

THE EFFECT OF TEACHING STRATEGIES ON IRANIAN TEENAGE EFL LEARNERS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of teaching strategies on Iranian EFL teenage learners' listening comprehension ability. 60 pre-intermediate female learners participated in this study, based on their scores on Oxford Placement Test. They have all been teenagers learning English in Kish Language Institute of Science and Technology in the north of Iran, Shahsavar. They were given a pre-test of listening comprehension at the beginning of the experiment, after that the researcher divided pre-intermediate students into experimental and control groups, each including 30 participants. Therefore, there were two groups to be taught. In control group the usual techniques of listening comprehension was practiced while the experimental group was taught the skills and strategies of listening comprehension as well. After 20 hour and half-long sessions of treatment all our subjects were given a post-test of listening comprehension. The results of data analysis revealed that teaching strategies helped students to improve their listening comprehension ability. One way ANCOVA showed that there was a statistically significant association between teaching strategies and EFL listening comprehension ability.

Keywords: Iranian Teenage EFL learners, Teaching Listening, Strategy Instruction, listening comprehension.

INTRODUCTION

Although listening is now well recognized as a critical dimension in language learning, it still remains one of the least understood processes. According to Morley (2001), during 1980s special attention to listening was incorporated into new instructional frameworks, that is functional language and communicative approaches.

Researchers disagree on whether or not learning and listening strategies should be actively taught to L2 learners. Several researchers believe that the research is, in fact, inconclusive as to whether instruction in strategies really produces any positive effect for learners (Hoven, 1999; Rubin, 1994) though it should be noted that this type of research is very difficult to conduct and results may not be clear. For example, in a study of student success in developing and using learning strategies (Chamot, 2004; Thompson & Rubin, 1996), it was found that L2 students did show some improvement in their use of strategies in comprehension of videotaped materials. However, the study did not show a positive correlation between strategy instruction and learner performance. In addition, no distinction was made between those strategies intended to assist in extracting meaning and those intended for learning a new language. A study of how raising awareness of the strategies L2 speakers can use showed that those learners who were given instruction in strategies for oral communication realized greater improvement in their speaking abilities than did the control group, which did not receive strategies instruction (Green & Oxford, 1995).

Various techniques have been developed to measure strategy use. Techniques fall into two broad categories:

1: those which permit the researcher to observe the strategy 2: those which provide participants the opportunity to self-report their use of strategies.

Measuring listening strategies presents a challenge because of the inability to “see” what happens during mental processing. The only way researchers can really see the strategy being used is to observe how the learner operationalizes the strategy or, in other words, the action the learner performs upon activation of the strategy (Buck, 2001). Each of the following reporting techniques has been used in research studies. It must be noted, however, that despite the benefits of each technique, drawbacks are evident and must be carefully weighed. Because of the behavioral aspect of observing a listener while s/he actively performs a task, observation has limited value in assessing listening strategies (Buck, 2001).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Listening comprehension is viewed theoretically as an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge.

This research has focused on the mental processes Iranian EFL learners use in listening comprehension.

"There has been little direct research that would clarify what listeners actually do while listening to oral texts in academic settings, especially on second language listening comprehension." In recent years a considerable amount of attention has been devoted to the processing of the printed word, both by native speakers of English and speakers of English as a second language. As a study is done on a group of 92 Iranian EFL freshman university students in South of Esfahan, all females and majoring in TEFL course. In order to determine whether there was a statistically meaningful relationship between the listening strategies employed by Iranian EFL students listening proficiency levels, the Pearson Correlation was computed, which revealed there was a significant positive medium correlation between listening proficiency and meta-cognitive and socio-affective strategies among advanced freshman students.

There have been few studies dealing with strategies that FL learners might use when provided with aural input. Nor indeed do there seem to be studies that approach aural comprehension from the perspective of the way meaning is constructed by learners-hearers, and whether some ways of constructing meaning lead to greater or lesser progress in the mastery of target language.

STATEMENT OF THE HYPOTHESIS

In this research it is hypothesized that successful Iranian EFL learners (‘success’ defined in terms of oral communicative abilities in general and listening comprehension in particular) employ certain strategies which less successful learners do not employ or employ only weakly.

The present study attempts to answer the following research question:

RQ: Does teaching strategies affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension ability at the pre-intermediate level?

This question can be expressed in terms of the following research null hypothesis.

H: Teaching strategies does not affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension ability at pre-intermediate level.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

Teenage Iranian EFL learners

The phrase Teenage Iranian EFL learners in this research study refers to the homogeneous female students aged 13 to 17 who have been learning English as a foreign language in Kish Language Institute of Tonekabon.

Teaching Listening

There are some listening skills which should be taught to English learners beside ordinary listening practices, learners need to be aware that the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary is vital in being a successful language learner, however it is not enough.

Strategy Instruction

One of the main issues throughout this study was teaching the strategies and skills of listening so that foreign language learners became aware of some basic techniques while they are listening to a dialogue.

Listening Comprehension

All comprehension depends on the storing and processing of information by mind (Holden, 2004). Guo&wills (2004) worked on different aspects of listening, and according to Cook (2001) any sentence listeners hear is matched against their mental scripts and schemas.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects

60 females participated in this study; they were distinguished as pre-intermediate learners, based on their scores on Oxford Placement Test. They have all been teenagers learning English in Kish Language Institute of Science and Technology in the north of Iran, Shahsavari. The age of the participants ranged from 13 to 17. Some of them have started English since they were very small and have successfully passed children courses before joining teenage levels and a few of my learners did not have a long background in English language learning.

Instruments

Three research instruments were used in this study. First, the listening section of KET, Key English Test, was used as the pre-test of listening for my pre-intermediate level, Preliminary English Test. The test included 25 items consisting of short statements, short conversations moving toward longer more challenging ones. For questions 1-5 put a tick under the right answer; for questions 6-10 write a letter next to each option; and for the rest of questions fill in the missing information. The instructions were quite clear with good quality of recording and they could hear each conversation twice; approximately 25 minutes for KET. The tests were hand scored by the researcher.

The second instrument consisted of two course books. All participants were taught by the book, Tune In: Learning English through Listening / Jack C.Richards & Kerry O' Sullivan (2007). In addition, half of the girls at each level received the listening skills & strategies of Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test / Deborah Phillips (1996).

The third instrument consisted of another version of KET which was administered as a post test at the end of the experiment.

Procedure

Before the beginning of the experiment, 60 out of 120 English teenage learners in Kish Language institute of Science & Technology, Tonekabon branch sat in one classroom to take the listening section of KET as their pre-test, according to the fact that their level of English listening proficiency was pre-intermediate based on their scores on Oxford Placement Test. After that the researcher divided pre-intermediate students into experimental and control groups, each including 30 participants. The pre-intermediate control group was exposed to Tune In, Learning English through Listening student book while the experimental pre-intermediate group also received the listening skills & strategies of Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test. An upper level of the course book was taught to intermediate control group. The researcher went through 20 sessions with each group. In control group the usual techniques of listening comprehension were practiced such as listening to a conversation and ticking the right answers, pre-listening and post-listening activities to expand the vocabulary and grammar. The treatment which was received in the other group was beyond ordinary activities of listening comprehension, they were thought where to focus on when hearing a short conversation or to avoid choosing answers that contain words with similar sounds but with different meanings from what they hear on the tape. Every single session the experimental group practiced one new skill as well as the common listening comprehension techniques.

After 20 hour and a half long session, all our subjects were given a post-test of listening comprehension.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted utilizing the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 16.0 for Windows. . One way ANCOVA has been met between pre-tests and post-tests, while a T-test was also conducted to find out the level of significance between the post-tests of our two levels of pre-intermediate and intermediate. There was a significant relationship between variables.

RESULT

Findings

In order to find out whether there was a significant relationship between those students who learnt the book only and those participants who received strategies as well, at two levels of pre-intermediate and intermediate, ANCOVA was run, the results displayed that there was a significant positive relationship between teaching strategies to EFL learners and their listening comprehension ability. Therefore, the null hypothesis: Teaching strategies does not affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension ability at pre-intermediate level, has been rejected.

Data Analysis

As it has already been declared, the aim of the present study is to investigate the effect of teaching strategies on Iranian EFL learners at pre-intermediate level. The results of investigated data, are revealed using descriptive statistics (mean and Std. Deviation) as well as inferential statistics of One-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA). Before we get started – we must first test the assumptions underlying the

ANCOVA. In addition to testing the assumption of independence and the assumption of normality we need to conduct a test of the homogeneity-of regression (slopes) assumption.

Table 1. Covariance analysis of EG and CG at pre-intermediate level

Dependent Variable: Key post					
<i>Source</i>	<i>Type III Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Corrected Model	291.499 ^a	3	97.166	28.276	.000
Intercept	603.196	1	603.196	175.535	.000
group	13.989	1	13.989	4.071	.048
KET pre	.000	1	.000	.000	.994
group *KET pre	.908	1	.908	.264	.609
Error	192.434	56	3.436		
Total	23612.000	60			
Corrected Total	483.933	59			

a. R Squared = .602 (Adjusted R Squared = .581)

Before conducting an ANCOVA – the homogeneity-of-regression (slope) assumption should first be tested. The test evaluates the interaction between the covariate and the factor (independent variable) in the prediction of the dependent variable. A significant interaction between the covariate and the factor suggests that the differences on the dependent variable among groups vary as a function of the covariate.

If the interaction is significant – the results from an ANCOVA are not meaningful – and ANCOVA should not be conducted.

Table 2. Means of dependent variable (KET) post-test

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>			
<i>Dependent Variable: KET post</i>			
<i>Group</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>N</i>
EG	21.8333	1.62063	30
CG	17.4333	2.01175	30
Total	19.6333	2.86396	60

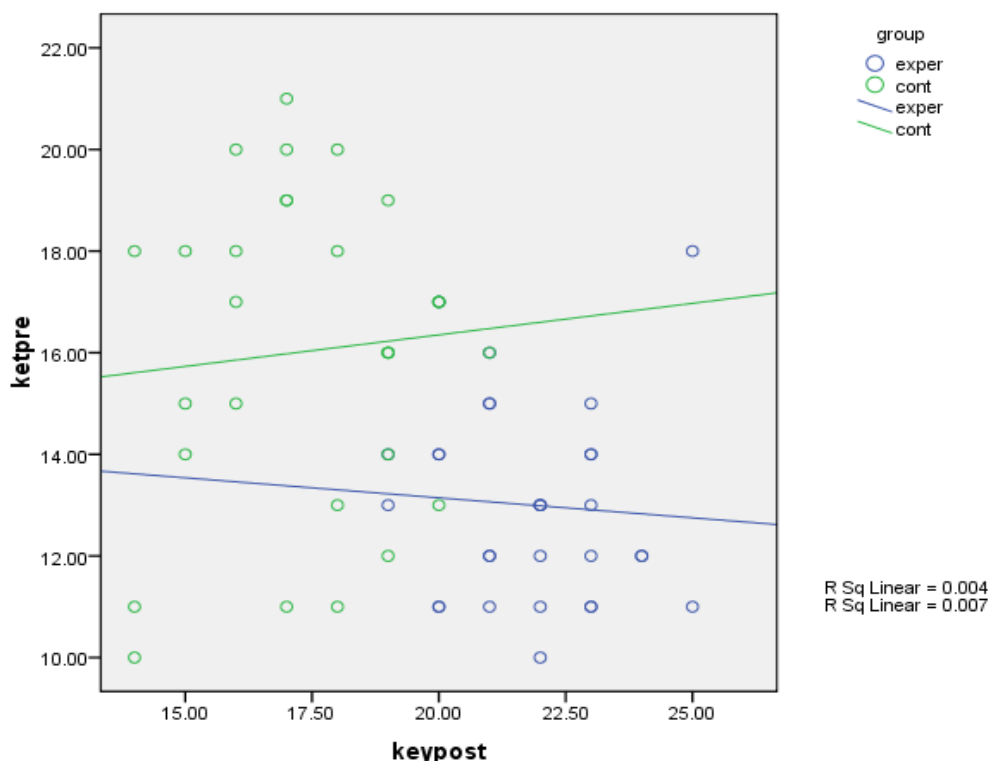
From the above output – we see that the underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for the one-way ANCOVA has been met. The covariate is included in the analysis to control for the differences on the independent variable. While it is not the central focus of the analysis, the results are available as part of the output. The primary purpose of the test of the covariate is that it evaluates the relationship between the covariate and the dependent

variable, controlling for the factor this relationship is significant. Additionally, what this shows us is that there is a relationship (effect) between the covariate and the dependent variable. Had this not been significant, the question then would be on the appropriateness of the selection of the covariate. Recall that the covariate must be linearly related to the dependent variable.

Table 3. Estimated Marginal Means at pre-intermediate level

<i>Estimates</i>				
<i>Dependent Variable: KET post</i>				
<i>group</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>95% Confidence Interval</i>	
			<i>Lower Bound</i>	<i>Upper Bound</i>
exper	21.867 ^a	.365	21.136	22.598
cont.	17.400 ^a	.365	16.668	18.131

These numbers uncover the fact that the mean of experimental group is considerably higher than that of the control group; which proves the effect of teaching strategies on the experimental group.



As it is observable through the graph above there is a linear relationship between the pre-test and post-test because the slopes are parallel which means the relation between variables in both groups has been alike.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of EG & CG at pre-intermediate level

<i>Descriptive Statistics</i>						
<i>Group</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>Minimum</i>	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
	KET pre	30	10.00	18.00	13.0000	1.94759
EG	KET post	30	19.00	25.00	21.8333	1.62063
	Valid N (listwise)	30				
	KET pre	30	10.00	21.00	16.0333	3.07922
CG	KET post	30	14.00	21.00	17.4333	2.01175
	Valid N (listwise)	30				

Note: The mean of experimental group for the pre-test equals 13.000, while it has risen up to 21.000 for the post-test. The mean has not significantly changed in the control group; it was 16.0333 in the pre-test, and 17.4333 for the post-test.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to identify the effect of teaching strategies on Iranian EFL teenage learners' listening comprehension ability. The results indicated that EG listening comprehension ability was significantly improved after the treatment.

Hypothesis Analysis

Having reported and presented the findings of the study, the researcher discusses the results, answers the research question and compares and contrasts it with other available and relevant findings found in the literature in this part.

RQ: Does teaching strategies affect Iranian EFL Teenage learners' listening comprehension ability at pre-intermediate? The null hypothesis teaching strategies does not affect Iranian EFL learners listening comprehension ability at pre-intermediate was rejected considering the findings through this study. Ellis (2003) regards listening to another language as task at a high level of difficulty in cognitive terms and therefore demanding full attention. Second language listeners appear to fall into two groups, namely the risk takers and the risk avoiders. The first group of listeners forms hypotheses as to meaning while recognizing little of the signal. The latter demand a large amount of hard bottom-up evidence before they draw conclusion as to the overall meaning. Neither, however, reacts in groups of listeners the way they would in L1 listening problems where the employ different listening skills/techniques.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study discovered a good deal of information on the basis of certain characteristics. As the participants of this study were teenagers, a change can be made in the settings to examine adult learners. And because of the limitations relating to location of this study, the same study can be conducted in other parts of the country. Finally the participants of this study were all female with average age of 13-17 years old .Similar studies can change variables of age and gender.

CONCLUSION

The outcomes reported in this study suggest support for several implications to provide more efficient teaching and learning situations. Since the outcome of the present study proves a significant relationship between EFL teenage students' strategic proficiency and their listening comprehension achievement; therefore, more appropriate courses which aim at improving students' strategic awareness should be included in the curriculum so that students' academic achievement will promote as a result. It was hypothesized that successful Iranian EFL learners, as defined in terms of listening comprehension abilities, employ certain strategies which less successful learners do not employ or employ only weakly.

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