The Effect of Multimodal Presentation on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension and Self-Efficacy

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ABSTRACT

The objective of the present study was to determine whether multimodal presentation of listening materials had any significant effect on EFL learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy. Fifty intermediate sophomore students who were majoring in English literature at a university in Iran participated in the study. The design was experimental according to which the participants were divided into two classes of 25 as the control and experimental groups. The intervention group received treatment on multimodal presentation of listening materials while the control group was taught conventionally. An interview was also conducted to investigate the experimental group perceptions of the multimodal presentation. The results revealed that multimodal presentation had an important role only in improving EFL learners' listening comprehension not their self-efficacy. It was also found that subtitled movies are more effective provided that the theme is interesting, the learners have enough practice and preparation at home, and the teacher gives sufficient background knowledge and feedback. The pedagogical implications for learners and teachers will be discussed.

Keywords: Multimodal presentation, Listening comprehension, Self-efficacy, EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

The rapid increase in the development of new technologies has paved the way for multimodal representations of knowledge and content (Plastina, 2013). According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996), meaning making depends on the verbal system, on the interactions established between all types of semiotic modes, and on the arrangements that potential carriers of meaning like spatiality and visuality make them. Cope and Kalantzis (2000) assert that with the purpose of perceiving and making such meaning, a new "multimodal literacy" is required that will permit individuals to understand the many and complex modes and the various settings in which communication occurs and meaning is combined. Although listening is possibly the most important language skill (Oxford, 1993), EFL learners still have problems in listening achievement especially in the foreign/second language context where the vocabulary, structural complexity, and language culture cannot be controlled by the listeners completely (Gao, 2012) and consequently, these lead to listening anxiety that is connected with low self-efficacy (Yao, 2010). As stated by Bandura (1997), self –efficacy can solve the problem of anxiety. On the other hand, some researchers believe that the way in which listening is taught has an effect on low levels of self-efficacy for listening and leads to their aggravation. Therefore, this study attempts to find if multimodal presentation has any

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effect on developing EFL learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy. In other words, the present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. To what extend does multimodal presentation improve EFL learners' listening comprehension?
2. To what extent does multimodal presentation enhance EFL learners' self-efficacy?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Among four language skills, listening comprehension is considered as the most important language skill because the aural input that is the foundation of language acquisition is provided by it (Gao, 2012). Vandergrift (1999) pointed to the important role of listening as a highly integrative skill in the process of language learning that can facilitate the emergence of other language skills. Gary (1975) believes that listening comprehension has four advantages: cognition, efficiency, utility, and affect. In relation to cognition, listening comprehension is regarded as a more natural way to learn a language because it requires recognition knowledge, whereas speaking skills require retrieval knowledge (Vandergrift, 1999).

With respect to efficiency, listening is important for learners because good language models can be absorbed by them through the exposure of teachers' production and realistic recordings. With regard to utility, the importance of listening comprehension lies in the fact that, more than one third of communication time is allocated to listening. Listening comprehension may be difficult for some learners because of speech rate (Blau, 1990; Griffiths, 1992), vocabulary (Kelly, 1991), phonological features (Matter, 1989), complex grammar (Gao, 2012), lack of background knowledge (Chiang and Dunkel, 1992), and low language proficiency (Brown, 1995).

For overcoming the above-mentioned difficulties as well as improving the self-efficacy, multimodality can be considered as a viable option that based on neuroscience research, learning can be increased with using of both visual and verbal modes of learning (Fadel, 2008). It is also believed that presenting materials in a variety of modes give the students a sense of comfort and success in their performance (Cronin, 2009, Omrod, 2008), and encourage them to develop a more versatile approach to their learning (Hazari, 2004).

Zimmerman (1995) believes that self-efficacy is domain and context specific, and results from successful task completion that can be the result of learning through multimodality. Multimodality drawn from social semiotics is an inter-disciplinary approach that communication and representation are understood as more than language and the social interpretation of making meaning range of forms is attended by it (Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2010). In addition to verbal interaction, other modes such as pictures, moving images, sound, and video are used in multimodal presentation (Kress et al., 2001).

However, little research has been conducted to investigate the effect of multimodality on listening comprehension. Moreover, self-efficacy as a result of multimodal presentation is another under-researched area examined in the present study.

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METHODOLOGY

Participants and Setting

The participants of the present study were 50 randomly selected sophomore college students who were majoring in English literature at a university in Iran. Of the participants, 36 were females and 14 were males that all of them were at intermediate level and between the age range of 19 to 22. They were randomly divided into two classes of 25 and only the students in an experimental group received a treatment regularly.

Research Design

The present study employed a mixed-method design that was composed of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Instruments

In order to answer the research questions, three instruments which their reliability and validity were assured, were used to collect the data quantitatively and qualitatively. They consisted of listening pre and post-tests, the English self-efficacy questionnaire, and a focus group interview.

Listening Test

One of the instruments used for collecting quantitative data in this study was the listening test which was the same in both pre and post-tests. The purpose behind using the listening pre and post-tests was to observe any differences in EFL learners' listening comprehension who participated as two distinctive groups. The listening test was selected and gathered from the intermediate level of three different books such as Real, American-English File, and Passages. The test contained 30 items which were distributed in four sections (A, B, C, and D) and the time allowed to answer the test was 30 minutes. For its validation prior to the main study, ten experts who had master's or PHD degrees in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) made judgments about all the items. The test was also piloted among ten university students similar to those in the main study for the clarity of items and rubrics and for determining its reliability through Cronbach alpha that was .83, a reasonably high level.

English Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

In order to gather quantitative data on self-efficacy, a questionnaire was used in the present study. The 6-point likert scale questionnaire was about how confident the EFL learners were about their listening comprehension capability in English. It consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire requested demographic information from the students such as age, gender, course, and lecturer. The second part which was the main part included 17 items like I think that I am pretty good at listening in English, I enjoy learning during listening activities, I am able to keep listening even when there are other interesting things to do, one of my main goals is to be better at listening by next year, I have no problem learning listening skills, when I decide to listen to something, I go ahead and do it, I remember the important points about how to listen very well, I feel secure about my ability to listen clearly, I can motivate myself to listen, it is not difficult for me to concentrate on my learning task, I learn new words easily, I understand the gist of what you hear, I understand details, I work out the

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meaning of unknown or incomprehensible words, I recognize opinions expressed in the text, I believe I will receive an excellent grade in this English class, I can retell what I hear. In 20 minutes, the students were asked to read the statements and rate their capability in each of the things described by circling one number from the scale. For validating the questionnaire, the same process of expert judgment and pilot study, as done for the listening test, was followed the reliability index was found to be .85 which proved a good level of internal-consistency.

Focus Group Interview

Qualitative data were gathered from focus group interviews with students. In this study, four EFL learners from the experimental group volunteered for the interview. They were divided into two groups and the interview was held in a room, conducted in Farsi, and took 20 minutes for each group. In this interview, the students were asked questions about the usefulness of the multimodal presentation in this semester.

Procedures

Before the training was started, the participants' scores in the listening pre-test were analyzed to determine the homogeneity of the groups in terms of listening performance level. Then the experimental group was exposed to multimodal instruction in the English laboratory and the control group did not receive any treatment. Movies with a variety of contents which consisted of different sections and had English subtitles were selected and shown in each session.

After twelve sessions and at the end of the training and in order to compare these two groups, listening post-test that was the same as the listening pre-test and the self-efficacy questionnaire were administered. Subsequently, four students from the experimental group were interviewed. Having employed SPSS, independent-samples t-test and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were conducted with the participants'recorded responses to examine if there was a significant relationship between multimodal presentation and EFL learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy.

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

The quantitative results related to listening comprehension ability and self-efficacy levels as well as the correlation between the these two variables are presented in this section. Table 1 shows the descriptive results of the listening pre-test.

Table 1: Descriptive statistics for the listening pre-test

	group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Pre-listening	Control	25	17.0	2.05
	Experimental	25	16.4	1.41

However, to see if this difference is significant, independent-samples t-test was used and the results are displayed in table 2.

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Table 2: Inferential statistics for the listening pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Pre-listening	Equal variances assumed	1.922	.172	1.123	48	.267	.56000
	Equal variances not assumed			1.123	42.491	.268	.56000

As Table 3 shows, there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups regarding their listening comprehension ability (t= 1.12, df= 48, p>.05). This lack of significance implies that there is no difference between control and experimental groups before the treatment regarding listening comprehension ability. In other words, the two groups are homogeneous.

Post-test descriptive results in table 3 indicate that the mean of the control group is 14.96 and that of the experimental group is 17.12.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for the listening post-test

	group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Post-listening	Control	25	14.9600	2.15019
	Experimental	25	17.1200	1.42361

Moreover, to determine if this difference is significant, an independent-samples t-test was used as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Inferential statistics for the listening pre-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Post-listening	Equal variances assumed	2.209	.144	-4.1	48	.000	-2.16
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.1	41.6	.000	-2.16

In order to answer the second research question on the effect of multimodal presentation on EFL learners'self-efficacy, a post-test only design was used. After the treatment, the two groups were given a self-efficacy questionnaire. Descriptive statistics for both groups in self-efficacy is given in Table 5.

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Table 5: Descriptive statistics for the self-efficacy post-test

	group	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Self-efficacy	Control	25	71.96	12.51
	Experimental	25	69.64	10.07

As indicated in this table, the mean of the control group is 71.96 and that of the experimental group is 69.64. Moreover, an independent-samples t-test (as displayed in table 6) was used to determine if there is any significant difference between the two groups.

Table 6: Inferential statistics for the self-efficacy post-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Self-efficacy	Equal variances assumed	.953	.334	.72	48	.47	2.32
	Equal variances not assumed			.72	45.9	.47	2.32

As Table 6 shows, there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups regarding their self-efficacy (t= .72, df= 48, p>.05). This lack of significance implies that there is no difference between control and experimental groups regarding self-efficacy. In other words, multimodal presentation does not enhance EFL learners' self-efficacy.

Qualitative Results

Four volunteer participants from the experimental group who were extensively exposed to subtitled video were also interviewed. The results showed that except one who did not find the subtitled video to be helpful, the other three participants strongly believed that subtitled video had many advantages for them. They asserted that subtitles assisted them to learn new vocabulary and expressions. With seeing and hearing the words at the same time, they were able to verify what they were thinking first. Furthermore, there was an increase in retention and recall of the language presented by subtitled films. As stated by them, no anxiety was felt while viewing a movie with subtitle. They also said that subtitles secured their learning and enhanced their confidence in language learning that this assertion was in contrast with the results that obtained from the questionnaires' statistical analysis. Finally they mentioned that the method that was used in teaching listening in this semester was useful and their listening comprehension was upgraded than before.

However, most of the interviewees believed that subtitled movies should have interesting themes and related to their everyday life. They also believed that if they have enough time playing the subtitled movies, they can be more prepared for the new ones after watching a reasonable number of videos supported by the teacher's feedback on the content.

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DISCUSSION

The current study was aimed to examine whether multimodal presentation would have any effects on EFL learners' listening comprehension and self-efficacy. The findings revealed that the experimental group significantly outperformed their counterparts in the control group in listening comprehension but there was no significant difference between the two groups in self-efficacy. This means that multimodal presentation (i.e., movies with subtitles) compared to listening only to the audio recording improved EFL learners' listening comprehension. This finding was also supported by the information gathered during the focus group interview with four students in the experimental group. The results of this study confirm claims by Fadel (2008) on the importance of both visual and verbal modes of learning and concur with findings by Cronin (2009) and Omrod (2008) who believe that multimodality has a positive effect on the learners' performance. More specifically, the positive effect of subtitles with movies as a teaching strategy is also reported by Garza (1991), Koolstra and Beentjes (1999) and Bird and Williams (2002). The present study results are also confirmed by a local study by Rokni and Ataee (2014) who state that watching movies with subtitles have positive effects on the learners' listening comprehension and improve it.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of this study results, it can be concluded that multimodal presentation has an important role only in improving EFL learners' listening comprehension not their self-efficacy. Therefore, by considering a central role that listening comprehension plays in academic success and the difficulty of this skill for many EFL learners, EFL teachers can help learners overcome their problems by providing subtitled movies as a teaching material in their classes. Students can also improve their listening by a special focus on multimodal materials that are abundantly found on the Internet and available through softwares.

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