

The effect of reactive versus intensive performance on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension ability

Parisa Farrokh*, English Translation Department, Lahijan Branch, Islamic Azad University, 1616, Lahijan, Iran

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Abstract

This study was an investigation to find out the effect of reactive versus intensive performance on Iranian intermediate EFL learner listening comprehension ability. It was an attempt to determine whether Iranian intermediate EFL learner are familiar with intensive and reactive performance or not. Moreover, does reactive versus intensive performance have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension skill. To do this, two groups (experimental1 and experimental2, 30 participants for each one) of Iranian EFL learners in intermediate level from Kish Language Institute in Tehran, Iran were selected. The participant took a standard OPT test to demonstrate their English proficiency. A listening audio text for pretest and posttest from the book "Four Corners" was administered. The required data for this study gathered after five sessions of teaching listening in both experimental groups. In other words, in the first experiment, we used intensive performance and in the second one, we used reactive performance. Finally, the data were analysed using an Independent Sample T-test and paired sample T-test. The results showed that the listening has been improved as a result of using intensive performance.

Key words: listening, comprehension, strategy, reactive performance, intensive performance.

*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: Parisa Farrokh, English Translation Department, Lahijan Branch, Islamic Azad University, 1616, Lahijan, Iran. E-mail address: farrokh_p@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Listening is an essential skill in learning a foreign language and it is actually a problem-solving skill. No one can deny the importance of listening skill in foreign language learning because the key to acquire a language is to receive language input. However, mere exposure to listening material does not always suffice to gain linguistic knowledge. Listeners as language learners need to go through an active process rather than simply decoding the auditory representations.

However, early work on second language listening assumed as rather passive, bottom-up view (Chamot, 2004). Difficulties in second language listening and listening comprehension were viewed as being essentially decoding problems, deriving from the heard materials. It was thought that while listening, listeners ought to be able to construct a meaning from which they could assimilate the original meaning of the speaker. Carrier (2003) asserted that listeners need to analyse different types of information to understand the speaker's meaning. Listening involves a listener, a text and a speaker. Listening skill is developed in an active process.

Early L2 listening research had an interest in a theory that being merely exposed to comprehensible input would improve listening skills and promote language acquisition, and it overlooked the processing of this input (Krashen, 1985). L2 listening research in recent years has, however, shifted to focus on how learners manipulate this input. Therefore, understanding the strategies second language learners tend to use to cope with the difficulties they experience while listening had become an integral part of L2 listening research. L2 listening research has been increasingly directed to clarifying listener's mental processes and identifying facilitative strategies (Mendelsohn, 1995; Thompson & Robin, 1996; Vandergrift, 1999).

The interest in listening comprehension strategies has evolved in a number of studies (O'Malley, Chamot & Walker, 1987; Oxford & Crookall, 1989). Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as the techniques that learners utilize to improve the use of the target language information. O'Malley and Chamot (1989) categorize strategies into two groups: cognitive, metacognitive. However, a third category, socio-affective, was added to describe the learning that takes place when learners interact with classmates, ask the teacher for clarification, or use specific techniques to lower their anxiety.

Previous research has also revealed that the learner proficiency is one of the main factors that determine the choice of a strategy (Rost, 2002). Skilled learners were found to use more strategies than their less skilled counterparts. Also there were differences in the types of strategies skilled and less-skilled learners used.

Language learners use cognitive strategies to help them process, store and recall new information (Goh, 1998). Two broad types of cognitive strategies have been the subject of L2 listening research: bottom-up and top-down. Bottom-up strategies include word-for-word translation, adjusting the rate of speech, repeating the oral text, and focusing on prosodic features of the text. Top-down strategies, on the other hand, include predicting, inferencing, elaborating and visualization. Previous research has revealed that advanced learners employ more top-down strategies than beginners.

The last category of strategies is socio-affective, which encompasses the attempts to create and promote positive emotional reactions and attitudes towards language learning (Chamot & O'Malley, 1987). Vandergrift (2003) defined socio-affective strategies as the techniques listeners employ to collaborate with others, to verify understanding, or to lower anxiety. However, listening performance involves an act of listening performed by listeners, learners. In the light of classroom practice, it concerns results of listening activities the teacher uses to enable learners to carry out; how effective or ineffective learners activate listening tasks. In this respect, Brown (1994) categorized classroom listening performance into six types as follows:

(i) Reactive performance : requires the teacher to enable learners to listen to the surface structure of an utterance and to repeat what they had heard.

(ii) Intensive performance: emphasizes components of spoken language or listeners' bottom-up level such as phonemes, sounds, words, intonation, discourse markers and grammatical structures.

(iii) Responsive performance: focuses on comprehending short stretches of spoken discourse. The teacher asks learners to immediately respond to what they hear from the teacher's speaking.

(iv) Selective performance requires the teacher to enable learners to scan or distract longer stretches of spoken discourse in order to understand their general and global meaning.

(v) Extensive performance is to develop learners' listening at the top-down level; learners are required to globally understand the spoken language of, e.g. lengthy lectures and conversation.

(vi) Interactive performance points out the relationship between listening and speaking; learners are required to participate in discussion and debates, etc.

In this research, the researcher has investigated the effect of reactive versus intensive performance on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension ability. In this relation, research question of this study is as follow:

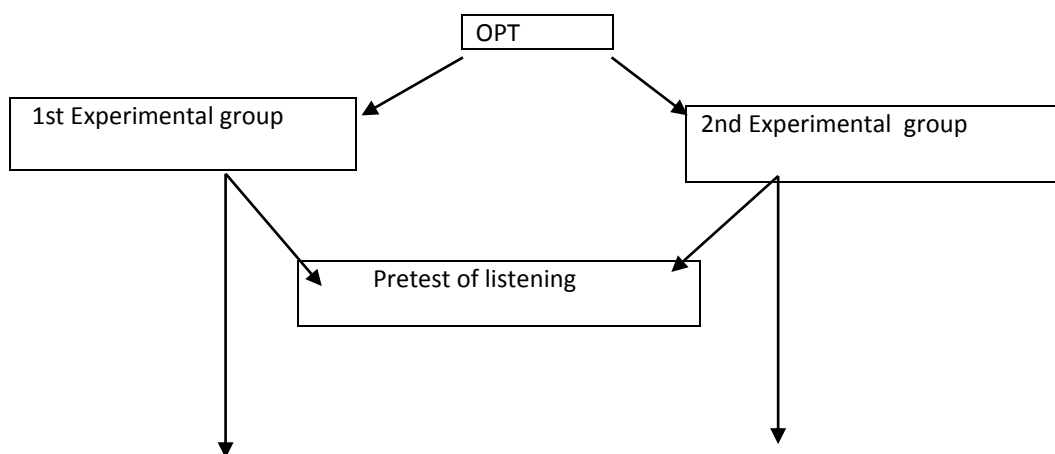
“ Does intensive versus reactive performance affect on Iranian intermediate EFL learner s' listening comprehension ability”?

To answer this question the following assumption was formulated

Intensive versus reactive performance does not have any effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension ability.

2. Methodology

This study followed an experimental design. The rationale behind using such a design lied in the fact that there was no random selection of subjects throughout the English Institutes in the country, and the study was supposed to be conducted in English Institute, thus, the participants were selected from Kish Institute in Rasht. The design of the present study has been illustrated diagrammatically in figure (1) below:



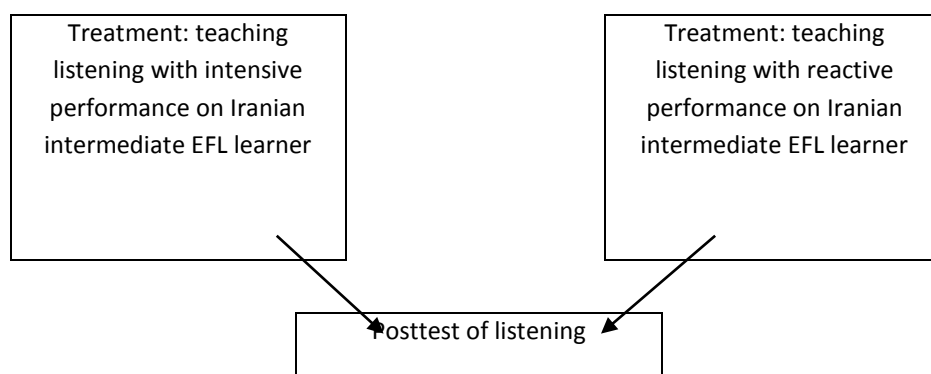


Figure 1. The Design of the Present Study

2.1. Participants

In the process of choosing the participants for the study, first of all, an OPT (Oxford Placement Test, 2001) was administered among 71 subjects who were English learners of Kish Language Institute in Tehran, Iran, however, 60 of whom were selected for the aim of this study. The subjects were randomly divided into two experimental groups (30 participants for each group). All participants were at intermediate level and regarding their age, they were between 10 and 19 years old. They were female. The study was made in English class course of institute.

2.2. Materials

In fact, there are four types of research material in the present study, each material has its own specific characteristics, included in the following parts:

2.2.1. Material for the Proficiency Test

To be sure of the homogeneity in two groups, a proficiency test was administered to establish the participants' homogeneity. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to make sure the participants were homogenous in terms of their language proficiency. This enables teachers to have a great understanding of what level their students are at. The test contains 50 multiple choice questions which assess student's knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary, a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions, and a writing task for assessing student's ability to produce the language.

2.2.2. Material for Pretest and Posttest

A pretest was administered to assess participants' listening comprehension ability. After the treatment of the study, a posttest was administered. The tests were taken from the book 'Four Corners' by Jack C. Richards and David Bolck. The audio used for the listening comprehension test comprised personal stories told by different people in a conversation form and participants were supposed to listen to the audio tracks and answer the questions provided for each conversation. Each conversation was about 5 minutes and the participants were supposed to answer the related questions.

2.2.3. Material for Treatment of the Study

The material for the treatment of this study included 8 listening passages together with their related audio tracks used for listening talk. Listening texts were selected from the book 'Four Corners' series approved by the "Cambridge University Press Staff." The volume used in this study was the second book of the Four Corners series suitable for intermediate level.

2.2.4. Procedure

As it was mentioned before, the first step in this process of conducting the research was the administration of OPT as the homogenizing tool. It was administered to 60 intermediate EFL learners. After analyzing the results, subjects were randomly assigned into two groups. Prior to the study, a pre-test was administered to assess participants listening comprehension ability. The time was allotted to test. The obtained scores from the two classes were statistically analyzed and compared to figure out whether there was any significant difference between the experimental groups in terms of their listening comprehension ability. All selected 60 participants were randomly divided into two groups with 30 participants for each one. One group as first experimental group, received listening with intensive performance. It took for five sessions. While the other group as the second experimental group received listening with reactive performance. The treatment took for five sessions. The participants were taught differently in experimental and in two experimental groups. For the first experimental group, the teacher played the audio track and when it finished she asked some questions to notice a specified element in the audio and student answered the questions. But in the second experimental group teacher played the same audio and the students just repeated what they heard and after that they answered the some questions.

To ensure that there was no environmental noise the participants were allowed to wear headphones so that they could concentrate on the listening tasks. The time allocated to the tests was 40 minutes.

2.3. Method of Analyzing Data

The numerical data were analyzed through SPSS, using an independent samples T-test between Post test score of the study and paired samples T-test between pretest and post-test score of each group.

3. Results

The nature of the hypothesis of the current study required that the data will be analysed and be used both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The descriptive statistics will be such as the measures of central tendency including mean and also the inferential statistics will be for calculating a t-test and for indicating the possible difference between the mean of both the pretest and the posttest of the scores of two experimental groups of the study.

3.1. Descriptive Analysis of the Data

This part focused on descriptive analysis of obtained data by using SPSS software. Table (1) indicates the descriptive analysis of posttest scores of both experimental groups in which there are intensive and reactive performance on Iranian intermediate.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis results of the posttests of the study

	Performance	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Listening	Intensive	30	5.9000	1.02889	0.18785
	Reactive	30	5.2333	1.45468	0.26559

As is shown in table (1), the number of students participated in each treatment was 30. It means that all selected participants took part in the tests. The mean of Intensive performance test for the first experimental group is 5.9000, and the mean of reactive performance test for the second experimental group is 5.2333. The standard deviation for two experimental groups equals to 1.02889 and 1.45468 respectively. This shows that there is variability of scores in the experimental groups.

Table (2) indicates the descriptive analysis result of paired sample of the study which there is intensive performance on Iranian intermediate.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis results of the paired sample of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest of the first EX	5.9000	30	1.02889	0.18785
	Pretest of the first EX	4.4000	30	1.47625	0.26952

As is shown in table (2) the mean of posttest of the first experimental group is 5.9000, and the mean of the pretest is 4.4000. The number of students participated in experimental was 30. It means that half of selected participated took part in tests. The standard deviation of posttest experimental and pretest experimental equal to 1.02889 and 1.47625 respectively. The standard error mean for posttest and pretest of the first experimental group equals to 0.18785 and 0.26952 respectively.

Table (3) indicates the descriptive analysis result of paired sample of the study which there is reactive performance on Iranian intermediate.

Table 3. Descriptive analysis results of the paired sample of the study

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Posttest of the second EX	5.2333	30	1.45468	0.26559
	Pretest of the second EX	4.8333	30	1.87696	0.34268

As is shown in table (3) the mean of posttest of the second experimental group is 5.2333, and the mean of the pretest is 4.8333. The number of student participated in this group was 30. It means that half of selected participants took part in tests. The standard deviation of posttest and pretest of the second group equals to 1.45468 and 1.87696 respectively. The standard error mean for posttest and pretest of the second experimental group equals to 0.26559 and 0.34268 respectively.

3.2. Inferential Analysis of the Data

After administration of pretest and after receiving the treatment, the participants both experimental groups were given their test of listening posttest. The analysis of the data was done via using SPSS software. So, table (4) shows the inferential statistics which includes the calculation of an Independent sample T-test.

Table 4. Independent Samples T-test results of the study

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening	Equal variances assumed	2.049	58	0.045
	Equal variances not assumed	2.049	52.208	0.045

Table (4) indicates, the independent samples T-test result of the results of the study. According to this table, the observed- t was calculated as to be 2.049, while according to best (2006,p.483) Critical-t was 2.000. It means that, $t_{observed} > t_{Critical}$, which has been used in interpreting the data for rejection or support of the hypothesis of the study in the next section. The degree of freedom is 58 ($df=58$), it was calculated from the common formula of $df=N-1$ for sum of populations in both groups. Moreover, the standard two-tailed test level of significance was considered as 0.05 (ibid,2006), while the level of significant in this table was calculated as 0.045. In other words, the significance is lower than the standard. Thus, it is show that the difference was not by chance. The other inferential analysis of the data of current study was related to the degree of relationship between pre-test and post-test in both groups. This was indicated by paired sample T-test between pre-test and post-test scores in each group of study. The results indicated in tables (5) and (6) below:

Table 5. Paired-Samples T-test results of the first experimental group of the study

		Paired Differences				
		Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	PosttestEX - PretestEX	1.50000	1.45626	5.642	29	0.000

Table (5), shows the paired sample t-test and it analysed the relationship between pre-test and post-test for the first experimental group. The degree of freedom in pair 1 was 29, ($df =29$) because just the population for the first experimental group was considered in pair 1. The paired difference t, equals to 5.642, while critical-t in order to the degree of freedom is 2.045. Thus, the calculated T value is higher than the T critical value in the first experimental group. The level of significance in pair 1 is 0.000 and it indicates that the difference is correct, also the difference was not by chance.

Table 6. Paired sample T-test result for the second experimental group of the study

		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
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		Mean	Std. Deviation			
Pair 1	Posttest of the second EX	0.40000	1.67332	1.309	29	0.201
	Pretest the second EX					

According to table (6), it indicates the paired sample T-test for the second experimental group and shows the relationship between pre test and post test in this group. The degree of freedom in pair 1 was 29, in order to be considered just the population in this experimental group. Besides, the paired difference t in this group is 1.309, while critical-t in order to the degree of freedom equals to 2.045. It is necessary to mention that, according to this table, again the calculated T value is more T critical value but it is clear that this calculated T value is lower than the calculated T value for the first experimental group. In other words, there was not any corpus teaching in the second experimental group, but there was an elaboration about terminologies and teaching listening in this group. Therefore, this increase in calculated T value for the second experimental group in comparison with the first experimental group is very low and it can be said that it was in order to the teaching listening. The level of significance in pair 2 is 0.000 and it shows that the difference was not by chance.

4. Conclusion

The current study was conducted to explore about a hypothesis and in this regard took several theoretical, practical and statistical steps. This study attempted to answer the following research question. The questions will be restated and the answer, based on the findings of the study, will be provided below.

Q: "Does intensive versus reactive performance affect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners listening comprehension ability"?

According to the results of the analysis shown in table (5), the answer is positive. Intensive performance could influence students' listening comprehension ability sufficiently and made statistically significant improvement in the students' listening ability. The present study revealed that it is worth to put emphasize on it.

In the current research the effect of intensive versus reactive performance on listening comprehension ability of female Iranian EFL learners in English Institute was investigated. The most significant aspect of the present research is its relationship with the practicality of the research. The English language has been considered one of the key component in keeping up with the globalization trend in Iran. Therefore English has been a compulsory subject in the Iranian educational curriculum, and knowledge of the English language is looked upon as top priority for all Iranian at all levels. This situation has created great demands in developing effective and efficient learning and teaching models in English education. Likewise, the students and the teachers have paid more attention to English learning strategies in order to help Iranian EFL learners to have native like proficiency in the English language. English teaching, learning theories and methods have been introduced through a great deal of research despite that research comparatively little has been done to examine the Iranian EFL learner. The results gained in this study can be used in the listening classroom to teach students how to improve listening ability.

Moreover, Teachers can understand and recognize which parts of listening comprehension are challenging for the learners or which parts are not fully considered by them. Then they can stress that successful listening comprehension would not take place unless some appropriate tasks and strategies are implemented systematically.

Emphasizing the significance of individuals' differences and their various learning styles, this study encouraged teachers to provide opportunities for learners to become acquainted with strategies such as intensive performance and help them match their styles with this performance.

The proposed study showed that performances such as intensive one could be considered as an effective one for teaching and learning of listening skill.

It could also offer valuable insights to EFL/ ESL/ESP teachers and syllabus designers to incorporate intensive performance in their teaching syllabi. Therefore, in the light of the findings of this study, it is recommended that language teachers incorporate intensive performance into the classroom activities to accelerate students' development in listening skill and to promote and sustain learners' effort in performance completion. These provide students with different conditions to practice the language communicatively and develop cognitively. Moreover, according to the findings of the current study, it can be concluded that intensive performance can be regarded as an efficient strategy in EFL contexts like Iran.

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