THE IMPACT OF COMPUTER-VIDEO PROJECTOR ON EFL LEARNERS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension is considered as an active process in which individuals change words to thought to create meaning from the passage. "Listening comprehension has a long history, from analog phonograph readings, through the audio tape era, and into the digital realm" (Jones, 2008). With the appearance of new technologies and their influences on our life aspects, including education, language teaching and learning has entered a new area. Assisted Computer Language Learning (CALL) and L2 listening comprehension skill training are bound together for good (Blasco, 2009. p. 107). Lin (2010) found that news video in a CALL program can promote L2 comprehension and gaining of vocabularies. Although a lot of research has been carried out on the role of CALL on educational settings to facilitate language skills and sub skills, especially in L2 environments (Jones, 2008), this research study is left untouched. The present study is intended to facilitate the process of listening comprehension in EFL environments. 56 Iranian undergraduate students were selected for this study, and then they were divided into two groups randomly: control and experimental groups. The control group received instruction traditionally, while for the experimental group the researchers took advantages of computer and video projector in listening instruction to play the message and the manuscripts to the learners, simultaneously. The post test was administered at the end of the semester; the obtained data indicated the superiority of experimental group over the control group. The use of video texts allows listeners to utilize the non-verbal components (body language) of communication that can assist them in processing and comprehending aural input.

Keywords: language learning, listening comprehension, video projector, aural input

INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is an important language skill that language learners need to develop. Furthermore, the development of all other language skills is interwoven with listening skills, it is said to be at the heart of both first and second language learning (Vandergrift, 2007). Language learning relies greatly on listening and it plays a fundamental role in language acquisition and makes it possible for the learners to interact orally. "It provides the foundation for all facets of language learning/acquisition, and plays a life-long role in the processes of communication (Guo and Wills 2005, p. 3)''.

Listening is the first language mode that children acquire. It is believed that listening comprehension is a highly integrative skill and is vital in learning/ acquiring a language and, also, is of great help to get other language skills (Vandergrift 1999, and Holden 2004). "Listening is used in language teaching to refer to a complex process that makes it possible for us to understand spoken language'' (Rost, 1990). Listening is not only a skill area in language performance, but also a critical means of acquiring a second language (L2).

The significant role of listening in acquiring a language is clear to all. As Krashen and Terrell (1983) put, the speaking phase should be delayed until after listening comprehension takes place. They both stress the priority of listening (input) on speaking (output). In the other words, comprehension is much more important than production without which communication is hindered.

Buck (2001) emphasized that numerous interacting strategies are involved in the process of listening comprehension. In his opinion there is a direct relationship between listening process and what speakers have in their minds which affect the interpretation of the information. ''Understanding is continually modified as incoming stimuli interact with previous input and other existing contextual information (Gary 2007, p. 518) ''.

Vandergrift (2007) asserted that "Research into L2 listening is important because a better understanding of the process will inform pedagogy. Students who learn to control their listening processes can enhance their comprehension. This, in turn, affects the development of other skills and overall success in L2 learning''.

Studies (Gruba, 2004 and Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004) have revealed that authentic digital video programming is a significant instrument that helps achieve higher levels of input which will lead to higher output, in turn.

With the appearance of new technologies, especially in the education realm, teachers should take advantages of them to help individuals develop their skills/ sub-skills in learning a new language. With the increased awareness of the need to help second language learners develop effective listening skills and with the greater availability of technology, nowadays, teachers are able to explore more creative ways of teaching listening in and out of the class using authentic materials.

A range of new opportunities for gaining listening proficiency in l2 has been provided as the result of development in technology and computer. New technologies are basic parts of any educational program, they are too essential in teaching students how to get and increase their skills and knowledge. By taking advantages of video technology, it is feasible to bring both visual and auditory materials to the second language (L2) classrooms. Wagner (2007) stated that "traditionally, the aural input for second language (L2) listening tasks has been delivered by a teacher reading aloud a text for the students''. In most cases, the role of technology and humans is the same in presenting and using materials in L2 listening classrooms.

Language learners want to understand target language (L2) speakers and they want to be able to access the rich variety of aural and visual L2 texts available today via network- based multimedia, such as on-line audio and video, You Tube, podcasts and blogs (Vandergrift, 2007).

Some researchers, however, have argued that the use of video might actually impede comprehension, because of its supposed potential for distraction. MacWilliam (1986) stated that the visual aspects of a video text can distract learners' attention from the audio input and may actually prevent comprehension. Gruba (1993) compared the performances of university students who took an audio-only test of listening comprehension with those who took a context-only video version of the same test. Gruba found no differences in test performance between the experimental and control groups. Gruba also added that some test takers were distracted by the visual stimuli, apparently.

Video materials have been identified as valuable resources for language study since they can provide a total communicative situation. Studies have suggested that visual support can facilitate listening comprehension (Wagner, 2007). Rubin (1990) found that the listening comprehension of high-beginning Spanish students who watched dramas on video improved significantly in comparison to those who received no video support for their listening training. She argues that "video is a useful tool to enhance listening comprehension if it is selected so that it provides sufficient clues for information processing. It is the selection that is critical, not just the use of video alone".

Additional support for enhancing listening comprehension is provided by the great availability of video and computer programs with multilingual soundtracks and captions. Video-based instruction can help college-level ESL/EFL students improve their communicative competence and their listening comprehension.

Borras and Lafayette (1994) studied advanced learners' use of digital video with and without subtitles, and concluded that learners who have subtitles under their control show better comprehension and better production of the language.

The effects of different captions on the listening performance of intermediate-level students of Spanish were compared by Markham, Peter and McCarthy (2001). The results indicate that the English captions group outperformed the Spanish captions group who, in turn, outperformed the no-captions group. They argue that students would benefit from a repeated viewing, progressing from L1 captions to L2 captions and finally to no captions.

In a research study by Ginther (2002) entitled "The relative effect of two kinds of visuals on listening performance on the computerized TOEFL test" it is indicated that content visuals slightly increased the comprehension of mini-talks but that context visuals decreased comprehension. It appears that advance organizers which provide no directly related information (e.g., context visuals) are not helpful to the listener.

Jones and Plass (2002) studied the effect of pictorial support and written annotations on the comprehension of aural texts in multimedia environments with beginning-level French classes. They found that students acquired more vocabulary and recalled the material better with the help of both pictorial and written annotations instead of pictures only and written annotations only. Delayed post-tests showed that the pictorial annotations had a stronger and longer-lasting effect than written annotations, both for vocabulary retention and for listening comprehension.

Redfield (2003) tried to find a way to present materials to foreign language learners. He suggested reading materials and listening to the tape simultaneously, or with some modifications in the order of presentation of the materials. The researcher found that the use of transcripts does seem to result in higher comprehension; however, reading before listening doesn't seem to improve comprehension. He also found that listening to a taped conversation and then reading the tape transcript result in better comprehension than reading the transcript first. He concluded that transcript presentation order matters.

Grgurovi and Hegelheimer (2007) designed a study to find evidence about whether subtitles or transcripts are more effective in providing modified input to intermediate ESL learners who studied in an academic listening class at a research university. They found that participants interacted with the subtitles more frequently and for longer periods of time than with the transcript.

Ramirez and Belmonte (2007) in a quasi-experimental research studied the effects that digital stories may have on the understanding of spoken English by a group of 6-year-old Spanish learners. Findings indicate that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the final test.

In another quasi-experimental research (Abidin et al, 2011) investigated the effects of digital stories on the understanding of spoken English by a group of 6-year-old Malay preschool children. Results revealed that the experimental group surpassed the control group. The findings raised subjects' interest related to the use of technology in the context of second language learning.

According to Rubin (2011) text type affects listening comprehension. In her view since written texts are syntactically more complex, less redundant and denser their comprehension is more difficult. Conversely, conversational texts are potentially easier to understand because they are less complex and more redundant.

According to Jowkar (2012) the main concern of EFL students and their teachers has always been having a good listening comprehension skill. He also added from the very moment that EFL students start learning English as a foreign language in school, what comes to their minds after listening to the native speaker's speech is to comprehend all the speech s/he produces. The role of listening skill in the process of language learning is quite recognized as it provides the aural input which serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact with others in verbal communication (Rost, 1990; Guo and Wills, 2005).

The importance of using video in teaching and learning new materials, especially learning a new language, has been emphasized by different researchers (e.g., Rost, 1990; Yang et al, 2010), but despite the various researches done this type of research seems to be left untouched.

This research study focuses on elaborating the function of video-projector on promoting listening skills. So it relies on the following hypothesis:

There is no relationship between video-projector and listening comprehension.

The following research questions are raised, too:

1. Does video projector affect listening comprehension?
2. Does playing the text and the tape simultaneously affect listening comprehension?

METHODOLOGY

56 undergraduate students participated in this research study. A pre-test was administered to check the homogeneity of the subjects. Then they were put into groups, control and experiment groups, randomly. The materials selected for the study were news from different radio and television programs in English. The subjects were asked to provide a copy of the audio material, determined by the teacher, for the coming sessions. They had enough time to practice at home. In the classroom, the instructor played the tape along with pieces of unseen parts for both groups. The subjects were required to listen to the tape and write down the required pieces of information.

The control group received instruction traditionally, that is the teacher played the tape in the classroom and the subjects were required to write down what they hear. While for the experimental group, taking advantages of video-projector, both the text and the tape were played to the participants simultaneously. The tape was played and the language learners could see its written form on the screen at the same time. Then the teacher removed the written text and asked the learners to listen to the tape again and write down what they hear, and leave blanks for the parts they can't recognize. The tapes were played with a reasonable rate of speed for both groups. The materials and test were also identical. Finally, the tape was played and the points, the samples had problems with, were shown and explained. The participants in experimental group didn't have the written form, the same as those in control group.

In every session, for both groups, some minutes were devoted to measure the students' performance on last session's materials. In addition, during the semester, similar unseen tests were administered for both groups, to see how well they have mastered the skill. The tests, seen and unseen included cloze test, completion test and sometimes written form of the audio text. No text was displayed during the exam for the experimental group. In each session, the papers were collected and analyzed to find out performance of both groups. The samples main problems were related to new words and expressions, assimilation and blending.

At the end of the semester a post-test was administered, the data was collected and analyzed. The results indicated supremacy of the experimental group over the control group. It was demonstrated that those samples in experimental group mastered a higher level of proficiency in listening skill. It seems that using both auditory as well as visual memories can help increase listening ability.

The participants in the experimental group argued that not only they mastered the skill, listening, at a higher level, but also they found language learning more interesting. In cases were they had problems with a word or phrase, they left blanks and during playing the text, while listening to the voice, they had a better chance of filling them. Although it maybe argued that it is the same as coping the words or phrases, it motivates the learners to guess the required words or phrases and then check themselves through playing the message/text. They performed unbelievably better than control group and their main difficulties with blending and assimilation were eliminated to some extent. In other words, it is through practice and introducing new methodologies and approaches that enable individuals learn new information.

In sum, the null hypothesis is rejected and it is claimed that there is a direct relationship between listening comprehension and video-projector. This technology functions as a facilitator which helps both language learners and instructors achieve the goal that is a better mastering of the knowledge. The use of both auditory and visual memories at the same time is proved to be very conducive in acquiring or learning newly taught materials.

www.journals.savap.org.pk
109

DISCUSSION

Exploiting technology in teaching listening skill promotes participants' achievement. It functions as a facilitator to acquire newly taught materials. Bringing video-projector to the classroom increases not only students' interest but also it provides a better chance of presentation for the instructors. Of course, since they will have the text displayed on the screen, careful attention has to be paid not to create a situation that leads the class to a passive state and causes the learners do nothing; only watching the scene and ignoring the main task. The written text has to be displayed once or at most twice for the parts the learners have had problems with.

This study aims at following constructivism view point ''zone of proximal development'' as well as developing self-esteem and independence. The finding of this research enables language learners to rely on themselves and to evoke autonomy. Teachers have to do their best in creating a setting that helps promote participants' learning. Usually, we face learners who complain about some difficult phrases or words they encounter in their works. In case where teacher or tutor is not present for problem solving, it is of great help and learners can overcome the problems more easily.

The use of video texts allows listeners to utilize the non-verbal components of communication that can assist them in processing and comprehending aural input. In the majority of L2 listening situations (excluding situations such as talking on the phone, listening to the radio, or listening to loudspeakers, etc.), the listener is able to see the speaker (Wagner, 2007). In these circumstances, L2 learners are usually afraid of speaking in public due to lack of fluency and accuracy; something which will not be achieved without mastery in listening comprehension.

Implications for both teaching and further research can be drawn from this study.

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