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***The Impact of Learning Platforms on Fostering
Listening Comprehension among Saudi High School
Students***

BY

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Abstract

This study aimed at exploring the impact of utilizing listening learning platforms on the listening comprehension skill of Saudi high school students. This study recruited 76 students of the first semester of high school students in Abha City during the academic year 2019. The experimental group consisted of 38 students, who utilized ELLLO platform during their instruction, while the control group comprised 38 students, who were taught in a traditional way in the classroom. Paired t-test revealed that there was a significant difference between mean scores of both the experimental and control group participants favoring the experimental group participants; confirming the positive impact of utilizing the English listening platforms on developing Saudi high school students' listening comprehension.

Keywords: Technology based instruction – platforms – listening comprehension – High school

**أثر منصات التعلم على الاستيعاب السمعي لطلاب المدارس الثانوية
السعودية**

الملخص

هدفت هذه الدراسة استكشاف تأثير استخدام منصات الاستماع التعليمية على مهارة الاستيعاب السمعي لطلاب المدارس الثانوية السعودية. جمعت هذه الدراسة ٧٦ طالبًا في الفصل الدراسي الأول من طلاب المدارس الثانوية في مدينة أبها خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠١٩. وتألقت المجموعة التجريبية من ٣٨ طالبًا ، استخدموا منصة ELLLO أثناء التدريس ، بينما اشتملت المجموعة الضابطة ٣٨ طالبًا تم تدريسهم بالطريقة التقليدية . أظهرت نتائج الدراسة وجود فرق ذي دلالة احصائية بين متوسط الدرجات لكل من المشاركين في المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة لصالح المشاركين في المجموعة التجريبية ؛ مما أكد الأثر الإيجابي لاستخدام منصات الاستماع التعليمية للغة الإنجليزية في تطوير الفهم السمعي لطلاب المدارس الثانوية السعودية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعليم القائم على التكنولوجيا - المنصات - الفهم السمعي -

المدرسة الثانوية

1. INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is based on the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is mentioned in the literature that it is incorrect to regard these skills as being fully independent of each other, since strong interplay is there between listening, speaking, reading and writing (Zhang, 2009).

The listening skill, as one of the English language skills, is characterized as a multidimensional language skill, beginning with knowledge of sounds and images, and concentrating on sounds and images (Latifi, Mobalegh&Mohammedi, 2011); continues with recognition and recollection of audio-visual stimuli and ends with interpretation of meaning. It is also stressed that mastering the listening skill affects all the other language skills. However, in the programs of teaching English as a foreign language the stress is on the reading, writing, and speaking skills, while the listening skill is overlooked.

Much literature indicates that anxiety – which students suffer during the face to face communication – has a holistic impact on the learning process in learning a foreign language and plays a decisive role in the development of listening skills (Liu & Huang, 2011; Mesri, 2012;). In the context of developing the listening skill, it is pointed out that there is a close relationship between the nature of the material to be presented and the listening performance. Materials used in the process are of considerable significance in order to meet the goals of improving communication skills (listening and speaking) (Kim, 2015). Material is considered an essential requirement for students to be competent in circumstances that they may experience in real life in the sense of language comprehension. Therefore, materials that play a key role in delivering content to students should be carefully chosen in order to provide students with reliable information on the target language and to provide examples of realistic use of the target language. Wilson (2006) claimed that speech speed, types of vocabulary, the distinction between accents, the sophistication of the text, the number of vague and unknown words in content, and the syntactic difficulties in which individuals are not acquainted with in listening materials contribute to the difficulties learners encounter in developing their listening skill.

In addition to the material to be taught, the teaching methods and strategies to be utilized are also considered to be essential variables in the development of the listening skill.

To achieve the real objectives of teaching listening in the EFL classroom, and to overcome the difficulties hindering the development of the listening skill, technology based learning and teaching has been adopted and utilized in the field of learning and teaching English as a foreign language.

In recent years, there has been an increase in literature documenting the benefits of integrating technology into classrooms (Colvin, & Bullock, 2014; Young, 2014; Burns & Lohenry, 2010; Cain, Black, & Rohr, 2009). Many of these studies have also reported how electronic technologies boost student engagement, focus and feedback for use in field practice. It has been shown that the use of technology in and outside the classroom has increased the involvement of all students (Cain, Black, & Rohr, 2009; Samson, 2010). Via technology integration, all students engage and feel that learning is more enjoyable and participating in immersive, experiential experiences (Cain, Black & Rohr, 2009; Samson, 2010).

With the increasing incorporation of technology into TESOL systems, listening instruction now incorporates a variety of diverse visual media, digital devices and immersive video conferencing. Such incorporation offers access to a wide variety of listening content, allows for greater versatility for learners, and increases encouragement and engagement for learners. As innovations are gradually incorporated into second-language classrooms, pedagogical and theoretical frameworks are being established that support their ethical use in the teaching of listening.

Nowadays, there are many popular and effective online-based resources that enable language teachers and learners to improve listening. These sites are suitable sources of learning for EFL learning purposes. There are some websites designed specifically to allow learners to practice and improve their listening skills.

While there is a great deal of research on the impact of technology based instruction on the production of language skills in foreign literature, there is a very small number of studies – especially in Saudi context - on the relationship between the growth of foreign language listening skills and the use of the language web platforms. On the other hand, the number and scope of studies that focuses on utilizing technology in teaching English as a foreign language concentrate on the other skills (SRW) rather than on the listening skill. In this respect, this

study is considered to fill a major gap in the literature. Besides, it is expected that the results of this study will be useful in providing guidance to decision-makers, curriculum planners and developers, instructors, and all foreign language education stakeholders to enhance the standard of teaching listening skills.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the use of learning platforms on the development of English listening skills of Saudi high school students. In line with this key objective, the study main question is as follows:

- Is there a significant difference in the English listening comprehension test scores of the experimental group subjects who utilized the English listening platforms and the control group subjects who utilized the traditional EFL classroom method in practicing the listening skill?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous research studies drew attention to the fact that technology – based instruction has a positive impact on foreign language learning and teaching in general and on listening comprehension in particular. Sejdiu (2017) stated that teaching English texts via audio, video, the Internet, podcasts, blogs and have been heralded as effective means of developing and enhancing language skills among L2 learners.

Much research has revealed that YouTube has its dramatic impact in the educational field. Antonio & Tuffley (2015) stated that YouTube has become like a classroom in one's pocket. They explained that YouTube offers fast and fun access to language and culture-based videos and instruction from all over the globe. The ease-of-access and flexibility of YouTube act as a valuable tool that typically offers freely accessible content for anyone with an Internet connection. YouTube can also be considered to be a window that provides people with chances to view the world from a different perspective and broaden one's horizons.

Metruk (2018) investigated the self-reported frequency of watching authentic English videos by university EFL students with the intent of practicing listening comprehension skills. Findings revealed that practicing listening outside classroom through viewing English videos was beneficial to the development of the study participants' listening skills.

ChiChien, Huang & Huang (2020).explored the effect of using YouTube as a supplementary material with EFL college students. The research intended to reveal the improvement of the students' listening

comprehension. After training in the combination of the computer-assisted learning technique and traditional pedagogy, students performed better on the listening comprehension test than without the treatment before.

2.1 THE LISTENING SKILL

2.1.1 The importance of listening skill

Listening is a process in which the listener gives special attention to the other party, as listening is a skill and an art, as it depends on complex mental processes. Given the necessity of thinking and hearing with each other, it is well known that this skill has a fundamental role in the learning process. In the past, it was the one through which different cultures and sciences were transferred from one generation to the next.

In the course of learning a foreign language, listening is no less important than that of daily life. Learners cannot improve speaking skills until they acquire listening skills as Nunan (1998) says that "... listening is the fundamental knowledge of language learning. Without listening skill, learners can never learn how to communicate effectively. This can be readily demonstrated from the fact that language skills are often merged into one another through the use of language. Nevertheless, English language students, in fact, often live in a limited situation where they have few chances to expose to natural spoken English. Therefore, they need a classroom listening practice so that they can have a strong training for their later successful communicative performance. More significantly, listening to spoken English gives learners the requisite feedback that serves as the foundation for language learning and paves the way for human intelligence to be investigated.

While important as mentioned, listening skills are widely defined in linguistic literature as "neglected," "overlooked" or "taken for granted" skills, as some people assume that aural competence comes naturally and develops automatically through language exposure and practice of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

From the researcher's experience of teaching English to the prospective teachers of English and from his visits to EFL classrooms during his supervision of prospective teachers at schools as well, it was found that of the four skills, listening comprehension is the lowest. Together, most prospective teachers always complain that they find it so hard in teaching the listening skill to high school students. Besides, Saudi high school students find great difficulty to answer the listening comprehension activities in their books. Although they are reasonably good at reading and writing, their ability to listen has been left behind. This is simply true because listening to English is, in fact, the most difficult skill for English as a foreign language learners to learn or develop; and because it is a skill that requires a number of different sub-skills.

2.1.2 What is listening comprehension?

Listening comprehension is a lot more than hearing. So many meanings have been made for this term so far. At its simplest, listening comprehension can be described in some English dictionaries as listening attentively. This means that listeners pay attention or focus on the task amid the distractions surrounding them. Listening comprehension, as Howatt and Dakin (1974) describe it, is the ability to hear and understand what the speakers have to say in terms of dialect, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and the context of the word. From this point of view, the process of listening would entail both hearing and knowing all aspects of the message conveyed.

According to Bozorgian (2012). Listening comprehension means that a person understands what he / she has heard. If he / she knows the text by reading it, he / she can understand it. Listening comprehension requires an active and aware process through which the listener builds meaning by using cues from contextual information and established knowledge. Rubin (1995) states that listening consists of interpreting information that the listener gets from visual and auditory cues in order to identify what is going on and what the speakers are trying to say.

Hamouda (2013) described listening comprehension as an interactive process in which listeners are involved in the creation of meaning. Listeners recognize oral feedback through sound discrimination, prior experience, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, and other linguistic or non-linguistic hints. Hamouda adds that listening comprehension is the method of understanding and making sense of the spoken language. This includes recognizing speech sounds, understanding the context of individual words, and understanding the grammar of sentences.

Rost (2002) described listening comprehension as a complex perception process in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know. According to Rost(2009), listening comprehension allows us to understand the world around us and is one of the main elements in developing good communication.

In reality, listening is a complex skill involving several micro skills; thus, Rost (2002) describes listening as a multi-layer process that includes:

- receiving what the speaker actually means – listening correctly;
- construction and representation of language – decoding;
- creating meaning through interaction and creativity – applying prior awareness of material and cultural norms and forecasting the future;
- negotiating context and reacting – Create an effective response.

2.1.3 Learners' challenges in listening comprehension

It is important to recognize the challenges faced by EF learners in developing their listening comprehension. According to Goh (1999), the most common challenges faced by EF learners in listening comprehension are: forgetting what they listen to, as well as understanding the general but not the intended message, ignoring the next part when thinking about the meaning of the vocabulary, preventing creating a mental image of the words that have been learned.

Field (2003) points out the most important listening challenges EF learners face in developing their listening comprehension. Field states these challenges as follows: learners know the word, but get the wrong meaning. Phonetic variations such as reduction, assimilation, and elision usually mislead learners while listening to a text. Learners are familiar with the term in written form, but not with the oral version. Learners have difficulties in capturing a word from a related voice, such as a dialogue.

Beside the above mentioned challenges, there are many other challenges facing EF learners in listening comprehension. To the researcher, the main problem is that listening activities are overlooked in the primary, middle and secondary stages; therefore students join the university with weak listening comprehension skills. Another problem is that learners at the university are not exposed to either enough listening material or to authentic one. Besides, the researcher sees that face to face classroom activities create what educators call the affective filter — an emotional response that hinders the mental processes of learning a foreign language. In order to reduce the affective filter in English learners, creating a positive learning atmosphere that makes them feel as relaxed as possible required. Thus, web learning platforms are thought to be helpful in reducing learners' affective filter.

2.2 ONLINE LEARNING

Online learning, nowadays, has become an important component of education and is claimed to have specific advantages in the teaching/learning process (Appana, 2008 and Shopova, 2014). Therefore, instruction has started to move from face-to face classroom settings to online learning environments in all fields of education, including EFL instruction. Traditional instruction environments of teaching English as a foreign language have been criticized for promoting passive learning, ignoring classroom interaction, communication, and learning independence. On the contrary, modern developments in internet-based technology have brought opportunities to education, particularly, through online education. Online learning has gained the approval of many advocates and studies. Clarke and Hermens (2001) argued that online learning is student-centered, since students can monitor their own learning speed, and exercises can be flexible to best suit the student's chosen learning style.

2.2.1 Online English learning platforms

There are many online English learning platforms that help teachers and learners of English as a foreign language. Teachers and learners can navigate the web and get access to hundreds of English learning platforms. These platforms provide various activities in terms of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in addition to vocabulary and grammar. With English learning platforms, learners gain complete control of their learning experience. They go at their own pace. They have the opportunities to choose from hundreds or thousands of catering activities for any kind of their interest. Unlike traditional face to face classroom instruction, English learning platforms help learners to step on with a lesson or go back to revisit the content anytime they need to.

Online English learning platforms help learners to focus on their learning needs. As they provide various activities in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), learners can select the skill they most need to improve. For example, in this study, learners selected the activities that help in improving the listening skill.

3 METHOD

3.1 Study Design

This study utilized a pre-test-post-test quasi-experimental control group research design which is widely used in educational research. The

subjects of the control group received the ordinary method of teaching listening in the classroom whereas those of the experimental group utilized learning platforms as supplementary activities. In experimental research designs, the objective of researchers is to show the impact of independent variables on dependent ones through controlling the external variables which are likely to impact the study process and results (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007).

Therefore, the significant differences in teaching performance and skills between the control and the experimental groups were determined in order to evaluate the impact of utilizing learning platforms on developing the listening skill.

3.2 Participants and Context

This study recruited 76 students of Saudi high school students in Abha City during the first semester of academic year 2019. The experimental group consisted of 38 students, who utilized ELLLO platform during their instruction, while the control group comprised 38 students, who were taught in a traditional way in the classroom.

3.3 Instrumentation

A20-item multiple choice listening comprehension test based on unseen selections from ILLLO learning platform was devised to assess the listening performance of the study sample. There were two parts of this test, which were short video talks (one-minute English) and mixer activities. Each section of the test accounted for ten questions individually, constituting twenty questions in total. Students were required to select one correct answer out of two choices after listening to the video. Videos were played just one time. Two marks were awarded to the correct response while an incorrect response was awarded zero. The test was validated by some jury members who are experienced in the field of TEFL and measurement and evaluation. Piloting was carried out to determine the reliability of the instrument. Kuder-Richardson 20 (K-R20) was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of the test was 0.86, indicating satisfactory level of reliability.

3.4 Materials

One learning platform called English listening lesson library online (ELLLO) was selected as supplementary material for practicing listening to the experimental group members. ELLLO is an English

listening lesson library online created in 2004 by an English teacher from Japan, Todd Beucken.

ELLLO offers thousands of free listening activities that teachers and students can have an access to. These activities are suitable for all levels (beginners, middle and advanced).The listening activities are categorized by difficulty in grammar and vocabulary. Teachers and students get activities based on their level. Each activity is completed by a vocabulary and listening comprehension test. In addition, scripts for each video or recording are also completed so that students can also train their pronunciation when practicing their listening.

In ELLLO, by clicking on the level, topic, and country features learners see on the site, they can choose the level, topic, and country of the speaker of the material they are going to practice. ELLLO makes learning English enjoyable and productive. It provides teachers and students with resources and activities that cannot be found in the conventional textbooks.

3.5 Prior to Experimentation

Prior to experimentation, the listening comprehension test was administered to the subjects of both the experimental and the control groups as a pretest in order to measure the gain scores of the subjects to eliminate any possible differences between the two groups on the pretest. T-test, as shown in (table 1) revealed no significant differences at a = 0.05 between the subjects of the experimental and the control groups on the pretesting of their listening comprehension. Thus, since there is no statistically significant difference between the control and experimental groups on the pretest, the two groups were assumed to be equivalent.

Table 1: Results of the t test of the means of the listening comprehension test of both the control and experimental groups on the pretest.

Group	N	Mean	SD	t. value	Sig.
Control				3823.454.67	Pretest
1.99	0.669				
Experimental	38		22.764.13		

3.6 Experimentation and Data Collection

Experimentation started at the first semester of the academic year, 2019. After experimentation, which lasted eight weeks, Data were also collected via the 20-item multiple choice listening comprehension test provided as a post-test to both the experimental and control group participants, and then analyzed using SPSS. During the 8-week study period, the participants of the experimental group were taught in listening exercises in conjunction with the ELLLO listening practices, which were incorporated as additional resources during their listening practice. The members of the control group practiced listening activities in the traditional way. The members of both the experimental and the control group were exposed to the validated listening test of the study. *t*-test was used to calculate the differences between the members of both the groups in terms of the listening comprehension skill.

4 Data Analysis

This study has shown the positive impact of using the English learning platform(ILLLO)on the listening comprehension skill of Saudi high school students. The study has also compared the scores obtained from the control and the experimental groups. The significant differences in the post test scores of the experimental and the control groups in the listening comprehension test were calculated through *t*-test (Table 2).

Table 2: Paired Samples *t*-test of the comparison between both the control and experimental groups on the posttest.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Df	t. value	Sig.
Control	38	31.90	5.83	Posttest	37	3.94
Experimental	38	34.41	4.70			.000

The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the scores of Saudi high school students of the

control and the experimental groups with respect to their listening comprehension skills, favoring the students of the experimental group. The mean scores calculated for the control and the experimental groups were (31.90) and (34.41) respectively. T value was 3.94. Thus the results showed lower than the p.value 0.05 of the significance. These results indicated that the subjects of the experimental group performed much better in the listening comprehension test in comparison with those of the control group.

5 Findings and Discussion

The results of the current study revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the control and the experimental groups considering the listening comprehension test. Results of this study were in favor the experimental group. Use of the t-test indicated that there were significant differences in the posttest scores of the control and the experimental groups through the listening comprehension test. Statistically significant differences were observed between the control and the experimental groups with respect to listening comprehension performance.

The study results have shown that the subjects of the control group had a positive impact on the development of their listening comprehension skill when they were taught via traditional methods (means were 23.45 and 31.90 in the pre and post testing respectively) However, the use of ELLLO in practicing listening had a much greater impact on the development of the listening skills in the subjects of the experimental group since ELLLO offered an effective, self-paced, and lower affective based learning environment. The findings of the current study are in line with studies that particularly discussed the use of learning platforms in English listening development.(Bullock, 2014; Burns & Lohenry, 2010; Burke & Snyder 2008. Colvin, & Young, 2014; Cain, Black, & Rohr, 2009; Kabooha&Elyas 2018; Kelsen, 2009; Watkins & Wilkins 2011).The researcher attributed the much greater development of teaching performance skills in the subjects of the experimental group to the ELLLO Platform, which is likely to provide time-flexible, self-paced, convenient learning and opportunities for the students.

In spite of the significance between the experimental and the control group subjects favoring the experimental group, it is clearly apparent that both the experimental and control group subjects' scores in the listening comprehension test were somewhat low as revealed by mean scores (31.90 and 34.41 respectively). These low scores can be attributed to the fact that listening skill is still the most difficult skill to learn. Besides, sociolinguistic

aspects of listening, such as the student's cultural context and his understanding of the cultural aspect of a foreign language, may also play a significant role in the student's perception of verbal discourse. Therefore, Saudi students might face some cultural challenges while listening to authentic material on the ELLLO platform.

Learning platforms helped in the integration of technology in education. The ELLLO platform is studied with respect to its effectiveness in the field of education in Saudi Arabia in order to investigate its impact on developing the high school students' listening comprehension. To address the scarcity of studies found in the literature, this study highlighted the effectiveness of utilizing the technological platforms in teaching and learning English as a foreign language. The technological platforms emphasize metacognitive knowledge that improves students' understanding and help them become aware of the learning process as well as their shortcomings and strengths, since it is a learner-based approach. (Sadaghian& Susan, 2016). In light of the findings of the study, technological platforms play a vital role in developing learner autonomy, as they encourage learners to be self-independent.

Some studies revealed the role learning platforms play in reducing anxiety in learning English as a foreign language (Pichette, 2009; Russell 2018). Several studies have demonstrated a negative relationship between language anxiety and performance in a language class (Chen & Chang, 2004; Elkhafai, 2005; Sellers, 2000; Young, 1999; Zhao, Guo, & Dynia, 2013). It is admitted that anxiety in EFL learning in general and listening activities in particular is related to classroom-based language learning and not to language learning that occurs in naturalistic settings. ELLLO platform provided high school students experimented in this study with naturalistic language settings that helped in lowering their affective filter.

Technological learning platforms play an important role in the enrichment of resources and the engagement of classes, as well as in promoting the academic growth of students. They have a huge influence on student learning, as they include vibrant examples and familiar settings for learners that make learning easier (Selinger, 2009; Ahmad, 2016).

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

The modest level of listening comprehension among Saudi high school students was the driving force behind this research, which tried to find a solution to this problem through the use of technological learning platforms. In a similar context, this study aimed at investigating the effect of utilizing learning platforms on the development of the listening skills of Saudi high school students. The findings showed that the use of technological platforms, and ELLLO is one of them, had a substantial

positive effect on the listening comprehension skill of the high school students. Therefore, there is an urgent need to train in service and pre service teachers of English on how to make use of technological learning platforms in teaching English as a foreign language. Therefore, teachers need to understand that their role has changed from being an authoritative teacher to being a facilitator/mentor on account of utilizing learning platforms in teaching English.

EFL teachers are recommended to use learning platforms as language-learning means in and outside the English language classroom. Learning platforms can also be used in language learning for the acquisition of linguistic information, which plays an important role in improving comprehensible feedback through paying attention to providing comprehensible input to learners throughout these platforms. There is also a need to be conscious of the less favorable views of platform practices by foreign-language learners compared to face to face classroom practices.

Therefore, both universities and educational directorates are recommended to incorporate utilizing English learning platforms into teacher education and training programs. Moreover, Students ought to be made conscious of the value of their own learning autonomy. Future research is planned to perform similar studies to explore the efficacy of English learning platforms in learning other skills (speaking, reading, and writing).

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