

Enhancing Listening Fluency through Well-beaten Path Approach

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Abstract—It is axiomatic that listening skill is the primary channel to the process of language acquisition. To foster this skill, a wide array of approaches and methods has been offered, one of which is the often-neglected well-beaten approach. The current study is an attempt to provide glimpse into the possible effect of employing well-beaten path approach on developing learners' listening fluency. To achieve such intent, 60 EFL learners were randomly selected and assigned to two groups. Before assigning them, they sat for a pre-test to ensure their homogeneity. For one group the well-beaten path approach was applied in that the same listening test was repeated three times and for the other group the test was run only once. The findings signified that using a well-beaten approach noticeably leads learners to outperform their listening fluency. The study results might significantly contribute to the more optimal teaching of listening skill.

Index Terms—well-beaten path approach, listening fluency, EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that listening skill is among the most fundamental skills in the process of language acquisition. It is not only a skill, like those of speaking, reading, and writing, which should be developed, but it might also be treated as a tool for developing other aspects of language (Rost, 1990; Zareian & Hashemi, 2015). Therefore, developing listening skill, as the backbone of language learning, is expected to receive decent attention especially by teachers and material developers. In recent years, however, there has been an increased focus on L2 listening ability because of its perceived importance in the process of language acquisition (Hayati, 2000). In a similar vein, enhancing the listening fluency of learners is also a focal point to be taken into account as well. By listening fluency, as Cheng and Millet (2013) define, it means individuals' ability to automatically process audio input and reach an acceptable extent of comprehension of it. Accordingly, a set of approaches have been offered to help learners optimally improve their listening fluency. One of these orientations is the well-beaten approach in which repetition plays the core role. The approach is founded upon the premise that repeating the same listening input to learners might remarkably enrich their listening fluency. The present study makes attempt to put this premise into realistic practice.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mastering listening skill to an acceptable extent is a laborious task for both learners and teachers (Field, 2008; Buck, 2001). From another perspective, Sigel (2013) justifies this difficulty by maintaining that because we learn our first language listening skill almost unconsciously and effortlessly, learning a L2 listening skill as opposed to the way we acquired L1, appears burdensome, due to the distressingly complex underlying processing mechanisms. These mechanisms include listeners' phonological, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic processing of the incoming information along with the use of conscious- based and generated inferences as well as the cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies. Researchers also attribute some other reasons for this complexity. By way of example, they confirm the bitter fact that arguments directed at understanding the real nature of listening skill is far from being over (Moore, 2011; Buck, 2001). Such complexities cause mainstream theorists as well as the material developers and teachers not to be able to design and develop apposite textbooks, approaches, and other instruments to help learners boost their listening fluency efficiently. Furthermore, as another probable reason, lack of enough familiarity with and background knowledge about the intended language may also make the story more complicated to learners, especially if their L1 shares minimum commonalities with the L2. Learners may even feel frustrated that they cannot sort out even a single word of an audio input. Nemtechinaval (2013) likewise, contends that most of L2 learners encounter a shocking cognitive load developing their listening fluency.

Despite these obstacles, a set of approaches have been proposed by respective experts to facilitate learners' mission of mastering L2 listening fluency. Bottom-up approach (Field, 2008), standard listening tests (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005), meta-cognitive listening cycle (Vandergiftand & Goh, 2012), and teacher modeling along with situational models (Goh, 2008) are among these approaches. One approach that has been paid indecent attention is the *well-beaten*

path approach. The approach contends that in order to effectively motivate learners to broaden their listening fluency, repetition is a quintessential factor to be taken into account. Roughly speaking, the more the authors surfed through the web, the less they could find a well-documented literature on well-beaten path approach and its impact on listening skill. In essence, not adequate studies have ever been conducted as far as this approach is concerned (which in turn highlights the significance of the present study).

Nevertheless, with respect to the substantive factor of repetition, some details need to be taken into account. Moore (2011) maintains that repetition is a prominent factor in both development of linguistic competence and the transformation of language practices. It also fundamentally contributes to a more vivid understanding of communicative competence and also its development across contexts. In a similar vein, Brown (2001) argues that repetition is a rudimentary prerequisite for learning, in the sense that it provides the possibility of bringing together related experience and committed memory. In listening fluency practice, in the light of well-beaten path approach, repetition helps learners gradually become more familiar with the highly diversified strands of audio input such as accent of speaker(s), context, topic, etc. Additionally, repetition also succors learners relieve their negative feelings like stress and anxiety in that they know that the audio is to be repeated more than once. Furthermore, given the highly-quoted saying “*practice makes perfect*”, constantly repeating audio input is also a sort of practice that might finally arouse better performance of individuals.

III. STUDY DESIGN

The study, as it was already explicated, intends to shed light on this research question that whether making use of a well-beaten path approach, whose key concept is repetition, bears positive effective impact on learners’ listening fluency. To test this research question, 60 male and female lower-intermediate EFL learners were randomly selected and assigned into two groups. One group that functioned as the control group embodied 30 learners on which no well-beaten approach was applied. And for another group (30 learners) which was the experimental group the under-studied approach was run. They were all sat for a pre-test to make sure they were in almost the same level of proficiency as far as their foreign language is concerned.

The two groups received the same audio input and related questions. However the way the audio input was presented to them was different. Put it another way, for the control group the listening clip was played only once. But for the experimental group, the same listening clip was played three times. During these four times, they were given the questions so that they could simultaneously listen and take the items. The audio and listening items were related to the course book they were passing in their institutes (*Top Notch series*). The audio duration was about 28 minutes and the test consisted of 20 items from two formats of true-false and multiple-choice. The test was extracted from the test pamphlet designed by Saslow and Asher. Finally, to analyze the collected data, Statistical Passage for Social Sciences (SPSS) in general and descriptive statistics and independent t-tests in particular were run.

With regard to ethical issues, not only they were briefly explained about the objectives of the experiment (by briefly the author tried to prevent negative qualities such as Hawthorn effect), but from all them the author received passive consent to take part in the research.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to begin the study and to make sure that the two groups were homogeneous enough in English language performance prior to the study; a pre-test was administered to both control and experimental groups. The descriptive statistics of this test appears in Table 1. As the table reports, the mean of the experimental group ($M=12.04$) in the listening pre-test is a bit higher than the mean of the control group ($M=11.71$) but the difference is very trivial.

TABLE 1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE PRE-TEST

	Codes	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pretest	Cont.	30	11.71	2.08	.37
	Exp.	30	12.04	2.17	.38

An independent t-test was then run to see if the two groups performed significantly different on the listening pre-test or not. Table 2 displaying the results obtained from this statistical analysis reveals that the two groups did not differ significantly in their performance. ($t = -.59, p > 0.05$).

TABLE 2.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLE TEST OF THE PRE-TEST

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
pre-test	-.591	58	.56	-.32	.56	-1.44	.78

After running the core phase of the study, again, in order to see if the two groups performed statistically different on the two tests, the raw scores obtained from the administration of the listening post-test were subjected to an independent t-test. Table 3 below shows the descriptive statistics of it. According to this table, the mean of the experimental group ($M=26.13$) is higher than that of the control group ($M=13.17$).

TABLE 3.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE POST-TEST

	code	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Post-test	Cont.	30	13.17	2.37	.45
	Exp.	30	26.13	3.79	.67

In addition, Table 4 shows that the difference between the control and experimental group performance on the listening post-test is significant ($t= -16.88$, $p < 0.01$). Therefore, it can be stated that the under-studied listening approach in the class enhanced students' listening performance.

TABLE 4.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLE TEST OF THE POST-TEST

	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
post-test	-16.88	58	.000	-13.64	.81	-16.23	-12.19

The obtained results signified that utilizing a well-beaten path approach will meaningfully augment the students' listening fluency. Therefore, it might be claimed that repeating an audio listening clip could help students become more fluent compared with when the same audio input is exposed only once. As it was already hypothesized in the beginning sections of the study, this improvement impact can be attributed to a set of reasons. For example, as far as affective factors are concerned, since students know that they will be exposed to the input several times, negative feelings including anxiety, stress, and panic drastically decrease in them which in turn could lead to outperformance on the test. Or as another justification, because as a result of repeating the same listening input for several times, the students are more likely to become familiar with the accent of speakers, the overall topic of the input, and other contextual factors which lead them to master the content. Moreover, this repetition provides learners with sufficient time that in case they are not able to make sense of the audio input refer to compensatory skills (Buck, 2001) such as their background knowledge, visual information, or even common sense.

The study also stipulates that teachers should take into account this approach of listening fluency in their classrooms. It could be advantageous for both teachers and students to enhance their comprehension ability in their second language. In contrast, teachers should bear in their mind the often-said proverb of "*A well-beaten path does not always make the correct way*" meaning that although well-beaten approach is basically revolves upon the repetition of the intended input, it does not signify that they should play the listening input as many times as they wish. To put other way, too much repeating of an input not only does not have any beneficial impact, but it might negatively affect students learning in that it can bore students and de-motivate them. Due to lack of any specific study dealing with the nature, number, and sort of repetition in this approach, it seems that teachers should decide on this central issue subjectively based on their local contextual factors especially the proficiency level of students. They might repeat the input more if their students are beginners and lower intermediate learners and less repetition for higher levels of proficiency learners.

The last but not the least point is that this approach is not deprived of criticism. For instance, we know that at the heart of well-beaten approach lies the concept of repetition. But what does it exactly mean by repetition? Does it simply mean playing back an input several times or it should involve some kinds of modifications, explanations, or the like before repeating? Furthermore, how many times should the audio be repeated? Can we set a certain number of repetitions (two? Three? Four? ...) or it should be decided upon based on teachers' intuitions? Moreover, does this approach work for all students from different language proficiencies? Is it logical, practical, and authentic to repeat the same listening input several times until it is understood? Does such a process happen in reality? These questions might in effect be treated as recommendations for further research in the same area so that more cogent findings could be obtained.

V. CONCLUSION

As it was maintained at the beginning section of the study, listening skill is one of the most paramount skills in any language. Its significance even doubles in foreign or second languages in that their process of acquisition is drastically different from that of first language. Consequently, implementing studies on this domain and shedding light on various approaches and strategies which might facilitate L2 listening fluency is necessary. The present study as one of the studies in achieving the same purpose investigated the effect of well-beaten approach on improving the listening fluency of students. The study revealed that this approach can meaningfully and significantly help students to enhance

their ability of listening comprehension. The approach is also a great help for teachers to reduce the impact of negative feelings like stress and anxiety which consequently leads to the better acquisition of the skill.

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