

The Effect of Listening Comprehension Strategies Instruction on ESL Learners Achievement in English Studies: An Empirical Study

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of listening comprehension strategies instruction on junior secondary school students' achievement in English Studies. The research design is based on a quasi-experimental non-randomized pretest, and posttest control group design. A total of 499 students constituted the sample size drawn from the three (3) sampled schools of an all-girls, a coeducational and an all-boys junior secondary school in Edo State, Nigeria. One intact class in each of the schools used was randomly selected and assigned to an experimental and a control group. Those in the experimental group were taught listening comprehension strategies, while those in the control group were not taught listening comprehension strategies. One instrument titled English Studies Examination Questions (ESEQ) was used to collect the data for the study. The data collected were analyzed using independent sample t-test and analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test the hypotheses. Results obtained from data gathered indicated that subjects in the experimental group that were taught listening comprehension strategies performed better than the subjects in the control group that were not taught listening comprehension strategies. Female students in the experimental group performed better than the male students in the experimental group. It was recommended among others that English studies teachers should teach listening comprehension strategies in the language classroom.

Keywords: English studies, listening comprehension strategy, gender

INTRODUCTION

Four macro skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—are anticipated to be taught in the context of language teaching and learning. The skills are related to one another and complement one another. The development of the students in the language classroom may be hampered by the neglect of any of the skills. Although it is the most fundamental of the macro skills, teaching listening in language classes receives scant emphasis. Both Linebarger (2001) and Vandergrift (2007) concur that while substantial research has been done on reading and writing skills, little has been done on listening skills. The importance of listening skills in human learning and development has been understated by researchers. Teachers erroneously believe that if pupils can hear, then they can listen. That is not accurate. There is much more to listening than just hearing. Perhaps this is the cause of our students' failure in English

Language. The West African Examination Council's (WAEC) findings over the years have made it clear that students struggle to listen well.

All students, especially those in junior secondary schools, need to improve their listening skills because they are so important to learning if they want to succeed in all of their academic courses, not just English Studies. Listening is essential to the success or failure of the entire educational system because learners acquire knowledge and information through listening to their teachers and classmates. Therefore, early in their academic careers, teachers should introduce pupils to the principles of listening and how to effectively master it. Listening is described as “the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages (International Listening Association (ILA; 2012)).”

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has its roots in strategy training. It reflects the blind training mode of strategy training. This means that this method does not create any strategic consciousness, but the tasks or material themselves induce the learners to subconsciously use learning strategies. The purpose of using Task-based Language Teaching to facilitate the acquisition of listening skills is to facilitate the process of processing listening information for operational purposes; to enable students to listen and execute real-world activities based on the information acquired from a listening practice. In this study, the researcher will use TBLT to teach the students in the experimental group.

The new National Curriculum for the Junior Secondary School level in Nigeria, established in 1985, uses the terms "English Studies," "Integrated English," and "English" interchangeably. It implies that English Language and Literature are taught as a unified curriculum. English language and literature are now taught together, as opposed to the previous school curriculum where they were taught separately. The term "English Studies" will be utilized in this study.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The aim of language learning is to promote the development of the learners' language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening comprehension is the primary channel of learning a language. The oral/aural skills of speaking and listening precede the visual skills of reading and writing. The four skills constitute the language learning process cycle. Despite the important relationship with the other three (3) language skills, listening comprehension is handled with kid's glove in pedagogical and applied linguistics research.

Bozorgian (2012a) reports that studies have demonstrated that when learners' listening skills are improved, it positively influences the other three language skills of reading, writing and speaking. This assertion was demonstrated by Morris and Leavey's (2006) study, which focused on pre-schoolers phonological development. The outcome showed that teaching listening skills improves pre-schoolers phonological awareness. Also, two different studies (Badian, 1999; Bergman, 1999), found that teaching middle school students the listening skills helped in the improvement of their reading comprehension. Bergman (1999) also found that when children listen to stories and read it at the same time, it enhances their reading comprehension skills. Berninger's (2000) study showed that students in Grades 1 – 6 improved significantly on their spelling skill after they had been taught aural skill. Similarly, also students in Grades 2 and 3, after being taught listening strategies had significant improvement in narrative and expository essay writing.

Feyten (1991) study sought to determine whether the importance of listening skill in the acquisition of foreign/second language skills should be paid more attention to, or if improving this skill leads to greater success in language learning, as well as whether there is a correlation between the ability to listen and the ability to speak a foreign language. The results of the study indicated that the correlation between the total listening ability and the successful acquisition

of a foreign/second language was statistically significant. Specifically, there was a statistically significant relationship between the listening ability and the overall proficiency level of the foreign/second language, the ability to listen to a foreign language and the ability to understand it, and the ability to read a foreign language.

A lot has been said on the influence of a person's ability to listen on their ability to speak. Oral (speaking) ability, like other linguistic abilities incorporate various aspects initiating learning. Although speaking skill entails an array of learning views, a student's capacity to listen influences learning generally and greatly increases speaking and other language abilities. Though listening and reading (the two receptive skills) have in common fundamental cognitive processes, they however receive input from two different sources. Through observation in a usual language learning process, this researcher draws a link between the listening and reading skills. Like reading, listening requires simultaneous coordination of ability and knowledge regulated by phonological, syntactic, and semantic processes. To emphasise the significant relationship between the receptive skills of reading and listening, studies by Park (2004) and Vandergrift (2004) agree that the two skills are close to one another. First, both involve basic linguistic processes, general knowledge, and are involved in both comprehension and decoding. Second, the two skills actively involve the two primary comprehension processes (bottom-up and top-down) utilized to make sense of the data received. Third, processing receptive data necessitates a flexible cognitive process that modify the cognitive representations that both readers and listeners develop as they receive information. (Mareschal, 2007). Finally, other psychological factors, meta-cognition in listening (Goh, 2008; Goh & Talib 2006) and in reading (Zhang & Wu 2009) and motivation in reading and listening (Gardner, Masgoret, Tennant, & Mihic, 2004; Linda & Brown, 2002), affect receptive skills.

Aural/oral Speaking and listening abilities lay the foundation for learning (Field, 2008), which writing systems may be built upon much more quickly than reading abilities. In addition to cognitive effort, writing ability also requires mechanical efforts to begin. At school age, children must be mentally and physically equipped. The main language abilities of speaking and listening are very important for the secondary language skills of reading and writing (Berninger, 2000). This is because language learning starts with auditory development at birth and oral development at 12–18 months; and reading orientation starts at 60–84 months of age, while writing instruction starts at school age (Shanahan, 2006).

The development of written language skills begins during the school period, as oral skills have been the primary focus of childhood. Yalcinkaya, Muluk, and Sahin (2009) reported that oral proficiency serves as the cornerstone for literacy skills (reading and writing). They contend that understanding the phonological foundation of a language affects written language abilities. They concluded that speaking, reading, and writing skills are all greatly influenced by listening abilities. In addition, oral language development is inextricably linked to writing. According to Shanahan (2006), the theory of effective writing is grounded in the structure of the oral language. He argues that writing is heavily dependent on linguistic perspectives, including phonological cognition, lexicon, morphological organization, syntactic organization, discourse organization, and pragmatic organization. Similar to this, Berninger, Abbott, Jones, Wolf, Gould, Anderson-Youngstrom, Shimada and Apple (2006) further emphasize the importance of oral language instruction in the acquisition of the phonological and orthographic mapping of basic spelling systems, as it leads to the acquisition of consciousness and awareness, which is an explicit strategy implication

Borzorgian (2012b), conducted a study on listening skill in the EFL context to explore the link between the four macro language skills and their influence on language proficiency. The study focused on how the four macro language skills relate to each other, if reading background affects language skills, and lastly how listening relates to language proficiency. The objective of the research was to evaluate the significance of the macro language skills in English as a

Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and how they interact with each other in the EFL environment. Seven hundred and one (701) job seekers in Iran taking the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) in Tehran were used for the study. The findings indicated that all macro-skills related to communication have a wide range of correlations, ranging from moderate (read and write) to high (listen and read). The ability to listen was strongly linked to the language proficiency.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The teaching of listening skill is not done in many language teaching programs. Learners are unaware of strategies for listening and do not have solutions to listening comprehension problems that they have even though listening is a way of learning a language. Curriculum planners, textbook writers, students and teachers seem not to recognize the importance of the development of this skill.

How then can students improve their performance in English Language? The answer may not be so simple; but one of the ways may certainly reside in their being taught the listening skill using effective teaching methods and listening strategy awareness among other practices.

Research Questions

To guide the study, two research questions were raised which were also hypothesized.

1. Is there a difference in the English Studies achievement between subjects taught listening comprehension strategies and those not taught listening comprehension strategies?
2. Is there a difference in the English Studies achievement among students taught listening comprehension strategies based on gender?

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the English Studies achievement between the subjects taught listening comprehension strategies and those not taught listening comprehension strategies.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the English Studies among students taught listening comprehension strategies based on gender.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method and Samples Used

The study is a quasi-experimental study, employing a non-randomized pretest-posttest control group design. The independent variable for the study is the teaching of listening comprehension strategies and two (2) variables - gender (male and female). The dependent variable is achievement in English Studies. Subjects in the study comprise four hundred and ninety-nine (499) junior secondary school 1 (JSS1) students selected from a population of eighteen thousand five hundred and eighty-three (18583) JSS1 students in the Junior Secondary Schools 1 (J.S.S.1) from Edo South Senatorial District, Edo State, Nigeria. Two intact classes were randomly selected from each of the three schools and assigned to treatment groups. The schools were labelled schools 1, 11 and 111 and the two intact classes in each school were labelled A

and B. Group A was the experimental group (students taught listening comprehension strategies, while Group B served as the control group (students not taught listening comprehension strategies).

The instrument used for the study is a teacher-made test that will be used for the end of term examination. The instrument is titled English Studies Examination Questions (ESEQ). It consists of sections A, B, C, D and E. Section A solicits demographic information about the students such as name of student, name of school and school type. Section B is made up of two comprehension passages with five questions each. Section C is made up of thirty multiple choice objective tests on grammar, lexis and structure and test of orals, section D is made up of guided essay with four options to choose from consisting of twenty blank spaces to be filled, while Section E is made up of ten multiple choice objective questions on literary terms in literature. The instrument was used for both the pretest and the posttest. At the pretest, it was used to ascertain the homogeneity of the two groups. It was also used as the posttest to test the effectiveness of the treatment (Listening comprehension strategy instruction).

The ESEQ was subject to expert assessment and critique by a Language Education Specialist, a Measurement and Evaluation Specialist and an English teacher at a secondary school to validate its face and content validity for this study.

To establish the content validity of ESEQ, the items were organized in a table of specification. Out of the seventy (70) items, forty (40) tested mere recall (lower order), while thirty (30) tested higher order levels of comprehension - interpretation and application. The items were therefore adjudged to be valid for use.

The reliability of the instrument was determined after pilot testing using forty (40) JSS1 students, who were randomly selected from a school outside the sampled schools but within the defined population. The internal consistency reliability of the Listening Comprehension Proficiency Test (LCPT) was estimated using Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR20) and a reliability coefficient of .85 was obtained.

The study lasted for twelve (12) weeks. The first week was for administering the pretest, ten (10) weeks for treatment and the last week for post-test. The procedure for each treatment is summarized below:

Experimental Group (Taught Listening Comprehension Strategies)

For one period of forty (40) minutes every week, throughout the duration of the study, which was ten (10) weeks for treatment, subjects listened to a different listening text that had been designed by the researcher, following the English Studies scheme of work. The same methodology as proposed by Willis (1996) was followed each time for those in the experimental group. Subjects were placed in groups of six students. The three components of the listening comprehension class included the following steps:

- i). *Pre-task*: an introduction to the topic and the task.
- ii). *Task cycle* (task, planning or report): learners hear task recordings.
- iii). *Language focus* (analysis and practice): review and repeat the task” (Willis, 1996).

One of the goals of task-based approach is to create a listening experience in the classroom that is as close to a real-life listening experience as possible. To achieve this, pre-listening activities help to establish expectations prior to entering a listening situation.

Pre-task (The pre-listening stage).

Pre- task (pre-listening) activities prepared the subjects for the information to which they were about to listen. Depending on the type of listening task, examples of pre-listening activities include looking at images, maps, diagrams or graphs; looking at vocabulary or grammatical

constructions; reading a relevant text; building semantic networks (a visual representation of concepts or words and how they relate to each other); anticipating what the listening text will say; going over the instructions or instructions for tasks; and carrying out guided practice.

Task Cycle (While-listening stage)

The while-listening activities are those that are directly related to the listening passage. These activities are the ones that the subjects were requested to perform either while they were listening to the passage or while the teacher was narrating; or immediately afterwards. Examples of While-Listening activities for this phase include: Circling an answer, picture, or object; arranging items or pictures; completing grids; tracing a path on a map; completing a picture; completing a list; completing cloze exercises.

Language focus (The post-listening stage)

Post-listening activities are conducted after the text was heard three times as required to achieve the listening goals. These activities are related to the listening text but do not necessarily involve listening and may be conducted outside of the classroom. Post-listening activities may expand the subject matter or vocabulary of the reading passage and thus have some relevance to the listening text. Again, depending on the kind of listening task, the students could be asked to relate the activity to a pre-listening activity; may transfer the listening passage to reading, speaking, or writing activities; summarization, extending, or modelling. Possible post-listening activities include role-plays, discussions, external research, creative composition, illustration, and problem solving.

Control Group (Not Taught Listening Comprehension Strategies)

One period of forty (40) minutes was used weekly for the study which lasted ten (10) weeks. Subjects in the control group listened to the same listening passages the subjects in the experimental group was exposed to. As is usually done in the schools whenever listening comprehension is done, subjects in the control group were tested on aural comprehension passages.

DATA COLLECTION

At the beginning of the study, the two groups were given the pretest. The result as shown in Table 1, revealed that the two groups were not significantly different at pretest (t-value of .95 is not statistically significant at .05 level). The treatment lasted ten (10) weeks, and the post-test was administered during the 12th and final week. The English Studies exercises for the posttests, which incidentally was the students' first term English studies examination questions were scored and the results analyzed using the appropriate statistical analysis.

Table 1: t-test of Independent Samples of the Pretest Scores of the Students Taught listening comprehension strategies and those not taught listening comprehension strategies

Groups	Pretest Mean	Std. Deviation	N	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	52.43	8.43	251	.95	.35
Control	53.19	9.38	248		

Table 1 shows that there is no significant difference between the two groups (experimental and control) in achievement in English Studies before the treatment. The pretest mean scores had a t- value of .95 significant at .35. This is not significant at .05 alpha level of significance, showing that the Subjects were homogenous at the beginning of the study.

DATA ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data collected. Hypothesis one (1) was tested using the ‘t’ test for independent samples, while hypotheses two (2) was tested using univariate ANOVA. All the hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

Findings

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in achievement in English Studies between the subjects taught listening comprehension and those not taught listening comprehension. Data collected to test hypothesis 1 were analyzed using the ‘t’ test for independent samples because the subjects were matched at the beginning of the study. The result of analysis is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Subjects’ Achievement in English Studies

Groups	Posttest Mean	Std. Deviation	N	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Experimental	81.29	13.78	251	9.12	.00
Control	68.31	17.79	248		

Table 2 indicates that the posttest mean score of the students taught listening comprehension strategies was 81.29, while the posttest mean score of the students in the control group not taught listening comprehension strategies was 68.31. This shows that the subjects taught listening comprehension strategies out- performed the students not taught listening comprehension strategies. To find out if the difference in the scores of the participants in the two groups is significant, ‘t’ test for independent samples was conducted. The posttest mean scores had a t- value of 9.12 significant at .00. This is significant at .05 alpha level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in achievement in English studies between the subjects taught listening comprehension strategies and those not taught listening comprehension strategies is rejected.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in achievement in English Studies among students taught listening comprehension strategies based on gender.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the differences between Female and Male Subjects' Achievement in English Studies

Groups	Gender	Post-Test Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Experimental	Females	84.04	13.32	135
	Males	78.10	13.67	116
	Total	81.29		251
Control	Females	70.81	16.20	117
	Males	66.07	18.88	131
	Total	68.31	17.79	248
Total	Females	77.90	16.12	252
	Males	71.72	17.76	247
	Total	74.84	17.16	499

Table 3 shows that one hundred and thirty-five (135) female subjects taught listening comprehension strategies had a posttest mean score of 84.04 with a standard deviation of 13.32, while one hundred and sixteen (116) male subjects taught listening comprehension strategies had a posttest mean score of 78.10 with a standard deviation of 13.67. Also, one hundred and seventeen (117) female subjects not taught listening comprehension strategies had a posttest mean score of 70.81 with a standard deviation of 16.20. One hundred and thirty-one (131) male subjects not taught had a post-test mean score of 66.07 with a standard deviation of 18.88. To explore whether these were significant, ANOVA was conducted.

Data from the ANOVA analysis shows an F-value of 14.354 significant at .000 testing at an alpha level of .05 for gender. This shows that there is a significant difference between the performance of the male and female participants. This difference is in favor of the females. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It is concluded that there is a significant difference in achievement in English studies between males and females taught listening comprehension strategies and those not taught listening comprehension strategies with those taught listening comprehension strategies benefitting more.

DISCUSSION

This study, which investigated the effect of listening comprehension strategy instruction on students' achievement in English Studies revealed that subjects taught listening comprehension strategy performed better than those not taught listening comprehension strategy. The better performance of those in the experimental group could be due to the active participation of the students in the listening process occasioned by the method. The task-based method is a learner-centered method and so makes room for teacher-student, student-student and student-text interactions, which enhance understanding. First, students taught listening comprehension strategies with the Task-based method were exposed to a lot of interactive tasks, such as role-play, dialogues, games, and game-like activities during their English Language listening comprehension lessons. The tasks may have provided the students with the opportunity to make more input in the listening comprehension class. Secondly, the students taught with the Task-based method were put into groups of six students throughout the duration of the study. The use of cooperative group discussion enabled the students in this group to communicate, listen

to, share, build up and exchange ideas, thoughts, opinions and feelings with one another in order to understand the content of an oral text. As the subjects in the Task-based method group discussed and shared opinions collaboratively, they learned a lot from one another. This finding also supports the assertion that pair work and group work in the language classroom allow learners to have better control over learning activities and participate more in the learning tasks than they would in the traditional classroom. It also enriched their learning process because students learn to read, write and think by having meaningful engagements with their peers.

Students seem to learn more when they engage in talks that are interpretative, analytical and explanatory. The findings is in agreement with the findings of Berninger, 2000; Berninger et al (2006); Borborian (2012b); Yalcinkaya, Muluk, and Sahin (2009).

Hypothesis 2 indicates that there is a significant difference in achievement in English Studies by gender in favour of the females irrespective of whether they are taught listening comprehension strategy or not. This could be attributed to the age long assertion that females are better at language learning than males. The findings is in agreement with the findings of Osa-Omoregie & Gbenedio, 2017, who found that females perform better than males in language learning.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, one can conclude that teaching students listening comprehension strategies enhances their overall language performance as those who were taught listening comprehension strategy performed significantly better than those who were not taught listening comprehension strategies. If language teachers emphasize the place of listening in the language classroom, students' performance in English studies will improve significantly.

Curriculum planners should revisit the English Language curriculum with a view to giving equal attention to the teaching of all language skills, especially the listening skill, that has been ignored, emphasizing its' teaching with the task-based language teaching, as well as other methods found to be effective in English Language teaching and learning. The teaching of the listening skill should also be included on the schools' timetable. Teachers should teach listening skills as they teach other language skills. Universities and Colleges of Education should modify their language teacher training programs to include learner-centered methods like the task-based language teaching. This would take care of the individual differences and the different listening abilities of learners.

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