The Effect of Listening on Improving Student’s English Language Reading Comprehension
MOJTABA MORADI, HAJAR KHANMOHAMMAD, RAHIL SHEIBANI

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to investigate whether listening can improve Student’s EL Reading Comprehension. This study was conducted with 40 learners including 20 male and 20 female junior EFL learners of 18-35, studying at Islamic Azad University IAU, Shiraz, branch, Iran, in 2013. A proficiency test was administered to show their homogeneity and equivalency. They were put into four groups of ten namely: female experimental and control groups, and male experimental and control ones. A nearly simple short story of eight pages was introduced to both female and male ones. The experimental groups were given the treatment, which was reading and listening the passage of the short story simultaneously, while no treatment was given to the control ones, but just to read the short story. The researcher made use of the T-test to figure out the differences, if any, between the groups. The result showed that the male experimental group answered the reading comprehension questions better than the male control case, while for the female, the opposite condition came true, that is to say that the female control group had better answers for the reading comprehension than those of the experimental one.

INDEX TERMS — control group, EFL learners, experimental group, intermediate level, proficiency test, short story, T-test.

1. Ph.D. Student in TEFL, Department of English, Qeshm Branch, IAU, Iran.
2. Assistant Professor in TEFL, Department of English, Tehran Branch, IAU, Iran.
3. Ph.D. student in TEFL, Department of English, Qeshm Branch, IAU, Iran.
1. INTRODUCTION

It is obvious for the world that listening is the most fundamental part of every language. Listening comprehension is not the same as reading comprehension, although they are closely related. Listening comprehension is an effective instructional strategy for remediation activities (e.g., to develop vocabulary and background knowledge) and for use when text difficulty exceeds the independent reading level of students. It can also be used to identify potential decoding problems, such as when a student’s reading comprehension is compared to his/her listening comprehension of the same text. Research has found that improvement in listening skill has a positive effect on other language skills - reading, writing and speaking. To illustrate, Morris and Leavey (2006) conducted a study focusing on pre-schoolers’ phonological awareness. The study reveals that listening instruction skills improve pre-schoolers’ phonological awareness.

Similarly, two other studies found out that the listening skills instruction assists middle school students to improve their comprehension (Badian, 1999; Bergman, 1999). In addition, the outcome of Bergman’s (1999) study revealed that listening and reading stories at the same time lead participants to improve their reading comprehension performance. In addition to the impact of listening skill on reading comprehension, a study reported by Berninger (2000) shows that participants in Grades 1 – 6 improve their spelling significantly through aural skill instruction whereas there is a high correlation between Grades 1 - 3 and the improvement of narrative and expository composition in Grades 2 and 3 through listening instruction.

Listening exercises provide teachers with the means for drawing learners’ attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in the language. Listening and reading have much in common in terms of input processing. Pearson and Fielding (1991) linked listening with reading skill. They argued that like reading, listening involves phonological, syntactic and semantic orchestration of skill and the knowledge controlled by cognitive processes at the same time.

1.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

According to Abdolmanafi-Rokni, Hamidi and Gorgani (2014), any strategy or methodology which is capable of improving the learners’ language proficiency should be taken into account. The aim of this study was to investigate whether listening can improve Student’s EL Reading
Comprehension. This will show the positive or negative effects that listening elicits and make recommendations for use in the classroom. This study, therefore, tried to find out possible effects of listening on students’ English language reading comprehension.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study, therefore, seeks answers to the following question:

RQ: Does listening have any effect on Iranian male and female students’ English language reading comprehension?

1.3 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The present research has been conducted based on the above-mentioned hypothesis:

NH: Listening has no effect on Iranian male and female students’ English language reading comprehension.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening is an important language skill to develop in terms of second language acquisition (SLA). Listening comprehension is at the heart of language learning. Learners want to understand second language (L2) speakers and want to comprehend a variety of L2 multimedia such as DVDs and the Internet. At the same time, listening is an important language skill to develop in terms of second language acquisition (SLA) (Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). Listening comprehension activities provide students with the aural component of the target language to help them better hear the intricate sounds, enunciations, and content and develop their abilities to communicate with others in a target language. Educators try to help students enhance their listening skills by assigning them videotape, audiotape or computer-based activities to complete either at home or in the language lab setting. With these materials, students can practice hearing vocabulary words, sentence structures, and dialogues in the target language.
The cognitive view of language learning sees listening comprehension as being basically the same as reading comprehension and consequently pedagogical practices have been very similar: In a typical lesson, there are “pre” activities, “while” activities, and “post” activities. However, teachers know that, despite our practice, listening is a bit different from reading. For instance, students can skim a text quickly to get a good idea what it’s about, but listeners can’t skim. The language comes rushing in at them. Listening must be done in real time; there is no second chance, unless, of course, the listener specifically asks for repetition. When students read, cognates (words that are similar in two languages) help understanding. But while cognates may look alike on the page, their sounds may be quite different and they may be less useful while listening. Listening also involves understanding all sorts of reductions of sounds and blending of words. There are false starts and hesitations to be dealt with. In a study that compared reading and listening in a foreign language (Lund, 1991), it was found that readers recalled more details than listeners, and that listeners, while understanding a lot of the main ideas, had to “fill in the blanks” in their understanding by guessing at context. Again, with the words rushing in and the student having no control, these findings make sense.

Brain imaging studies of language comprehension have demonstrated that there is a comparable network of areas of the brain activated in higher-order cognitive processes of reading and listening comprehension. There is a high similarity in cortical areas recruited for listening and reading comprehension processes at the word, sentence, and discourse level (Jobard, Vigneau, Mazoyer, & Tzourio-Mazoyer, 2007). Brain imaging studies convincingly point to the same direction of behavioural studies, indicating that the higher-order processes of listening and reading comprehension are intertwined rather than separate. On the one hand, there are differential cortical areas recruited by modality specific processes, such as the processing of word form by the visual word form area (Cohen et al., 2002). Yet there are comparable areas recruited by a modal processes such as inference-making and other higher level cognitive processes (Booth et al., 2002; Carpenter et al., 2001; Constable et al., 2004; Jobard, Crivello, & Tzourio-Mazoyer, 2003; Michael, Keller, Carpenter, & Just, 2001).

Listening comprehension is at the heart of reading comprehension. Comprehension is the core of verbal ability or intelligence, and can call on nonverbal processes too. Comprehension involves the relating of two or more pieces of information (e.g., Kintsch, 1999). Those pieces
of information can come from long-term memory (prior knowledge), but in reading comprehension at least one piece must come from the text. For years, educators and publishers followed a unimodal approach to listening comprehension and presented aural texts without visual or verbal/textual supportive information. Students were often frustrated by such activities (Jones Vogely, 1998) for any number of reasons including lack of prior knowledge of the topic, the comprehensibility of the speaker, the materials reviewed, the lack of visual information, or even the technological design employed.

Vandergrift (1999) emphasizes that listening is a complex, active process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know. Two distinct processes characterize listening comprehension. Learners rely on prior knowledge in order to understand the meaning of a message; they are using „top-down” processes. Prior knowledge includes the knowledge of the topic, familiarity with the discipline, awareness of the listening context, the text-type, the culture or other information held in long-term memory. Top-down processing refers to how we use our world knowledge to attribute meaning to language input; how our knowledge of social convention helps us understand meaning. It involves “the listener’s ability to bring prior information to bear on the task of understanding the “heard” language” (Morley, 2001).

Bottom-up processes are also used by learners when they rely on specific components of the L2 for aural comprehension. Meaning is constructed from morphemes to words to grammatical relationships to lexical meanings until, eventually, the message is decoded. “Bottom-up refers to that part of the aural comprehension process in which the understanding of the “heard” language is worked out proceeding from sounds to words to grammatical relationships in lexical meanings” (Morley, 2001).

Listening comprehension, according to Vandergrift (2002), is an interactive, interpretive process where listeners use both prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge in understanding messages. In other words, both „top-down” and „bottom-up” processes are at work in the listening activity. It is a continuum where learners will lean towards one process or the other depending on their knowledge of the language, the topic or the listening objectives. If objectives are established before the listening task, learners have a purpose. They can become selective and decide which of the two processes will be activated.
Children with a history of oral language impairment are more likely to present with reading difficulties than their peers (general population). Some research identified this increased likelihood to be as great as 4-5 times more likely than their peers (Catts, et al., 2001). It has been shown that children who struggle with phonemic awareness have significant difficulty acquiring phonic word-attack strategies. There is also evidence that a child’s level of vocabulary significantly impacts reading development, but there has been debate in the research over whether or not it is only vocabulary or if reading acquisition is affected by all of the oral language components mentioned above. Another question studied in the research is which components of reading does oral language impact. Evidence exists linking oral language to the word recognition aspects of reading and/or the comprehension aspects of the reading model. It is important to consider that “not only are oral language skills linked to the code-related skills that help word reading to develop, but they also provide the foundation for the development of the more-advanced language skills needed for comprehension” (Cain & Oakhill, 2007, p. 31).

Supported reading is reading with the support of recorded materials. Individuals read along with the novels or textbooks while they listen to the verbatim recording of the same material. When students are engaged in supported reading, they no longer have to labour over every word. Instead, they can read at a comfortable pace that allows them to acquire the information contained in the text. Because the printed material is recorded, students can not only read the assigned text, they can re-read it — something struggling readers generally do not follow. It seems that listening is of paramount importance to improve English language reading comprehensions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

The participants are 40 learners including 20 male and 20 female junior EFL learners of 18-35, studying at Islamic Azad University (IAU), Shiraz, branch, Iran, in 2013. The participants showed great interests in following and working in such situations that was why they were selected. In addition, they had the oral production of stories course at the time too.

3.2 INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURES
At first, a proficiency test was administered to show their homogeneity and equivalency. They were put into four groups of ten namely: female experimental and control groups, and male experimental and control ones. A nearly simple short story of eight pages is introduced to both female and male ones. The time allocated was 30 minutes. The experimental groups are given the treatment, which is reading the passage of the short story and its listening simultaneously, while no treatment is given to the control ones, but just to read the short story. Then after 10 minutes rest, the four groups were presented with questionnaires. They were ten questions to be answered in multiple choices. And later on, the questionnaires will be collected, analyzed and the results will be interpreted.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

When the needed raw data were collected, their responses to the four conditions namely male and female experimental, and male and female control ones were observed; later on their mean scores, standard deviations, and standard error of measurements were shown. After that, a T-test was run to show the comparisons of the different conditions of the groups. A T-test was used to indicate the differences existent concerning the different conditions of the groups at the end and at the beginning of the work. Then comparisons were made and the results and information are indicated in the following paired sample test tables.
### TABLE 1

**PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST REFERRING TO THE FEMALE PRE-TEST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre control</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.12</td>
<td>1.876</td>
<td>.244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre experimental</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.16</td>
<td>1.567</td>
<td>.177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of pre-control groups and the pre-experimental female groups. So they are homogeneous.

### TABLE 2

**PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST REFERRING TO THE MALE PRE-TEST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre control</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.43</td>
<td>1.675</td>
<td>.300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre experimental</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.65</td>
<td>1.567</td>
<td>.211</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of pre-control groups and the pre-experimental male groups. So they are homogeneous.

**TABLE 3**

**PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST REFERRING TO THE FEMALE POST-TEST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.876</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post control</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.95</td>
<td>1.987</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post experimental</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.45</td>
<td>1.754</td>
<td>.453</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 indicates that there is not a statistically significant difference between the two parts, however; treatment was given to the female post-experimental group, and even the female post-control one has better answers for the questions than those of the female post-experimental group as well.
### TABLE 4

**PAIRED SAMPLE T-TEST REFERRING TO THE MALE POST-TEST**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error of Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post control</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17.67</td>
<td>1.566</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post experimental</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18.87</td>
<td>1.012</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the two male ones. In fact, the mean score of the post experimental receiving the treatment is significantly higher than that of the post control having no treatment in the male case.
Table 5 shows that the T value of pre-experimental and post-experimental is not statistically significant for female. However post-experimental female groups was given the treatment, but it was not effective or significant, so the two female ones are the same as far as mean scores are concerned.
Table 6 shows that the T value of pre-experimental and post-experimental groups is statistically significant. In fact, the post-experimental group receiving the treatment which was listening to the short story, has better answers for the reading comprehension than to those of pre-experimental ones having no listening. So, the mean scores of the post-experimental group are higher than those of the pre-experimental ones.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Listening is a factor in language proficiency which can directly affect other skills and be affected by other several strategies or techniques (Safarali & Hamidi, 2012). The aim of this study was to investigate whether listening could improve student’s EL Reading Comprehension. The result showed that the male experimental group answers the reading comprehension questions better than the male control case, since it was accompanied with listening, while for the female, the opposite condition comes true, that is to say that the female control group had better answers for the reading comprehension than those of the experimental one. It also recommends a continued use of listening during reading comprehension for the whole cases, since at least it forces and fosters them to pay complete attention to the short story.
as well. It has been said and seen that listening and reading can be both similar and different processes. They are different to the extent that the two modalities impose different demands on the cognitive processing system, and they are similar because they use the same knowledge base during comprehension. It is also mentioned that listeners and readers have to use strategies available to complete their comprehension tasks. These strategies cannot be directly observable, but can be inferred from different patterns of results.
REFERENCES


[21] Vandergrift, L. (2002). It was nice to see that our predictions were right: Developing metacognition in L2 listening comprehension. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 58*, 75-84.