



The Effectiveness of Audio-Visual Aids in Enhancing Listening Comprehension in EFL Classrooms A Critical Review of Three Empirical Studies

ImadABADOU¹

University of Algiers2 (Algeria)

abadouimad@gmail.com

Mohamed OussamaLARIBI²

University of Algiers2 (Algeria)

mohamed.oussama.laribi@gmail.com

WafiaHELALA^{3*}

University of Algiers2 (Algeria)

helala.wafia@univ-alger2.dz

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Abstract

The implementation of technology in education offered various tools to support learners' engagement and skills development, particularly in EFL classrooms. This secondary research critically examines the effect of audio-visual aids in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension, through studies from different geographical backgrounds. The study started with the theoretical background by defining audio-visual aids, listening comprehension, and key elements related to both concepts.

It also explores theories supporting them, namely the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia learning, Dual-coding Theory, Krashen's Input Hypothesis, and the Affective Filter Hypothesis to understand how the integration of audio-visual aids enhances listening comprehension. In addition, it identifies key challenges such as cognitive overload, over-reliance on technology, technical issues, accessibility, and cultural and contextual constraints. This research also relies on a critical review of the three empirical studies. These studies were compared and contrasted in terms of their findings, and also discussed based on relevant theories and concepts.

The findings showed that audio-visual aids contributed positively to listening comprehension, by offering multimodal input, increasing learners' motivation, and also facilitating vocabulary understanding. However, one of the studies pointed out challenges that might face learners

such as input complexity when using authentic audio-visual aids among lower proficiency learners, suggesting effective and wise implementation of audio-visual aids that match learners' level.

Keywords: audio-visual aids, enhancing, listening comprehension; EFL classrooms

Introduction

Technology is a concept that has become pervasive in all domains, and education is no exception. In the past, teaching and learning relied heavily on memorization and lecture-based instruction, and it was limited to traditional tools such as blackboards and textbooks. However, in recent years, the integration of technological devices such as audio-visual aids into EFL classrooms has made the teaching and learning process more practical and enjoyable. Therefore, it may be posited that audio-visual aids are the perfect tools for developing listening comprehension, which is regarded as one of the most challenging aspects of language learning.

Listening is not only about hearing the words spoken, but it is also the art of interpreting, understanding, and responding to the meaning behind those words. Listening is an essential skill in acquiring a language, therefore, many EFL learners struggle to develop this skill because of the limited exposure to unfamiliar accents, authentic language and impractical teaching methods used by EFL teachers. Traditional materials may not be sufficient to address these challenges. In contrast, audio-visual aids can function as the perfect tool to meet the learners' auditory needs and facilitate the teaching learning process, as these aids can present spoken language in combination with visual cues, making it easier for learners to decode meaning and develop listening comprehension skills.

The present research aims to investigate the effectiveness of audio-visual aids in enhancing listening comprehension in EFL classrooms. The study explores how these aids improve learners' ability to comprehend aural input. Since it is secondary research, this study relies on the critical review of existing empirical studies relevant to the topic.

This study is mainly significant for EFL teachers, since it provides a clearer understanding of the effective implementation of audio-visual aids in teaching listening. Additionally, it contributes to the academic community by guiding future practices in language teaching. As the education system continues adapting to the technological age, understanding the function of audio-visual aids in EFL classrooms becomes even more important, making this study relevant to both educators and researchers in the field of language teaching.

1. The Role and Importance of Technology in Teaching and Learning

Technology has revolutionized learning by providing interactive and engaging educational tools. Audio-visual aids represent a powerful tool in this field, as they provide learners with visual and auditory input. This combination of words and pictures makes learning more vital than words alone (Mayer, 2014), offering contextual cues such as gestures and facial expressions, which aid learners in decoding meaning.

Additionally, according to Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), an individual engaged in the learning process may possess either a high or low affective filter, which encompasses the degree of motivation, stress, anxiety, and self-assurance. The utilization of audio-visual aids has the potential to mitigate the affective filter by establishing a more captivating and less anxiety-inducing educational atmosphere, wherein they may enhance the learners' focus and motivation. A good understanding of audio-visual resources can make the EFL classroom interactive and engaging (Mathew & Alidmat, 2013). Furthermore, these tools adapt learning experiences to suit individual needs, preferences, and learning styles.

Audio-visual aids can meet the needs of students who do not have the same learning style. While visual learners benefit from imagery materials, auditory learners benefit from sound materials. Furthermore, in EFL settings, learners often find difficulties in understanding spoken language. However, learners exposed to AVM show notable improvement in their listening compared to traditional textbooks (Al-Athwary & Lasloun, 2021). Audio-visual aids are relevant when teaching listening comprehension, as they can provide varied multimodal input that helps develop such receptive skills.

2. The Listening comprehension

Listening comprehension was defined by many scholars; for instance, Rubin (1995) defined it as the ability to comprehend spoken language, filter its meaning, and interpret it effectively in a communicative situation. Rost (2011) also described listening comprehension as a complex process of integrating neurological, linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic processing to build meaning out of what is heard. On the same line, Helgesen (2003) defined it as an active, purposeful process in which listeners attempt to interpret and make sense of what they are hearing. According to Brown and Yule (1983) and Hamouda (2013), listening comprehension is an individual understanding of what the listener heard and his ability to repeat the words, although the listener may be able to repeat the sounds without real understanding. All these definitions highlight that listening comprehension is a complex and interactive process that goes beyond physical hearing to include interpretation and meaningful engagement with spoken language.

Additionally, Buck (2001) highlighted that listening comprehension is a highly complex process, teachers who aim to evaluate it have to first understand how the process works. A clear understanding of the language comprehension system reveals that both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge are essential to the listening process.

3. Listening Skills

Listening is one of the four fundamental language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing that are the pillars of language acquisition and effective communication. Listening is a receptive skill since it involves receiving, interpreting, and comprehending words uttered. It is the initial language skill that humans learn even before starting to speak in their mother tongue and thus forms an essential part of language learning.

Listening forms a fundamental part of language learning since it is the starting point of acquiring and internalizing a language (Rost, 2011). It is significant to learners because,

lacking the skill to listen to spoken language, would result in difficulties in engaging in conversations, following commands or instructions, and catching important aspects of their learning context (Brown, 2007). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL), listening enables learners to acquire pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical structures through hearing authentic linguistic input (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). It is an inherent skill as it helps students to perceive spoken words more clearly, grasp speech subtleties, and perceive diverse patterns of communication within the target language (Field, 2008).

Studies have also invariably demonstrated that listening is not just essential for language understanding but also for other intellectual processes included in communication, like problem-solving and critical thinking. For example, whenever we listen to an argument or a debate, one must necessarily listen to content, think through different perspectives, and relate ideas to one another (Field, 2008). In EFL classrooms, this will also involve exposure to a variety of spoken texts, ranging from daily conversation to formal spoken language one is likely to hear in academic settings.

Good listening practice also habituates learners to respond to the language in actual contexts (Rost, 2011). Therefore, a focus on listening skills development in EFL curricula is not merely an issue of comprehension, it also facilitates more comprehensive language acquisition, and as such, it constitutes an important part of EFL learning. Therefore, there exist two different types of listening processes, i.e., bottom-up and top-down, involved in the process of understanding spoken discourse.

4. Importance of Listening in EFL Classroom

Listening is more than passive hearing of sounds, it is an active and participatory activity that plays a crucial role in EFL classrooms. Listening is the most effective method through which language learners pick up new words, idiomatic expressions, and usage of language in daily life (Rost, 2011). In the average EFL classroom, students might not get the chance to communicate with native speakers outside the classroom, especially where English is not the dominant language. Thus, listening practice in class is crucial in order to connect the classroom learning with real communication.

Listening plays two roles in language acquisition. Not only does it help learners to understand spoken language, but it is also a model for speaking. While listening to actual audio and video materials, learners can observe how the native speakers use pronunciation, intonation, stress, and rhythm, and it will improve their own speaking skills (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Listening activities include listening for the gist, summarizing what they heard, or answering questions of comprehension. These exercises encourage engaged interaction with language, so learners become more competent to comprehend and produce language.

Listening may also provide learners with exposure to diverse accents, dialects, and cultural contexts. Such exposure is particularly beneficial in an increasingly globalized world where English is variably spoken. For example, a student may hear a British speaker, then an American or Australian speaker, with varying accents and nuances of vocabulary and pronunciation. This helps students develop a dynamic ear, preparing them for actual multi-diverse communication settings in real life. The importance of audio-visual aids and the role of listening skills are supported by various theories.

5. Theories Related to Audio-Visual Aids

5.1 Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning

Richard Mayer's CTML (Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning) offers the prediction that people have two separate information-processing channels: an auditory/verbal channel and a visual/pictorial one (Mayer, 2009). People learn more effectively when both channels are used simultaneously rather than using words or pictures alone. This aligns with Mayer's broader premise that: "learners can better understand an explanation when it is presented in words and pictures than when it is presented in words alone." (Mayer, 2009, p. 3).

Mayer's CTML is mainly based on three core assumptions: the dual-channel assumption (people have separate channels for processing verbal and visual materials), the limited capacity assumption (each channel has a limited capacity for processing information at a given time), and the active processing assumption (meaningful learning occurs when learners engage in selecting, organizing, and combining information) (Mayer, 2009).

Main principles include the dual-channel hypothesis, emphasising the need to use both channels to prevent cognitive overload. According to the modality effect, learning improves when verbal information is presented auditorily rather than visually, clearing the visual channel for pictorial processing (Mayer, 2009). The Coherence Principle also states that learning is enhanced when unnecessary material is excluded; adding irrelevant yet interesting information can distract learners and increase cognitive load unnecessarily (Mayer, 2009). For instance, in a lesson on the water cycle, presenting an animated diagram (visual) alongside a clear spoken narration (auditory) helps learners better understand the processes involved compared to presenting only a text.

5.2 Dual Coding Theory

DCT (Dual Coding theory) is a cognitive approach to language, established in 1971 by Allan Paivio. This approach explains how the human brain processes, stores, and recalls information. It assumes that there are two cognitive subsystems of the brain related to language behaviour. The first one, called the image system, is specialized for processing non-verbal objects and events. The other, the verbal system, is specialized for processing linguistic information. These two systems are functionally independent, but constantly interconnected for encoding, organizing, transforming, storing, and retrieving information (Paivio&Begg, 1981).

According to Paivio, the verbal system processes information in the form of words; he refers to these forms as logogens. While the non-verbal system processes information in the form of properties that occur in the real world, and this form is called imagens. These two systems regularly interact with each other and establish a connection. Furthermore, one of the most important predictions from dual coding theory is that the logogens and imagens have additive effects on memory, in other words, recalling information better is when using both systems simultaneously.

Although DCT is almost 50 years ago, it has important implications on present educational practices, especially in the context of language learning, where both comprehension and retention are critical. Audio-visual aids, by design, align closely with

Paivio's theory. This theoretical approach corresponds to the audio-visual metaphor (Paivio&Begg, 1981). When learners receive input from both systems at the same time, for example, listening to spoken language while watching a video, can form two mental representations of the same content, this dual processing method improves learners' understanding and retention of information compared to using only one channel. The theory suggests properly mixing what is presented in words with images that can illustrate, explain, and concretise the textual concept, and the perfect way to do this is by using audio-visual aids.

In the context of EFL listening instruction, where learners may face challenges such as unfamiliar accents, limited vocabulary, and reduced exposure to authentic language input, the implication of dual coding theory can be a practical option, especially with the technological development of instructional devices such as audio-visual aids. With the combination of verbal and non-verbal systems, learners may understand and infer meaning and enhance their listening skills.

Dual Coding Theory offers a valid explanation for the use of audio-visual aids in EFL listening instruction. It provides a set of assumptions for why learners are more likely to understand, retain, and apply new language input when it is delivered through both verbal and non-verbal channels. By aligning teaching strategies with this theory, which reflects the use of audio-visual aids, EFL teachers can enhance the effectiveness of listening skills.

5.3 The Input Hypothesis

The input hypothesis is a central theory in language acquisition that was proposed by Stephen Krashen. This theory claims that the one way to acquire a language is by understanding messages, or receiving comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985). Comprehensible input is a language input that is a step beyond the learner's current level of competence, a concept Krashen labels as $i+1$. Learners must understand the majority of the input while encountering new language elements, moving from i , learner's current level, to $i+1$ the next level, to acquire a language.

The Input Hypothesis has important implications for the development of listening comprehension in EFL contexts. As this theory is often used in listening activities, teachers can help learners to acquire language by providing comprehensible input that is interesting and engaging. To assist learners with understanding input that may be a little above their proficiency level, teachers can use audio-visual aids, which provide comprehensible input by combining spoken language and visual context, such as gestures, pictures, and recordings of natural, authentic input.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis offers strong theoretical support for integrating audio-visual aids into EFL listening instruction. By providing interesting, meaningful, and understandable input. "All other factors thought to encourage or cause second-language acquisition work only when they contribute to comprehensible input and/or a low affective filter." (Krashen, 1985, p.4).

5.4 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) forms the foundation of his Monitor Model, which grants importance to affective variables in second language acquisition. The

"affective filter" is a metaphorical filter that can either permit or block the processing of linguistic input based on the learner's emotional state. Krashen (1982) hypothesizes that motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety are some of those variables that strongly dictate whether the learners are receptive to the intake of language. In situations where the learners are relaxed, motivated, and confident, their affective filter is said to be low, and the input can penetrate to the language acquisition device to enable efficient learning. But when students are under stress, unmotivated, or afraid of failing, the affective filter goes up and input can't be internalized regardless of whether or not the input would otherwise be comprehensible.

In teaching, this theory deals with the provision of a comfortable and low-stress environment. For example, Lightbown and Spada (2013) discuss that learners who are comfortable and supported are likely to take up content and make communicative attempts. A rewarding, humorous, and interactive teacher can lower learners' affective filters, and thus acquisition is enhanced. Conversely, tense or overly critical situations can shut down even sufficiently motivated learners from processing input. This has been supported in a study by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), who identified a definite correlation between anxiety and decreased ability to process and store second language input.

With regards to the use of audio-visual materials, Krashen's hypothesis confirms their application in reducing learner anxiety. Videos, animations, and other AV content are likely to create a more relaxed and engaging atmosphere, particularly if the material is interesting and culturally suitable. This positive affective context can reduce the affective filter, making learners more receptive to language contact. For example, authentic video clips or story animations can reduce stress and promote enjoyment, which encourages natural listening practice. Affective states are as crucial as input itself, Schütz (2005) contends in determining whether or not language acquisition occurs.

In short, not only does the Affective Filter Hypothesis account for why some students learn language more effectively than others, but it also offers sound justification for AVM to be employed in listening instruction particularly where such content is stimulating, suitably graded, and delivered in a low-stress context.

6. Comparison and Contrast of the Findings

6. 1 Comparison

The three studies conducted by Kim (2015), Woottipong (2014), and Kirana (2016) shared some similarities that support the use of audio-visual aids in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension. In all of the articles, pre-test and post-test designs were utilized by the researchers to measure learners' improvement. For instance, Kirana (2016) compared scores of the experimental group and the control group, and the experimental group utilizing audio-visual materials (AVM) achieved an average post-test score of 69, significantly more than the 62 the control group achieved with a traditional method. Similarly, Kim (2015) used TOEIC-based listening tests across three proficiency levels, and reported a marked improvement in post-test scores for intermediate learners from 13.28 (SD=1.96) in the pre-test to 14.93 (SD=1.91) in the post-test, and advanced learners from 14.86 (SD=2.16) in the pre-test to 16.25 (SD=1.76) in the post-test. In Woottipong's (2014) study, the participants showed a significant gain in listening scores from 7.80 in the pre-test to 11.80 in the post-test, after twenty sessions using AVM.

The research findings further indicated that a majority of the participants showed a positive attitude, high motivation, and engagement toward using audio-visual aids in EFL classes. Woottipong (2014) observed that students became more engaged in class activities and showed interest in lessons presented with videos content. This observation was supported by the results from the questionnaire given to learners in the post-test, which ranged from 3.39 to 4.17, that is in between average to high levels. Showing that students had positive attitudes towards the use of audio-visual material, increasing their motivation to learn English.. Similarly, Kirana (2016) noted that students in the experimental group were more enthusiastic and cooperative, engaging more actively and confidently. Kim (2015) used a questionnaire to reinforce these findings, in which students rated their agreement concerning the use of AVM. The participants were interested in audio-visual-based lessons more than textbook-based, and appreciated the ability to link visual cues with spoken language. These findings suggest that the implementation of AVM not only enhanced students' listening comprehension but also motivated them and made them more involved in the learning process.

Furthermore, all the three studies emphasized the importance of multimodal input in supporting EFL listening comprehension. Researchers reported that the implementation of visual elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and situational context not only helped learners to interpret meaning more effectively than audio alone, but also improved their understanding of vocabulary and minimized their mistakes and errors. Kirana (2016) provided evidence that the participants of the experimental group made fewer mistakes and demonstrated improvement in answering listening comprehension questions. Woottipong (2014) reported that learners found it easier to remember and understand vocabulary when using audio-visual materials. Also, the presence of visual input made them more careful and accurate in listening tasks. Kim (2015) also emphasized the value of linking spoken input with visual cues, mentioning that audio-visual aids helped learners clarify meaning.

6.2 Contrast

Although all three studies agreed on the effectiveness of audio-visual materials in developing listening skills, their findings had some differences. One significant difference was in Kim's study, where significant gains were observed only for the intermediate and advanced groups, whose mean scores were enhanced on the post-test. However, the low-proficiency group did not achieve significant gains, proving that authentic AVM input may not be effective for inexperienced learners, because authentic audio-visual aids often feature natural, unsimplified language, which can be challenging for beginner-level students.

This contrasted with the findings of both Woottipong (2014) and Kirana (2016), who reported measurable gains across all learners, even learners that might be at a lower proficiency level. Kirana noted that learners exposed to AVM scored a higher average than the control group. Woottipong's participants also showed a significant improvement, suggesting that the well implementation of AVM in listening EFL classes can benefit learners at different levels.

Furthermore, while all three studies highlighted the benefits of using AVM, Kim (2015) was the only one to address its drawbacks, especially for lower proficiency learners. The low-level group reported several challenges related to fast speech, idiomatic expressions, and

difficulty concentrating. On the other hand, Woottipong (2014) and Kirana (2016) did not mention any notable limitations in their results. Their studies focused only on the positive outcomes of the use of audio-visual aids in EFL listening classes.

7. Discussion of the Findings

The three articles reviewed examine the effectiveness of audio-visual aids in enhancing listening comprehension among EFL university learners. The findings of the articles report that audio-visual input has a positive impact on learners' listening performance. However, their impact varies depending on learner proficiency level, input complexity, and course design. The following paragraphs summarize the findings related to the theories presented in the theoretical background.

Dual coding theory is emphasized in each of the three studies. It explains the use of audio-visual aids by the concept that students learn effectively if information is received through verbal and non-verbal channels. For instance, Kim (2015) reported that the majority of students benefited from AVM, which links visual information with spoken language. Similarly, Woottipong's (2014) study revealed that students agreed that English subtitles in video materials were an excellent aid to learning English. Additionally, Kirana (2016) observed that the visualization provided by AVM helped students understand what they were listening to. This aligns with Paivio's dual coding theory, which suggests that learners can encode information with the integration of visual and verbal systems.

These findings also validate Mayer's Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. According to this theory, learning is most effective when verbal and visual information are processed simultaneously through two different channels: the auditory/verbal and the visual/pictorial. Intermediate and advanced learners, through Kim's (2015) findings, demonstrated measurable enhancement in listening comprehension when AVM was used, which proves that they could deal with multimedia input without cognitive overload. Likewise, Woottipong (2014) reported that learners perceive AVM as a helpful tool to support understanding. Kirana (2016) also noted that learners were more attentive and focused during AVM-based lessons and made less comprehension errors. However, the findings from Kim's (2015) study revealed a potential limitation to both theories.

The low level group not only found difficulties in terms of fast speech, idioms, and organization of content, but also did not show significant improvement despite being exposed to the same AVM. This indicates that although dual input may theoretically enhance learning, it is not universally effective across all proficiency levels. This can be due to cognitive overload, where the complexity and speed of the input exceed the learner's capacity to process and integrate it, according to Mayer. From Paivio's view, dual input is not always effective as learners might be unable to connect the verbal and non-verbal information when the input is not simplified. Therefore, the success of AVM depends on both the quality of multimodal input and the learners' proficiency and cognitive readiness.

All the participants of the studies responded positively to the use of audio-visual materials, which increased their motivation, engagement, attention, and perception. According to the results of the questionnaire from Kim (2015) and Woottipong (2014), learners became more active and interested in the listening course when using AVM. Kirana (2016) observed

that learners were more focused, participatory, and interested during AVM-based sessions. This supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which argues that learners' emotional state can act as a filter that either facilitates or hinders the acquisition of a new language. When learners are motivated, interested, and have reduced anxiety, their affective filter is low. Therefore, the learner's positive attitudes observed across the three studies suggest that AVM helps foster emotional factors that contribute to lower affective filter and facilitates language acquisition.

Despite the agreement of the three articles on the effectiveness of audio-visual aids in improving listening skills, Kim's (2015) study differed in the level of learners. This study identified that the benefit of AVM may not be extended to low level learners, due to the difficulty of comprehending authentic input. According to Krashen's input hypothesis, the input must be at an appropriate level, neither too difficult nor too easy for learners to be effective. Additionally, this theory suggests that comprehensible input is language input that is slightly above the learner's current level, but still understandable with the help of context and visual cues. In the studies by Kim (2015), Woottipong (2014), and Kirana (2016), the use of audio-visual materials offered a rich multimodal input that included both spoken language and visual elements such as facial expressions, gestures, and situational context. These features make input easier and more comprehensible for learners.

After reviewing the three articles and discussing the findings in light of relevant theories, the three studies demonstrate that the use of AVM leads to notable improvement in listening comprehension, positive attitude, and increased motivation among EFL learners. Therefore, that study confirms that the use of audio-visual materials plays a significant role in enhancing EFL learners' listening comprehension, particularly when these materials are suitable to learners' interests and their proficiency level.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, this secondary research substantiates that audio-visual aids are a valuable and significant tool in promoting listening comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. If effectively utilized, with due consideration to learners' needs and cognitive processes, audio-visual materials can result in enhanced comprehension, increased motivation, and interest, and offer extensive exposure to authentic language input. Their utilization is in tandem with the current emphasis on learner-centered classrooms, as audio-visual aids are a practical assistance for augmenting listening comprehension through stimulating and engaging input.

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