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The Impact of Word-Recognition Practice on the Development of the Listening Comprehension of Intermediate-Level EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims at examining the effect of word-recognition practice on EFL students' listening comprehension. The participants consisted of 30 intermediate EFL learners studying in a language institute in Birjand City, Iran. They were assigned randomly to two equal groups, control and experimental. Before starting the experiment, the listening section of IELTS was given to all of the students as the pretest. Then, during the experiment, the experimental group was asked to transcribe the listening sections of their course book while in the control group, the students did not transcribe. After 25 sessions (2 hours each) of instruction, another test of listening (IELTS proficiency test) was given to both groups as the post-test. The results of the two tests were then analyzed and compared using one way ANCOVA test. The results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the control group ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, it was concluded that word-recognition practice is an effective way for the improvement of EFL learners' listening comprehension. The overall results of the study are discussed and the implications for further research and practitioners are made.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, Word-recognition practice, Intermediate EFL students, Listening comprehension strategies

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1. Introduction

With the shift of focus in language teaching towards helping the learners improving their communicative competence, the listening skill has got more importance. This somewhat poorly taught skill (Mendelsohn, 1994) is now considered

as an active process (Nunan, 1998) which deserves further attention and research. In line with the new conceptualization, listening was defined as an "active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal)



needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings" (Purdy, 1997, p. 8).

To emphasize the active role of the listener, Anderson and Lynch (1988) maintained that in listening comprehension "the listener has a crucial part to play in the process, by activating various types of knowledge, and by applying what he knows to what he hears and trying to understand what the speaker means" (p. 6).

With the shift of focus on perceiving listening as an active skill, more focus has been put on teaching the learners on how to develop this skill. One way that learners can develop their listening comprehension is by using strategies. According to Vandergrift (1999) "strategy development is important for listening training because strategies are conscious means by which learners can guide and evaluate their own comprehension and responses" (p. 176).

According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990) there are three main types of strategies: 'meta-cognitive', 'cognitive' and 'social' strategies. Previous studies have tried to see the impact of using these strategies on students' listening comprehension. For example, the findings of Vandergrift's (2003) study indicated that listeners with higher proficiency used more meta-cognitive strategies compared with the low proficient ones. The findings of Liu's study (2008) also indicated that planning strategies were related with listening proficiency and were used more by listeners having more proficiency.

Transcribing as a learning strategy has been used by some researchers (Mennim, 2012; Stones, 2013). In listening comprehension, by transcribing what they listen to, students can focus more on sounds, words, and sentences and identify the problematic areas instead of getting the overall meaning. Besides, by listening to

words and sentences for more than one time, they can 'focus on form' which can result in better learning.

In spite of the significance of listening skill and the potential contribution of transcribing on its development, one can see the paucity of empirical studies in this area. Therefore, this study aims to explore whether the use of word-recognition practice in EFL classes can help develop students' listening comprehension. Accordingly, in line with the objectives of the study, the following research question was raised:

Does word-recognition practice have any significant impact on the development of the listening comprehension of Intermediate-level EFL learners?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 30 (15 girls and 15 boys) EFL learners studying in an English language institute in Birjand City, Iran, in year 2015. The mean of the participants' age was 20 and all of them had a similar language proficiency based on the scores from the English language proficiency test taken from them. They were assigned randomly to two groups, experimental and control. Each group consisted of 15 learners.

2.2 Data collection:

Before starting the experiment, the listening section of IELTS was given to all of the students as the pretest. Then, during the experiment, the experimental group was asked to transcribe the listening sections of their course book. In the control group, however, the students did not transcribe. After 25 sessions (2 hours each) of instruction, another test of listening (IELTS proficiency test) was given to both groups as the post-test.

2.3. Data analysis:

The data collected through the pre-test and post-test were entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. The data were then analyzed and compared using one way ANCOVA test. Both descriptive and inferential analyses were presented in the next section.

3. Results

In order to answer the research question, one way ANCOVA test was used. ANCOVA can be used when there is a two-group pre-test/post-test design comparing the impact of two different interventions, taking before and after measures for each group. Before doing ANCOVA analysis, Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances was conducted. Here, we were only interested in the value of the significance level of the interaction term in the output obtained from the Levene's test procedure. If the Sig. level for the interaction is less than or equal to .05, then the interaction is statistically significant and it indicates that the assumption has been violated.

In this study, as the results in table 1 show, the Sig. or probability value is 0.278 that is above the cut-off, and the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups [$F(1) = 1.223$ sig= 0.278 > 0.05]. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, and the assumption of homogeneity of regression was not violated.

Table 1: Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.223	1	28	.278

Now that we have finished checking the assumptions, we can proceed with the one-way ANCOVA analysis to explore the differences between the groups. To address the research question (Does word-recognition practice have any

significant impact on the development of the listening comprehension of Intermediate-level EFL learners?), descriptive statistics of both groups, control and experimental groups, in pretest and posttest were obtained which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Results of descriptive statistics for control and experimental groups

Parameters	Control Group			Experimental Group		
	n	M	SD	n	M	SD
pre-test	15	12.93	2.28	15	13.06	2.12
post-test	15	14.26	2.12	15	17.53	1.72

According to Table 2, 15 control and 15 experimental EFL learners participated in the study. The mean of control learners' posttest is 14.26 (SD= 2.12) and that of experimental ones is 17.53 (SD= 1.72).

To compare the effectiveness of the intervention designed to develop participants' listening comprehension, a one-way between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted. The independent variable was the type of intervention (transcribing the listening tasks), and the dependent variable consisted of scores on the listening test administered after the intervention was completed. Participants' scores on the pre-intervention administration of the listening test were used as the covariate in this analysis. To ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate, preliminary checks were conducted. After adjusting for pre-test scores, as indicated in table 3, a significant difference was found between the two groups on post-intervention scores on the listening test [$F(1) = 1793.795$, $p = 0.000$, partial eta squared= .985].

Table 3: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for difference between pretest and posttest

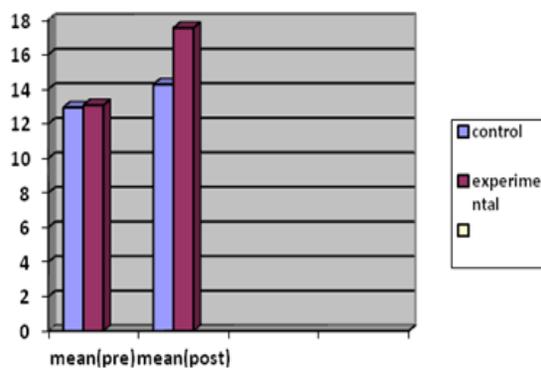


Parameters	Type III Sum of Squares	Mean Square	Squares	Partial Eta Squared	Sig	F
Intercept	6961.633	6961.633	1	.985	0.000	1793.795
Groups	158.700	158.700	1	.594	0.000	40.892
Error	108.667	3.881	28			
Total	7229.000	30				
Corrected Total	267.367	29				

$R\text{ Squared} = .594$ (Adjusted $R\text{ Squared} = .579$)

According to the results, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between control and experimental groups' performance in listening comprehension after the treatment. The results in table 3 show that the experimental group outperformed the control group because of word-recognition practice. In this case, the difference that was observed is statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) indicating a higher score for those who had experienced word-recognition practice. Due to fewer listening mistakes and greater overall listening comprehension, the scores obtained by the experimental group were higher in the post test (see figure 1).

Figure 1 Difference between students' performance on pretest and posttest in listening comprehension



4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted in order to examine the effect of word-recognition practice on the development of EFL students' listening comprehension. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between

control and experimental groups' performance after the treatment.

Similarly, a study was conducted in Iranian context focusing on the effect of transcribing on beginning learners' phonemic perception (Afsharrad & Sadeghi Benis, 2014). To this end, the authors proposed transcribing as an aural input enhancement device and examined its effect on learners' phonemic perception. Thirty one female students who were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups participated in this study. The experimental group had to transcribe exercises during the experiment while the control group did not. The results of the study showed that transcribing improved beginning learners' phonemic perceptions significantly.

Another study investigated the effects of partial dictation on the listening comprehension ability of Iranian intermediate EFL learners (Marzban & Abdollahi, 2013). Two homogeneous groups of intermediate EFL learners in an Iranian language institute were chosen. Each group consisted of 30 female intermediate EFL students. One of the groups was chosen as the experimental group, and the other as the control group. They both took a listening test as a pre-test. For one term, consisting of 20 sessions, the students in the control group were given the listening exercises in their textbook. The experimental group, in addition to the listening exercises in the textbook, was given partial dictation 11 times during the term. At the end of the term, the listening comprehension ability of both groups was post-tested with the same listening test taken from a TOFEL test, which was also used as the listening pre-test. Results of the t-test showed that dictation had a significant effect on the listening comprehension ability of the participants in the

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experimental group. The mean score obtained by the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group.

Overall, the results of the present study supported the positive effect of transcribing on the development of EFL learners' listening comprehension. EFL students can utilize the findings of the present study to develop their listening comprehension. This study is also expected to give positive input to English language teachers in the teaching of listening comprehension. Based on the results, the English language teachers can use transcribing as a technique/strategy for teaching listening comprehension skill more efficiently. EFL curriculum designers can also devote special attention to students' listening comprehension and develop relevant and constructive materials that can help students develop this skill.

This study added to the meager body of studies that have been conducted in foreign language learning/teaching literature about the influence of transcribing on EFL students' listening comprehension. We hope that other researchers continue this line of research in order to help EFL students boost their listening comprehension which is one of the main components of communicative competence.

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