



Exploring the Use of Short Films in A Deep Learning Oriented EFL Listening Classrooms: A Qualitative Case Study

Dessy Kurniasy^{1*}, Zahratul Idami², Shafrida Wati³, Wahidah⁴

^{1,2,3,4}IAIN Langsa, Langsa, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: dkurniasy@gmail.com

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Abstract

Listening comprehension continues to present significant difficulties for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially when they must process spoken language in real time. The audiovisual media in listening instruction can improve comprehension and learning engagement. This study investigates how short films are used in a deep learning approach in a university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) listening class. A qualitative case study method was used, involving twenty-two undergraduate students in a Listening and Speaking course at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Langsa, Indonesia. Classroom observations, student reflection logs, and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data. The training unfolded over four separate sessions. The project involved watching films, identifying important words, creating stories, and writing personal reflections. The findings indicated that the incorporation of short films improved students' listening comprehension by providing contextual visual cues that facilitated meaning construction. Moreover, the use of reflective activities encouraged deeper cognitive involvement, allowing students to connect the film's content with their own experiences and the larger societal context. Conversely, some students encountered difficulties in spontaneous oral retelling, attributable to limited vocabulary and speaking confidence. In conclusion, the study indicated that the combination of audiovisual materials with deep learning activities can cultivate more meaningful listening experiences within EFL classrooms.

Abstrak

Pemahaman menyimak masih menjadi salah satu keterampilan yang menghadirkan tantangan signifikan bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL), terutama ketika mereka dituntut untuk memproses bahasa lisan secara real time. Integrasi media audiovisual dalam pembelajaran menyimak berpotensi meningkatkan pemahaman sekaligus keterlibatan belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pemanfaatan film pendek melalui pendekatan deep learning pada kelas menyimak bahasa Inggris di tingkat perguruan tinggi. Menggunakan metode studi kasus kualitatif, studi ini melibatkan 22 mahasiswa di



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kelas Professional Listening and Speaking di Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Langsa, Indonesia. Proses pembelajaran dilaksanakan dalam empat sesi terpisah mencakup aktivitas menonton film, mengidentifikasi kosakata penting, mengonstruksi alur cerita, serta menulis refleksi personal. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan film pendek mampu meningkatkan pemahaman menyimak mahasiswa melalui visual yang membantu proses konstruksi makna. Selain itu, penerapan aktivitas reflektif mendorong keterlibatan kognitif yang lebih mendalam, sehingga mahasiswa dapat mengaitkan isi film dengan pengalaman pribadi maupun konteks sosial yang lebih luas. Namun, sebagian mahasiswa masih mengalami kesulitan dalam melakukan retelling lisan secara spontan, yang disebabkan oleh keterbatasan penguasaan kosakata serta rendahnya kepercayaan diri dalam berbicara. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa kombinasi antara media audiovisual dan aktivitas pembelajaran berbasis deep learning berpotensi menciptakan pengalaman menyimak yang lebih bermakna dalam konteks pembelajaran EFL.

Introduction

Listening ability is widely regarded as one of hardest part of learning English as a foreign language (EFL) because learners must process spoken language instantly and simultaneously interpreting meaning, vocabulary, pronunciation, and contextual information. Unlike reading activities, listening does not allow learners to easily review or repeat information, which often creates cognitive overload and listening anxiety among EFL students (Graham & Santos, 2023). In higher education settings, listening competence has become increasingly essential because students are expected not only to understand spoken information accurately but also to respond critically and communicatively in academic contexts.

In line with current educational developments, language teaching practices around the world have gradually shifted from traditional teacher-centered instruction toward more communicative and student-centered learning environments. Contemporary EFL pedagogy no longer focuses solely on the transmission of linguistic knowledge; instead, it emphasizes the creation of meaningful learning experiences that resemble authentic communication situations (Richards, 2022). However, listening instruction in many tertiary EFL classrooms still relies heavily on conventional audio recordings and scripted dialogues that provide minimal contextual support for learners. This condition remains common in Indonesian EFL classrooms, where students often encounter textbook-based listening exercises rather than authentic spoken discourse, resulting in limited exposure to real-life language use and natural interaction (Zein, 2020).

To overcome the limitations of traditional audio materials, short films have increasingly been considered an alternative medium for listening instruction. Recent studies suggest that multimodal audiovisual materials can significantly support listening comprehension because learners receive not only auditory input but also visual cues such as facial expressions, gestures, intonation, and situational context that facilitate meaning construction during listening activities (Mekheimer, 2024). The integration of audiovisual elements also improves learners' motivation and memory retention because information is processed simultaneously through auditory and visual channels (Boltiziar & Munkova, 2023). Furthermore, the narrative structure embedded in short films enables learners to engage emotionally and cognitively with authentic language use, thereby increasing classroom participation and learning engagement (Pradana & Fakhurriana, 2023).

The integration of short films in EFL listening instruction is closely related to the concept of deep learning approaches in higher education. Contemporary perspectives on deep learning emphasize that students should actively construct understanding, connect new knowledge with prior experiences, reflect critically on learning content, and apply knowledge meaningfully rather than merely memorize information superficially (Fullan et al., 2018). Within listening instruction, a deep learning approach encourages learners not only to identify spoken words but also to interpret implied meanings, analyze contextual information, and engage critically with authentic language input. Therefore, integrating short films with a deep learning approach may provide meaningful opportunities for tertiary EFL learners to improve listening comprehension while simultaneously developing higher-order thinking skills and reflective learning processes.

Recent studies have highlighted the significant role of audiovisual materials in improving EFL learners' listening comprehension. For example, Mohamed A. Mekheimer conducted a study in 2024 entitled *"Beyond the Textbook: A Year-Long Exploration of VODcasts in EFL Education."* The study investigated whether authentic video-based instruction could improve college students' English skills. Using a quasi-experimental design with pre-test and post-test procedures, the research compared students who learned through VODcasts and authentic videos with those who learned through traditional audio materials. The findings revealed that students exposed to authentic audiovisual materials demonstrated significant improvement in listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and overall language development. The study concluded that multimodal audiovisual input provides richer contextual support than conventional listening materials. However, the research mainly focused on learning outcomes and did not deeply explore how students cognitively processed listening activities through a deep learning framework.

Another relevant study was conducted by Dukhayel Aldukhayel in 2021 entitled *"The Effects of Captions on L2 Learners' Comprehension of Vlogs."* This study examined the

influence of audiovisual support and captions on EFL learners' listening comprehension. The research involved 96 EFL learners who watched vlogs under different subtitle conditions, including L1 captions, L2 captions, and no captions. Using an experimental quantitative design, the study found that visual and contextual support significantly improved learners' comprehension, especially when the audiovisual content strongly matched the spoken language. The findings suggested that multimodal input facilitates listening comprehension by helping learners interpret meaning through contextual cues. Nevertheless, the study concentrated mainly on caption effects and did not investigate reflective or critical listening processes associated with deep learning approaches.

Similarly, Jana Boltziar and Dasa Munkova conducted a study in 2023 entitled *"Emergency Remote Teaching of Listening Comprehension Using YouTube Videos with Captions."* The problem addressed in this study was the difficulty of teaching listening comprehension effectively in online learning environments during emergency remote teaching. The researchers employed a technology-assisted instructional approach using YouTube videos with captions to support EFL learners' listening activities. The findings demonstrated that audiovisual learning tools increased learner engagement and improved listening comprehension because students could combine auditory input with visual information and subtitles. However, the study primarily emphasized technological delivery and remote learning adaptation rather than classroom-based deep cognitive engagement in listening instruction.

The majority of prior investigations predominantly concentrate on subtitles, audiovisual exposure, or quantifiable listening outcomes, rather than exploring the pedagogical integration of short films within a deep learning framework to foster critical thinking, reflective understanding, and substantial interpretation. Furthermore, a significant number of research studies employed quantitative or experimental approaches that provide limited understanding of the intricacies of classroom interactions and the difficulties related to their implementation. There remains an inadequate comprehension of how the incorporation of short films within a deep learning paradigm can enhance listening comprehension among tertiary EFL learners, particularly in the context of Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions such as IAIN Langsa. This particular context is significant due to the fact that students frequently experience restricted exposure to authentic English communication beyond the classroom, while traditional teacher-centered instructional practices continue to exert a strong influence on classroom interactions.

Although short films and deep learning approach have been widely discussed, but the research shows that this two perspective combination studies remain limited relatively. Previous studies have mostly find out how well films increase students' motivation or improve vocabulary (Luoma & Kosunen, n.d.). Meanwhile deep learning

approach have tended to be used to improve reading and writing skills rather than listening comprehension (Trigwell et al., 1999). Therefore, there is still limitation understanding about how the use of short film that is intergrated systematically within a deep learning approach to enhance listening skill at tertiary level. Another limitation investigation relies on experimental and quantitative approaches which emphasize measurable learning outcomes such as test score. While this study provides significant evidence on effectiveness, they frequently offer limited insight into how the learning process actually unfolds in classroom environments. Consequently, the practical issues faced by educators and students during the implementation of such approaches remain insufficiently explored (Luoma & Kosunen, n.d.).

This issue is particularly relevant in the Indonesian EFL setting in which teacher-centered tradition still influenced many learning environments, and students' opportunities to engage with authentic English outside classroom are relatively limited. In this condition, students should struggle to develop their listening competence due to limited exposure to authentic spoken language (Zein, 2020). Some educators tend to be hesitant to employ film-based resources because they are concerned about cognitive overload or uncertain how to guide students think more deeply. In light of these situation, further investigation is required to comprehend how audiovisual tools and cognitive learning strategies can be more effectively integrated into listening instruction. It is vital to not only to evaluate learning outcomes but also to find out practical challenges that might arise during classroom implementation.

This study seeks to address a research gap by examining the efficacy of a hybrid strategy and its use in higher education EFL classrooms. The primary objectives of this study are to deal with two research question: How can the integration of short films with a deep learning approach enhance the comprehension of auditory material for EFL students in higher education? What challenges emerge when this strategy is implemented in the classroom, and how may these challenges be mitigated? This study seeks to enhance the theoretical framework of listening pedagogy and furnish language instructors with pragmatic guidance for optimizing learning environments by exploring these subjects.

Method

This study employed a qualitative case study design to investigate how short films integrated with a deep learning approach could support listening comprehension in a tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. A qualitative approach was selected because it enabled an in-depth exploration of students' learning experiences, perceptions, classroom engagement, and reflective understanding during the instructional process rather than merely measuring numerical outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2024). The

study was conducted at IAIN Langsa, particularly in the English Language Education Study Program during the 2024–2025 academic year.

The participants consisted of 22 undergraduate students enrolled in a Professional Listening and Speaking course. The participants were selected through purposive sampling because the selected class represented an intermediate-level EFL classroom in which students experienced difficulties in understanding authentic spoken English. The criteria for participant selection included: (1) students were actively enrolled in the listening course during the research period, (2) students had previously studied basic listening materials but had limited exposure to authentic audiovisual media, and (3) students agreed voluntarily to participate in classroom observations, reflective activities, and interviews. These criteria were considered appropriate because the study aimed to explore students' listening comprehension processes within authentic classroom settings.

The study utilized four short films as instructional materials, namely *The Crush*, *The Silent Child*, *Ciúnas (Silence)*, and *The View from Up Here*. These films were selected because they represent narrative and drama genres containing authentic spoken interaction, emotional expressions, and contextual social themes relevant to students' experiences. In addition, the films provide rich audiovisual elements such as facial expressions, gestures, intonation, and situational contexts that support listening comprehension and reflective discussion. The relatively short duration of the films also allowed students to focus on both language input and thematic interpretation without experiencing excessive cognitive overload.

Data were collected through classroom observations, students' reflection logs, and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted during four instructional meetings using structured observation sheets to document students' participation, attentiveness, note-taking behavior, interaction patterns, and responses toward audiovisual listening activities. Reflection logs were completed by students after each session to explore how they interpreted the films, connected the stories with personal experiences, and reflected critically on the themes presented in the films. These reflective writings were useful in identifying students' deeper cognitive engagement during the listening process.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the completion of the instructional sessions to obtain more detailed information regarding students' perceptions, difficulties, listening strategies, and learning experiences during the implementation of short film-based listening activities. A total of 10 students were interviewed purposively based on their level of classroom participation and reflection log responses. Each interview lasted approximately 20–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure data accuracy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2024).

The instructional process was implemented across four classroom sessions. In the first session, students watched the selected short film to develop general understanding and identify the main storyline. The second session focused on identifying key vocabulary, expressions, and contextual meanings through repeated viewing activities and guided listening tasks. During the third session, students participated in group discussions and oral retelling activities to summarize the film content and interpret implicit meanings. In the fourth session, students completed reflective writing tasks and classroom discussions aimed at connecting the film themes with real-life experiences and broader social contexts. These activities were designed to encourage deeper cognitive processing and reflective engagement consistent with deep learning principles.

The collected data were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2022) thematic analysis procedures. The analysis involved data familiarization, coding, theme categorization, and interpretation of emerging patterns related to listening comprehension, learner engagement, and reflective learning experiences. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employed triangulation across observation notes, reflection logs, and interview data. Member checking and detailed methodological documentation were also conducted to ensure credibility, dependability, and transparency throughout the research process (Nowell et al., 2024).

This study used a qualitative case study method to look into how short films could be used in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) listening classroom as part of a deep learning framework. We chose a qualitative approach so that we could look more closely at how students learned, what they thought, and how involved they were in the teaching process, instead of just focusing on numbers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The English Language Education program at the State Islamic Institute (IAIN) Langsa, Aceh, Indonesia was where the study took place. There were 22 undergraduate students in the study who were taking a Listening and Speaking class for the 2023-2024 school year. The study used purposive sampling to pick participants to take part, focusing on a specific class where the teaching style was used.

Data were gathered using three instruments: classroom observations, student reflection logs, and semi-structured interviews. To assess students' preparedness and involvement during the listening activities, structured observation sheets were utilized. These sheets documented attendance, the organization of learning resources, note-taking practices, and levels of focus exhibited while watching the short films.

Furthermore, students submitted reflection logs post-activities to articulate their comprehension of the film's content and connect the themes to their personal experiences or societal contexts. These reflections offered insight into students' profound cognitive engagement with the learning materials. After the instructional sessions, semi-structured

interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions, difficulties, and strategies related to understanding audiovisual material (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The teaching activities transpired throughout four periods. Students first viewed a short film to get a basic understanding, thereafter engaging in additional screenings to identify key words and phrases. They subsequently encapsulated the tale through oral or written recapitulation and executed reflective writing tasks.

The data were analyzed thematically, as described by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were generated inductively and classified into themes related to listening comprehension and learning engagement. We employed data triangulation and member checks to establish credibility. To increase the study's reliability, we followed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) recommendation by carefully documenting all the methods used.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study were derived from classroom observations, field notes, students' reflection logs, retelling activities, and semi-structured interviews conducted during four instructional sessions. Thematic analysis revealed several recurring patterns related to students' listening comprehension, cognitive engagement, classroom participation, and reflective learning processes during the implementation of short films within a deep learning framework. The results indicate that audiovisual learning activities gradually encouraged students to become more active listeners, critical interpreters, and reflective learners in the EFL classroom.

One of the earliest findings concerned students' preparedness and engagement before the listening activities began. Classroom observations demonstrated that most students came prepared with notebooks, writing tools, and seating arrangements that allowed them to focus on the audiovisual materials effectively. Such behaviors indicated an initial awareness of active listening strategies and learning readiness. However, several students still appeared passive and unprepared during the first session.

Table 1. Observation Results During Listening Activities

Observed Behavior	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
Students prepared learning tools	16 students	19 students	21 students	22 students
Students took notes actively	9 students	15 students	18 students	20 students
Students participated in discussion	7 students	12 students	17 students	19 students
Students demonstrated reflective responses	5 students	9 students	15 students	20 students

The observation results demonstrate a gradual increase in students' classroom engagement throughout the instructional sessions. During the first viewing activities, many students relied heavily on visual context to understand the storyline because they experienced difficulty recognizing unfamiliar vocabulary and authentic spoken expressions. However, repeated viewing activities appeared to support students' comprehension development significantly. By the second and third sessions, students began identifying keywords, taking notes actively, and discussing implied meanings with peers. These findings support recent studies arguing that audiovisual materials facilitate listening comprehension because visual and auditory information are processed simultaneously, enabling learners to construct meaning more effectively (Mekheimer, 2024; Boltiziar & Munkova, 2023).

Students' interview responses also revealed that audiovisual materials reduced anxiety and increased comprehension confidence during listening activities. One participant explained:

“When I watched the film for the second time, I could understand the story better because I looked at the characters' expressions and gestures. It helped me guess the meaning even if I did not know all the words.” (Student 7, Interview)

Another student stated:

“Usually listening activities only use audio, so I become nervous and confused. with short films, I feel more interested because I can follow the story visually.” (Student 12, Interview)

These responses indicate that visual context played an important role in supporting learners' meaning-making processes during listening activities. Recent research similarly suggests that multimodal audiovisual input can reduce cognitive burden and improve learners' engagement because visual cues provide contextual assistance during authentic language processing (Bùi, 2024; Zuhriyah & Irmayani, 2025).

Despite these positive developments, differences between receptive and productive language performance remained noticeable during the retelling activities conducted in the third session. Although many students demonstrated improved understanding of the film content, only a limited number were able to retell the story fluently and coherently in English. Several students hesitated frequently, paused while searching for vocabulary, or produced grammatically incomplete utterances. Observation notes indicated that students generally understood the narrative but experienced difficulty transforming comprehension into spontaneous spoken production.

One student expressed this difficulty during the interview:

“I understand the movie in my mind, but sometimes I cannot explain it directly in English because I need more time to organize my words.” (Student 4, Interview)

This finding aligns with recent perspectives on second-language speaking anxiety and cognitive processing, which explain that productive speaking tasks require simultaneous processing of meaning, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation under time pressure (Teng & Zhang, 2023). The results therefore suggest that listening comprehension development does not automatically guarantee oral fluency, particularly in EFL contexts where opportunities for authentic spoken interaction remain limited.

The students’ reflection journals from the final session further demonstrated evidence of deeper cognitive engagement and reflective learning. Most students were able to connect the themes presented in the short films with personal experiences, educational values, and broader social issues. Compared to their earlier reflections, later responses showed better organization, richer vocabulary use, and more analytical interpretation of the film narratives.

For example, one student wrote:

“The film taught me that communication is not only about language but also understanding other people’s feelings. I realized that listening carefully is important in real life, not only in the classroom.” (Reflection Log, Student 15)

Another reflection stated:

“Through the film, I learned about social problems and how people struggle emotionally. It made me think critically, not only about English words but also about human relationships.” (Reflection Log, Student 9)

These findings indicate that the short film activities encouraged students to move beyond surface-level comprehension toward reflective interpretation and critical engagement. Such outcomes are closely associated with contemporary deep learning principles, which emphasize meaningful understanding, critical reflection, and knowledge integration rather than rote memorization (Fullan et al., 2018). The reflective writing activities also appeared to provide students with additional cognitive processing time, enabling them to organize ideas more effectively than during spontaneous oral retelling tasks.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that integrating short films within a deep learning framework positively contributed to students’ listening comprehension, engagement, and reflective learning experiences in the EFL classroom. Students gradually developed greater confidence in interpreting authentic spoken language and analyzing audiovisual content critically. Nevertheless, the study also revealed continuing challenges related to

oral production and spontaneous speaking performance. While audiovisual materials effectively supported receptive comprehension, students still required additional opportunities for structured speaking practice to strengthen productive language skills.

These findings imply that short film-based listening instruction should be integrated with interactive speaking activities such as paired discussions, guided retelling, shadowing exercises, and collaborative reflection tasks. Such activities may help bridge the gap between receptive listening comprehension and productive oral communication. In tertiary EFL contexts such as IAIN Langsa, integrating audiovisual materials with reflective and communicative learning tasks may therefore provide meaningful opportunities for developing both listening competence and higher-order thinking skills simultaneously.

Conclusion

This study concluded that integrating short films within a deep learning framework effectively enhanced EFL students' listening comprehension at IAIN Langsa. The findings demonstrated that audiovisual elements such as gestures, facial expressions, and contextual cues helped students interpret authentic spoken language more effectively, while reflective writing activities promoted deeper cognitive engagement and critical understanding. Repeated exposure to short films also increased students' confidence and supported more meaningful listening experiences. These findings support recent studies emphasizing that multimodal audiovisual learning can improve listening comprehension, learner engagement, and contextual meaning-making in EFL classrooms (Mekheimer, 2024; Boltiziar & Munkova, 2023; Bui, 2024).

However, the study also found that students still experienced difficulties in spontaneous oral production due to speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, and rapid speech processing. To address these challenges, pedagogical scaffolding such as repeated viewing, guided reflection, and structured speaking activities was found to support students' metacognitive awareness and learning confidence (Graham & Santos, 2023). Overall, this study suggests that audiovisual-based deep learning activities can create more engaging and student-centered listening instruction in tertiary EFL contexts, although further research involving broader participants and different educational settings is still needed.

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