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**An Investigation on the Effects of Intensive/Extensive
Teaching Listening on EFL Learners Listening
Comprehension Development**

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IN THE NAME OF GOD

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Abstract

In this study, we investigated the effectiveness of intensive and extensive listening teaching methods for EFL learners with respect to their different proficiency level. In the experiment, two groups of students were selected among English language learners and asked to participate in the study. They were divided into two groups of lower proficiency and higher proficiency. Furthermore, to compare the effectiveness of abovementioned listening techniques, for each level, each group of Language proficiency was put into two subgroups of Intensive and Extensive procedures. Standard TOEFL test has been taken from all groups both before and after the treatment. For each group, after a descriptive statistics, paired sample t-test was performed on the test results to show the effectiveness of different treatments. Next, a test of homogeneity for both pre and post treatment was performed. Then hypotheses were tested based on the results of the statistical tests. The results from the analyzing the data showed intensive technique is more effective for lower level students but less effective for higher level students, compared to extensive technique. On the other hand, extensive technique, in compare with intensive technique, showed better results for higher proficiency level students, and not much effective for lower level students. The results of this study could be quite helpful for English teachers to find an appropriate and an effective listening technique that meets the learners' needs, which might just be the key to different listening obstacles that many learners face.

Key words: Listening techniques, Intensive listening, Extensive listening, Listening comprehension development.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, first an overview of the research will be presented. Next, the problem leading to carrying this research will be stated. This will be followed by significance of the study. Next, research assumptions, questions and research hypotheses will be explained.

1.1 General Overview

Listening has long been regarded among the four macro-skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing as the “Cinderella”. No one can deny that listening is one of the main factors in communicative competence, but, as other skills, it needs to be treated equally not only in the class, but also in the preparation of the language teacher (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

According to Flowerdew and Miller, one of the main concerns in second language acquisition (SLA) among the four skills has always been the way we can acquire an appropriate listening strategy in L2. Later, Richards (2005) referred to the point that lots of second and foreign language learners have focused on acquiring good listening and speaking skills in L2, so it is a necessity for teachers to know a lot regarding current approaches of the aural/oral skills, nowadays. Language educationalists have not paid enough attention to second language (L2) listening for long, but now it has gained its own significance. While those who research in SLA relatively ignore listening in their

works, it has recently gained its chief significance in language teaching (Richards, 2005).

Richards (2005) based on the presence of listening component in main examinations like school exiting exams, university entrance exams, and other standardized examinations (e.g., TOEFL; TOEIC) found out that listening ability is now considered as one of the major factors in evaluation of second language proficiency alongside speaking, reading, and writing. Moreover, the importance of listening has been considered by Krashen (1982) who believed that the input must be comprehensive and comprehensible. The value of listening in L2 learning has been indicated in Krashen's Input Theory. It means that students, most probably, will enhance their comprehension from input if they choose effective listening strategies (as cited in Vandergrift, 1997).

Furthermore, two respectable models of language understanding and comprehension in foreign and second language listening have been applied to lots of researches within the last few decades (e.g., O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Peterson, 2001; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). They are called *Extensive processing* and *Intensive processing*. The two processing models may interact and ends to the point that the listeners be aware of the significance of background knowledge and text organization in listening comprehension.

In contrast, Richards (1990) shows that second language classes emphasize on transactional listening. It means that without any intervention or comprehension for the intention of clarifying the points or giving feedback, students just listen to oral texts aiming to gain information and completing a task for comprehension. It is probable that understanding of listening comprehension strategies and effectively dealing with the tasks in listening remain at the basic or slight level by learners. However, they may have insufficient knowledge and capability to work with English listening tasks. Moreover, as it has been mentioned by Brittin (2005), listening cannot just be considered as a passive activity. Many skills like interaction, paying attention, concentration and practice needed to be transferred to students. As O'Mally, Chamot, and Küpper (1989) pointed out, it is a process that needs active and conscious involvement of the listener to be able to use

cues from contextual information and existing knowledge then construct meaning. Simultaneously, he should be equipped with multiple strategic resources to complete task requirements. As a result, according to what has been mentioned so far, it is understandable why the significance of L2 listening comprehension has been a hot issue for long, while these days its high status has been taken into consideration in language education. Thus, increasing the awareness of students to use appropriate strategy in listening comprehension and bringing up their consciousness about the importance of improvement in listening are highly recommended.

Cheng (2004), in a study with the focus on the assessment of listening in college students, pointed that the observation of dynamic cognitive mental process in listening is impossible and it is measureable if the listener reconstructs the message which is played. Some may consider it as a complex, unconscious, and unobserved mental operation which language learning process can develop it naturally. Further investigation is needed to show if listening abilities in foreign language learners progress through time. If second language learners do not know the method by which they can make their listening proficiency better, they cannot take much listening output due to inability in absorbing them from their teacher. Hence, wondering how to listen in English will influence students' performance in the listening comprehension process. It should be noted that most studies have revealed the reason why students face difficulty in handling listening comprehension and why they have made long efforts to declare the ways by which non-English-major students enhance their skills at the universities. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to know the difficulties or problems that a student may face during his real life communication and in the class. Besides, it is essential for him to know the factors which are effective for comprehension of listening.

Generally speaking, listening teaching methods can be divided based on the two techniques; Intensive listening and Extensive listening. Many listening activities aim to elicit, or help the learner to notice a new language feature, or listen to a specific piece of information. This is called Intensive Listening (IL), and it involves listening to shorter

and rather difficult listening texts. Other activities help the learner to focus on the global comprehension of longer listening passages; and this is called Extensive Listening (EL).

Intensive listening requires students to understand the meaning of each discourse and, ultimately, to understand every sentence and word. Generally, intensive listening requires students to listen to a text several times, or divide the text into paragraphs and sentences to understand each one; or by doing dictation word by word. The goal is for students to understand every sentence.

Alternatively, extensive listening does not require students to understand every sentence, and every word, instead, students are encouraged to grasp the general meaning of the passage. The key point of listening is to understand the content.

Waring (2003), one of the earliest supporters of extensive listening, has suggested that an extensive listening program would, at a minimum, involve listening to considerable amounts of text; the use of listening texts which learners are able to understand reasonably effortlessly; high levels of comprehension; the absence of pre-set questions or tasks; listening at or below one's level of "comfortable listening ability".

Waring (2003) indicated that in the same way that extensive reading (ER) has been shown to help successfully address problems that students face in developing adequate reading speed, improving sight recognition of lexis and grammar, and improving comprehension and retention, extensive listening (EL) should be able "to improve our automaticity in recognizing spoken text, to enjoy the listening, to practice the listening skill for knock-on effects such as tuning into pronunciation and noticing intonation patterns."

Regarding the importance listening comprehension in instructed SLA, and the two listening techniques of teaching this language skill, this study aims to investigate the effects of intensive listening and extensive listening in relation to learners' listening proficiency.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Listening is often regarded as a highly challenging skill to master and that there is not a variety of listening techniques for learners to use. English teachers conduct listening activities in the form of intensive method and that the teachers often stick with the listening method that they have chosen from the beginning level and do not come up with new methods and strategies, so that they could change the method as the learners' comprehensions evolve. Many EFL learners are having trouble improving their listening comprehension. Problems such as: which strategies to use, how one could overcome the obstacles in listening tasks, which approaches are more practical, and whether there is a relation between the proficiency level of the learners and the methods they use.

Many studies like Zhang (2005) and Waring (2003) have been carried out in favor of extensive listening method and supported its effectiveness. Some other studies, on the other hand, have supported the effectiveness of intensive listening technique and how crucial it is for learners to practice the intensive listening technique in order to improve their listening comprehension.

Although many researches have been done on listening methods and techniques to enhance listening comprehension, little or no research has been done to investigate a clear comparison between the effects of intensive and extensive listening, particularly in relation to language proficiency.

1.3 Significance of the Study

A better understanding about the effects of listening methods on the listening comprehension development would certainly have major implications for second/foreign language teaching and teachers. To be precise, concerning the factors which have effects on the learners' listening comprehension development, one is the recognizable impact of extensive listening method. Another noticeable factor for the improvement of listening comprehension is the use of intensive listening method. What this study is trying to

figure out is to see whether the use of different listening techniques, intensive/extensive have diverse effects on the learners' listening comprehension development.

If proficiency proves to be of any effects in teaching listening then an appropriate listening technique should be applied in accordance with learners proficiency level.

Thus, the outcome of this study could help the teachers to have a better understanding of listening methods and their implications on learner's listening comprehension development. Another benefit of this study is to know the effectiveness of each technique based on level of learners, so that English teachers can adjust their listening teaching procedures accordingly.

1.4 Research Assumptions

Taking into account the number of studies which have been carried out on the effects of different listening techniques on the L2 listening comprehension development, the following assumption can be stated:

1. It can be assumed that intensive/extensive exposure of L2 learners to aspects of L2, or different language skills can effect L2 learning.
2. There is a relation between the L2 learners' listening comprehension and the listening techniques they use.

1.5 Research Questions

Based on the research problem which was mentioned earlier the objectives of this study can be expressed as the following questions:

1. Is there any significant difference between the effects of extensive and intensive listening teaching techniques on listening comprehension development in EFL learners?

2. Is there any relationship between the proficiency level of EFL learners and the effects of different teaching techniques, intensive/extensive on listening comprehension development?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

The main objective of this study was to see the effects of intensive and extensive listening on EFL learners' listening comprehension development. The null hypothesis can be stated as follows:

H01: There is no significant difference in the effects of extensive and intensive listening teaching methods on listening comprehension development in EFL learners.

H02: There is no relationship between the proficiency level of EFL learners and the listening teaching procedure: Intensive/extensive

1.7 Definitions of Terms

- Meta-cognitive strategies involve how listeners listen to the listening passage and which strategies they use to plan, monitor and evaluate comprehension (Rubin, 1994, p. 211). For example, listeners may evaluate information and monitor their answers by questioning the answer: "Does this answer make sense according to the context"
- Cognitive strategies involve solving learning problems by considering how to store and retrieve information from the listening passages (Rubin, 1994). For example, listeners focus on word group or background knowledge while they listen.
- Intensive listening (also referred as bottom-up processing) is when listeners use their knowledge of words, syntax and grammar to analyze or comprehend the information (Rubin, 1994). For example, listeners will focus on the meaning of individual vocabulary words or syllables, instead of the content of the listening passages.

- Extensive Listening (also referred as top-down processing) is when listeners use their knowledge of the world, real situations and roles of human interaction to interpret or predict the information (Rubin, 1994). For example, listeners may emphasize the gist of the whole listening passage instead of the meaning of individual words.
- Local questions focus on single vocabulary words that have contextual support. For example, listeners may focus on individual words or syllables in the listening passage instead of the background information of the listening passage. When listeners answer local questions correctly, it suggests they use bottom-up processing.
- Global questions focus on main ideas and background knowledge instead of individual words or syntax in the listening passage. For example, listeners may use their background knowledge of the target language and use this information to predict the listening passage or content. When listeners answer global question correctly, it suggest they are using top-down processing.

1.8 The structure of the research

This thesis has been designed to have five chapters. Chapter One, the introduction, explains the general overview, the purposes of this study, statement of the problem, and the research questions of this study. Chapter Two reviews several previous studies of learning and listening strategies, Intensive listening, Extensive listening. Chapter Three explains the methodology used in this study, context and setting, participant profiles, research design, instruments, data collection, as well as data analysis, and procedures used in this research. Chapter Four reports the results, focusing on research findings on the basis of the two research questions raised in this study. It also discusses the results. Chapter Five deals with conclusions of the research, implications of the findings, and finally, some suggestions are offered for future research.

1.9 Limitation of the Study

The current study effectively elicited information relevant to the research questions. However, because of restrictions, this research has some limitations.

- 1) The research scope is limited; it might not be representative of all EFL learners. That is, the investigation focused only on the EFL learners who are studying at Hamedan Marefat Language Institute.
- 2) The research method could be more triangulated, i.e. EFL learners' personality traits could be included.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

In this chapter, review of the related studies on listening comprehension, listening proficiency, listening strategies and an overview on the empirical studies carried out in this regard will be presented.

2.1 Historical Sketch of Teaching Listening

People usually overlook the importance of listening comprehension and ignore its significance in learning and teaching, as mentioned in Chapter One. Listening comprehension is a complex process, so it has gained its value in language acquisition as there is a gradual increase in the awareness of listening comprehension. Due to such awareness, lots of problems which are related to listening are revealed. There are some other studies regarding other language and proficiency levels that can help to pave the way for designing proper general listening strategies though these directly relevant studies may create some difficulties.

According to Oxford (1993), 'Listening is a complex, problem solving skill', so listening is 'more than just perception of the sounds. Listening includes comprehension of meaning bearing words, phrases, clauses, sentences and connected discourse'. It is believed that mastering listening in other languages is usually harder than one's own.

Generally, as it is defined by Oxford (1990), ‘learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning and they are especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self-directed involvement’. In addition, the strategies work as facilitators of language learning and make it enjoyable, easy and transferable to new situations. Meanwhile, the effective use of listening strategies assists the student to develop an overall proficiency and gain more self-confidence. If language learning strategies are used appropriately, other language skills will also be improved. Among all strategies developed for language learning, cognitive style of the learner, proficiency level and the task help L2 learners to tackle their problems (Bacon 1992).

Using and developing proper language learning strategies has been one of the hot topics for L2 researchers within the last thirty years. There are a large number of studies published to help L2 learners adopt a suitable learning and listening strategy, Chamot (1987), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), O’Malley, Chamot, and Küpper (1989), Oxford (1990). Nevertheless, the way how you can use a proper learning strategy and applying it effectively so it could be in line with the proficiency level of learners has never been an easy task.

There are many researchers like Chamot (1987), O’Malley and Chamot (1990), O’Malley, Chamot, and Küpper (1989), Oxford (1990), Rost and Ross, (1991), Goh (1998), and Peterson (2001) along with many others who put lots of theories, issues and studies into practice to find the most suitable strategy in language learning. We may refer to Dunkel (1986) who stated that “the goal of communicative competence is reached by putting the horse (listening comprehension) before the cart (oral production).” To be more precise, in order to achieve speaking proficiency, listening comprehension development is a base. Listening is considered as a base of language acquisition by some scholars, for example, (Dunkel 1986; O’Malley, Chamot and Küpper 1989; Rubin 1994; Park 2004; Hill & Tomlinson, 2004) because aural inputs work as a raw material for processing in language acquisition.