A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TWO EFL WHILE-LISTENING TECHNIQUES

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Abstract: In foreign or second language learning contexts, listening is often considered an essential yet undermined skill (Bidabadi, 2011; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). In order to emphasize and increase the effectiveness of this 'least-wondered skill', innovative tools need to be researched. To this end, this study has aimed at investigating the use of two distinct while-listening techniques in EFL (English as a foreign language) lessons, namely 'shadowing' and 'note-taking'. The major focus was to analyse the impact of these techniques on learners' listening comprehension ability and changes in their perceptions of listening lessons and their own listening abilities. Specifically, the following research questions were asked: 1) which of the two while-listening techniques, namely 'shadowing' or 'note-taking', improves learners' listening comprehension to a higher extent? and 2) how does each while-listening technique influence learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards listening in the foreign language? The research was conducted with four groups of pre-intermediate level English language preparatory class students at a state university in Turkey. Groups were randomly assigned to receive training on either 'shadowing' or 'note-taking' from the same instructor for six consecutive weeks. Quantitative data include the pre-and post-test results for listening, as well as scores of comprehension check questions asked at the end of each training session. In addition, learner reflections provide information on students' opinions and perspectives related with each technique. Quantitative findings indicate a significant difference between groups in terms of learners' listening scores, and qualitative findings reveal various themes in relation to the techniques.

Keywords: ELT, listening, shadowing, note-taking

Introduction

Listening is a critical element in the language performance of learners, whether they are communicating at school, at work or in the community. Through the usual flow of a day, listening is utilized almost twice as much as speaking and four to five times as much as reading and writing (Van Duzer, 1997). Additionally, listening skill could be considered as the main channel through which students make initial contact with the target language and its culture (Curtain & Pesola, 1988). However, listening skill in learning English as a foreign/second language has mostly been put into the background (Vandergrift, 2012). This 'problematic' skill (Nowrouzi, 2015) has been considerably defined as one of the four language skills which involves the least practice opportunities. This 'problematic' skill (Nowrouzi, 2015) has been considerably defined as one of the four language skills which involves the least practice opportunities. Therefore, due to this and other reasons, most foreign language learners regard themselves as less proficient in listening than in other aspects of a language (Graham, 2006). Nevertheless, this point of view could be replaced as long as new solutions to listening problems are explored.

Listener Problems

From the aspect of foreign language listeners, there exist a wide range of listening adversities (Goh, 2000). These difficulties are thought to arise related to perception, parsing and utilization periods of listening

(Anderson, 1995; Goh, 2000). The aim of a listener is to comprehend the listening input, however he/she may encounter various barriers such as not catching words, facing unclear pronunciation or fast speech rate, or deficiency of contextual knowledge (Hassan, 2000). Additionally, learners' lack of auto-control over their listening process could easily create a problem. When examining Turkish EFL learners' listening problems, similar difficulties are observed.

Listening Strategies

In order to assist foreign language learners in improving their listening comprehension, language teachers need to put this process into prominence throughout their courses (Bozorgian, 2014). Scaffolding by the teacher not only through teaching listening but also by motivating learners to be active listeners is highly recommended (Talebinejad & Akhgar, 2015). The reason for this requirement is that EFL learners considerably feel the need to have the chance to listen and progress in the target language through meaningful contexts. Teaching learners the perception of 'metacognition' is another means to cultivate better listening performances (Bozorgian, 2014). Learners' awareness in how to make use of meta-cognitive listening strategies could lead them to go further easily in listening comprehension. Through metacognition, their observation and evaluation of their own listening process could be maximized, which will contribute to their listening performance. So as to develop their learners into more effective listeners, foreign/second language teachers need to widen their strategy knowledge and practice, and spend effort to implement strategy-based listening instruction (Vandergrift, 1999).

Instructional Strategies in Listening

One view favours making EFL learners efficient listeners of English through teaching and applying listening strategies during listening instruction (Vandergrift, 1999). An additional view by Van Duzer (1997) argues that teaching listening comprehension by means of activities which favour real-life listening contexts could be useful. Teaching and implementing listening strategies which endorse success in listening such as predicting or asking for clarification is another means to go further in listening comprehension (Mendelson and Rubin, 1995). According to Van Duzer (1997), throughout teaching listening, the selection of relevant and authentic materials, and composing possibilities for learners to use top-down and bottom-up strategies could additionally be offered. Furthermore, Ahmadi and Gilakjani (2011) offer the view that an instruction type through the union of intensive and extensive listening could foster learners' awareness in listening, their ability to implement strategies in listening and enhance their listening proficiency. Moreover, teaching listening covers not only directing learners during listening, but also motivating them and making them feel an inner desire to learn listening (Akhgar & Talebinejad, 2015).

Despite the considerable body of literature on the use of listening strategies in ELT across a variety of settings, fewer studies have been conducted on the teaching of listening. From the aspect of organizing a listening class, forming a framework of pre, while and post-listening activities will allow the teacher to move in a more organized methodological manner and therefore apply the usage of effective listening techniques (Glakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). With this aim, the current study will test the efficacy of two while-listening techniques, namely shadowing and note-taking.

Shadowing

Shadowing is a while-listening technique which is utilized by foreign language teachers to enhance learners' listening comprehension skill, particularly their bottom-up skills (Hamada, 2015). According to Tamai (1997), shadowing is defined as an active cognitive activity during which listeners listen to an ongoing speech, try to repeat the listening input as much as possible without intervals and following the upcoming speech to understand the speaker. Since EFL learners have difficulty in recognizing the listening input, shadowing is considered to empower learners' rehearsal of the information they hear (Hamada, 2015).

Note-taking

Taking notes while listening to a lecture is a routine owned by learners of all ages with the aim of promoting learning and recalling the learning input later (Teng, 2011). Note-taking is an additional while-listening technique which allows listeners to have an opportunity to gain proficiency in listening comprehension, analysis, selection and writing original notes so that they do not need to re-listen to the speech (Ferris & Tagg, 1996). According to Ornstein (1994), note-taking should take an obligatory part in language learners' entire process of learning.

Research Problem

Much research has been conducted on strategy use in foreign/second language listening, and a lot of information has been gathered about student perceptions. Research that focuses on actual listener performance and how it is influenced by various instructional techniques is needed. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the application of two distinct while-listening techniques in English preparation classes at a university in Turkey. Specifically, the research questions were:
1) Which of the two while-listening techniques, namely 'shadowing' or 'note-taking', improves learners' listening comprehension to a higher extent?
2) How does each while-listening technique influence learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards listening in the foreign language?

Methods

A mixed methods approach was used in the current study to examine two while-listening techniques and their effects on listening comprehension from both quantitative and qualitative aspects.

Research Context

The study was implemented at the English preparatory classes at a state university in Turkey. Having employed skills-based instruction for the last five years, the institution supplies a general English course of twenty-four hours per week at the pre-intermediate level. Listening and speaking lessons constitute seven hours of the entire weekly instruction. Learners' listening proficiency within the semester is evaluated through two quizzes and two midterm exams.

Participants

A total of 82 EFL learners, 36 males and 48 females, in four English pre-intermediate level classes have participated in this study. The entire group comprised students who were to study in different field, such as psychology and engineering in the following year. Participants were randomly divided into two groups as shadowing and note-taking groups. Aged between 18 and 20 years, learners were excessively willing to take part in this research study.

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected by means of two distinct instruments, i.e., exams and student opinions. The first and second listening midterm exams of learners served as pre and post-tests, the comparison of which helped to display participants' improvement in listening comprehension. Each group of students received training between the pre- and post-tests. Treatment for each group consisted of six sessions through the assigned while-listening technique. In the treatment sessions, the first 40 minutes involved information on, instruction in and application of the technique. At the end of each session, 30 minutes were spent in order to apply a listening comprehension check and allow learners to write about their ideas and opinions of the technique they were trained in.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Statistical analysis was generated through SPSS v.21 program with the aim of analysing the quantitative data based on pre- and post-test scores. In addition, Content Analysis (Weber, 1990), which required the organization of ideas around themes, was utilized as a means to analyse learner opinions.

Results and Findings

The first research question set out to determine which specific while-listening technique would lead to greater improvement in learners' listening comprehension. According to the pre- and post-test score comparisons of participants in the shadowing group, there existed a statistically significant difference (see Table 1). In other

words, shadowing technique led to a significant level of improvement in the participants' listening comprehension.

Table 1. Improvement in listening comprehension scores of the shadowing group

	Shadowing (n=41)	Comparisons	p
L1 – Median (Pre-test)	78 (60:88)		
		L1- L2	p<0.001
L2- Median (Post-test)	88 (60:100)		

Similarly, there existed a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores of participants in the note-taking group (see Table 2). This means that note-taking technique has also changed participants' performance in listening comprehension to a great extent.

Table 2. Improvement in listening comprehension scores of the note-taking group

	Note-taking (n=41)	Comparisons	p
L1 – Median (Pre-test)	84 (55:100)		
		L1- L2	p<0.077
L2- Median (Post-test)	84 (56:93)		

Based on further statistical analyses, of the two while-listening techniques, shadowing has improved learners' listening comprehension to a statistically higher extent, indicating that it was a more effective technique in improving students' listening comprehension (see Table 3).

Table 3. The comparison of improvement between shadowing and note-taking groups

	Shadowing (n=41)	Note-Taking (n=41)	p
L	12.05+ 4.76 -	-2.49+ 8.14 -	p<0.001

The second research question set out to specify what learners thought about the while-listening techniques they were trained in and how each technique influenced learners' perceptions of and attitudes towards listening in the foreign language. With this objective, opinions of participants were organized around particular themes that emerged from the data. In the shadowing group, 84% of students thought that the technique was useful and 32% felt they have improved through the technique. Furthermore, 24% found the technique enjoyable and liked it, 16% were hopeful about the future advantages of shadowing and 12% of participants planned to apply the technique outside the class or in other tasks. In addition, 4% of learners have stated they wanted further listening practices. Among the negative comments about shadowing, participants have specified that they had difficulty applying the technique (28%) and did not find the technique useful (4%).

In terms of the note-taking remarks, 77% of students have mentioned that they found the technique useful and 46% felt that they have improved by means of this technique. 23% of these learners planned to apply the technique outside the class in other tasks or tests. Moreover, 20% have found note-taking enjoyable and liked it. Seeing the questions prior to listening was considered as helpful by 9%, and 3% of note-takers said that they benefitted more from the technique through practice.

Note-taking students' comments also included neutral and negative content. In fact, 51% had difficulty applying the technique and 37% liked some types of note-taking, but disliked others. Furthermore, 14% of learners found different types of note-taking more appropriate for different types of texts. 9% of note-taking participants did not find the technique much useful. Findings indicate that there were more positive comments compared to negative comments for both techniques (see Table 4). Moreover, the numbers and percentages of negative opinions is much higher in the note-taking group

Table 4. Learners' opinions of the listening techniques

Positive remarks	Shadowing (%)	Note-taking (%)
Find the technique useful	84	77
Feel the improvement through the technique	32	46
Plan to apply the technique outside the class/in other tasks or tests	12	23
Find the technique enjoyable and like it	24	20
Hopeful about the future benefits of the technique	16	-
Find it useful to see the questions before listening	-	9
Wishes to have further listening practices	4	-
Benefitted more from the technique through practice	-	3
Negative remarks		
Has difficulty applying the technique	28	51
Like some versions of the technique, dislike others	-	37
Certain versions are more appropriate for certain text types	-	14
Did not find the technique much useful	4	9

Conclusion

In line with previous studies (Nah, White & Sussex, 2008; Vandergrift, 1999; Glakjani & Ahmadi, 2011), this study showed that the application of an organized while-listening instruction can lead to significant improvement in learners' listening comprehension. Participants in shadowing as well as note-taking groups grew into more effective listeners by means of the training in distinct while-listening techniques, yet a statistically more significant improvement was detected in the shadowing group. A similar advantage of the shadowing technique was found in several former studies with EFL learners who have difficulty in listening (Hamada, 2015).

Qualitative findings of the study also revealed that most students in either group approached the particular techniques positively. In other words, students found the techniques useful, enjoyable, beneficial and promising. The fact that shadowing group's comments included fewer negative ideas with less frequency shows that shadowing might be a more favourable and easier technique for the learners to apply.

Recommendations

Educational Implications

This study shows the importance of listening instruction and training in different listening techniques in a foreign/second language to enhance learner proficiency in listening comprehension. Both shadowing and note-taking are influential while-listening techniques, but shadowing especially could be recommended to teachers who aim to improve their learners' listening comprehension. However, selection of the most appropriate listening comprehension technique is considerably important since different techniques require different capabilities and learning atmospheres. A teacher may apply various techniques in a pilot study and discover which technique will be more useful to and preferred by his/her group of students.

Implications for Researchers

As a continuation to this study, further research could be conducted to explore other while-listening techniques and their effect on listening comprehension performance of learners of distinct age, language level and contexts. In addition, both shadowing and note-taking could individually be compared to other while-listening techniques. Further studies may also be carried out to understand the effects of both techniques on distinct variables such as listening anxiety or listening motivation of EFL learners.

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