.g. as an imitation of a radio news bulletin for purposes of language teaching.”(pp.98-99).

Non-authentic materials are specifically prepared for the teaching and learning of English, for instance scripted texts, textbooks, workbook and reference books. For the purpose of this study, the non-authentic materials used are a children song entitled “You are my sunshine” taken from an accompanying listening text from course book (see Appendix 6b), a recording of five news items taken from the MUET December 2001 (see Appendix 7b), a recording of a telephone conversation between two friends taken from a scripted dialogue for pedagogic purposes (see Appendix 8b), an interview taken from the MUET October 2004 (see Appendix 9b) and some announcements taken from the Model Test Papers for the MUET tape for listening test (see Appendix 10b).

1.7.4 Listening

Underwood (1989) defines listening as “an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear” (p.1). Heinich, R. et al. (1985) stated that listening is a psychological process that begins with someone’s awareness of and attention to sounds or speech patterns (receiving), proceeds through identification and recognition of specific auditory signals (decoding), and ends in comprehension (understanding). In this study, the listening activities are based on listening texts such as filling in the blanks, stating whether true or false statements and answering multiple choices of questions (see worksheet on Appendices 1c, 2c, 3c, 4c, 5c, 6c, 7c, 8c, 9c and 10c). This means that one of the ways that we can evaluate the learners’ responses on the use of authentic materials in ESL listening lessons is by evaluating their performances on the listening tasks.

1.7.5 The Objectives of MUET Listening Lessons

In this study, the objectives of Malaysian University English Test (MUET) for listening as stated in the syllabus specifications for the Malaysian Post-secondary education are to enable students to understand various types of oral texts in social and academic contexts such as telephone conversations, meetings, announcements, news, documentaries, lectures, presentations, talks and discussions. The skills emphasized in listening lessons are listening for main ideas, listening for specific information, note-taking, paraphrasing, summarizing, inferencing, predicting, drawing conclusions, recognizing speakers’ attitudes, roles and relationships and listening critically (see Malaysian University English Test Regulations and Scheme of Test, Syllabus and Sample Questions, 2001, p.14). The listening materials that are normally used in MUET are non-authentic listening materials from various types of texts in social and

academic contexts such as telephone conversations, announcements, meetings, news, documentaries, lectures, presentations, talks and discussions.

1.7.6 Motivation

For this study, I have adopted the definition of motivation as defined as defined by Crookes and Schmidt (1991) cited in Peacock (1997). Motivation is the “interest in and enthusiasm for the materials used in class: persistence with the learning task, as indicated by levels of attention or action for an extended duration; and levels of concentration and enjoyment” (p.145). However, Ushioda (1993) cited in Peacock (1997) defines motivation as “practitioner-validated” (p.146) and adds that stimulated learners participation and enthusiasm are significant outcomes in themselves.

1.8 Limitations of the study

This study is only focussing on the students’ responses on the use of authentic listening materials in ESL classroom. There might be some other variables that may influence them in their responses to the use of the authentic listening materials such as their language ability, age, gender, topic of interests, the students’ previous knowledge, task difficulty and the activities that were carried out during the listening lessons. Thus, to reduce the level of the variability, the choices of the authentic materials used in the class are based on topic approach, whereby the topics are based on the learners’ interest, the students’ level of language ability and their previous knowledge. The tasks designed are appropriate to their level in which the listening skills that were being emphasized such as listening for main ideas, listening for

specific information, predicting, drawing conclusions and recognizing speakers' attitudes.

This study is confined to one of the secondary schools in Kuching due to the time and financial constraints. The participants are lower six students from SMK Batu Lintang. Since this a small scale research, the results from the findings must be considered within the scope of limitation. Nevertheless, the size of the sample is relatively not as important as the types or kinds of responses that I will get. The kinds of responses that I found out from this study revealed the true responses to the use of authentic listening materials though it is restricted to one particular school.

Apart from that, the study was carried out within a restricted time period, only ten days (five days to observe authentic materials in ESL listening lessons and five days for non-authentic materials) due to time constraints. As a result of this restriction, the learners might not be able to adapt themselves to the kind of authentic listening materials. For instance, the learners could not listen clearly to the authentic listening materials as one of the features of authentic listening texts is noisy as there are some background noises. Besides that, the researcher did not have enough time to get to know in depth the variables that influence the learners' response. The other variables that might influence the learners' response are pedagogical support from the teacher to enable them to understand the authentic listening texts better such as provision of a full range of cues (pictures and vocabulary explanation), duration period specified for listening lessons and the students' language level proficiency. Thus, the findings from the study cannot verify a valid generalisation for the students'