



Using Performance Assessment Tasks for Developing EFL Listening Comprehension Skills among Preparatory Stage Pupils

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بحث مشتق من الرسالة الخاصة بالباحث

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis was to investigate the effect of using performance assessment tasks on developing EFL listening comprehension skills among preparatory stage pupils. The instruments of the research included: a list of listening comprehension skills and a pre- post EFL listening comprehension skills test. In addition, using performance assessment tasks were prepared. The participants of the study included (60) pupils chosen from El Shaheed Prep School, El Basateen Directorate, Cairo Governorate in the academic year 2017-2018. They were divided into two groups: The experimental group (n=30 pupils) and the control group (n=30 pupils). The experimental group received instruction using the performance assessment tasks for developing their listening comprehension skills whereas the control group pupils were exposed to traditional assessment. The data was statistically analyzed using non-paired samples t- test and the effect size was calculated. The results showed that there were statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the experimental group and control group in the post measurement in favor of the experimental group students in the overall listening comprehension skills and in each sub skill (critical comprehension, inferential comprehension and literal comprehension). It was concluded that using performance assessment tasks affected on developing listening comprehension skills among preparatory stage pupils.

Key words:

Performance assessment tasks, listening comprehension skills.

Introduction:

Language is a means of thinking and transferring culture from one generation to another. It is also a means of communication among mankind. Hence, countries give great interest to teaching languages other than the native language to their citizens. The main objective of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Egypt is to develop the students' skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Language learning depends a great deal on listening which supplies the aural input that acts as the basis for language learning. Grognet and Duzer (2002) stated that listening is a demanding process involving many elements: the listener, the speaker, the content and visual support. These elements integrate with each other to enable the listener to make sense of the incoming information and enable the listener to recognize speech habits as clues for deciphering meaning.

To improve listening skills, Ross (2006) suggested some important guidelines: The purpose should be made clear to the students. They can better focus on specific vocabulary acquisition, grammar practice and listening for different purposes. Progression of listening comprehension activities should be used to transfer the learner from being a passive learner to an active learner. Teaching methodology considerations is important to vary techniques in order to challenge students. Long listening activities should be presented according to their level of complexities and be provided from the very simple texts to the lower level students and move to the very complicated authentic materials to the advanced students. The use of authentic listening material should be provided based on the students' needs and social contexts.

EFL learners face problems in listening comprehension while learning a foreign language. They include lack of phonemic awareness; listeners fail to comprehend the message. Listeners also face difficulties in listening because of stress, rhythm, pronunciation and intonation, rate of delivery, reduced forms, lack of concentration and accent of the speaker, lack of vocabulary, lack of proficiency, lack of practice and lack of linguistic competence (Lubbad, 2013).

Other reasons for the learners' low level in the listening skills are related to the tasks. Teachers spend most of the instruction time testing bits of listening skills rather than teaching and assessing higher order listening skills. They focus only on what students will encounter in the test and devote their teaching to achieve this goal. The second reason for the low performance of these skills is that regular testing encourages students to focus on memorization and recognition of decontextualized bits of listening at the expense of higher level of listening skills (Shabaan, 2013). Another reason for this problem is students' high anxiety level caused by regular tests. This high-level of test anxiety, in turn, increases their problems with constructing meaning of the text and negatively affects their skills (Badr, 2013).

Mendelsohn (2006) affirmed that much of what is traditionally misnamed teaching listening should be called testing listening. That is, because teaching means showing the learner how to do anything and applying, but testing simply implies having students do something, and then evaluating how well they did it. Most of listening class takes the traditional form of having the learners listen and answer questions, without teaching them how to go about it, i.e. testing their listening rather than teaching them to listen.

Studies were conducted for developing listening comprehension skills among learners at different levels. Owea (2003) implemented and evaluated a program for developing listening comprehension skills in order to improve academic achievement. It was observed that there was a problem of poor listening skills when pupils did not follow written or oral directions, especially in the case of homework assignment and cooperative learning activities. Puppin (2007) indicated that traditional paper and pencil testing is criticized because it creates a gap between what is taught according to communicative approach and the way the learners are assessed. Traditional tests do not reflect the learners' actual potentials. They often lack construct validity and have poor content validity, i.e. tests do not adequately measure what is taught in the classroom and become the main focus of

language instruction and have not affected students' language learning positively. This is the main concern of authentic assessment.

O'Malley and Pierce (1996) discussed two major issues of the increased interest in alternative assessment. First, the traditional assessment procedures fail to assess the full range of student outcomes. Multiple-choice questions are not adequate to assess learners' higher order thinking skills, which are highly valued in today's curriculum. In addition, they do not represent recent improvement in teachers' understanding of what and how students learn. Wiggins (1992) stated that teachers should include language functions that reflect both social and academic language. Within this context, the areas of grammar and pronunciation can be addressed, instead of being assessed as discrete items. In all cases, assessment should be instructive, challenging, engaging, and even enjoyable.

Advocates of performance assessments maintain that every task must have performance criteria for at least two reasons: (1) the criteria define for students and others the type of behavior or attributes of a product which are expected, and (2) a well-defined scoring system allows the teacher, the students, and others to evaluate a performance or product as objectively as possible. If performance criteria are well defined, another person acting independently will award a student essentially the same score. Furthermore, well-written performance criteria will allow the teacher to be consistent in scoring over time. If a teacher fails to have a clear sense of the full dimensions of performance, ranging from poor or unacceptable to exemplary, he or she will not be able to teach students to perform at the highest levels or help students to evaluate their own performance. The key to develop performance criteria is to place oneself in the hypothetical situation of having to give feedback to a student who has performed poorly on a task. The teacher should be able to tell the student exactly what must be done to receive a higher score. If performance criteria are well defined with examples the student then will understand what he or she must do to improve (Stiggins, 1991). Using the information, Teacher can give feedback on a student's performance either in the

form of a narrative report or a grade. There is a way to record the results of performance-based assessments; a performance–assessments checklist was used by teachers to evaluate the pupils’ work and progress in performing (Airasian, 1991; Stiggins, 1994).

Gulikers, Bastiaens, and Kirschner (2004:69) argued that there are differences of opinion about what constitutes authenticity because some authors emphasize the task and context and others refer to performance assessment. They make a distinction between authentic and performance assessment pinpointing that “every authentic assessment is performance, but not vice versa”. The authors stated that the degree of fidelity of the task and the conditions in which the performance takes place is greater in authentic assessment than in performance assessment. Khaira and Yambo (2005) argued that authentic assessments should resemble meaningful performances in real world contexts and should involve real life tasks with multiple solutions for the students.

Al Maghrebi (2014) stated that with the increasing numbers of students educated in general education classrooms; the challenge is to provide appropriate instruction to support student success. Traditional instructional approaches too often fail to engage learners, to address their individual needs, and to ultimately support academic success. Designing curriculum that combines both learning needs and targets deeper levels of understanding is possible. Through the use of the backward design approach, learning can become relevant and meaningful for all students, supporting their mastery of general curricular standards. When standards, assessment, and inquiry-oriented activities drive the curriculum, learning can be transformed. Teacher understanding of the difference between student knowledge and student understanding is critical to implementing a backward design approach. Just because a student can memorize facts for a test does not mean he understands what they mean. If a student was asked to explain his answer, he would be unable to articulate an explanation. Developing instruction that targets such level of understanding

requires thoughtful planning and the backward design steps can serve as a guide.

There are three stages of backward design: The first stage is to identify desired results which concentrate on the instructor who must consider the learning goals of the lesson, unit, or course. This stage focuses on the knowledge that learners should know, master and retain. The second stage is to determine acceptable evidence the instructors consider as the assessments and performance tasks students will complete in order to demonstrate evidence of understanding and learning. Therefore, the instructors will have a clearer vision of what evidence students can provide to show they have achieved or have started to attain the goals of the course. The final stage is to plan learning experiences and instruction when instructors begin to consider how they will teach. This is when instructional strategies and learning activities should be created. With the learning goals and assessment methods established, the instructor will have a clearer vision of which strategies would work best to provide students with the resources and information necessary to attain the goals of the course (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998).

Context of the problem:

Out of the researcher's experience in teaching for (18) years, it has been noticed that the first year prep school pupils' level is low in some listening comprehension skills. The researcher observed a lot of problems that face the pupils: The first problem is that most teachers use traditional methods of teaching to develop prep pupils' listening comprehension skills. In a typical listening lesson, pupils either listen to the script of a reading textbook or listen to recorded materials, they answer comprehension questions based on the content of the listening materials. In this kind of lesson, correct answers are emphasized, but the listening process is usually ignored and skills and strategies for effective listening are not practiced. That is, pupils are just tested on their ability to answer correctly and are not taught how to listen to

English. Second, the amount of time dedicated for listening lessons is limited, compared to other skills. Pupils are not sufficiently exposed to a variety of authentic materials, either.

Previous studies concerning the Egyptian context indicated that the Egyptian pupils have poor mastery of listening comprehension skills (Helal, 2006; Soliman, 2008; Selim, 2011; Shabaan, 2013; Yusuf 2015; Tealib, 2017, Ghamry, 2018). These studies stated that the main focus in teaching English is mostly on grammatical aspects and written work rather than on listening and speaking skills. So, listening skills are still neglected in the English language classes. Thus, there is a need for an effective way for developing listening comprehension skills for preparatory stage pupils.

Shabaan (2013) stressed that the success of any assessment depends on the effective selection and use of appropriate tools and procedures as well as on the proper interpretation of students' performances. In addition to the importance for evaluating students' progress and achievement, the assessment tools also help in evaluating the suitability and effectiveness of the curriculum, the teaching methodology and the instructional material. Yusuf (2015) asserted that it is very important to develop the listening comprehension skill as it is out of teachers' and students' interest.

A pilot study was conducted to evaluate listening comprehension skills among first year prep school pupils. The participants were 20 pupils in El Shaheed Abd El-Khalik Prep School, in El-Basateen Educational Directorate, Cairo Governorate during the first semester of the academic year 2015-2016. A listening comprehension skills test was prepared by the researcher and administered to assess the pupils' performance in the listening comprehension skills. The results of the pilot study revealed that 65% of the pupils got less than 50% of the total score of the test. They

could not follow the native speaker, infer the main idea of the listening text, guess the meaning of the difficult vocabulary in the listening test, use their prior knowledge to make sense of it and predict what people are going to talk about (or understand inferred information). Therefore, this study is an attempt to develop listening comprehension skills for the first year prep school pupils using performance assessment tasks.

Statement of the problem:

The problem of the study is the low level of first year EFL preparatory stage pupils in EFL listening comprehension skills required of them at that stage.

Questions of the study:

To solve the problem, the present study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the EFL listening comprehension skills required for the first year preparatory stage pupils?
2. What are the performance assessment tasks for developing preparatory stage pupils' EFL listening comprehension skills?
3. What is the effectiveness of using performance assessment tasks for developing EFL listening comprehension skills among preparatory stage pupils?

Delimitations of the study:

The present study was limited to:

- 1- A sample of first year prep school pupils chosen (n= 60) from El Shaheed Prep School, El Basateen Directorate, Cairo Governorate in the academic year 2017-2018.
- 2- Some listening comprehension skills required for the first year preparatory stage pupils.

3- Some listening tasks adapted from Student's Book, New Hello 1 for the first year preparatory stage pupils.

Participants of the Study

The participants were assigned from two intact classes of first year preparatory school pupils in El-Shaheed Prep School, El Basateen Directorate, Cairo Governorate, in the academic year 2017-2018. The first class represented the experimental group (N=30) and the second class represented the control group (N=30).

Instruments and material of the study:

A) A checklist of EFL listening comprehension skills.

Based on the review of literature and studies related to listening comprehension, a preliminary list of listening comprehension skills was prepared. The list was submitted to a jury of twelve staff-members in EFL to verify its validity. The jury members were asked to determine the appropriateness of 24 skills to the first year preparatory stage pupils. Changes and modifications concerning the skills were considered. Based on the jury's feedback, nine skills were agreed upon.

B) A pre-post EFL listening comprehension skills pre-post test.

The EFL listening comprehension skills test was designed to measure the 9 sub skills assigned as very important by the jury members. Two questions were assigned to measure each skill. Four listening passages were selected. To estimate the validity, the initial version of the EFL listening comprehension skills test was submitted to eleven jury members specialized in TEFL to evaluate each question in terms of content and level of comprehension measured. They were asked to give their opinions regarding the clarity of the test instructions, the difficulty level and length of the test and how far each

item measures the skill intended to measure. The jury members reported the appropriateness of the test items to measure the assigned skills and suitability of the test to the sample of 1st year prep stage pupils. Some modifications were made based on the opinions of the jury members such as changing a long listening text with a shorter one because it should not be more than three minutes long and modifying phrasing of some questions.

The Performance–Assessment Tasks

A performance–assessments checklist was used by researcher to evaluate the pupils’ work and progress in performing the performance assessment tasks. Through performance assessments, the teacher assessed the quality of student performance, judged and monitored pupils’ progress through observations. The researcher provided comprehensive information about pupils' strengths and weaknesses. The teacher asked the pupils to listen, answer and perform the tasks. During the tasks, the teachers evaluated the pupils’ performance using performance -assessment checklist. Then, their performance was evaluated according the three levels: poor, proficient and advanced. Based on the pupils’ performance and the teacher’s performance–assessments checklist, some extra tasks would be developed or remedial work would be assigned to pupils with poor assessments. After implementing the performance–assessment tasks, the EFL listening comprehension skills post test was administered to the participants of the study to identify the effect of the performance assessment tasks in developing their EFL listening comprehension skills.

Results of the Study

Data were statistically treated using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) program (version 18). Table (1) and (2) show the results of the study.

Table (1): T. test and η^2 results for the experimental and control groups on the post EFL listening comprehension skills test

| Macro skills | Micro skills | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | "t" | df | Sig. |
|---------------------------|--|--------------|----|------|----------------|------|----|------|
| Literal Comprehension | 1- Identifying the main idea in the text (the gist). | Experimental | 30 | 1.63 | 0.49 | 5.19 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 1.00 | 0.45 | | | |
| | 2- Recognizing the language function (apologizing, complaining, suggesting, requesting, advice...) | Experimental | 30 | 1.73 | 0.44 | 8.49 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.46 | 0.68 | | | |
| | 3-Understanding the details from specific information in the text. | Experimental | 30 | 1.33 | 0.75 | 3.63 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.66 | 0.66 | | | |
| Inferential Comprehension | 4-Extracting unstated information from the listening text. | Experimental | 30 | 1.26 | 0.73 | 3.47 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.63 | 0.66 | | | |
| | 5-Guessing meaning of unfamiliar items from context. | Experimental | 30 | 1.36 | 0.71 | 4.97 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.53 | 0.57 | | | |
| | 6-Determining the pronouns reference in the listening text. | Experimental | 30 | 1.53 | 0.68 | 4.51 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.73 | 0.69 | | | |
| Critical Comprehension | 7- Distinguishing between facts and opinions. | Experimental | 30 | 1.56 | 0.72 | 8.03 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.30 | 0.46 | | | |
| | 8- Predicting what speakers are going to talk about based on the students' previous knowledge. | Experimental | 30 | 1.23 | 0.72 | 5.41 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.36 | 0.49 | | | |
| | 9- Identifying speaker's purpose through the listening text. | Experimental | 30 | 1.36 | 0.66 | 4.26 | 58 | 0.05 |
| | | Control | 30 | 0.60 | 0.72 | | | |

This table shows that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the post listening comprehension test (Overall Listening) and the nine sub- skills in favor of the experimental group.

The “t” values of the differences between mean scores of the experimental and control groups on the post EFL listening comprehension skills test

| Test | Group | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | “t” | Df | Sig. | η^2 |
|-------------------|--------------|----|-------|----------------|-------|----|------|----------|
| Literal level | Experimental | 30 | 4.70 | 1.08 | 8.47 | 58 | 0.05 | 0.65 |
| | Control | 30 | 2.13 | 1.25 | | | | |
| Inferential level | Experimental | 30 | 3.96 | 1.54 | 5.60 | 58 | 0.05 | 0.36 |
| | Control | 30 | 2.01 | 1.14 | | | | |
| Critical level | Experimental | 30 | 4.17 | 1.21 | 12.69 | 58 | 0.05 | 0.74 |
| | Control | 30 | 1.01 | 0.64 | | | | |
| Total score | Experimental | 30 | 12.90 | 2.89 | 10.52 | 58 | 0.05 | 0.66 |
| | Control | 30 | 5.40 | 2.62 | | | | |

This table shows that there is a statistically significant difference at 0.05 level between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups on the post literal, inferential, critical level of the EFL listening comprehension skills test in favor of the experimental group. Table (2) shows also that η^2 is acceptable which means that using performance assessment tasks had an effect on the literal, inferential, critical level of the EFL listening comprehension skills test.

Discussion of the Results:

Results of this study revealed that there was a statistical significant difference between the experimental and control groups in favor of the experimental group. There was an obvious improvement

in the EFL listening comprehension skills of the experimental group pupils on the post administration of the EFL listening skills test. These results can be attributed to the use of the performance assessment tasks. The effectiveness of using the performance assessment tasks in enhancing pupils' EFL listening comprehension skills might be attributed to the following factors: The instructional and comprehensible authentic materials were used such as applying some experiments using authentic objects, video recordings, and the computer. These authentic materials provided the participants with accurate and up-to-date information about the topic and engaged the pupils in listening to the listening text. Using performance assessment tasks helped the researcher to monitor pupils' progress making use of classroom observations. Using performance assessment tasks provided an opportunity for pupils to monitor their own progress and helped teacher to identify the points of strength and weaknesses. Using questioning strategies embedded in the tasks allowed an opportunity for deeper thinking and provided the researcher with significant insight into the degree and depth of listening comprehension skills among the participants.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study the following recommendations are suggested:

- 1- Listening comprehension instruction needs to be given more attention and care in EFL classes. More time and effort are needed to develop this main skill and its sub-skills.
- 2- Listening materials should be authentic, varied, motivating, interesting and suitable to the pupils' levels.
- 3- Teachers should be aware of the listening comprehension skills necessary for each stage so that they can develop and evaluate these skills properly among their pupils. In addition, pupils need to be aware of these skills to work hard to master them.

- 4- EFL teachers are recommended to pay more attention to developing their pupils' literal, inferential and critical listening comprehension skills.
- 5- Teacher's role as a guide and a facilitator should be further emphasized in listening comprehension instruction contexts, thus allowing learners sufficient opportunities to actively make meaning of spoken texts.
- 6- More emphasis should be given to use performance assessment techniques with the formal ones (paper and pencil tests) in order to make classroom assessment more comprehensive.
- 7- Teachers should be trained to use performance assessment techniques in order to utilize them in the classrooms.
- 8- Pupils should be given more opportunities to practise listening comprehension skills in a friendly, supportive, anxiety- free learning environment that stresses the importance of group and pair work in fostering learners' EFL listening comprehension skills.
- 9- Supportive feedback should be offered throughout the learning process, not only to help pupils identify their weaknesses in listening and ways of overcoming them but also to encourage their strengths and consequently increase their motivation and involvement in listening.
- 10- Awareness of the importance of performance assessment tasks whether for EFL pupils or teachers should be raised in preparatory stages which lead to a better learning-teaching performance.
- 11- Teachers of different grades are encouraged to use performance assessment tasks such as classroom discussions, teacher observations and performance assessment techniques during the learning process as sources of information about pupils' progress.

4.5. Suggestions for Further Studies

Based on the results of this study, the following are suggestions for further research:

1. Implementation of performance assessment tasks at different educational levels.
2. Using performance assessment tasks to develop pupils' reading, writing, and speaking skills among learners at different educational levels.
3. Using performance assessment tasks to develop oral communication skills.
4. Training teachers on using performance assessment.

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الملخص العربي

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى قياس فاعلية استخدام مهام تقويم الأداء فى تنمية مهارات الفهم الاستماعى لدى تلاميذ الصف الأول الاعدادى، وقد ارتكز هذا البحث على مراجعة الأدبيات والدراسات السابقة الخاصة بتقويم الأداء لمهارات الفهم الاستماعى. وقد اشتملت ادوات و مواد الدراسة على قائمة مهارات الفهم الاستماعى المناسبة لتلاميذ الصف الأول الاعدادى، اختبار قبلى بعدى لقياس مهارات الفهم الاستماعى، ومهام التقويم الادائى لتنمية مهارات الفهم الاستماعى، وتضمنت عينة الدراسة ستين طالبة من تلاميذ الصف الاول الاعدادى متمثلة فى فصلين تم تحديد الفصل الاول كعينة تجريبية والأخرى كعينة ضابطة عدد كل منهما ثلاثون طالبة لكل مجموعة. تم تطبيق اختبار الفهم الاستماعى قبليا على المجموعتين ثم تدريس مهام التقويم الاداء للمجموعة التجريبية فقط. طبق اختبار الفهم الاستماعى بعديا على المجموعتين لقياس فاعلية استخدام مهام تقويم الاداء. وتم التحليل الإحصائى لدرجات التلاميذ فى المجموعة التجريبية والضابطة باستخدام اختبار t.test وكذلك حساب حجم الاثر. أظهرت النتائج وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين متوسطى درجات المجموعة التجريبية والمجموعة الضابطة فى القياس البعدى، وذلك لصالح المجموعة التجريبية فى مهارات الفهم الاستماعى ككل وفى كل مهارة فرعية على حده.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

- مهارات الفهم الاستماعى- التقويم الأدائى.