



The Role of Native-Speaker Audio in Enhancing ESL Students' Listening Skills Through Authentic Assessment

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Abstract. Listening skills are particularly challenging for English as a second language (ESL) students in preparing them for a real-world communication in both academic and professional settings. This study examined the role of English native-speaker audio in improving students' listening skills through authenticity principles that simulate real-life circumstances. An explanatory mixed methods approach was employed in this study whereas the quantitative data gathered from a Likert scale survey (N = 344) and the qualitative data derived through interviews with nine students. The results of the survey disclosed that listening to native audio enhanced students' listening comprehension and promoted meaningful learning for their future career. Interview data revealed that students developed efficient listening skills namely note-taking, repetition, identifying important words and adapting to different speech rates. This study contributes to address two main gaps: the scarcity of practice-based research on authentic listening assessment in ESL classrooms, and the necessity to further document and evaluate the use of native-speaker audio to guide listening assessment practices beyond local settings. Overall, future studies are recommended to investigate the effects of authentic assessment on learners' overall language skills, as to better prepare them for real-world communication in professional settings.

Keywords: ESL, Listening skill, Authentic assessment, Cognitive strategies, Implicit knowledge.

1 Introduction

Listening is an important skill along with speaking, reading and writing for L2 acquisition. Over the last decade, teaching listening in ESL contexts has faced numerous critical challenges, particularly on the teaching perspectives. The empirical studies discovered on these challenges that need to be encountered in the author's effort. To the author's knowledge, the challenges include speech perception and processing difficulties (Singh et al., 2024), memory and attention load (Ramalingam et al., 2022), instructional challenges and resource limitations (Mohammed et al., 2021).

In Kolej Poly-Tech MARA (KPTM) Kuantan, Malaysia, semester 1 students who register Proficiency English (HPE1043) course are expected to improve communication skills and enhance the fundamentals of the English language. However,

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N. A. Ishak et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of the International Conference on Cross-Disciplinary Academic Research 2025 - Track 3 Advances in Humanities, Education, Teaching, Learning and Arts (ICAR-T3 2025)*, Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research 1006,

https://doi.org/10.2991/978-94-6239-662-3_16

listening is a particularly difficult skills for them, generating worries about how to improve their listening skills and apply them in future professional contexts. Previously, listening skill in HPE1043 was evaluated using a test-based approach in which students listened to recorded excerpts and answered related questions. The instruction followed the format of national examinations such as Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM) and Malaysian University English Test (MUET). Nevertheless, this method was not in line with students' future workplace communication needs and had little impact on developing meaningful or practical listening skill. Following this, HPE1043 was revised by the faculty in KPTM and adjusted it from an exam format to a task-based format. Moreover, this adjustment was aligned with transferable skills added in the syllabus such as communication, ethics and professionalism, as well as leadership, autonomy and responsibility as to better prepare the students for their career after they graduated. It is due to the fact that new graduates were reported to have low workplace performance due to a lack of essential skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration (Basir et al., 2022; Osman et al., 2025).

Over the last decade, research has shown a tendency toward technology-enhanced, authentic assessment and learner-centered approaches in order to resolve ESL listening challenges (Bakar et al., 2019; Mat Zaid et. al, 2024; Polatcan et al., 2025). Precisely, new studies demonstrate that authentic assessment is well-suited for teaching listening to ESL learners. As such, teaching listening using authentic audio materials, mind mapping, English podcast, note-taking and pre-listening activities can all benefit students in improving their listening comprehension (Naeem & Rehman, 2021; Hazaymeh & Alomery, 2021; Rmelah & Pornwiriyaakit, 2023; Alfian & Nurcaeran, 2024; Aithal & Kakde, 2025; Qasserras, 2025). Notably, authentic assessment also promotes deep learning and cognitive challenge, increases motivation and engagement, and exposes students to real-world relevance and readiness for their future employment (McArthur, 2023; Villarroel et al., 2020).

The design of the authentic assessment is based on three important elements including realism, cognitive challenge, and evaluative judgment (Villarroel et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is relatively important to embed the strategic application of cognitive strategies (Rahman et al., 2025) and the development of implicit knowledge (Godfroid, 2021) in which can encourage a deeper and more meaningful language learning. As a result, the design of HPE1043 listening task in KPTM Kuantan incorporated authentic assessment characteristics as to establish meaningful learning and real-world communication (Villarroel et al., 2020). The task consisted of listening to the authentic native English speaker audio, taking notes, identifying main ideas with specific information, concluding the audio and organizing all the information into a mind map. The task also aligned with three of the twelve authentic performance tasks such as student choice, cognitive demand and time frame (McTighe et al., 2020).

While listening is a regular component of ESL instruction, students frequently struggle to use these skills outside the classroom. This challenge is likely linked to the prevalence of scripted audio materials, which provide minimal exposure to genuine spoken English. As a result, students may not develop listening skills that are easily transferable to real-world contexts. To address this issue, the current study aimed to investigate the role of English native-speaker audio in improving students' listening

comprehension by using tasks that underscored real-world value, cognitive engagement and implicit learning. Therefore, the research questions are:

- How does native audio improve students' listening comprehension and support meaningful learning?
- How does native audio contribute to the development of students' cognitive skills and implicit knowledge in listening?
- What is the influence of cognitive demands, student choice, and time frame on students' listening comprehension performance?

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Challenges of Teaching Listening in ESL Contexts

Listening skill is an important skill in second language acquisition, providing the basis for effective communication and academic success in ESL contexts. Research frequently shows that L2 learners confront numerous challenges to effective listening comprehension. Singh et al. (2024) point out that the quick and transient nature of natural spoken language, together with related speech phenomena such as contractions and linking, may distort expected word structures, while accents and pronunciation diversity limit real-time decoding. These obstacles are consistent with Ramalingam et al.'s (2022) finding that listening places a high demand on working memory; when speech is quick or involves unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar, learners' cognitive abilities might become overwhelmed, resulting in missing meaning or partial understanding. According to Mohammed et al. (2021), listening is usually undervalued in curriculum, with more emphasis placed on reading and speaking, and teachers frequently lack the necessary training, resources, or locally appropriate materials to facilitate successful listening instruction. Infrastructure and technology limits increase these challenges, limiting access to quality listening activities. Understanding native-like spoken English frequently needs acquaintance with discourse norms, nonverbal cues, and sociolinguistic context, all of which many learners have inadequate exposure to (Singh et al., 2024).

Listening skills are also essential to helping students to communicate effectively in real-world professional settings. Transferable abilities like as communication, ethics and professionalism, leadership, autonomy, and responsibility should be prioritized in order to increase relevance and align students with workplace expectations. This focus addresses recurring concerns about graduates' performance, as many recent graduates appear underprepared due to deficiencies in essential soft skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration, which impede their transition from academia to the workforce (Basir et al., 2022; Osman et al., 2025). A study on soft skills and graduate employability in Malaysia revealed a skill mismatch that influenced employment outcomes, emphasizing the relevance of communication, analytical skills, teamwork, and professional conduct in job readiness (Basir et al., 2022). Similarly, a study of Malaysia's manufacturing sector discovered persistent deficiencies in communication, leadership, problem-solving, and teamwork skills

despite excellent technical competence (Osman et al., 2025). The authors also identified a mismatch between academic preparation and industrial requirements, with employers prioritizing adaptability and emotional intelligence. These findings highlight the need of improving listening education as part of a larger effort to improve graduate job readiness. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in improving listening instructional strategies to meet real-world work demands.

2.2 Addressing the Challenges of Teaching Listening in ESL Contexts

Over the last decade, research has shown a trend towards more integrated, technology-enhanced, authentic assessment, and learner strategies to address ESL listening challenges. Polatcan et al. (2025), for example, found that metacognitive listening strategies are positively and significantly associated with both critical listening attitudes and academic listening skills. Their findings further indicate that metacognitive listening strategies serve as significant predictors of academic listening performance, with this relationship mediated by learners' critical listening attitudes. Moreover, Project-Based Learning (PjBL) has been shown in studies to significantly enhance listening skill by involving learners in collaborative, realistic, real-life communication tasks (Bakar et al., 2019). This method combines listening and speaking and employs authentic materials such as videos and internet resources to immerse learners, successfully boosting listening skills through interaction and contextual learning. Another previous study, for example in Malaysian ESL context, has used the HURIER Model to improve listening comprehension, which includes Hearing, Understanding, Remembering, Interpreting, Evaluating, and Responding (Mat Zaid et. al, 2024). This model provides a systematic framework by breaking down the listening process into sections that are interconnected, allowing students to develop particular abilities at each stage. This research found that the methodology was helpful in improving listening skills among young learners and improving their ability to interpret native English audio and other real-world listening resources.

In addition, English podcasts were used as repetition-based instruction at the University of Technology Tawan-Ok in Chonburi, Thailand, to improve students' listening skills. Students worked with five audio excerpts from a podcast series and performed related exercises before being scored on their ability to identify main ideas as well as specific details. The study had positive outcomes, with post-test scores surpassing activities and students indicating overall satisfaction with the assessment method (Rmelah & Pornwiriyakit, 2023). Furthermore, strategies like note-taking, the use of real audio materials and pre-listening activities can help students become more confident and competent listeners. According to a systematic review in higher education, note-taking and schema activation are important techniques for students' transition from basic to difficult academic listening tasks, while instructional assistance and authentic content improve understanding and learner autonomy (Alfian & Nurchaeran, 2024). Moreover, pre-listening activities including content prediction and previous understanding activation, help learners anticipate and process material more effectively, resulting in superior comprehension outcomes (Aithal & Kakde, 2025).

Reputable research shows that authentic assessment goes beyond traditional testing by developing deep learning and cognitive challenge, increasing motivation and engagement, and immersing students in real-world relevance and preparedness (McArthur, 2023; Villarroel et al., 2020). For example, research shows that when students are given authentic tasks, their learning becomes deeper and more lasting (Villarroel et al., 2020). Students also strengthen their cognitive skills, interact more meaningfully with course material, and transfer information more efficiently to new settings. Furthermore, authentic assessment experiences increase students' motivation, autonomy, and commitment to learning because they perceive the direct relevance and significance of their efforts (McArthur, 2023). When learners believe their assessments to be important, valuable, and linked with their intended objectives, their engagement increases further. Meanwhile, in an ESL context, English native audio is used to help students improve their English skills with the usage of authentic native English audio and real-world settings promoted throughout the learning process (Qasserras, 2025). The author emphasizes the use of both top-down and bottom-up processing, as well as extended listening outside of the classroom, as crucial to activating phonological processing abilities and enhancing ESL/EFL learners' overall listening competency.

In contrast, the current HPE1043 listening exams are based on SPM and MUET practice materials that lack native speaker input. These repetitive recordings have the potential to disconnect students and limit cognitive skill development. A study in Pakistan investigated into the effect of native speaker audio on reading proficiency. Two groups were compared, with the experimental group listening English text-based audio narrated by native speakers. When compared to the control group, this group shown significant improvements in reading and speaking skills, particularly in pitch, stress, and pronunciation (Naeem & Rehman, 2021). Based on these findings, it is required to revise the HPE1043 listening evaluation by including native speaker audio to offer students with more realistic exposure and improve their overall language development.

In addition, a study conducted at University Al-Ain found that mind map-based learning greatly improves students' critical thinking skill. The researchers discovered that mind mapping stimulates students to engage in multiple cognitive processes, which helps them better how they capture, organize, and communicate information (Hazaymeh & Alomery, 2021). In contrast, the present HPE1043 listening assessment uses traditional test-based procedures in a rigid setting, which limits students' capacity to think creatively or apply varied solutions. This linear method limits deeper learning and inhibits the adoption of flexible note-taking strategies. As a result, incorporating mind maps into the listening assessment is recommended to help students develop language and thinking abilities while also aligning with the course's goal of developing more competent and communicative learners.

In conclusion, while previous research has acknowledged the importance of authentic listening materials, little is known about how native audio especially promotes meaningful learning and cognitive skill development for professional context. This study fills these gaps by investigating how native audio affects comprehension, cognitive processing, and learning in a structured diploma-level English proficiency course.

2.3 Theoretical Foundations of Authentic Assessment Principles, Cognitive Strategies and Implicit Knowledge

This study is guided by three theoretical foundations, including authentic assessment principles, cognitive strategies, and implicit knowledge. Archbald and Newmann originally used the term authentic in the context of learning and assessment in 1988. Initially, they used the term authentic performance to characterize tasks that required creating knowledge, displaying deep understanding, integrating diverse concepts, and applying prior learning to relevant activities other than typical examinations. Wiggins (1990) later underlined the need of authentic assessment being clearly structured, with assessment criteria made clear and accessible to learners in advance. In this regard, authentic assessment is built around three main components: realism, cognitive challenge, and evaluative judgment (Villarroel et al., 2018). Realism entails placing assessment tasks in real-world or professional contexts, allowing students to apply their knowledge to authentic problems that mirror those they may face outside of the classroom, thereby increasing the relevance and transferability of learning (Villarroel et al., 2018). Cognitive challenge involves assessments that engage higher-order thinking skills, encouraging students to examine, evaluate, and produce material rather than merely recalling it, so building deeper understanding and problem-solving ability. Evaluative judgment highlights students' ability to critically appraise the quality of their own and their peers' work, which promotes metacognition and self-regulation, both of which are necessary for lifelong learning (Tai et al., 2018; Villarroel et al., 2018).

Complementing these attributes, the cognitive mechanisms outlined by Rahman et al. (2025), as well as the development of implicit knowledge discussed by Godfroid (2021), contribute to authentic learning by allowing students to internalize and apply knowledge flexibly. Rahman et al. (2025), for example, highlight four key factors influencing listening development: attention as the initial gateway for processing input; working memory as a constraint on linguistic load; L1 transfer, which may facilitate or hinder comprehension depending on linguistic similarity and learner awareness; and cognitive restructuring, whereby explicit knowledge is transformed into procedural fluency through practice and feedback. These cognitive mechanisms are particularly significant in teacher-centred EFL contexts. Furthermore, McTighe et al. (2020) identify three of twelve performance factors—student choice, cognitive demand, and time frame—that are strongly aligned with authentic assessment principles, emphasizing the importance of allowing students autonomy in how they demonstrate learning, ensuring tasks are sufficiently challenging, and providing adequate time for meaningful engagement. These components and aspects work together to build a comprehensive framework that not only analyzes student learning holistically, but also prepares students for real-world challenges by encouraging critical thinking, self-evaluation, and practical problem-solving skills. As a result, this study employed the model developed by Villarroel et al. (2018) to design the authentic assessment structure (see Fig. 1).

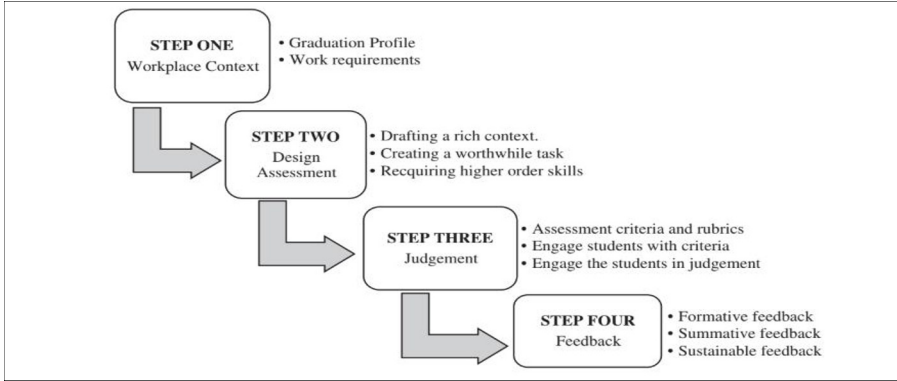


Fig. 1. Model to build authentic assessment (Adopted from Villarroel et al., 2018).

Fig. 1 depicts the model to build authentic assessment (adopted from Villarroel et al., 2018), which guided this study in the design of the listening task for HPE1043. The explanation for every step is as follows:

- Step One (Workplace Context): Step one is to create the workplace context where students are expected to employ their skills after graduation. Instructors should review their graduation profile and professional requirements for the relevant field. This guarantees that the assessment tasks are in line with industry standards and prepare students for real-world challenges rather than just academic ones.
- Step Two (Design Assessment): When the context is clear, the next step is to design a task that reflects it. This includes drafting a realistic setting, creating a worthwhile and engaging task and ensuring that it requires higher-order thinking skills. The tasks should be meaningful, relevant, and reflect the types of activities that students may encounter in their future careers.
- Step Three (Judgement): In step three, clear assessment criteria and rubrics should be established to judge the task. Students should actively participate in understanding and implementing the criteria accordingly. This helps the students to be aware of what they need to achieve throughout the assessment.
- Step Four (Feedback): Lastly, the feedback step is relatively important in meeting the task's objectives. This involves the formative feedback, summative feedback and long-term feedback. These feedbacks also important in encouraging students to reflect, progress and build independence throughout their learning process.

In conclusion, the theoretical foundations presented in Fig. 1 as well as cognitive strategies and implicit knowledge laid the underpinning for the current study.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The current study employed a quasi-interventional form convergent parallel mixing method design, which integrates quantitative and qualitative data collected in the same study phase to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences of authentic listening tasks. Although this study involved the implementation of a pedagogical intervention, it did not meet the characteristics of the actual experimental design, as the study did not involve control groups, random assignments, or comparison of pre and post-tests. Hence, the study is more suitably classified as a quasi-interventional study or pedagogical implementation, rather than an experimental study.

The design of the converged parallel mixing method was selected because it allows quantitative and qualitative data to complement each other and confirm each other through a triangulation process (Dawadi et al., 2021; Fetters et al., 2013). Quantitative data provides an overview of students' perceptions and learning outcomes, while qualitative data offers an in-depth understanding of the challenges, experiences, and benefits felt by students related to authentic listening activities.

Quantitative data were collected using a Likert scale questionnaire containing 10 items, which were developed to answer Research Question 1 (RQ1) and Research Question 3 (RQ3). Descriptive statistical analysis, including frequency and percentage, was conducted using Microsoft Excel software to summarize student responses.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews, which were used to elaborate and enrich quantitative findings related to RQ2, as well as provide contextual support for the findings of RQ1 and RQ3. The interview protocol consists of six open-ended questions developed based on an interview framework by Patton (2015). Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which allowed for the identification of recurring themes, patterns, and students' perceptions of the use of authentic hearing materials.

By integrating findings from both datasets during the interpretation phase, the design of the current study has enhanced the credibility, validity, and depth of the findings, as well as providing a more nuanced understanding of how exposure to native speaker audio materials affects students' cognitive development and authentic language use in the context of learning English as a Second Language (ESL).

3.2 Settings and Participants

This study was conducted in KPTM Kuantan, Malaysia, a private higher institution that offers a variety of diploma programs. As part of the language learning context in this study, the focus was on HPE1043 course, a compulsory subject enrolled by semester 1 students in developing their essential English and communication skills. Additionally, the course is offered to four diploma programs in KPTM Kuantan such as Diploma in Accounting (AA101), Diploma in Business Management (AB101), Diploma in Civil Engineering (EV103), and Diploma in Human Resource Management (AB107).

Purposive sampling was employed to choose a suitable sample for experimental research design and data collecting, allowing for a more specific investigation of listening performance (Mat Zaid et. al, 2024). Therefore, only Semester 1 students enrolled in the course HPE1043 selected as study participants as they are directly involved with the authentic listening tasks performed throughout the course.

- Quantitative Sample (Survey Questions)

The quantitative component involved a total of 344 students, representing the attainable population of Semester 1 students of the HPE1043 course at KPTM Kuantan during the data collection period. This study used the total population sampling method, where all eligible students were invited to participate in the study. This approach ensures adequate statistical representation as well as increases the reliability of descriptive findings in an institutional context. Therefore, this sample size is considered sufficient to reflect students' overall perceptions and experiences of the pedagogical interventions implemented.

- Qualitative Sample (Interview)

For the qualitative component, a total of 9 students were selected from the questionnaire respondents using criterion-based purposive sampling. The selection of participants is guided by the principle of data saturation, where participants are selected to represent different levels of engagement and questionnaire responses (e.g. high, medium and low perceptions of listening tasks). Previous qualitative studies have shown that a small sample size of between 6 and 12 participants is sufficient to achieve thematic saturation in semi-structured interviews in homogeneous groups (Guest et al., 2006).

The participation of 9 interview participants allowed for an in-depth exploration of the students' experience while maintaining methodological rigor and feasibility of the study. This approach ensures that qualitative findings can complement and explain quantitative findings in a meaningful way.

3.3 Research Procedures

The intervention was intended to expose students to authentic listening materials in order to improve their listening comprehension skills. The research procedures that align with Villarroel et al.'s (2018) model are outlined below:

- Step One (Workplace Context): This step defined the real-world setting in which students would practice their listening and communication skills. Students listened to real audio, such as songs, talks, and podcasts, while taking notes on main ideas, specific information and conclusions. These tasks replicated workplace communication for the HPE1043 course.
- Step Two (Design Assessment): To reflect real-life conversation, a listening task was developed utilizing native English audio recordings (e.g., from British or American speakers). The assignment encouraged students to analyze and apply what they listened in authentic situations by requiring them to take notes, discuss and make meanings.
- Step Three (Judgement): Students were evaluated using clear and authentic criteria. They then used Canva to construct mind maps in pairs or groups of three,

arranging their notes and discussions. This technique helped them improve their evaluative judgement and collaborative skills.

- Step Four (Feedback): Students were given formative and summative feedbacks on comprehension, note-taking and organization. Reflections and discussions emphasized ongoing development and autonomy, encouraging lifelong learning with authentic assessment.

4 Results

4.1 Survey Result

A total of 344 students from four diploma programs at KPTM Kuantan participated in the survey. The first section of the survey was designed to address RQ1: How does authentic native audio improve students' listening comprehension and support meaningful learning? (see Fig. 2).

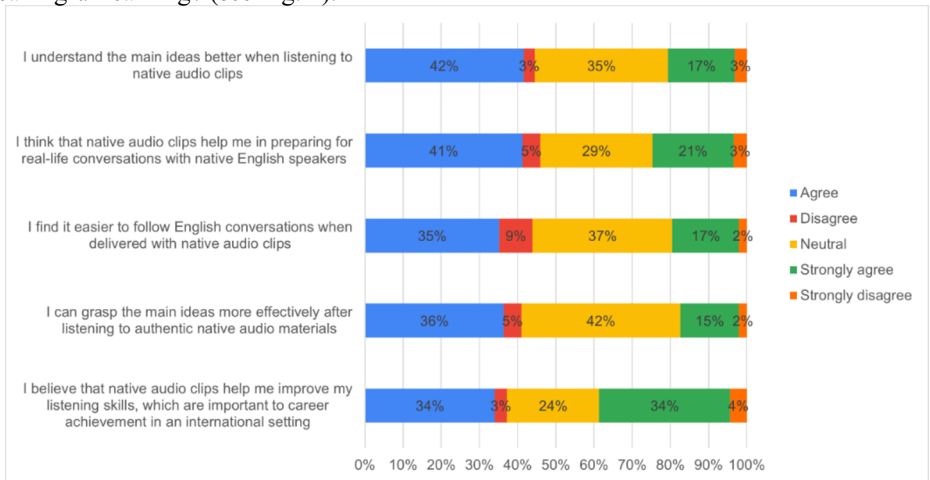


Fig. 2. The Role of Authentic Native Audio Clips

As illustrated in Fig. 2, the majority of students responded positively to the use of authentic audio clips. For instance, 42% agreed, and 17% strongly agreed, that listening to original audio samples helped them understand the main ideas. Likewise, 41% agreed, and 21% strongly agreed, that the clips prepared them for real-life conversations with native English speakers. Overall, this result suggests that authentic listening task that used native audio can greatly enhance students listening comprehension and promote meaningful learning experience.

Additionally, the second section of the survey was intended to address RQ 3: What is the influence of cognitive demands, student choice, and time frame on students' listening comprehension performance? Fig. 3 depicts an analysis of the result.

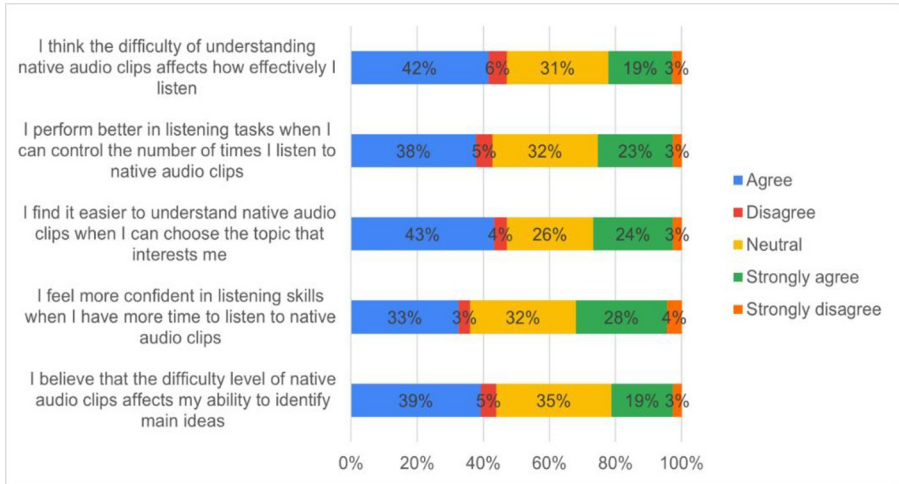


Fig. 3. The Impact of Cognitive Demands, Student Choice, and Time Frame

Fig. 3 showed that 42% of students agreed and 19% strongly agreed that their ability to understand the content was merely affected by the difficulty of understanding native audio clip used in the listening task. On the other hand, student choice and time frame also give big impacts on students’ listening skills. A total of 43% agreed and 24% strongly agreed that interesting topics chosen helped the students to comprehend the audio well. This supports the idea that learner autonomy and relevant content can enhance attention and motivation. In terms of the time frame, the result also showed that 33% of students agreed and 28% strongly agreed by providing them more time to listen can boost their confidence in listening skills. Likewise, 38% agreed and 23% strongly agreed that their listening comprehension and their performance were relatively improved as they could control the number of times they listened to the audio.

All in all, the results demonstrate that embedding authentic performance tasks such as cognitive demands, allowing topic chosen and giving flexible completion time can greatly enhance students listening comprehension and performance. These elements are very valuable when designing meaningful and supportive listening tasks.

4.2 Interview Result

A semi-constructed interview was conducted to explore the participants’ perspective and opinion on contribution of native audio clips on their cognitive skills and implicit knowledge in listening to answer RQ2. The interview consists of six open-ended questions which were answered by nine chosen participants. The transcript was reviewed repeatedly and initial ideas were also noted.

Students’ English Proficiency Level (SPM English result)

The data from the interview shows that three out of nine participants got an A for their English in SPM. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that these participants’

proficiency level is quite high. However, there are participants who still feel their English proficiency level is below average despite achieving grade A in SPM. Three participants remarked:

"I'm quite confidence with my English since I got an A for it in SPM". [P4]

"I managed to get an A for my English during SPM but my current proficiency level is not that good" [P5]

"A-, my English proficiency level is common" [P6]

The rest of the participants are either independent (3) or basic users (3). There are currently improving their English proficiency level to align with their tertiary level of education. Two showed:

"My current English proficiency level is B2. I can understand and communicate well in English but I'm still working on my speaking and listening skills especially when it comes to understanding native speakers." [P7]

"Honestly, my proficiency level is A2. However, my English level right now is getting better but I need more improvement on my listening skills." [P9]

Lessons Learned from Native Speaker Audio Clips

Participants noted that listening to native audio clips improved their focus and attention, notably in identifying important details, distinguishing different slangs and dialects, and responding to fluctuations in speech pace. They shared:

"I learn that listening to native speaker audio make me more focus on what the audio says in order to get the information." [P6]

"I've learned that native speakers tend to speak faster, which can make it challenging to understand. However, by focusing on the main ideas instead of individual words, I can understand the overall meaning better." [P7]

"I need to take more time to understand what the native speaker said. It's a bit hard but it's better than the one that I had to listen in SPM because I can improve my listening skills by my own. I just heard the native speaker on YouTube." [P9]

This reflection exhibits the development of essential listening strategies where participants are able to shift their focus from decoding individual words to understanding the broader meaning. They also gain the ability to adapt to real-life spoken English.

Acquired Listening Strategies from Native Audio Clips

Based on the data, the participants have tried different listening tactics like repetition, slowing down the audio, taking notes, and identifying keywords. Eight out of nine participants admitted that they need to replay the audio multiple times to get the main idea of it. Below are significant answers shared by the participants:

“I listen to the audio over and over and note down each word mentioned. Then, I extract the main idea of the passage.” [P5]

“I listen for keywords and context instead of trying to understand every single word. Also, I'm focusing on repeated words or sentences as it might be the main idea of audio.” [P7]

“I've learned that it's okay to take some time to listen to native audio clips for many times and slow the audio down to make me understand the whole clips.” [P8]

Primarily, participants used repetition and careful imitation to fully absorb and accurately capture the audio content. Additionally, the majority of participants reported that it became easier to pursue knowledge, and they saw a significant increase in confidence. Their ability to grasp meaning without relying heavily on grammar allowed them to enjoy the activity better, making the process less stressful and more natural.

Comprehension Challenges with Native Speaker Audio

Eight out of nine participants revealed that they had difficulties to understand the native speaker audio due to their accent and slang. Majority of participants think the ways of the speakers speak and pronounce words seriously affects the listening assessment because they could not listen to the text clearly. One of them said:

“I struggle with fast speech, unfamiliar accents and slang. If I focus too much on individual words, I lose track of the conversation. Some words also sound different from how they're written which can be confusing” [P7]

Four out of nine participants disclosed their struggle in understanding the native speaker audio occurred due the fast-talking pace of the speakers. Nearly half of the participants stated that the audio speed hindered their ability to identify key words and

follow content effectively, suggesting a gap in their listening fluency and familiarity with natural speech patterns. One answered:

“The slang and accent in English that they use for the audio, sometimes they speak too fast and it's really hard to understand what they want to tell us.” [P2]

Perceived Listening Proficiency Post-Exposure to Native Audio

Five out nine participants claimed that their confidence level and listening ability had improved after they listened to the native speaker audio multiple times and completed the listening task. Two participants said:

“I feel more confident but I know I still need more practice. The more I listen, the easier it becomes to recognize common phrases and speech patterns. It's challenging but I see improvement on my listening skill.” [P7]

“From this listening task, it is actually can improve my ability to more understand English in various accent besides can train my brain to work fast.” [P8]

Three out of nine participants shared they could find the main points of the native speaker audio with ease after completing the task. One participant remarked:

“After listening to the native speaker audio, it is easy to get the main points of the audio.” [P1]

One participant admitted that the native speaker audio is much harder to understand compared to what they have listened during their secondary school. Due to this realization, the participant thinks they have an average listening skill. One stated:

“To be honest, this was more difficult than the listening task during SPM. Because of this, I think I am average listener” [P4]

Comparison of Native Audio Listening and Traditional Activities

The last question is about how does listening to native speakers in audio clips differ from other listening activities, particularly when grammar is not the main focus. Majority of the participants (5 out of 9) claimed that they found the listening task has become easier since they did not have to focus on the grammar rules. Three participants find the listening activity enjoyable, and they use Canva to develop their mind maps.

This new guideline has given students the opportunity to be creative when expressing their knowledge of an audio clip in Canva mind maps. They said:

“It's more fun because I get more freedom to write my notes based on what I heard from the audio.” [P2]

“It's easier to extract main idea. I also find it is easier to score the task because there are no grammar rules.” [P5]

It is worth noting, one participant disclosed the authenticity of the material, which depicts real-life situations, is cited as a source of motivation, and the group-based task aspect aids in collaborative learning. One participant mentioned:

“Listening to native speakers feels more natural and helps me focus on meaning rather than grammar. It also exposes me to real-life English. I really love this task because we can discuss it with our group member and we also can share our opinion.” [P9]

5 Discussion

The study revealed that incorporating authentic assessment through English native-speaker audio notably enhanced students listening skills as well as their cognitive skills and implicit knowledge. According to survey and interview results, students reported increased focus and ability to discern slang, dialects, and accents. These findings are aligned with the previous research on authentic assessment that highlighted its benefits in improving comprehension and promoting meaningful learning experiences (McArthur, 2023; Villarroel et al., 2020).

Students also employed several listening strategies, including repetition, slowing down audio, taking notes, and recognizing keywords. The use of native audio and authenticity-based is effective in input processing, which requires learners to give focused attention to spoken input (Rahman et al., 2025). However, several students reported difficulties processing and comprehending native audio, highlighting L2 listening obstacles such as speech perception issues and cultural obstacles (Singh et al., 2024; Ramalingam et al., 2022). Survey results also showed that native audio improved students' attention and motivation, which is consistent with previous research (McArthur, 2023; Villarroel et al., 2020). Providing authentic assessment with native audio provided students with more options, a less stressful setting, and opportunity to improve their cognitive skills (McTighe et al., 2020; Godfroid, 2021; Rahman et al., 2025). Furthermore, authentic assessment prepared students to adapt to real-life spoken English and overcome listening challenges such as speech perception, memory load, strategy limitations, and contextual barriers (Mohammed et al., 2021; Ramalingam et al., 2022; Singh et al., 2024).

Despite these benefits, eight out of nine participants experienced trouble understanding native accents and slang due to the audio's constant speed. Students dealt with these difficulties by employing metacognitive strategies such as replaying audio, focusing on keywords, and engaging in collaborative reflection. This lends weight to the idea that native English audio and real-world circumstances facilitate language learning in ESL settings (Qasserras, 2025). Five of the nine participants reported enhanced listening skills and confidence following repeated exposure, while others praised the task's break from grammar-heavy activities, which they found less stressful. This is consistent with authentic assessment concepts regarding student choice, time period, and cognitive demands (McTighe et al., 2020; Godfroid, 2021; Rahman et al., 2025).

Mind mapping also helped students understand and organize material by allowing them to extract core concepts, locate details, and summarize overarching messages. These practices show higher-order thinking and cognitive engagement (Hazaymeh & Alomery, 2021). The use of Canva provided crucial findings, since students were able to collaborate and use it creatively to brainstorm their mind maps. These findings are consistent with earlier research that has emphasized metacognitive strategies as important components of advanced listening lessons (Polatcan et al., 2025). Interviews also revealed differences in students' self-perceived proficiency: whereas three of the nine had received an A on their SPM English exams, several still thought their English was below average. This shows that exam results may not accurately reflect learners' confidence or readiness for real-life communication, underlining the need of authentic tasks that promote authentic language usage (Villarroel et al., 2020; Naeem & Rehman, 2021).

Finally, combining native speaker audio and strategy-based tasks answers employer concerns about graduates' communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and collaboration skills (Basir et al., 2022; Osman et al., 2025). This approach promotes the development of transferable workplace skills like communication, professionalism, autonomy, and leadership by incorporating authentic listening materials into assessments, encouraging collaboration, and connecting learning to real-world contexts (McArthur, 2023; Villarroel et al., 2020). Overall, these findings demonstrate the efficacy of authentic assessment in boosting L2 learners' listening comprehension and preparing them for professional settings.

6 Conclusion and Implications

In conclusion, this study explored the important role of English native-speaker audio as an authentic assessment in enhancing students' listening skills. The findings suggest that native-speaker audio improved students' comprehension by encouraging cognitive strategies, motivation and engagement, as well as preparing them for real-world communication. The utilization of authentic materials allowed students to analyze knowledge in more depth and build transferable skills that extend beyond the classroom. Despite encountering difficulties with accents, slang, and audio pace, students used coping methods like as repetition, note-taking, and collaborative

reflection, demonstrating the importance of authentic and learner-centered approaches. The findings demonstrate that authentic assessment not only improves listening skills, but it also promotes autonomy, cognitive skills, and problem-solving skills, all of which are necessary for lifelong learning.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the pedagogical benefits of using technology as a medium for active learning. Students were able to brainstorm and communicate in creative ways using tools like Canva, which aligns with research that supports the significance of digital platforms in increasing engagement and developing an impression of ownership over learning.

Moreover, the limitations of the study were constrained to only one higher institution with a quite small sample size. In response, future research is recommended to investigate and explore the effects of authentic assessment across ESL learners' proficiency levels and the other educational settings. Besides, future research also can look into the impacts of authentic assessment to the other language components such as writing, reading and speaking hence it would offer significant insights into how the assessment could help ESL learners to improve their overall communication skills in both academic and professional settings. Furthermore, investigating how digital tools might be systematically integrated into listening activities could provide new insights into efficient technology-enhanced teaching approaches. Through these initiatives, authentic assessment can continue to evolve as a relevant approach to language acquisition, bridging instructional methods to real-world applications.

Acknowledgments. This paper benefited substantially from the guidance and supervision provided by Geran Inovasi Sosial & Pemindahan Ilmu Komuniti UMPSA (CDU230127). The authors would like to thank the colleagues who provided helpful input and encouragement.

Disclosure of interests. The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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