



# The Effectiveness of Audio Storytelling in Improving Students' Listening Skills in EFL Classrooms

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## Abstract

Listening comprehension plays a crucial role in tertiary EFL learning; however, many university students struggle due to limited exposure to contextualized and authentic audio input. Despite the growing use of storytelling in language teaching, few empirical studies have examined the effectiveness of audio-only storytelling in higher education EFL listening classrooms. This study investigates whether audio storytelling significantly improves university students' listening comprehension. A quasi-experimental one-group pre-test-post-test design was employed involving 30 undergraduate EFL students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a validated listening comprehension test and analyzed through descriptive statistics and a paired-sample t-test. The results showed a significant improvement in students' mean scores from 62.40 (pre-test) to 78.60 (post-test), with  $p < 0.05$ . The calculated effect size indicated a strong practical impact. These findings suggest that audio storytelling provides contextualized and meaningful input that significantly enhances listening comprehension in tertiary EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** *audio storytelling; listening comprehension; EFL; story-based learning; tertiary education; quasi-experimental design*

## Introduction

Listening comprehension remains one of the most challenging skills for university students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. At the tertiary level, students are required to understand lectures, academic discussions, and various forms of spoken input that demand advanced listening competence. However, many learners struggle to grasp main ideas, identify specific information, and infer meaning from spoken English delivered at natural speed. These difficulties indicate that listening instruction at the university level requires more effective and engaging pedagogical approaches.

One major cause of students' listening difficulties lies in conventional instructional practices. Listening classes often rely on textbook-based recordings that emphasize answering comprehension questions rather than developing listening strategies. Such materials frequently lack meaningful context and authentic communicative value, leading students to become passive listeners. Moreover, limited exposure to English outside the classroom further restricts opportunities to interact with natural spoken input, which is essential for developing listening fluency and confidence.

To address these challenges, researchers and educators have proposed storytelling as an alternative instructional approach. Storytelling presents language in coherent and meaningful narrative structures, allowing learners to process spoken input within a contextual framework. Unlike isolated dialogues or decontextualized exercises, stories naturally integrate vocabulary, grammar, and discourse features, thereby facilitating comprehension. Through narrative input, learners are encouraged to predict events, connect ideas, and infer meaning, which are key cognitive processes in listening development.

Previous studies have reported positive effects of storytelling on language learning outcomes. For instance, story-based instruction has been shown to enhance learner engagement and motivation while supporting vocabulary acquisition and overall comprehension. Audio-based learning media have also been found to improve learners' familiarity with pronunciation, intonation, and speech rhythm. However, much of the existing research focuses on digital storytelling that combines audio and visual elements or is conducted at primary and secondary education levels. As a result, the specific contribution of audio-only storytelling to listening development at the tertiary level remains underexplored.

Although storytelling has gained attention in language education research, empirical evidence examining its effectiveness in higher education EFL listening classrooms is still limited. In particular, few studies investigate the use of audio storytelling without visual support, which requires learners to rely solely on auditory input. This gap is significant because university students frequently encounter listening situations—such as lectures and academic podcasts—where visual cues are minimal or absent. Therefore, further investigation is needed to determine whether audio-only storytelling can effectively enhance listening comprehension in tertiary EFL contexts.

Grounded in theories of meaningful input and contextualized language learning, audio storytelling is assumed to provide comprehensible and engaging input that supports listening development. Narrative structures activate learners' background knowledge and promote top-down processing, enabling them to construct meaning beyond individual words. By focusing on meaning rather than isolated linguistic forms, audio storytelling may foster more effective listening strategies and deeper comprehension.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate the effectiveness of audio storytelling in improving university students' listening comprehension in EFL classrooms. Specifically, the research seeks to answer the following question: Does the use of audio storytelling significantly improve students' listening comprehension at the tertiary level?

### **Method**

This study employed a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design to examine the effectiveness of audio storytelling in improving university students' listening comprehension. Specifically, a one-group pre-test-post-test design was implemented to measure students' listening performance before and after the instructional treatment. This design was selected to observe measurable improvement within a natural classroom setting where random assignment was not feasible.

### **Research Design**

The research procedure consisted of three stages: pre-test, treatment, and post-test. Initially, a listening comprehension pre-test was administered to determine students' baseline ability. Following the pre-test, participants received listening instruction through audio storytelling over **six meetings**, each lasting **90 minutes**, conducted within a four-week period. After completing all treatment sessions, a post-test was administered under the same testing conditions as the pre-test to measure improvement.

Although this design allows for measuring progress over time, the absence of a control group limits stronger causal claims regarding the exclusive effect of the treatment.

### **Participant**

The participants were 30 undergraduate students enrolled in an English course at a university where English is taught as a foreign language. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had relatively similar academic backgrounds and English proficiency levels. All participants had previously completed foundational English courses and were familiar with standard listening activities used in tertiary classrooms.

### **Research Instrument**

The primary instrument was a listening comprehension test designed to measure four key listening indicators: identifying main ideas, understanding specific information, making inferences, and recognizing vocabulary in context. The test consisted of 25 multiple-choice items based on audio recordings comparable in difficulty to the treatment materials.

To ensure content validity, the test was constructed in alignment with the course syllabus and reviewed by an English language teaching expert. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha yielded a coefficient of 0.82, indicating high internal consistency and reliability of the instrument.

#### Scoring Procedure

Each correct response was awarded one point. The total raw scores were converted into percentages on a scale of 0–100. The same scoring rubric was applied to both the pre-test and post-test to maintain consistency and objectivity.

#### Treatment Procedure

The treatment involved the integration of audio storytelling as the primary listening material. The selected audio stories were appropriate for students' proficiency levels and ranged between 5–8 minutes in duration. The materials featured natural pronunciation, coherent narrative structure, and moderate speech rate without visual support.

Each session followed a structured sequence:

1. Pre-listening activity (prediction and vocabulary activation)
2. First listening (general comprehension)
3. Second listening (specific information identification)
4. Post-listening discussion and feedback
- 5.

Students were encouraged to focus on overall meaning rather than translating word by word. The instructor facilitated comprehension through guided discussion without providing immediate transcripts.

#### Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to summarize pre-test and post-test performance. A paired-sample t-test was conducted to determine whether the observed difference was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Additionally, Cohen's *d* was calculated to measure the practical significance (effect size) of the treatment.

#### Threats to Validity

Several potential threats to internal validity were considered. The testing effect may have influenced students' familiarity with test format, while maturation could have contributed to natural improvement over time. Because the study used a one-group design without a comparison group, the findings should be interpreted cautiously. Despite these limitations, consistent procedures and

equivalent testing conditions were applied to minimize bias.

## Result and Discussion

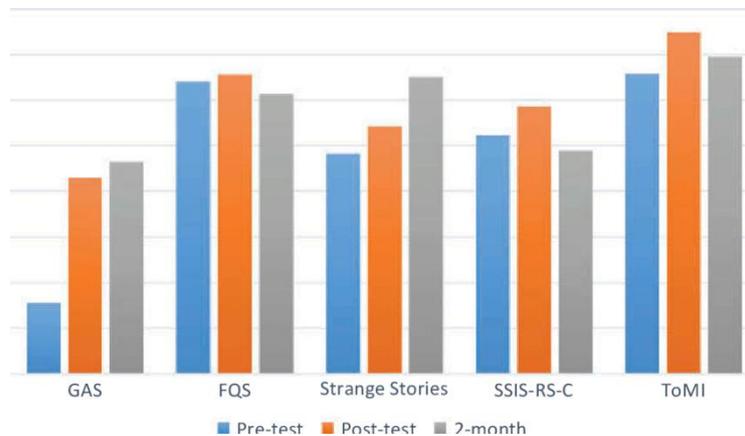
### Results

The results of this study present the statistical findings of students' listening comprehension before and after the implementation of audio storytelling. Descriptive statistics revealed that the mean pre-test score was 62.40 (SD = 8.15), while the mean post-test score increased to 78.60 (SD = 6.90). The mean difference between the two tests was 16.20 points.

A paired-sample t-test was conducted to examine whether the difference was statistically significant. The analysis showed a t-value of -9.45 with a significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Since the p-value was lower than the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant difference between pre-test and post-test scores.

To determine the magnitude of the treatment effect, Cohen's d was calculated. The effect size was **1.95**, which is categorized as a large effect. This indicates that the improvement in listening comprehension was not only statistically significant but also practically substantial.

### Visualization of Score Improvement



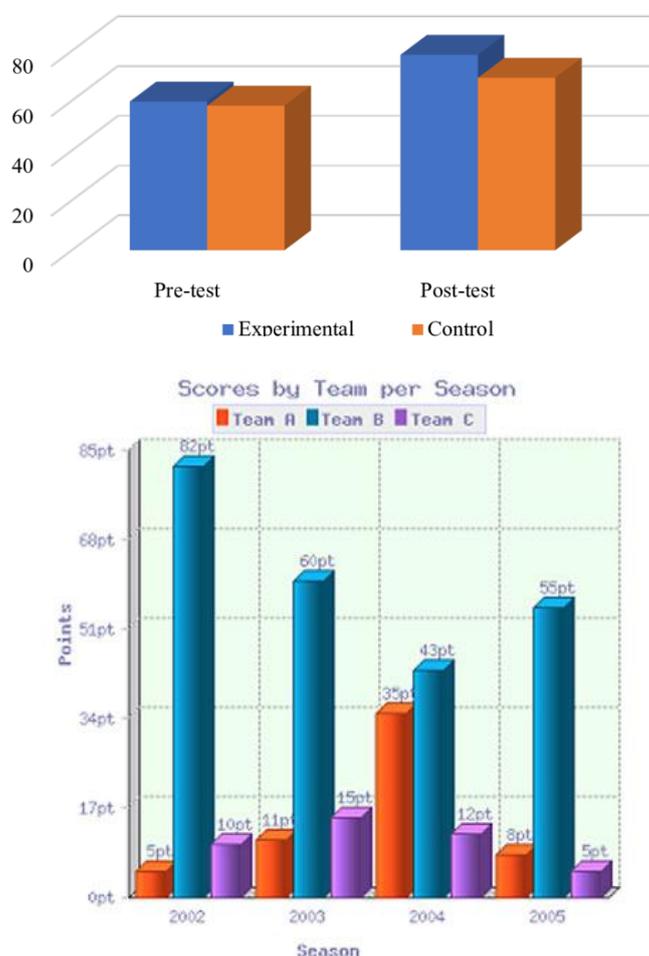


Figure 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Mean Scores

The figure illustrates the noticeable increase in students' listening comprehension after the implementation of audio storytelling.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that audio storytelling significantly improves university students' listening comprehension. The large effect size suggests that the treatment produced a meaningful pedagogical impact beyond statistical significance. The improvement can be explained from several theoretical and pedagogical perspectives.

### Theoretical Explanation

First, the findings support the Input Hypothesis proposed by Stephen Krashen, which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in second language acquisition. Audio storytelling provides meaningful, contextualized input that allows learners to understand language slightly above their current proficiency level ( $i+1$ ). Because the stories were structured narratively, students could rely on contextual

clues to construct meaning, thereby facilitating comprehension.

Second, the results align with metacognitive listening theory developed by Larry Vandergrift, which highlights the interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing. Narrative texts activate background knowledge, enabling learners to predict events and infer meaning. This activation of top-down processing helps students compensate for limited vocabulary or rapid speech rate, thus enhancing overall listening comprehension.

#### Exposure to Authentic Pronunciation

Audio storytelling also exposes learners to natural pronunciation, intonation, stress patterns, and rhythm. Continuous exposure to authentic spoken input supports phonological processing and reduces listening anxiety. This repeated exposure likely contributed to students' improved ability to identify key information and infer meaning from spoken texts.

#### Comparison with Previous Research

The findings confirm previous studies reporting positive effects of storytelling on language development. For example, prior research has shown that storytelling enhances engagement and comprehension in EFL classrooms. However, unlike many earlier studies that focused on digital storytelling combining audio and visual elements, this study specifically investigated audio-only storytelling at the tertiary level. The results extend previous research by demonstrating that visual support is not always necessary for improving listening comprehension, particularly when narrative structure provides sufficient contextual scaffolding.

#### Pedagogical Implications

Based on the findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed for EFL instructors:

1. Use pre-listening prediction activities to activate students' background knowledge before listening.
2. Apply repeated listening cycles, allowing students to focus first on general meaning and later on specific details.
3. Encourage post-listening discussion to strengthen inferential comprehension and critical thinking.
4. Select narrative audio materials of 5–10 minutes with clear structure and appropriate speech rate.
5. Delay providing transcripts to encourage active listening strategies.

These strategies can help transform listening classes from passive answer-checking sessions into interactive meaning-construction processes.

### Limitations

Despite the positive findings, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study employed a one-group pre-test–post-test design without a control group, which limits strong causal generalization. The sample size was relatively small ( $n = 30$ ), and the treatment duration was limited to six meetings. Additionally, no delayed post-test was conducted to measure long-term retention. Future research should employ experimental designs with control groups, larger samples, and extended treatment duration to provide stronger empirical evidence.

### Conclusion

This study examined the effectiveness of audio storytelling in improving university students' listening comprehension in an EFL classroom. The findings demonstrated a statistically significant improvement with a large effect size, indicating that audio storytelling provides substantial pedagogical impact in tertiary listening instruction. Beyond statistical evidence, the results highlight the importance of contextualized and meaningful auditory input in facilitating comprehension.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the role of comprehensible input and narrative structure in second language listening development. Audio storytelling enables learners to activate background knowledge, apply top-down processing strategies, and construct meaning from extended spoken discourse. The narrative format supports inferential thinking and reduces reliance on word-by-word decoding, thereby promoting deeper listening comprehension.

Pedagogically, this study suggests that integrating structured audio storytelling into listening courses can enhance student engagement and listening performance. When combined with prediction activities, repeated listening cycles, and post-listening discussions, narrative-based audio materials can transform listening classes into active meaning-construction environments rather than passive comprehension-testing sessions.

However, the study is limited by the use of a one-group pre-test–post-test design, a relatively small sample size, and a short treatment duration. The absence of a control group restricts broader causal generalization. Future research is therefore recommended to employ more rigorous experimental designs, involve larger and more diverse participants, and examine long-term retention effects through delayed post-tests. audio storytelling represents a practical and theoretically grounded instructional strategy for improving listening comprehension in higher education EFL contexts. Its integration into tertiary classrooms offers a promising direction for developing more engaging and effective listening pedagogy

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