

Research Article

THE IMPACT OF VISUAL INPUT ENHANCEMENT ON IRANIAN INTERMEDIATE EFL LEARNER'S LISTENING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

***Zeynab Geranmayeh Jourkouye and Fereydoun Vahdani**

*Department of English Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages,
Payam Nour University Rasht, Guilan, Iran*

**Author for Correspondence*

ABSTRACT

Though listening comprehension ability is one of the important skills in foreign language learning, there has been relatively little research in this specific area. The present study attempts to investigate the impact of visual input enhancement on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension ability. For this purpose, 90 students were selected for the study. Having being homogenized by a TOEFL test, they were randomly assigned in two groups, control and experimental. Each group consisted of 45 students. Then both groups sat for a pre-test, which was listening comprehension test. The purpose of this test was to measure the learner's initial subject knowledge of listening comprehension ability. Afterwards, the experimental group received treatment based on visual input enhancement. However, the control group received no treatment and approached the traditional way of teaching listening. The treatment procedure took 7 sessions. Finally at the end of the course both groups sat for the post test of listening comprehension ability. Then the statistical analysis was run through T-Test. The results of the study showed that learner's listening comprehension ability improves more when they are provided with visual input enhancement. The results of this study may also be useful for those who are interested in this field.

Key Words: *Visual Input Enhancement, Listening Comprehension Ability*

INTRODUCTION

No one can deny the importance of listening skills in foreign language learning because the key to acquire a language is to receive language input. Krashen *et al.*, (1984) claim that acquisition takes place only when students absorb enough comprehensible input. The same claim was supported by Rost (1994) who confirmed that listening is vital in language classrooms because it provides input for learners. As an input skill, listening plays a crucial role in student's language development. Krashen (1985) argues that people acquire language by understanding the linguistic information they hear. Thus language acquisition is achieved mainly through receiving understandable input and listening ability is the critical component in achieving understandable language input. Without understanding inputs at the right level, any kind of learning simply cannot occur. Thus listening is a fundamental language skill, and as such it merits a critical priority among the four skill areas for language students. As Hasan (2000) pointed out, "listening comprehension provides the right conditions for language acquisition and development of other language skills" (p.138). Listening, therefore, is essential not only as a receptive skill but also to the development of spoken language proficiency. Rost (2002) also indicates that developing proficiency in listening is the key to achieving proficiency in speaking.

Listening plays an important role in communication as it is said that, of the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9% (Gilakjani and Ahmadi, 2011). According to Devine (1982), listening is the primary means by which incoming ideas and information are taken in. Gilbert (1988), on the other hand, noted that students from kindergarten through high school were expected to listen 65-90 percent of the time. Wolvin and Coakley (1988) concluded that, both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication. Listening is central to the lives of students throughout all levels of educational development (Coakley and Wolvin, 1997). Listening is the most frequently used

Research Article

language skill in the classroom (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1991; Vogely, 1998). Both instructors (Ferris and Tagg, 1996) and students (Ferris, 1998) acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension for success in academic settings. Numerous studies indicated that efficient listening skills were more important than reading skills as a factor contributing to academic success (Coakley and Wolvin, 1997).

Statement of the Problem

Listening is more important for the lives of students since listening is used as a primary medium of learning at all stages of education.

In spite of its importance in foreign language learning, the teaching of listening comprehension has long been —somewhat neglected and poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs (Mendelsohn, 1994).

The neglect of the listening skill was accompanied with an ongoing debate about which of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) is the most crucial for the learning and acquisition of a second language. However, past research has thus far revealed that a large proportion of the L2 research findings indicates that listening is the most important skill for language learning because it is the most widely used language skill in normal daily life (Rost, 2002), and it develops faster than the three other language skills, which in turn suggests that it can facilitate the emergence of the other language skills (Oxford, 1990).

EFL learners have serious problems in English listening comprehension due to the fact that universities pay more attention to English grammar, reading and vocabulary. Listening and speaking skills are not important parts of many course books or curricula and teachers do not seem to pay attention to these skills while designing their lessons. Most teachers take it for granted and believe that it will develop naturally within the process of language learning. Persulessy (1988) states that one of the reasons for the opinion that listening is a skill that tends to be neglected is the feeling among language teachers that this skill is automatically acquired by the learner as he learns to speak the language. Most teachers also assume listening is synonymous to breathing— automatic (Thomas and Dyer, 2007).

So the purpose of this study is an attempt to explore a broad view of the impact of visual input enhancement on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension ability.

Research Question

In order to tackle the problem of the research in a much consolidated way, the following research question has been formulated as follows:

RQ: Does visual input enhancement have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension ability?

Research Hypothesis

In order to answer the research question, the following null hypothesis has been formulated:

H0: visual input enhancement does not have any effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension ability.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

1. Method

1.1. Introduction

This part introduces the method of the study. More specifically it details the design of the study, the subjects who participated in the experiment, the instrumentation, procedures and statistical analysis.

1.2. Design of the Study

The design of the study was quasi-experimental design, which is a pre-post test design.

1.3. Participants

The participants of the study were 190 learners of English from Shokouh language institute. Having being homogenized by a TOFEL test, 90 male and female language learners were randomly selected (from among almost 190 learners) to take part in the study. Having confirmed their homogeneity, they were randomly assigned into two groups, an experimental group and a control group, each consisting of 45

Research Article

students. The experimental group received treatment based on visual input enhancement. And the control group received no treatment; however they approached the traditional way of teaching listening.

1.4. Materials

To conduct the present investigation and to implement the process of data collection, the researcher used various tools including the TOEFL test of English language proficiency, pre-test of listening comprehension and post -test of listening comprehension.

1.5. Procedure

As it was already mentioned, the participants were randomly assigned into two groups, control and experimental group. The pre-test of listening comprehension was administered to both experimental group and control group to take their initial knowledge of listening comprehension ability.

One group served as the control group in which students received the traditional way of teaching listening by answering to the multiple-choice questions. The other group served as experimental group in which students received treatment based on visual input enhancement in listening comprehension in that the subjects were exposed to the video. This means that an experimental group received focused attention on another particular part of language, which in this case was a visual cue in listening comprehension while the control group just provided with audio presented information. The whole research project took in almost seven sessions. At the end of the sessions, listening comprehension development of the students in both groups was tested using the post-test, which was the same listening comprehension test. On the basis of these tests the effectiveness of visual input enhancement on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension ability was determined.

1.6. Statistical Analysis

The date of the study was computed based on computer assisted program (SPSS) software. T-Test was used to present the analysis and result of the study based on the hypothesis of the research

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Data Analysis and Results

1.1. Data Analysis

This part presents the result and analysis of the data. In order to begin the study, the researcher administered a pretest to both control and experimental groups unexpectedly. Table 1 and Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the pretest for control and experimental groups:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the pretest for control group

No	Min	Max	Mean	SD
90	5	27	19.22	8.30

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of pre test for experimental group

No	Min	Max	Mean	SD
90	4	18	11.50	3.40

And finally with the end of the course, the post test was administered to both experimental and control group. The descriptive statistics of this test are shown in table 3:

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the post tests for control and experimental group

Variable	No	Mean	SD	S.E. of Mean	DF	2-tail sig.
EXP	45	52.65	9.21	1.06	45	0.95
Cont	45	31.55	6.68	1.46		.000

Research Article

Then in order to make a comparison between the two groups to see if there is any statistically significant difference between the two groups, the obtained raw scores were subjected to two separate independent t-tests. As table 4 indicates, the experimental group had a remarkably better performance than the control group on listening comprehension test.

Table 4: Independent t-test comparing the performance of the two groups on listening comprehension test

Variable	No	Mean	SD	S.E. of mean	DF	2-tail sig.
EXP	45	58.94	1.295	1.350	35	0.86
Cont	45	31.95	7.153	1.176		.000

Then in order to see whether the treatment given to the experimental group had caused any significant change in their performance; another independent t-test was run. Table 5 well shows that the experimental group outperformed the control group significantly.

Table 5: Independent t-test comparing the performance of the two groups after the treatment

Variable	No	Mean	SD	S.E. of mean	DF	2-tail sig.
EXP	45	55.40	1.10	0.17	29	0.96
Cont	45	30.86	1.08	0.15		.000

1.2. Results

The results of the analysis through T-test indicated that using the visual input enhancement in the course of listening may lead to a better performance in EFL learner's listening comprehension ability. In addition, the result of this study showed that visual input enhancement was found to be significant and had a positive effect on Iranian Intermediate EFL learner's listening comprehension improvement.

Conclusion

When working with listening comprehension in the classroom, Hedge points out that the most important task for teachers is to develop learner's confidence in listening to English (2006:243). Evidently, lack of confidence can have a negative effect on listening performance, which is why a lot of research has been devoted to the effect of listening strategies and pre-listening activities on L2-learners.

Apparently, learners tend to improve their comprehension when they are prepared for the listening session. This means that the main purpose of using visual material in the classroom is to help learners develop confidence in listening, as is the intention of pre-listening activities and listening strategies.

Another reason to use visual material in the classroom is that the curriculum of English requires learners to be able to use body language themselves when needed in oral communication. Consequently, L2-learners have to be exposed to native speaker's body language and learn how to interpret it in order to develop this skill.

The study that I have carried out shows that visual input enhancement might have a positive effect on L2-learner's listening comprehension, even though the effect might not be that significant for all learners. Therefore, teachers ought to try the methods mentioned above in practice with the intention of finding out what best suits their group of learners.

As for visual input, it may be useful for learners to practise listening comprehension both with and without visual elements in order to improve their ability to manage different kinds of listening situations in real life.

Research Article

REFERENCES

- Berne J (1998).** Examining the relationship between L2-listening research. *Foreign Language Annals* **31**(2) 169-190, 88-103.
- Canning-Wilson C (2000).** Practical aspects of using video in the foreign language classroom, *The Internet TESL Journal* **6**(11). Retrieved April 15 2011 from: <http://iteslj.org/Articles/Canning-Video.html>.
- Ginther A (2002).** Context and content visuals and performance on listening comprehension stimuli. *Language Testing* **19**(2) 133-167.
- Graham S (2006).** Listening comprehension: The learner's perspective. *System* **34**(2) 165-182.
- Hedge T (2006).** *Teaching and learning in the language classroom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jones L (2003).** Supporting listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition with Multimedia. *Calico Journal* **21**(1) 41-65.
- McCafferty S and Stam G (2008).** *Gesture: second language acquisition and classroom research*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Osada N (2004a).** Listening comprehension research: a brief review of the past thirty years. *Dialogue* **3**(1) 53-66.
- Rouet J and Potelle H (2005).** Navigational principles in multimedia learning. In: *The cambridge handbook of multimedia learning*, edited by Mayer R (New York: Cambridge University Press) 297-312.
- Rubin J (1994).** A review of second language listening comprehension research. *The Modern Language Journal* **78**(2) 199-221.
- Vandergrift L (2011).** Second language listening: presage, process, product and pedagogy. In: *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* 2nd edition, edited by Hinkel E, New York: Routledge 455-471.