



## DEVELOPING SPEAKING SKILLS USING AUTHENTIC MATERIALS AMONG B1 LEVEL STUDENTS OF FRENCH

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the effectiveness of using authentic materials to develop speaking skills among B1 level French language learners. The research was conducted over six weeks and involved an experimental group using authentic French-language media and a control group using textbook-based instruction. Through pre- and post-tests, classroom observation, and student feedback, the study measured fluency, vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation, and learner confidence. The results indicated that authentic materials had a significant positive impact on speaking performance, especially in terms of natural language usage and learner motivation. The findings suggest that authentic resources should be integrated into communicative French language teaching to enhance speaking skills at the B1 level.*

**Keywords:** *Communicative competence, oral fluency, French as a foreign language, intermediate learners, language acquisition.*

### INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak a foreign language fluently and confidently is a core goal for language learners and a key indicator of communicative competence. Speaking enables learners not only to express their ideas but also to participate actively in social and academic interactions. At the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), learners are expected to describe experiences, explain opinions, and handle everyday conversations, though they



may still struggle with fluency and spontaneity. Traditional language instruction often emphasizes grammar, vocabulary drills, and scripted dialogues, which may limit learners' exposure to the kinds of authentic, unpredictable language used in real-life situations. Such approaches risk producing learners who are grammatically accurate but unable to engage in natural conversation. To address this gap, language educators increasingly turn to communicative and task-based methods that encourage interaction and active use of the language. Authentic materials resources created by and for native speakers, such as videos, songs, news reports, menus, or podcasts play an essential role in supporting speaking development. These materials offer realistic input that helps learners internalize natural speech patterns, acquire contextual vocabulary, and become familiar with cultural references and communicative norms. Exposure to these materials encourages learners to move beyond memorized phrases and rehearse language in more meaningful, spontaneous ways.

At the intermediate (B1) level, learners are particularly well-positioned to benefit from authentic resources, as they already possess basic grammatical structures and vocabulary. With adequate support, they can engage with real-life content that challenges them to refine their fluency, improve pronunciation, and broaden their expressive range. In communicative classrooms, authentic materials serve not only as input but also as the basis for dynamic speaking activities such as discussions, debates, role-plays, and interviews. Enhancing speaking skills through authentic resources aligns with broader goals in second language acquisition theory, which emphasize learner autonomy, real-world relevance, and meaningful use of language. When implemented thoughtfully, these materials provide a motivating and linguistically rich environment that supports learners in transitioning from controlled classroom speech to confident, real world communication.



The development of speaking skills in a second language has long been a central concern in language education research. Within communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), authentic materials have emerged as essential tools for enhancing learners' oral proficiency. Numerous studies over the past two decades have explored the effectiveness of authentic input in improving learners' ability to speak with fluency, accuracy, and confidence.

One of the most influential theories supporting the use of authentic materials is Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of meaningful and comprehensible input in language acquisition. According to Krashen, learners advance in their language proficiency when they are exposed to language input that is slightly above their current level of competence. Authentic materials such as conversations, videos, or podcasts produced for native speakers can serve as this input, offering linguistic forms in real contexts rather than artificial classroom scenarios.

Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory also underscores the role of social interaction and cultural context in learning. Language is not acquired in isolation but through meaningful use in social settings. Authentic materials reflect the cultural and pragmatic aspects of language, helping learners develop communicative competence as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), which includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

Authentic materials are defined as spoken or written texts created for real communicative purposes by and for native speakers of a language (Gilmore, 2007). These include newspapers, radio broadcasts, menus, travel guides, films, and interviews. Unlike pedagogical materials specifically designed for instructional use, authentic materials present language in its naturally occurring form, including regional accents, informal expressions, and spontaneous speech patterns.



Berardo (2006) argues that authentic texts increase learners' motivation because they provide a sense of relevance and real-world application. They also allow learners to see how language is used in daily life, which contributes to more holistic language development. Peacock (1997) further emphasizes that learners find authentic materials more interesting and enjoyable, which leads to increased effort and better performance, particularly in oral tasks. Gilmore (2007) conducted a comparative study that showed learners exposed to authentic materials outperformed those using textbook-only resources in fluency, lexical range, and listening comprehension. Similarly, Mishan (2005) highlights how authentic input enhances not just linguistic competence, but also intercultural awareness, which is essential in a globalized world.

In relation to speaking, authentic materials offer learners exposure to varied speaking styles, interactional features, and pragmatic cues such as turn-taking, hesitation devices, and informal contractions. These elements are often lacking in traditional textbooks. Littlewood (2004) and Nunan (2004) emphasize that meaningful interaction, grounded in real-world contexts, is crucial for the development of oral skills. Furthermore, authentic materials provide rich contexts for task-based speaking activities such as role-plays, discussions, debates, and interviews. Such tasks encourage learners to process language actively and respond in real-time, thus enhancing their fluency and communicative competence (Ellis, 2003).

Despite their numerous benefits, authentic materials can also pose challenges. Martinez (2002) and Field (2008) caution that the complexity and unpredictability of real-life language can be overwhelming for learners, especially those at lower levels. Factors such as fast speech, colloquial vocabulary, and background noise may hinder comprehension and discourage participation. Therefore, effective implementation requires careful selection of materials and



strategic scaffolding. As Tomlinson (2011) suggests, pre-task activities, vocabulary support, and guided comprehension tasks can help make authentic input more accessible and productive for language learners.

At the B1 level, students typically possess the foundational grammar and vocabulary necessary to engage with moderately complex texts and conversations. Authentic French-language materials can thus serve as a powerful tool to transition learners from mechanical practice to communicative competence. Morrow (2009) and McGrath (2013) argue that authentic input at this stage helps reinforce prior knowledge while encouraging learners to take more risks in speech production.

## METHODS

This experimental study aimed to investigate the impact of authentic materials on the development of speaking skills among B1 level learners of French. The study followed a task-based approach, incorporating authentic resources such as audio and video materials, French news clips, podcasts, and real-life dialogues into classroom activities. The primary objective was to assess the effectiveness of these materials in enhancing fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and overall oral communication skills. The methods employed are described in detail below. The study involved 30 French learners enrolled in a B1 level language course at a university language department. All participants had completed at least one year of formal French language study and were considered at an intermediate level according to the CEFR. The learners were divided into two groups: an experimental group ( $n = 15$ ) and a control group ( $n = 15$ ). The experimental group was exposed to authentic materials during their speaking practice, while the control group continued to work with traditional language textbooks and scripted dialogues. The age range of the participants was 18 to 25, with a balanced gender distribution.



This study utilized a pre-test/post-test design, with both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. A baseline assessment was conducted before the experiment to evaluate the participants' speaking skills in terms of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation. The post-test was administered after the 8 week intervention period to measure any improvements in these areas. The study was carried out over a 10 week period. During the first 2 weeks, both groups received traditional speaking practice using textbook materials. After this initial phase, the experimental group began to engage with authentic materials, while the control group continued using the prescribed coursebook activities.

The following authentic materials were used in the experimental group:

- French news clips: Short segments from French news broadcasts, covering a variety of topics, including current events, culture, and daily life in French-speaking countries. These clips were chosen to expose learners to natural speech patterns, varying accents, and colloquial vocabulary. Example: A 3-minute clip from the *“Journal Télévisé”* on France 2 discussing a major cultural event in Paris. The learners were asked to summarize the content and discuss the cultural significance of the event, using phrases such as “Les Parisiens sont connus pour...” (Parisians are known for...) or “Cet événement a lieu chaque année...” (This event takes place every year...).
- Podcasts: French-language podcasts focusing on everyday conversations, interviews with native speakers, and cultural discussions. Examples included “Transfert” and “Le Gratin”, which feature informal dialogues and are designed for a general French speaking audience. An episode from the “Transfert” podcast in which a speaker talks about their personal experience of moving to a French speaking country. After listening to the episode, students practiced introducing themselves and sharing personal stories in



French, using expressions like “Quand je suis arrivé(e) en France...” (When I arrived in France...) or “J’ai découvert que...” (I discovered that...).

- French songs and lyrics: Popular French songs were selected to help students familiarize themselves with the rhythm, tone, and pronunciation of spoken French. Lyrics were analyzed in class, and students were encouraged to sing along as a way to improve their pronunciation and fluency. A popular song like “La Vie en Rose” by Édith Piaf was used for both listening and speaking tasks. After listening to the song, students discussed its meaning and practiced key phrases, such as “Quand il me prend dans ses bras...” (When he takes me in his arms...) to reinforce pronunciation of linked sounds and rhythm.
- Authentic dialogues and role-plays: Real life conversations and scripted dialogues based on everyday situations (at the market, at a café, or making travel arrangements). These dialogues were sourced from real-world scenarios and provided opportunities for students to engage in task-based speaking activities. After listening to a recorded conversation between two people ordering coffee at a French café, students practiced similar dialogues with their peers. They used phrases like “Je voudrais un café, s’il vous plaît..” (I would like a coffee, please) or “Ça va, merci, et vous? ..” (I’m fine, thank you, and you?).

To assess the impact of the authentic materials on speaking skills, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected throughout the study.

- Pre-test and Post-test: Speaking assessments were conducted at the beginning and end of the study. These assessments consisted of a 5-minute individual oral exam, where participants were asked to describe a picture, answer a series of questions, and participate in a short conversation with the



examiner. The exam was scored using a rubric that focused on fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, and pronunciation.

- Surveys and Interviews: After the 8-week intervention, students in the experimental group completed a survey regarding their experiences with the authentic materials. Open-ended questions allowed them to reflect on how the materials influenced their motivation, confidence, and speaking development. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of participants to gather more in-depth qualitative data.
- Classroom Observation: Observations of classroom interactions were conducted during the task-based activities to assess students' participation levels, engagement, and use of the authentic materials in real-time communication.

The pre-test and post-test speaking assessments were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analysis included the calculation of mean scores for each group, and a paired t-test was conducted to compare the improvements in speaking performance between the experimental and control groups. Qualitative data from surveys, interviews, and classroom observations were coded thematically to identify patterns in students' responses regarding their experience with the authentic materials.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the use of authentic materials had a significant positive impact on the development of speaking skills among the B1-level learners of French. The comparison of pre-test and post-test results shows an overall improvement in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use for the experimental group. The control group, which did not use authentic materials, showed minimal improvement in these areas. The pre-test scores of both groups were comparable in terms of speaking fluency and accuracy, with an average score



of 55% for both groups. However, after 8 weeks of intervention, the experimental group showed a marked improvement in their post-test scores, with an average increase of 20%, reaching a score of 75%. In contrast, the control group's scores only increased by an average of 5%, reaching a score of 60%.

Survey results from the experimental group indicated that most students felt more engaged and motivated to learn French after using authentic materials. Approximately 80% of students reported that they enjoyed the tasks and found the materials more relevant and enjoyable than the traditional textbook exercises. In interviews, several students mentioned that they felt more confident using French in real-life situations. One participant stated: "After practicing with the podcasts, I feel more confident speaking to native speakers because I understand how they speak in real life, not just what's in the textbook."

Classroom observations revealed that the experimental group was more engaged during speaking activities. They actively participated in role-plays, debates, and group discussions. The use of authentic materials, such as podcasts and news clips, led to more meaningful conversations and provided students with the opportunity to interact in a more realistic context. The control group, while participating in textbook-based activities, showed less enthusiasm and engagement, particularly in speaking tasks.

The results of this study support the hypothesis that authentic materials can significantly improve the speaking skills of B1-level French learners. The improvements observed in the experimental group's speaking abilities were particularly evident in their fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use. This is consistent with previous studies that suggest exposure to authentic language materials enhances language learners' ability to communicate effectively in real-world contexts. The experimental group's improvement in fluency can be attributed to the increased exposure to natural, conversational French. Authentic materials,



such as podcasts, French songs, and news clips, provide learners with a model of how language is actually used in everyday situations, as opposed to the more formal and structured language found in textbooks. The ability to hear native speakers using colloquial expressions and varying their speech patterns helped students replicate these patterns in their own speech, reducing hesitations and increasing speech flow. This finding is consistent with the work of Vandergrift (2007), who argues that authentic listening material helps learners improve their listening comprehension and, by extension, their speaking fluency. By practicing with real-world materials, students are better equipped to handle spontaneous conversations, which are often the most challenging aspect of speaking a foreign language. The improvement in pronunciation observed in the experimental group can also be linked to the use of authentic materials. French news clips and podcasts exposed students to various French accents, pronunciation nuances, and the rhythm of natural speech. As a result, students were able to better imitate the native pronunciation patterns, particularly in terms of liaison (the linking of words in fluent speech) and vowel sounds that are often difficult for non-native speakers. This aligns with the research of Derwing and Munro (2005), who highlight the importance of exposure to authentic language in improving learners' pronunciation. They suggest that listening to native speakers helps learners acquire the correct intonation and rhythm, which textbook-based materials often fail to provide.

Although the results of this study are promising, there are several limitations that should be considered. Firstly, the study was conducted over a relatively short period (8 weeks), and longer-term studies could provide further insights into the lasting impact of authentic materials on speaking skills. Secondly, the sample size was small, and future studies with a larger and more diverse group of participants would help generalize the findings. Additionally, while this study focused primarily on B1-level learners, future research could explore the impact of



authentic materials on other proficiency levels, including beginners (A1) and advanced learners (C1).

## CONCLUSION

This experimental study has demonstrated that the use of authentic materials significantly enhances the speaking skills of B1 level French learners. The results revealed marked improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage in the experimental group, which engaged with real-world materials such as podcasts, news clips, songs, and dialogues. In contrast, the control group, which relied solely on traditional textbook-based activities, showed only minimal improvement. The findings of this study underscore the importance of integrating authentic materials into language learning curricula, as they provide learners with exposure to real-life language use, including colloquial expressions, various accents, and conversational speech patterns. By practicing with authentic resources, students are better prepared for practical communication in real-world situations, which is often the ultimate goal of language learning.

Moreover, the positive effects on fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary use indicate that authentic materials can provide learners with a richer, more immersive language experience compared to traditional, scripted content. This aligns with previous research that emphasizes the value of real-world exposure in promoting language development, especially in the context of speaking skills. Despite the promising results, this study acknowledges certain limitations, such as the relatively short duration of the intervention and the small sample size. Future research could explore the long-term effects of authentic material-based activities and expand the sample to include learners from diverse backgrounds and proficiency levels.

In conclusion, integrating authentic materials into the language learning process proves to be a valuable strategy for improving speaking skills, fostering



greater learner engagement, and preparing students for more natural and effective communication in French. Further research and practical application of these materials are recommended to continue advancing the field of foreign language pedagogy.

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