USING VIDEOS AND FILMS TO IMPROVE LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract: This article examines the role of videos and films as pedagogical tools for developing listening
and speaking skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Drawing on
principles of communicative language teaching and multimodal learning theory, the study
explores how authentic audiovisual materials provide rich linguistic input and meaningful
contexts for language production. The article discusses key classroom strategies — pre-viewing, while-viewing, and post-viewing activities — alongside speaking tasks such as
role-plays, shadowing, and discussion-based exercises.

Keywords: EFL teaching, listening skills, speaking skills, videos, films, authentic materials,
multimodal learning

1. Introduction

In contemporary English language education, the integration of multimedia resources has

become increasingly central to effective pedagogy. Among these resources, videos and films
occupy a unique position: they combine visual, auditory, and contextual cues in ways that
replicate authentic communicative situations far more richly than traditional textbook materials
can. For EFL learners — who often have limited exposure to natural English outside the
classroom — audiovisual media can serve as a vital bridge between formal instruction and
real-world language use.

Listening and speaking are the two skills most directly tied to oral communication, yet they
remain among the most challenging for EFL learners to develop. Listening requires the
simultaneous processing of phonology, syntax, vocabulary, pragmatic meaning, and cultural
context. Speaking demands accurate and fluent production under real-time cognitive pressure.

Traditional approaches — audio recordings, drills, and scripted dialogues — often fail to
capture the spontaneity and authenticity of natural speech. Videos and films, by contrast,
present language as it is genuinely used: embedded in social situations, accompanied by
gesture and facial expression, and enriched by cultural meaning.

This article argues that the thoughtful, methodologically grounded use of videos and films in

EFL classrooms can make a substantial contribution to the development of both listening and
speaking skills. The discussion is organised around three main areas: the theoretical basis for
using audiovisual materials, practical classroom strategies, and methodological guidelines for
teachers.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 The Nature of Listening and Speaking in Language Acquisition

Listening and speaking are frequently grouped together as the "oral skills," yet each involves
distinct cognitive processes. Listening is a receptive skill that requires active meaning
construction: learners do not merely decode sounds but interpret utterances within their
pragmatic and situational context (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Speaking, as a productive skill,
involves the real-time coordination of lexical retrieval, grammatical encoding, phonological
planning, and social awareness.

Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) provides one influential framework for understanding how listening supports acquisition: learners develop proficiency by receiving
comprehensible input that is slightly beyond their current level (i+1). Authentic video materials
— graded or ungraded — can serve precisely this function, offering natural speech at varying
levels of difficulty. Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) complements this by arguing that

production, including speaking practice, is itself necessary for acquisition: learners notice gaps
in their knowledge when they attempt to communicate.

2.2 Multimodal Learning and Authentic Input

Multimodal learning theory, as articulated by Gunther Kress (2010) and others, holds that
meaning is made not only through language but through the integration of multiple semiotic
modes — image, gesture, sound, movement, and text. Films and videos are inherently
multimodal: they present language alongside paralinguistic cues (facial expressions, body
language, intonation) that carry significant communicative meaning. For language learners, this
multimodality is especially valuable because it mirrors the conditions of real communication and
provides multiple channels for inferring meaning.

Authentic materials — those not designed specifically for language teaching — have been
shown to heighten learner motivation and foster cultural competence (Gilmore, 2007). Films
and TV series expose learners to a wide range of registers, accents, and speech styles that
graded textbook dialogues systematically exclude. This variety prepares learners for the
authentic communicative encounters they will face outside the classroom.

2.3 Affective Dimensions

Beyond cognitive gains, audiovisual materials have a well-documented positive effect on

learner affect. Engaging narratives and visual stimulation reduce anxiety, increase motivation,
and create an emotionally invested learning context. When learners are genuinely interested in
a film's content, they attend more carefully to language and process it more deeply — what
cognitive psychologists call elaborative encoding (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). This affective
engagement translates into more durable vocabulary retention and greater willingness to
participate in post-viewing speaking activities.

3. Classroom Strategies for Developing Listening Skills

A well-structured lesson using video materials is typically organised into three phases:
pre-viewing, while-viewing, and post-viewing. Each phase serves distinct pedagogical
functions.

3.1 Pre-Viewing Activities

The pre-viewing stage prepares learners linguistically and cognitively for the input they are
about to receive. Key activities include:

• Schema activation: Teachers elicit learners' background knowledge about the topic,
genre, or cultural context of the video through discussion questions, brainstorming, or
image-based prompts.

• Vocabulary pre-teaching: Key lexical items that are essential for comprehension are
introduced in advance, reducing the cognitive load during viewing.

• Prediction tasks: Learners are given the title, a brief description, or a short clip and asked
to predict content, characters, or outcomes. This activates top-down processing and heightens engagement.

Pre-viewing activities transform passive viewers into active listeners with a purpose,
significantly improving comprehension outcomes (Lynch, 2009).

3.2 While-Viewing Activities

During viewing, learners engage with the material through structured tasks that direct their
attention to specific linguistic or communicative features:

• Global comprehension tasks: Learners answer general questions about the main idea,
characters, or plot. These tasks encourage holistic listening without becoming overwhelmed by detail.

• Focused listening tasks: Learners attend to specific language features — particular
vocabulary items, discourse markers, or expressions of attitude — and note them during
viewing.

• Pause-and-predict: The teacher pauses the video at a key moment and asks learners to
predict what will be said or done next, fostering strategic listening.

• Note-taking: Particularly useful with documentaries or educational videos, note-taking
develops learners' ability to process and record information selectively.

It is important that while-viewing tasks do not overload learners; the goal is directed attention,
not exhaustive transcription.

3.3 Post-Viewing Activities

Post-viewing activities consolidate comprehension, deepen language processing, and provide
opportunities for speaking practice:

• Comprehension discussion: Learners discuss answers to comprehension questions,
clarifying understanding and pooling interpretations.

• Language focus: Teachers draw attention to particular grammatical structures, idiomatic
expressions, or pronunciation features noticed during viewing.

• Critical reflection: Learners discuss themes, characters' motives, or cultural values
depicted in the video, developing both language and intercultural competence.

4. Developing Speaking Skills through Film-Based Activities

Video and film materials provide rich stimuli for a wide range of speaking activities. The
following are among the most effective:

4.1 Role-Play and Simulation

Role-plays based on scenes from films allow learners to inhabit social roles, practise specific
speech acts (requesting, apologising, persuading), and experiment with register and tone.

Unlike abstract role-play scenarios, film-based role-plays give learners concrete models of
language in use, reducing performance anxiety and providing clear linguistic targets.

4.2 Shadowing

Shadowing — the simultaneous or immediate imitation of a speaker — is a powerful technique

for developing pronunciation, prosody, and fluency (Murphey, 2001). Learners select a brief
extract (30–60 seconds), listen repeatedly, and then attempt to reproduce the speech as
closely as possible. Film dialogues are ideal for shadowing because they feature natural
connected speech, contractions, and intonation patterns that textbook recordings often lack.

4.3 Discussion and Debate

Films with morally complex themes or social issues provide excellent springboards for
structured discussion and debate. Learners practise argumentation, turn-taking, hedging, and
the expression of opinion — communicative functions essential for academic and professional
English.

4.4 Creative Speaking Tasks

More creative tasks include re-dubbing scenes with learners' own dialogue, creating alternative
endings and presenting them orally, or delivering character analyses as mini-presentations.
These project-based tasks develop both linguistic accuracy and communicative confidence.

5. Methodological Guidelines for Teachers

The effectiveness of video-based instruction depends on careful planning and principled
decision-making. The following guidelines are offered for teachers:
Material selection: Teachers should select materials appropriate to learners' proficiency level,

age, and interests. Authentic materials may need to be scaffolded heavily for lower-level
learners; graded educational videos may be more appropriate at earlier stages.
Subtitles: The use of subtitles should be purposeful. L1 subtitles may support comprehension
at lower levels but reduce listening effort; L2 subtitles draw attention to written form; no subtitles
maximise listening challenge. The choice should align with lesson objectives.
Task design: Tasks should have clear communicative purposes and focus on meaning as well
as form. Open-ended tasks that allow for genuine personal response tend to generate more
authentic language production than mechanical exercises.
Classroom management: Repeated viewing of short excerpts is generally more effective than
single viewings of long sequences. Teachers should plan for pausing and rewinding
strategically.
Assessment: Speaking activities derived from film materials can be assessed using communicative rubrics that evaluate fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, and interactive
competence.

6. Conclusion

Videos and films offer EFL teachers a powerful and versatile resource for developing both
listening and speaking skills. Grounded in theories of comprehensible input, multimodal
learning, and communicative competence, audiovisual materials provide authentic,

contextualised language exposure that motivates learners and prepares them for real-world
communication. When used within a structured three-phase framework and accompanied by
purposeful speaking tasks, videos and films can transform the EFL classroom into a dynamic
environment where language is experienced, not merely studied.
Future research might productively examine the differential effects of various film genres on
specific listening sub-skills, or investigate how digital tools — such as video annotation
platforms — can enhance the pedagogical potential of audiovisual materials in contemporary
EFL teaching.

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