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THE EFFICIENCY OF MEDIA IN TEACHING ESL LISTENING SKILLS¹

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth in computer technology among linguists and literary researchers has opened up the way for the introduction of computers into language teaching and learning. The Internet has the potential to provide a new learning environment that has rich digital, textual, graphic, audio, and video features for the language learning approach. Technology is useful for teaching listening because each type of technology provides opportunities for students to expand their ranges of listening strategies. The aim of the paper is to investigate the efficiency of various kinds of media (audio, video and multimedia) in teaching listening skills in particular in an ESP classroom. The participants of this study were one hundred and twenty first year students from the Faculty of Information and Communication Technologies, Bitola, North Macedonia. Straightforward Quick Placement & Diagnostic- English language proficiency test and listening tests – designed by the researcher were used as instruments of this study. The results revealed that there was a strong positive significant correlation between multimedia and the learners' listening comprehension ability.

KEYWORDS:ESP, listening, technology, students

¹ original research paper

INTRODUCTION

The use of technology inside the second language classroom brings new opportunities to enhance language learning, especially in the area of listening, which Vandergrift (2004) states “is probably the least explicit of the four language skills, making it the most difficult skill to learn” (p. 4). The implementation of technology to teach listening is a complex process that involves understanding the meaning of spoken messages (i.e., input), and the language input received via listening plays a key role in language learning (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010). Factors such as the use of sight, sound, and text are three features thought to be used in various technological materials that could potentially help learners enhance their listening skills (Jones, 2008). It is thought that with continuing innovations in technology, listening tasks may become “more multisensory and interactive” (Jones, 2008, p. 406). If this is true, it may be prudent for teachers to understand that successful implementation of technology in the classroom may be entirely dependent upon the use of pedagogical activities that are not possible in other learning settings (Salaberry, 1999). Thus, the use of technology in a classroom would not be to simply replicate, but rather to enhance the completion of tasks that could only be accomplished through the use of computers or other technological devices (Hughes, Thomas, & Scharber, 2006). Levy and Stockwell (2006) concur with this assertion by stating that “an essential factor in using technology to teach any language skill or area is that technology should provide something that is not available through more traditional means” (p. 180).

Therefore, the focus of this paper is to research the role that technology has on the teaching of listening, and how technology can make listening input more comprehensible to second language learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The use of computers makes the language learners autonomous in learning, which are key factors in learning a language and in listening skills in particular. Although the audio materials are the most traditional technological materials used to enhance listening skills, the use of audio of podcasts have kept the role of audio-only materials in play when it comes to listening instruction (Juniardi, 2008).

Podcasts as audio or video programs can be practical as a tool to enhance listening skill. Podcasts provide a creative way for students and teachers to explore the authentic material. Podcasts offer students access to extra listening both inside and outside of the classroom. The use of podcasts can result in teachers and learners' positive attitudes towards computer-assisted multimedia (O'Bryan and Hegelheimer, 2007). Teaching listening by using podcasts may increase students' motivation in listening in English because of the easy access they offer to the material (Earp, 1998). Multimedia (text, graphics, audio and motion video) enhances listening skills development in a foreign language. They help to enhance both processing and recalling of the target language. According to Meskill (1993) multimedia could improve listening skill focused on: (a) visual and text roles as a tool to organize language in aural texts; (b) video motivation aspect as a profit for language teaching; (c) a fact that those media combinations could reach language target so that they could give important input to language acquisition process; (d) comfortable environment to describe chart and discourse strategy for the students. Listening skill is not a simple skill, it requires an ability to elaborate information. Tyagi (2013) defines the listening process that includes five stages such as listening, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding. Underwood (1989) simply defines listening as an activity that focuses on understanding the meaning of what is being heard. Moreover, Richard & Rubin (in Van Duzer, 1997) said that listening enhances the visual aspect in activities of listening comprehension. Based on those explanations, students are required to actively respond to and interpret the information being listened to. Salomon (1979) and Vanderplank (1990) explained that multimedia features (visuals, video and text) support aural processing and second language listening skill development. The main features of multimedia are visuals, video, and text (Meskill, 1996).

Visuals, pictures, slides, and drawings have many roles in language learning activities and enhance comprehension and recall of information (Pavio, 1965). Also, visuals support form meaning development and have positive effect on learning. Including visuals for listening skills development support spoken language and the ability to process incoming aural information. When oral input is in the first language, more mental energy is needed in order to understand information and mechanical linguistic issues. While the information in visuals saves cognitive energy. *Video* is considered more comprehensible, and powerful for second and foreign language students (Vanderplank, 1990). Videos motivate learners and engage them to give more of their attention to aural input. Videotexts,

for example, enable language students to increase their interests in learning the language (Cross, 2011). They come literate and psychologically prepared to react to video using skills, and therefore could get used to decoding video messages for extended periods of time.

Text – there is a growing body of evidence that texts co-occurring with videos can aid L2 listening comprehension (Garza, 1991; Markham, 1989; Meskill, 1993; Stewart and Pertusa, 2004). Some researchers indicate that video clips with captions (both in full text and with key words) influence learners' word recognition and content comprehension (Guillory, 1998; Chung, 1999). Also, in his study Pavio (1986) claims that text with video reinforces understanding and results in a quality input.

To sum up, with all multimedia functions described above, the computer can play a very important role in facilitating language learning. It can also make language learners more creative, collaborative, active and autonomous in learning, which are key factors in learning a language in general and in improving students' listening skills in particular.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 120 first year university students from the Faculty of Information and Communication Technologies, Bitola, North Macedonia. They studied English for specific purposes as an obligatory course in the first semester.

INSTRUMENTS

Two instruments were employed: 1) Straightforward Quick Placement & Diagnostic- English language proficiency test, that has been designed to decide which of the five levels of the *Straightforward* series is the most appropriate for each student. It has 50 questions, the first 40 are grammar questions and the final 10 are vocabulary questions.

and 2) listening tests – designed by the researcher. Each lesson consists of audio exercises and students have a task to answer the questions posed in the tests in relation to the level of numeration and explanation, explanation of functions and characteristics and explanation of differences and similarities. The choice of the listening text content is in accordance with the English subject.

PROCEDURES

The following procedures were followed. First, a general proficiency test was administered in order to ascertain the proficiency level of the students (intermediate). Second, the students were equally distributed in 3 groups, 40 students in each of them: auditory, visual and visual with text and they were asked to listen to seven listening texts about technology during one month. Each lesson consists of audio exercises and the students have a task to answer the questions posed in the tests in relation to the level of numeration and explanation, explanation of functions and characteristics and explanation of differences and similarities. The purpose was to evaluate the learners' listening comprehension ability through creative activities and questions related to contents that are in accordance with the subject matter of their ESP course. The teaching content was the same for all three groups and contained the following three phases: pre-listening, while-listening and post listening.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher tried to answer this research question: Is there any statistically significant relationship between different kind of media (audio, video and video materials with text) and the listening comprehension skills of EFL learners? The answers of 120 students were assessed according to the set criteria for each of the given tests. 4 variables were created for x1 = pre-listening, x2 = global comprehension, x3 = listening for details and x4 = post-listening. For these purposes MANOVA was used.

Table 1. Difference in means between the groups (audio, video and video materials with text)

Variables	Audio materials	Video materials	Video materials with text
X1	0.42	0.52	0.70
X2	0.39	.034	0.64
X3	0.30	0.34	0.71
X4	0.29	0.30	0.75
Diff. in means	0.34	0.38	0.73

The table shows that students from all three groups using different kind of media advance in the listening comprehension process, i.e. the average grade of the third group video materials with text (0.73) has the greatest marginal value, i.e. students from that group achieve the best results compared to the second group video materials (0.38) and the first one audio material (0.34) at a statistically significant level.

Table 2. MANOVA regression for audio , video and video materials with text (7 listening texts)

	Audio materials	Video materials	Video materials with text
Variable	Coefficient	Coefficient	Coefficient
1.x1	0.305	0.166	0.122
	(5.52)**	(3.00)**	-1.97
1.x2	0.158	0.259	0.183
	(2.85)**	(4.55)**	(2.72)**
1.x3	0.242	0.243	0.684
	(4.04)**	(4.24)**	(1.72)*
Constant	0.028	0.048	0.134
	-0.82	-1.2	(2.16)*
Number of observations	240	246	246
Legend	* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	* p<0.05; ** p<0.01	* p<0.05; ** p<0.02

The table shows that the application of technology for improving listening skills has statistically significant influence in all 3 (three) groups at level $P < 0.05$. In the first group – audio, the pre-listening phase, i.e. pre-knowledge (0.305) has the greatest marginal contribution in the final assessment of the students' tests in English language teaching; the general listening (0.259) from video materials group has the largest marginal contribution, while detailed listening (0.684) has the greatest contribution to the assessment in the third group – video materials with text.

The comparison of the final results shows that the concept of presenting information with image, sound and text gives better results versus presenting information only with sound or only with sound and image and positively reflects on listening skill development and students' knowledge.

Meanwhile, indicators for multimedia and creative activities were ability to consider responses, ability to establish new information, accuracy utterance and sentence element, and capability to do generalization and hypothesis.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study revealed that technology-based intervention for training students in listening lectures was successful. The students from the third group showed significant improvement in acquiring listening skills. Students' listening ability after using multimedia was effective and gave meaningful improvement. It made some possibilities such as:

- creative, active, and effective learning process
- development of learners' independent performance to solve problems
- linking theoretical to practical knowledge
- a high degree of student's participation
- a high degree of creativity

This finding confirms the practical value of technology, because it provides in-depth information about different thinking of the learners.

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