

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON IMPROVING LISTENING SKILLS IN ENGLISH THROUGH COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING, TECHNOLOGY (CALL)

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ABSTRACT

The study aims at focusing on improving listening skills using Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) techniques. The main objective of the study was to investigate the perceptions of the students about CALL methodology in terms of enhancing students' listening skills at the undergraduate level in Pakistan. In this view, an experimental method has been chosen during teaching in which listening test was administered. The nature of the study was qualitative. The population has been chosen by adopting a random sampling procedure. On the other hand, interviews have been taken with learners in the end. Fifty respondents from Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University have been taken as a population for this study. They have been treated differently in a way that, learners have been given special treatment by using Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) with the usage of new techniques for the period of one semester. Data was collected and analyzed by using Interviews and Thematic Analysis. The results of the current study revealed that the learners who have been teaching through CALL and technology for a period of one semester have improved their listening skills as compared to the common classroom techniques.

Key words: Computer Assisted Language Learning, Interviews, Thematic Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

English Language and the use of technology have become part and parcel of each other, all the time and everywhere. Nunan (2000, cited in Barani 2011) has pointed out that listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. Ali (2004:65) stated that the

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foremost aim of learning a language is to get its know-how by listening. Ear training is an important area in which the learners' ears are attuned to foreign sounds. It is, therefore, the present chapter is focused on a brief study on Listening skills in an ESL classroom. The current study will utilize Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to teach listening items in ESL classrooms. It also highlights the other aspects of the study like objectives, research questions, the significance of the study, and the research gap. In summation, it also extends the scope of the study, as well as mentions the technology as material for data collection.

The various studies related to CALL in certain contexts have been focused on by the researchers. Every one of the researchers has focused on a different aspect of his or her study and context. Greenleaf (2011) focuses on implementing CALL in the teaching of second language listening skills. Abbasi (2017) in his study suggests the use of CALL in enhancing reading skills in English at the intermediate level. On the other hand, it is observed that these things are not common to discuss in my context as public sector Universities ignore CALL in teaching English as a second language, especially in listening skills. After the extensive literature review of Computer- Assisted English as a Foreign Language Teaching (EFL) the researcher discovered that the most of these studies are conducted in the Western countries where English is the first language; however, very limited studies are conducted in countries where English is the foreign or second language (Al-Mansour, 2012). Therefore, students are not able to use the software in their English classes and cannot achieve the benefits of technology as listening is essential for language learning. It provides input to the learners (Rost, 1994). Students get input when they know how to use technology in the ESL class. CALL has integrated innovative ways for learners who are unaware of that method. For that reason, the researcher felt that there is a need to conduct a study on the use of CALL and technology that focuses on the perceptions of new teaching pedagogies to apply in English class. Consequently, I adopt this lack of research in the given field as the research gap in other studies and understand the need to do research in the Pakistani context. Amongst the four language skills of a foreign language, the listening skill has been taken as the most complex one. The techniques to teach and learn the second language listening skill

are still traditional in practice. Therefore, the students fail to appropriately comprehend the literal and contextual meanings of provided texts.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study has emphasized the perceptions of students in the light of listening skills, in the ESL classroom. This Study remains popular in the future, because of technology. In the case of Computer Assisted Language learning (CALL), it gives awareness regarding the most useful websites and software of the present era. This study will help new researchers in the field of computerizing and technology, it also helps out the students who would be unaware of the usage of current trends related to computers. Furthermore, this study will deal with new approaches of CALL like blended learning and filliped learning. It will ultimately change the perceptions of students about listening skills in this modern age. The proposed study will have a great impact on the overall language skills of the students of undergraduate and their attitudes too towards CALL and technology. Another great impact of this proposed study is that it will give way and exposure to other researchers to come and conduct their research in this particular area because nowadays every student has command over the usage of mobile devices and software so they could get in touch to anyone anywhere in the world. It will be easy for English Language teachers to contact their participants with no effort and this is the scope of CALL in today's world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Meaning of Listening Skill: Various researchers describe different views on the definition of 'listening'. According to Anderson at all, (2001), the nature of listening skills is complex, its viewed as both active and complex because listeners construct meaning-based messages by receiving them. Sometimes listening is referred to as a passive skill in contrast to speaking as "a constructive process in which the learner is an active participant" (Nunan, 1998). The listeners must construct and interpret a speaker's meaning by activating their own background and linguistic knowledge as well as attending to the speaker's intentions (Rost, 1990). Recent definitions recognize that listening is both active and complex; however, the field still lacks a generally accepted definition of what listening is (Janusik, 2010). If it

were a simpler, more straightforward skill, it would be better understood by listening researchers, more easily taught by L2 educators, and more deftly acquired by L2 learners.

Nature of Listening: As indicated by Nunan (2002), there are two perspectives on listening comprehension in the language instructional method since the mid-1980s. These are the two views on the bottom-up and the top-down processing. Bottom-up processing refers to the recognition of the elements of speech in a language. As indicated by this view, during the time of the listening process, what the listener hears are decoded forms of the sounds of the smallest meaningful units, which are related to the phonemes of the text. In addition, sounds are decoded and organized to make phonemes link together to make words, and they combine with other words to make phrases, and in the last, words are decoded and linked together to make clauses and sentences to give a meaningful text.

As Nunan (2002) stated that in this process, meaning is derived in the end and after the recognition of each element of the text and connects these elements together to form a complete text. Vandergrift, (2003) states that the learners construct understanding through meaningful connections in language and associate with lexical items and grammar. In the Top-Down Processing - The learners comprehend language by connecting it with "prior knowledge" and thorough familiarity with the situational context, (Morley, 2001). The top-down listening process refers to the background knowledge of the speakers and what they intend to say. According to Uso-Juan and Martinez-Flor (2006), a set of knowledge stored from a previous experience could be activated by the recognition of words. In this process, the listeners reconstruct what the speakers mean to utter the sounds as a hint of their background knowledge about the situation and context (Nunan, 2002), situation and context might be related the things like the topic, speaker, the speaker and listener relationship, the prior events.

Related Studies of Listening Skills: Abbasi (2017) in his study mentions the use of CALL and its methodology in enhancing reading skills in English at the intermediate level in Pakistan. He has used the quantitative method for data collection. He has used pre and posttest with the help of two different groups. Results of this study show that students of the experimental class were more positive towards this

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methodology; on the other hand, the traditional class was more confused and did not show interest in ESL class activities.

Morever, Reinders, H., & Cho, M.Y. (2010) worked on the "use of a mobile phone-based audio book to provide extensive, out of class instruction in L2 English listening practice. The population of the study was 60 students at the University level who tried to improve the form and meaning of language. The application slightly raised the volume of each occurrence of selected grammatical features in the book. Results of the study showed that some students found the volume changes distracting and a number did not complete the reading assignment.

Moreover, Nah, (2011) tried to investigate changes in students' attitudes towards using mobile phones to access the Internet to improve their L2 English listening comprehension. After 12 weeks of the experiment by 30 university students who tried learning to listen using a specially designed listening comprehension, WAP site, 20% of their neutral attitudes towards the experiment increased 8%, and 12% decreased in positive and negative attitudes attributing to the extra expense for the internet connection and the limitations of mobile phone technology.

Similarly, Hwang, W.Y., & Chen, H. (2013), investigated the effect of a PDA-based multimedia program to enhance listening skills for primary school children. A group of 30 pupils trialed the system for two months. Results showed that experimental group students gained higher English vocabulary acquisition as well as listening and speaking skills compared to the control group who studied without PDA support.

In another study, Sedigheh Vahdat & Maryam Eidipour (2016) adopted CALL to Improve the Listening Comprehension of Iranian Junior High School Students. Participants were 60 female students studying in grade 8 at Maktab Zeinab and Bideli junior high school in Dezful. The researcher used a mixed methodology and the nature of the study was qualitative using questionnaires and observation. According to the results, compared to the traditional class, the number of positive responses to the learning environment was higher among the students in the CALL class. Moreover, the students in the CALL class were more interested in learning in the class than those in the traditional class.

Call-the Acknowledged E-Learning Method: The abbreviation CALL is briefly defined to teach a language to second or foreign learners with the assistance of computers. The concept of CALL emerged in 1960 when the program PLATO (Programmed Logic/Learning for Automated Teaching Operations) came into existence. According to Levy, (1997) and Marty (1981), it was a milestone in computer programming at the University of Illinois.

CALL Practice to Develop Teaching and Improve Listening Skills of Language Learners by Using Software: Listening skills received lesser attention with respect to CALL practice. For many researchers, like Egbert, (2005b), it is not an easy task to improve the skills of listening and speaking with help of computers and other technological devices capered to face-face interaction. Egbert (2005b) points out the benefit native speakers receive in interaction with speakers of English as their second language. It does develop their speaking and listening skills. It is an easy way to interact globally with applications like MSN or Skype, web conferencing, and other formats of computer-mediated communications (CMCs).

The study of Klassen and Milton (1999) evaluates the beneficial use of the Digi-based learning program of the English language in a renowned University in Hong Kong. The results reveal that multimedia-based programs improved learning when compared to traditional classroom learning. According to Stockwell, (2007), Language learning technologies have taken many forms in the shape of picture learning, video, audio-video lexicological applications, and recording systems.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants: The participants in this study were those who actively participated in the research. The participants were the Second semester, 1st-year students from the Department of English. They were of the same age group, studying in the same class. The gender of participants was mixed with male and female. The number of participants in the current study was 50 in general. Participants were selected through random sampling. The class was taught for four hours in one week. The course of learners ended at the last of the semester.

Questionnaire: Qualitative design.

Framework of Interview: The interviews were formatted in a semi-structured way and consisted of 15 main items built by the

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researcher on the same questionnaire items. This framework of Nunan (1992) was used by (Joseph Paul Siegel, 2014) from Aston University in Birmingham, England in his work on "Problem atising L2 listening pedagogy" in January 2014. The same framework was used by Joseph Paul Siegel (2014) in which (Nunan, 1992), who mentions that this questionnaire provides qualitative information ad helps the researcher identify the emerging forms and themes in a self-reporting of data. Questions are organized in a thematic way for clear response and recording of data (Burns, 2010). Throughout the interviews, the sequence of questions was shifted for participants' responses and replies. The interviews were held after the end of the session and they consisted of examples of methodology, class activities, strategies, and materials given during the session. The researcher noticed and recorded the interviews digitally which lasted for half an hour. In doing so, the purpose of the researcher was to justify the interviews conducted and contribute to the outcomes of the interviews, thus the choice of language (Mann, 2011).

Interview Protocol: The interview protocol comprised of openended, semi-structured questions and they are adopted from Nunan (1992). The variables of the semi-structured interview protocol were similar to those implied in the close-ended questionnaire. The researcher's interview protocol was an instrument of inquiry asking questions for specific information related to the aims of a study (Patton, 2015) as well as an instrument for a conversation about a particular topic (i.e., someone's life or certain ideas and experiences).

Data Analysis Methods: The data was analyzed from the results of the research questionnaire and interviews. Next, feedback was taken from learners. These interviews were conducted to evaluate the performance of learners in the ESL classroom. Lastly, the interviews were analyzed with thematic analysis. It was through code and categories, and comparison of each set of data to reveal themes (Mathison, 2005). The themes captured and summarized the content of the data (Thomas, 2009). Grove (1988) states that researchers choose this method because it is suitable to analyze qualitative data, as it allows the researcher to identify patterns and characteristics within data (Glaser & Strauss, 2006). The researcher used this method believing that in the pedagogical studies of action research. Thematic and content analysis was employed in the study for results.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

In the current study, 50 undergraduate students participated. These students were studying in the department of English. All 50 students' responses on the CALL methodology related to Technology. The researcher first examined the qualitative data collected from the same students and then integrated the results to interpret the findings. As the nature of the research question, the researcher examined the responses qualitatively by combining several relevant themes and interpreting those themes. Although the current study aimed at getting students' perceptions of CALL which was taught to them using two different methods certain themes emerged in the course of this study. The researcher interviewed the participants about the CALL methodology and integration of technology, it became evident that few hidden themes emerged in their responses. The emerging themes suggest how students acknowledge the importance of technology in the ESL classroom. The following themes generated from their responses suggest the importance of these themes as (Shah, 2016:24) states that "throughout the entire analysis process, the researcher searched thoroughly for contradictory evidence and made revisions to the interpretations accordingly to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings".

THEMESEMERGED FROM RESPONSES

Non-availability of devices to all the students: One of the themes that emerged from students' responses was that most of the students in Pakistan have the non-availability of digital devices because of their financial conditions. Some of the students could not buy these devices, because of that they do not have knowledge about the usage of software and websites. It creates a big hurdle for them in the class to learn new terms related to technology. The major challenge faced by ESL teachers in remote learning is unawareness of digital technology because of the non-availability of digital devices.

Students prefer Activity-based learning (Active learning): Almost all the students endorsed new activities used in the ESL classroom because of active learning in which students could participate and interact in the learning process rather passively taking in the information. Many responses from the respondents show their excitement such as, "I really enjoy!!! These activities they were really helpful and interesting like few of them are (.)...listening audio and

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giving the answer of the question and second is finding the problem". They agreed that the activities give them the opportunity to actively engage with the information they need and they perform better. It is through the active learning strategies that their cognitive skill provides them with an opportunity to connect new and old information, correct previous misconceptions and reconsider existing thoughts and opinions.

Traditional teaching was not preferred by students compare to digital method: One of the themes was students' boredom with the traditional teaching methods. The students stated that that felt bored in the conventional classes. One respondent stated, "Teachers lecture was lengthy---uh-- I become bored in this class". Therefore, the course material should be modified to add digital methods which could enhance their interest in ESL class. A few students suggested that the teacher should bring digital devices in the classroom like laptop, multimedia gadgets, and desktop computers with online access. They also suggested that in the course teacher should add interesting activities related to digital methods in which students could practice course materials having online access for a longer time and get better grades in the course being taught.

The listening skill emerged being the most difficult ESL EFL skill: One of the frequently recurring themes found in students' responses was about listening skill being the most difficult of all four language skills, which can be noticed in this response, "I listen from teacher many things-s-s-s--but don't remember aahhhh----it. I asked questions about the activity that was difficult---mmhhhmm---for me". Goh (1999) states that the most common problem faced by students in listening in the order of frequency of utterances. Listeners quickly forget what is heard and they do not recognize even the words that they already know. The findings also suggest that listening skill should be given more attention in the process of language learning. It could be observed that students were tired to catch the major points from the teacher and they felt difficulty remembering the information.

Collaborative Learning: In the present study the idea of collaborative learning brings a major change in the type of two different groups. Collaborative learning occurs in peer to peer understanding and learning in large groups. It involves students working in pairs or small groups to discuss new concepts and find

solutions to problems collaboratively. Similarly, students teach one another by addressing misunderstandings and clarifying misconceptions. Most of the students were helping their classmates in the teaching sessions which were divided into two groups and the students clarified the sections to the other students when the instructor was not present.

A proper and well balanced integration of teacher's interaction, well defined and suitable curriculum, teaching and learning strategies and availability of relevant digital infrastructure emerged: The majority of the students were confused on the course and the teaching methods being used by the instructor. One could notice from this response such as, "because the teacher don't show us clear picture, but --- on--only papers -. which create confusion for me..uhhh--- in the class". Most of the responses show that in ESL classroom there should be a properly balanced class in which teacher should involve students as course could be well defined to them. On the other hand, course designers should combine a suitable curriculum in which they add one of the portions for the usage of technology to make it feasible for students. Although course designers should provide the availability of relevant material related to the specific course with digital infrastructure. The students will come to know about the software and the websites that have been added in their curriculum. In the context of language learning these availabilities are to be a source of their future success in language skills. They considered the language courses should be taught to them in a way they can communicate with their teachers and peers in the class and they would become critical thinkers in their career.

DISCUSSION

Findings gathered through the students' perceptions of the course material teaching and learning experiences suggest in Shah's (2016:26) words that "the methods that students typically adopt in their studies are bound to influence the quality of the understanding cherished, with a deep approach that is often associated with better academic results". This study tries to suggest in Hiew's words (2012:161) that "students' perceptions should be taken seriously, reviewed seriously as it is a two-way process involving teachers and learners". The students recorded perceptions reflect their experiences and understanding and observed the barriers between the teaching-

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learning environment and the course work (Scheja, 2006). In this context, (Earl, 2012 & 2013) suggests that the course designers might turn to possibilities for utilizing the capabilities of technology. Earl (2013:164) believes that a student's response can present and "influence how they feel about the course and course materials, how they see themselves as learners and how they respond to the teacher and the course". The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between the perceptions and teaching outcomes in order to know how the students learn from new strategies with new material which could enhance their listening skills.

Description of the Study: The main objective of this study was to investigate the perceptions of students about modern technology with the help of CALL in English language teaching and learning at Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University. The study was same level of learners. The teaching material included Academic IELTS course at an English learning website (https://www.edx.org/course), with the major focus on listening skills. The researcher taught for one semester. The researcher focused more on the student center teaching with the help of CALL program and technology.

Contribution of the Study: Listening is one of the four skills of language that has a major and equal importance in the process of language learning. Listening skill is the most difficult skill among the four skills of language teaching (Natasha Walker, 2014). In the context of my research, it is taught only through traditional methodologies. Students' comprehension of listening English is very poor; they have problems in understanding the literal and contextual meaning of the texts. Listening plays a vital role in verbal communication as approximately 45% in speaking, 30% in reading 15% and writing, about 10% (Mendelsohn, 1994). This study aims at investigating the perception of students towards improving listening skills of Pakistani undergraduate students with the usage of CALL at Sahaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Nawabshah. The Internet provides a plenty of listening materials with the advantage of instant access to a variety of support resources that can facilitate listening comprehension. Despite that, the teacher- centered approaches are still widely practiced in Pakistan and that serves as a major cause of failure in listening skill. This failure calls for better approaches in teaching English language in Pakistan. The most advanced approach to bridge this gap is CALL.

The current research has proved positively in investigating the use of Computer Assisted Language learning in improving English listening skills at undergraduate level and accomplished in improving test score. describing the attitude, and enhancing the inspiration of students. The current research has given the answer of entire research questions successfully with the help of its methodology and analysis. The present study has effectively accomplished the objective of enhancing the characteristics of students. There was glaring distinction found between the results of the students, particularly in test group of students related to the technology. The students demonstrated extraordinary enthusiasm for the diverse and vivid videos clarifying the sentences and new vocabulary. In this way, CALL technique demonstrated its viability among the undergraduate students in enhancing their imprints. This study will help the course designers by which they would be able to add the portion of technology related to the specific subjects. This research will give a chance to the English Language Teaching (ELT) facilitators to come up with innovations in technology such as Software, websites, Language Management System (LMS) and English language labs. With CALL in language education, ELT may go through significant rapid changes throughout the world so that it can be approached by everyone. In Pakistan most of the institution still follow the conventional methods for language teaching. This study will make new history in Pakistan by which language teachers would use new methods in enhancing four skills of language. This study will meet the diverging and exceeding needs of Pakistani English Language Learners (ELL) to reach at required level of literacy/ learning ability in English listening through computer. The study would help billions of learners and new researchers everywhere throughout the world. It will also be useful in distributing learner's work in Pakistani public sector Universities where the learners' background would not allow them to attend all the classes in a day. In addition, learners will access any material related to listening skill wherever and wherever they want.

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