

A Comparative Study on the Effects of While Listening Note Taking and Post Listening Summary Writing on Iranian EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract—The aim of this study was to find out if there is any significant difference between while listening note taking and post listening summary writing on listening comprehension ability of Iranian EFL learners. A pretest-posttest design was used in this quasi-experimental research. The study was conducted in a language institute in East Azarbaijan province in Iran. Sixty students in two homogenous advanced classes were selected as the participants and in one class while listening note taking was used as the treatment and in the other class post listening summary writing was used. The results of Paired-Samples t-test revealed that both classes had improvement in their listening comprehension ability, but the results of the Independent Samples t-test showed that there was not any significant difference in the both groups' post tests. The results can have pedagogical implications for language teachers and curriculum developers.

Index Terms—listening comprehension, while listening note taking, post listening summary writing, EFL

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening is the most important skill in learning a new language and its main purpose is to be able to understand what the intended meaning of the speaker is (Rost, 2011), but unfortunately usually not enough attention is paid to it and it has not received enough priorities (Farhady, Jafarpoor, & Birjandi, 1994; Gorbani, 2011). According to Nunan (1999), "listening is a Cinderella skill in second language learning" (p. 199). Nunan further explains that most people believe that knowing a language is the ability to speak and also write in that language. Chastain (1988) believes that there is this belief because students and teachers don't recognize listening as a prerequisite to a developed speaking ability. But it is the teachers' responsibility to help students to learn some strategies to concentrate more on listening and therefore be successful language learners (Brown, 2000). Listening develops faster than speaking and is very effective in developing other skills in learning a new language (Oxford, 1993; Scarella & Oxford, 1992, as cited in Shirani Bidabadi & Yamat, 2011). Some researchers have emphasized the main role that listening comprehension has in learning a new language (Brown, 2000; Chastain, 1988; Harmer, 2001; Rost, 2011). Rost (2001) points out that because listening comprehension is very essential in using and learning a language and it is the basic channel in L2 acquisition, the development of this skill should be given great priority in instruction. Linse (2005) says that listening skill is the base of other skills and it should be taught to students. Vandergrift (2003) claims that meta-linguistic awareness in listening and explicit teaching must be emphasized in listening.

There are two views about what happens when we comprehend aural messages. According to one view (Buck, 2001; Linse, 2005; Nunan, 1991), some listeners chunk the received input into sounds, assemble them to make words, then make clauses and sentences and so on. This view is called bottom up approach to listening. The other group of listeners who are more successful, believe that the meaning is not merely and exclusively inside the texts but also they bring the knowledge from outside the text or what Nunan calls "inside the head" knowledge, that is, knowledge which is not clearly and directly in the words or phrases. This view is known as top down view of listening. Bottom up listener acts as a tape recorder and top down listener as a model builder. Bottom up processing is a linear, additive processing whereas top down processing is the one in which the learner uses the previous knowledge to get the whole story (Nunan, 1991).

Brown and Yule (1983b, as cited in Nunan, 1991) claim that there are four factors that make listening difficult: the accent and speed of speaker, whether the listener is a participant or not, the listening content, and any visual or practical supports which aid the listener; therefore learners need to be able to develop a skill to segment words in spite of the challenging nature of listening texts which are full of reduced forms and elisions and connected streams of words.

Unfortunately listening has not been given much attention in EFL/ESL settings. Teachers, especially EFL teachers, are often not aware of or maybe not interested in teaching listening techniques and the processes of listening and merely focus on the final product and the outcome. Instruction in listening classes is limited to testing and focusing on the product (Rezaei & Hashim, 2013; Sheerin, 1987). Likewise, Field (1998) believes that most published books about listening don't teach the listening, but test it. But Oxford (1990) and Peterson (2001) believe that focusing on what to learn has been shifted to how to learn or learning strategies. In her view there are different learning strategies or activities that learners perform to help them learn easier, faster, and more practically. Two strategies of note taking and summary writing are among the ones that help learners make the information that comes to them more tangible and help them sort and organize the incoming information in the target language (Oxford, 1990).

Note taking is a very important strategy that can be used for listening and reading, but unfortunately students don't have enough knowledge about it or ability on how to do it, or if they have any information, they are not taught to practice it, although it can activate working memory and help problem solving (Boch & Piolat, 2005; Gur, Dilci, Coskun, & Delijan, 2013). Furthermore, it is thought by mistake that this strategy is just for advanced levels. The teachers should make the students aware that they need to have notes about the main ideas and key words. Not taking needs a metacognitive strategy called "organizing" (Oxford, 1990). Many researchers (Aiken, Thomas, & Shennun, 1975; Bretzing & Kulhavy, 1979; Divesta & Gray, 1972; Kiewra, 1984, as cited in Boyle and Weishaar, 2001) have also mentioned that while listening note taking has advantages both for helping better and active comprehension and for future recall. Majid Hayati and Jalilifar (2009) conducted a study about the effect of note taking and found that note takers had better achievements than non note takers. Tsai-Fu (2009) believes that note taking causes enhanced comprehension. According to Ellis (2003), listening and taking notes simultaneously is a 'dual-task' which may be very difficult and challenging for many L2 learners. Arslan (2006) defines note taking as an external version of memory store. While taking notes, students are actively engaged in the task. Studies show that note taking helps the learner to store and comprehend the message better through concentration boost and increased attention than when there is mere listening or reading (Botch & Piolat, 2005; Piolat, Olive, & Kelog, 2004). As Dunkel and Pialorsi (2005) and Hasswell and Lee (2013) mention, when learners are allowed to take notes, they feel more comfortable and they have better performance in answering the post listening questions. Weener (1974) believes that note taking causes assimilation of the new information in to the cognitive structure and makes the new information more recallable than if there weren't any note taking. Hartley and Marshall (1974) mention three reasons for taking notes: (a) to help later recall, (b) to be able to review the ideas when needed, (c) to have higher concentration while listening.

Summarizing is another strategy that shows whether or not learners can get the new information and comprehend it. By summarizing the learner tries to paraphrase the original message and change it to an easier and shorter version (Kirkland & Saunders, 1991; Oxford, 1990; Walters & Chien, 2014). According to Oxford (1990), "writing a summary can be more challenging (and sometimes more useful) than taking notes, because it often requires greater condensation of thoughts" (p. 88). Tuncer and Altunay (2006) had a study about summary writing of students with visual impairments in listening classes and the findings showed the procedure helped these students to improve their listening comprehension. There are some studies on summary writing (Hood, 2008; Keck, 2006; Walters & Chien, 2014; Wichadee, 2013; Yang, & Shi, 2003; Yasuda, 2014), and very few on the effect of summary writing on listening comprehension ability (Tuncer & Altunay, 2006; Yu, 2013, Zhang, & Elder, 2011).

However, to the knowledge of the researchers, there was not any study regarding the comparative study of the effect of while listening note taking and post listening summary writing in the EFL context of Iran. In this regard, the aim of this study was to find out the effect of two strategies (i.e., while listening note taking and post listening summary writing) on Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension. For this reason the following research questions were posed:

1. Does while listening note taking affect EFL students' listening comprehension?
2. Does post listening summary writing affect EFL students' listening comprehension?
3. Is there any significant difference between the effects of while listening note taking and post listening summary writing on EFL students' listening comprehension?

II. METHOD

Design

This study was a quasi experimental research with a pretest and a post test. Note taking and summary writing are the independent variables and listening comprehension ability is the dependent variable. Note taking and summary writing were manipulated as treatments in two comparison groups of the study.

Participants

This study was conducted with 60 students from two advanced level classes in an English institute in Tabriz in East-Azərbayjan, Iran, in December 2014. The participants were male and female university students of different fields of study with the age range of 18 to 25. At the beginning of the study a pretest was administered in order to see if the participants are homogenous. The results of the pretest confirmed the homogeneity. Then the classes were randomly assigned to the not taking class and the summary writing class, each with 30 students.

Instruments

The following instruments were used for data collection in the present study:

1) A listening comprehension test with 15 multiple choice questions taken from Barron's (2008) iBT TOEFL book was used as the pre-test

2) Longman TOEFL iBT as the course book

During the 20 sessions of the study, the students practiced the Longman TOEFL iBT book in both classes. The students studied the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but the focus of this study was on the listening part which was about 20 minutes for each session.

3) Another listening comprehension test with 15 multiple choice questions taken from Barron's iBT TOEFL book as the post test

III. PROCEDURE

This study was conducted during 40 hours, or 20 sessions of study in two advanced level English classes. The students in this institute have three sessions of one hundred minute English class every week. The teacher of both classes was the same (one of the researchers). The homogeneity of the students was verified using a t-test to compare the pretests of the two class. The students practiced the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but the focus of this study was on the listening part which was about 20 minutes for each session.

The listening passages that the students listened to in the pretest, class practices, and posttest were unheard ones and they were for the advanced level since they were taken from a TOEFL book. During each session, the students listened to four different passages in each class. In order to conduct this study a multiple choice listening comprehension test with 15 multiple choice questions which was chosen from Barron's (2008) TOEFL iBT book was used as the pretest to know about the students' listening comprehension at the beginning of the study and to check the homogeneity of the participants. During the pretest, students listened to two different lectures just once, then they were given the 15 questions to answer in 20 minutes.

After the pretest, the treatment was manipulated. In one class, while listening note taking was taught and practiced for about 20 minutes in each session as the treatment. The students listened to the listening passages with different topics during the study. The students were asked to listen to the passages just once and while they were listening they were asked to take notes about the main points and key words of the listening passages. After taking notes they answered the multiple choice comprehension questions about each listening passage using their notes. The answers of these questions were immediately checked and explained in the same session. In the other class post listening summary writing was used as the treatment during 20 sessions about 20 minutes each session. The students listened to the listening passages of different topics just once and after the listening finished, they were asked to write a summary of the text and then answer the multiple choice questions about each listening passage using their summaries. Their answers for the multiple choice questions were checked in the class.

At the end of the study, on the 20th session, another multiple choice listening comprehension test with 15 questions from Barron's (2008) TOEFL iBT book and with new topics was used as the post test for both classes. The test started with the students listening to two passages, and after that they were given 20 minutes to answer its multiple choice questions. Finally, the collected data were entered into the SPSS 17 for further analysis. To answer the research questions of the study, Paired-Samples t-test and Independent-Samples t-test were carried out to compare within group and between group improvements, respectively. The alpha level for significance testing was set at .05 level of significance

IV. RESULTS

A. Result of the Kolmogorov Smirnov Test

The non-parametric test of Kolmogorov Smirnov (K-S test) test was used to see if the participants' listening scores in the pretest were normally distributed (see Table 1).

TABLE 1.
ONE-SAMPLE KOLMOGOROV-SMIRNOV TEST ON PRETEST LISTENING SCORES

		Pretest
N		60
Normal Parameters	Mean	82.40
	Std. Deviation	7.34
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.10
	Positive	.07
	Negative	-.10
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		.81
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		.52

a. Test distribution is Normal.

As shown in Table 1, the p value of .52 is more than the Alpha level of .05. This means that the participants' listening scores in the pretest were normally distributed; hence resorting to parametric tests in order to perform statistical analysis.

B. Results of the Independent Samples T-test for Homogeneity

An Independent samples t-test was carried out to find out whether there was a significant difference between the pretest scores of note taking and summary writing groups (see Table 2).

TABLE 2.
RESULTS OF THE INDEPENDENT-SAMPLES T-TEST BETWEEN NOTE-TAKING AND SUMMARY-WRITING GROUPS IN PRETEST

Leven's Test for Equality of Variances										
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	Std. Error Differences	95% Confidence Interval Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
Pretest Equal Variances Assumed	.21	.64	-.03	58	.97	.06	1.91	-3.89	3.76	

As it is shown in the Table 2 Leven's Sig. value was .64, which was higher than .05 level of significance. This meant that the variances of the two groups could be assumed equal. The p-value ($p = .97$) was also more than the alpha level (.05). Therefore, in the beginning of the study the two classes were homogeneous.

C. Results of the Data Analysis for Research Questions 1 and 2

To find whether there was a significant change from the pretest to the posttest in the Note-taking and Summary-writing groups, two Paired-Samples t-tests were run. The results of the descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR THE SCORES OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION TEST

		M	SD	N
Group Pretest	Note-taking	82.43	7.67	30
	Summary-writing	82.36	7.12	30
Posttest	Note-taking	88.06	5.64	30
	Summary-writing	85.36	7.18	30

As Table 3 indicates, the posttest mean scores of both groups are higher than their pretest, and the mean score of the note-taking group was higher than the summary writing group. In order to determine the significance level of their mean difference, results of the Paired-Samples t-tests are shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4.
PAIRED SAMPLES T-TEST OF THE MEANS OF THE TWO GROUPS ON THE PRETEST AND POSTTEST

Paired Differences								
Group	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of Differences		t	df (2-tailed)	Sig.
				Lower	Upper			
Summary Writing	-2.83	3.60	.65	-4.17	-1.48	-4.30	29	.00
Note taking	-5.63	4.35	.79	-7.25	-4.00	-7.09	29	.00

As indicated in Table 4, the sig. (2-tailed) in both groups was .00 which was lower than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, a significant difference was proved between the pretest and posttest in note taking and summary writing classes. So the research questions 1 and 2 are confirmed.

D. Results of the Data Analysis for Research Question 3

In order to find the answer to the third research question, the researchers conducted an Independent-Samples t-test to see which group significantly outperformed in the posttest of listening. Table 5 revealed that $p > 0.05$, and therefore there isn't any significant difference between the posttests.

TABLE 5.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST FOR THE POST-TEST OF NOTE-TAKING AND SUMMARY-WRITING GROUPS

	Levens' Test for equality of variances		T	df	sig. (2-tailed)
	F	sig.			
Equal variance assumed	2.80	.09	-1.71	58	.09

* $p < .05$

According to Table 5 the Levens' sig was .09 which exceeded 0.05 level of significance. This meant that the variances of the two groups should be assumed equal. The sig. (2-tailed) value was .09 which was higher than 0.05 significance level. The results of the t-test indicated that the difference between mean scores of the two groups was not statistically significant, (58), $p = .09 < 0.05$). It was concluded that there was no significant difference between the results of the post tests of the two groups and therefore, the third research question of this study was negatively answered. In other words, there was not significant difference in the listening comprehension of the note-taking and summary-writing groups.

V. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to find out the effect of while listening note taking and post listening summary writing on Iranian EFL students listening comprehension and to see if there is any significant difference between the effects of the two listening strategies. Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that although while listening note taking and post listening summary writing had a positive effect on Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension, there was not a significant difference between the results of posttests of the two groups of Iranian EFL students.

In line with the findings of this study, some researchers have emphasized the role of while listening note taking and post listening summary writing on learners' listening comprehension. Gur, Dilci, Coskun, & Delican (2013) conducted a study in Turkey to help learners not to be passive listeners and to see how listening to different lecture types by note taking affects listening comprehension. The results revealed that students who used note taking methods had higher levels of comprehension. In a study by Sahin, Aydin, and Sevim (2011), it was mentioned that note taking was an effective method in listening comprehension. A study by Piolat, Olive, and Kellogg (2004) revealed that note taking was effective in both higher achievement and recall. Other researches by Frost, Elder, and Wigglesworth, (2012); Yu, (2013); and Kirkland and Saunders, (1991) also revealed that summary writing is an important and useful method in listening comprehension. Although further work is required to gain a more complete understanding of the factors affecting Iranian EFL students' listening comprehension ability in each group, our findings indicated that both while listening note taking and post listening summary writing had positive effects on the participants' listening comprehension ability, but there was not any significant difference between the results of the two groups which reveals that although there were different treatments for the two classes, both groups had nearly the same amount of improvement in their listening comprehension abilities. Therefore, any of these listening techniques or a combination of both could be useful in Iranian EFL classes according to special contexts, needs of the students, types of activities, and time. Although this study had some limitations regarding the number of participants and time devoted, its findings could be useful for material developers to create necessary tasks and exercises, as well as teachers to choose the most appropriate strategies for improving their students' listening comprehension in EFL classes.

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