

The effects of pre-listening activities on listening comprehension of first year non-english majors at the university of transport technology

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Received: 20/12/2023; Accepted: 28/12/2023; Published: 06/1/2024

Abstract: *Listening comprehension plays an important role in language learning and teaching process, especially in English Language Teaching (ELT) reform. Students at the University of Transport Technology, with low English language proficiency, usually encounter difficulties in learning this receptive skill, especially when they have to get at least 450 score of TOEIC test. To devote a contribution, the study was carried out in the form of a quasi-experiment research project. The findings revealed that students made positive changes in their academic results, their attitude towards listening skill as well as pre-listening activities. On this basis, some implications for teachers' professional development, classroom practices and future research were proposed.*

Keywords: *Listening, English, comprehension*

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension has always been playing an important part in foreign language learning and teaching because it offers a direct access to obtaining language input. Maley (1984) stated that listening is the key factor to all effective communication since it gives learners information which helps to build knowledge necessary for using the language. It is the combination of numerous factors to create the effective listening comprehension; therefore, teachers need to help students with the process of learning English listening.

The University of Transport Technology (UTT) is a medium-sized university under the Ministry of Transport of Vietnam. It originates from a vocational school specializing in transport construction, economics, and mechanics. At UTT which educates thousands of non-English majors each year, General English (GE) taught for students of all majors is one of the two compulsory English subjects (including GE and ESP). Only by passing GE can students continue with ESP.

2. Research content

2.1. Methodology

Research design

A concurrent mixed method is applied in this study to investigate the effects of pre-listening activities on listening comprehension of UTT's non-English majors. In the study, pre-test and post-test

were used to measure the relationship between pre-listening activities and the listening comprehension. At the same time, the attitude of students was explored using questionnaires and reflective journals with the participation of students at UTT. The reason for combining quantitative and qualitative data is to better understand this research problem by converging both quantitative (broad numeric trends) and qualitative (detailed view) data (Creswell, 2009).

Participants

The research was conducted with the participation of 70 non-English majors aged between 18 and 20 coming from 2 classes namely 68DCVL21 and 68DCVL22 of Economics Faculty.

At UTT, English listening are taught in four 50-minute periods per week. Text book used for the course was Starter TOEIC which includes 12 units combining 2 skills – reading and listening with various topics. The book's level of difficulty is considered to be appropriate for pre-intermediate leveled students. Besides, the process of teaching and listening follows the syllabus and schedule of the school.

Questionnaires

The first questionnaire (before the experiment) contains two sections: The first section aims to gather students' background information and experience in learning listening. The second section one including 10 questions focuses on investigating the students'

attitudes towards learning listening comprehension skill basing on 3 components of attitude including *cognitive, affective, behavioral*.

The second questionnaire paper (after the experiment) also include two sections. Section I concentrated on the students' attitudes towards learning listening comprehension skill. The Section II was designed to check what attitudes students have on pre-listening activities as a useful aid to listening comprehension.

Reflective Journals

In the scope of this study, due to students' limited time and ability, a guided reflective journal is designed to deliver to 10 EG students after every 2 lessons to capture students' changing attitudes, if any. The guided reflective journal is designed in 2 versions: English and Vietnamese basing on the model of Hampton (2010). It also includes some hints to help students ease the task. After being designed, a pilot reflective journal was delivered to a group of students of another English listening class outside EG, CG classes to check if students could understand the questions and provide necessary information or not.

Data collection procedures

The present study took place within 3 months during the second semester of the first year students at two classes of UTT.

At the beginning of the course, the researcher asked the head of English Division for the permission to conduct experiment in two classes 68DCVL21 and 68DCVL22.

Besides, at the end of every two weeks, guided reflective journals were delivered to collect the data on the attitudes of students towards pre-listening activities so as to find out any changes in students' attitudes towards pre-listening activities.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study included the scores of pre-test, post-test as well as the results of questionnaires are collected and analyzed using SPSS statistic software version 20.0. Descriptive statistics and *t-Test* were employed to examine the effects of pre-listening activities. All data were presented in a summary tables and graphic tables followed by a detailed description to give a full picture of all the experimental subjects. Reflective journals were encoded and decoded with themes of attitudes and analyzed to triangulate the data for more in-depth information.

2.2. Data analysis and interpretation

Findings from tests

The analysis of the two tests help to compare the results of EG and CG revealed whether students in the EG made any progress in listening skill in comparison with the CG.

The pre-test scores demonstrate that there are very slight differences about scores of two groups. To affirm if there is difference in the listening comprehension between two group before applying intervention, the pre-test results are analyzed by employing independent sample t-test which helps to conclude inferentially that the students of the two groups are at equal level of listening comprehension at the beginning of the research.

The post-test scores show a big difference in score between the EG and CG. The number of students having bad score in the EG is much lower than that of the CG. By contrast, in good score category, the percentage of students in the EG increases while no student in CG can get score of 7 or more. From t-Test analysis of the post-test of two groups, it can be concluded that there is a difference in the scores of the students in the two groups after the application of pre-listening activities in training program. However, the mean scores of the two groups do not show a significant difference between the two groups.

Beside the affirmation that there is difference in the scores between two groups after the intervention mentioned in previous part, the difference between post-test and pre-test scores of two groups are not the same. In fact, the difference mean between post-test and pre-test in EG is higher with more students get better score after the training. Inferentially conclusion can be drawn in this case that students in EG group obtain better improvement in comparison with those in CG.

Findings from questionnaires

The questionnaire 1 (before experiment) was administered to EG to collect students' background information and their thoughts, feelings about listening skill, pre-listening activities as well as the behavior tendency to be adopted in listening class.

High percentage of students recognized the *importance* of listening comprehension skill.

Regardless of how important it is, listening skill causes *difficulty* to most of the students. Limited vocabulary, rapid delivery of speech and shortage of cultural background knowledge are three factors leading to listening difficulty the most.

In students' opinions, *vocabulary and grammar knowledge and preparations for listening tasks* are two most influential factors affecting listening skill.

Findings from reflective journals

While questionnaires seek for quantitative data, the reflective journals provide qualitative data. These two data sources are compared to each other in the concurrent mixed method, which helps to triangulate the findings, resulting in well-validated and substantiated findings. (Creswell, 2009)

Because of the time limit, two pre-listening activities are chosen to be implemented in each lesson. It is to say, each pre-listening activity is repeated three times and is scattered during the whole course.

2.3. Recommendations and suggestions

Recommendations

Regarding the pre-listening activities, some suggestions are also discussed as follows. For material writers, firstly, it is evident that pre-listening activities employed by the teacher in a listening lesson should be diverse. Second, the teachers should also take account of individual differences such as learning styles or proficiency level. Some kinds of activities that are of students' interests, suitable with their level of proficiency and attract more participation of the students should be applied more often despite the fact that they take more time to prepare than others. Third, teachers should make use of a variety of pre-listening activities to help students listen to the text better. Finally, it is necessary for teachers to operate these pre-listening activities under game models and have bonuses, gifts or right encouragement to make class atmosphere more exciting.

With regard to listeners themselves, the study shows that listeners set the goal of knowing much about linguistic knowledge like grammar and vocabulary. Thus, listeners had better try to utilize their background knowledge to deduce the meaning and make inferences in stead of putting too much effort into learning linguistic items.

Suggestions for future research

This research mainly aims at finding out whether pre-listening activities can have a positive effect on students' performance and attitudes but not into detail about the students' level or the effects of each type of activity. Therefore, for future research, researchers can find out which are suitable for certain learners' levels or compare the impact of different activities.

Furthermore, due to aforementioned limitations,

the paper only studies pre-listening stage which has not been adequately investigated so far. So, further studies may focus on other stages of listening comprehension process.

3. Conclusions

From practical situation of teaching English at tertiary level, there are several factors negatively affecting the students' listening comprehension in learning listening in general and in listening to a specific passage in particular. From the data analysis, it is important to acknowledge that the teacher's teaching techniques, especially at the pre-listening stage, have great influence on the students' comprehension. Despite teachers and students' full awareness of the significance of pre-listening activities, and the teachers also apply some of these activities in their listening lessons, not all pre-listening activities are beneficial in bringing about high comprehension in students' listening.

To improve the situation, such things as teaching and learning conditions, the listening materials, the listening activities, learning strategies and students' preference, ... should be taken into consideration. In more details, varying pre-listening activities, using pre-listening activities appropriately and flexibly, encouraging students' internal factors and improving the pre-listening activities in the materials, are feasible and effective solutions to apply in listening lessons.

After all, it is wished that the current study will make a small contribution to the improvement and renovation of the current situation of teaching and learning English in University of Transport Technology in particular and in other EFL institutions in general.

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