

The Use of Instructional Activities to Enhance Listening Skills Among Form Four Students

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Abstract

Among the four language skills ESL learners need to be competent in, listening is regarded as the one skill the ESL learners have a tough time acquiring. The learners may feel it is too difficult to master. At the same time, the teachers may face challenges in finding the right materials suitable for the whole class, which comprises learners of different competency levels. This study aims to investigate whether there are any improvements in students' listening skills when Instructional Language Activities are incorporated as the main activities in their listening lessons. Another aim of this research is to examine whether there are any differences between the control and experimental group in terms of their pre-test and post-test. 34 Form Four students participated in this research. One group, the experimental group (18), had undergone the intervention of using Instructional Language as the activities. Another group, the control group (16), experienced the conventional method of listening lessons. Both groups underwent five sessions, respectively. The instruments included a pre-test and a post-test. From the data gathered, it is found that the students who went through the Instructional Listening Activities demonstrated a higher listening mark achievement than those who did not go through the Instructional Listening Activities. The result also indicated improvements in the experimental group after using Instructional Language Activities. The result shows that instructional listening activities can help upper secondary school students improve their performance in listening tasks or assessments. Furthermore, this listening activity has allowed students to stay focused and alert on the instructional cues that lead them to the answers for the tasks.

Keywords: ESL, Listening Skill, Instructional Listening

Introduction

A competent English user should be able to balance competency in speaking, reading, writing, and listening. As a nation that takes English as the second language, the need to

produce learners who can master the four language skills is even greater. Despite the importance, not all language skills receive the same focus in the ESL classroom. Specifically, however crucial it is, listening skill seems to be the one the learners find challenging to master (Bakar et al., 2019; Tan, 2017).

As much as teachers want learners to master listening skills, there are several reasons why achieving it is a hurdle. Apart from the fact that second language learners commonly are not familiar with listening to conversations in the English language, the issue with listening materials is one of the obstacles the teachers face. There is indeed an abundance of listening materials available. However, since Malaysian classroom settings consist of learners of mixed ability, finding the right listening materials suitable for the whole class is challenging (Ahmed, 2017). Quality listening materials and lessons should not only be able to help students in improving their listening test performance but also help them hone listening skills for social convention and communication.

Educators have widely used the instructional strategy to enhance language activities for second-language learners. It is noted that instructional strategy in language lessons is known to assist ESL learners in improving their language competency, especially in understanding content when communicating with others. With that in mind, this study is aimed to use instructional activities in listening skills lessons. Thus, based on this background as the guideline, the research questions are as follows:

- a) Are there any improvements in students' listening skills when instructional language activities are incorporated?
- b) Are there any differences between the control and experimental group pre-test and post-test performance?

This study seeks to understand the impact instructional strategies and activities have on listening lessons. This study involved form four students from a secondary school in Miri, Sarawak. 34 students were chosen to be part of this study. A pre-test and post-test were administered to answer the two research questions set.

Literature Review

Learners today study English as a second or foreign language for a compelling purpose. One of the main reasons is for them to achieve communication competence with others. Apart from mastering reading, writing, and speaking skills, listening skills should be regarded as one of the essential skills to master in English language learning. According to Djabborova (2020), 45% of the time we use is used to listening, while around 70% of the time, students use to listen. Listening is essential to learning English since it gives second-language learners language input, which is essential for language development (Darti & Asmawati, 2017).

Despite its importance, honing listening skills among ESL students is still considered a difficult task among educators. There are some compelling reasons for it. Elzamil (2021) noted that speech rate, pronunciation, vocabulary limitations, and a lack of background knowledge were all factors in the participants' struggles to learn to listen to English. This is further elaborated by Abdulkhay (2022) noted that students struggle with L2 hearing because they can't easily transfer their L1 abilities; Slower vocabulary growth reduces listening

comprehension, which demotivates second language learners; difficult for learners to adapt to different accents when they concentrate on one pronunciation while studying; As opposed to the other three language acquisition skills, L2 learners' ability to concentrate has a direct impact on their listening skills (Abdulkhay 2022)

Listening in Malaysian Context

Findings from Nor et al. (2019) found that the lecturers' speed of speech is the main reason the students cannot understand the lesson accurately. Thus, this has resulted in students responding to questions incorrectly. Students' unfamiliarity with the topic discussed in the lesson also does not help either. This also impacted how they performed in listening tests as parts of the audio included conversation of different accents and speeds. All these hurdles also affected their confidence in responding to people's conversations in English.

To discuss this further, a study by Hamid and Idrus (2021) investigated students' anxiety in listening. It is found that the anxiety score for listening ability correlates with anxiety in speaking ability. These findings are significant for educators to understand what this means in communication-related aspects. When it is interrupted by anxiety, the input process during listening will disrupt the output process, which in this case, is speaking. Thus, the necessary information may be delivered wrongly.

Specifically, conducting a successful listening lesson in Malaysian classroom settings could depend on classroom management. Limited time given is listed as one of the reasons why the teachers have issues running the lesson planned for the activities (Krebt, 2017; Ramadhani & Ys, 2017). Ramadhani and Ys (2017) further explained that the time allocated per session is too short. Planning and executing listening activities efforts to start with. When the time allotment is short, it takes time for teachers to provide instructions and an overview of what is expected of them for the scheduled speaking exercise. One effect of delaying the job till the following day or lesson is that pupils may grow bored or disinterested in doing it. Therefore, it is much more crucial when teachers must divide it to focus on the other three language skills, namely, writing, reading, and speaking, within the time allocation issue. (Raissi et al., 2014).

The Use of Instructional Activities in Listening Lessons

Instructional listening is a cognitive process that students experience through conscious thinking. During this process, the students are aware of their cognitive thinking strategy and thus able to apply and evaluate what the response will be as the output (Emerick, 2019). There are several recorded studies on using instructional strategies in listening activities. Maftoon (2020) studied using instructional strategy in listening lessons on ESL in Iran. In the study, it can be concluded that using this instructional strategy improves learners' listening performance and cognitive awareness of the students. Another study was done by Selamat and Sidhu (2020) on the student's perception of instructional strategy in listening activities. The students who participated in this study were satisfied with the improvement that they experienced. It is found that using this strategy can be more effective when extracting details based on the lectures that they listen to. A study by Robillos and Bustos (2022) on Thailand ESL students found a significant difference between the learners' pre- and post-listening scores when the instructional strategy is used as the intervention in the listening lessons. A study on teachers' perception of instructional strategy in listening lessons was also done by

Vallenki et al (2022) on teachers. The findings show that to conduct instructional listening activities, and teachers face several challenges. The challenges include classroom management issues, semesters that are short and unfamiliar with the lesson contents, and assessment practices. While some studies are conducted on instructional listening activities, few are done within the Malaysian secondary school setting.

Methodology

The design of this research is using a Quasi-experimental approach. Pre-test and post-test on students' listening assessments were used to examine students' improvements. Observations were taken in the form of comparing the assessment marks before and after using Instructional Activities to enhance listening skills among the students.

Instruments

- A pre-test that included 4 sets of Part 2 listening assessments in the format of the SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) paper with 8 multiple-choice answer questions in each set
- A post-test which is identical to the pre-test.

This research included 34 students divided into a control (16) and an experimental (18) group. The control group is from class 4 Ar-Rasyid, and the experimental group is from class 4 Al-Arif. They are Form 4 students aged 16 with A2 to B1 proficiency levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) from SMK Agama Miri, Sarawak. These students have not done any listening assessment in the format of SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) before the implementation of the research.

The data collection method took 5 weeks of school with 1 to 2 weekly sessions. The pre-test was done in the first week for both classes, 4 Ar-Rasyid and 4 Al-Arif, which took around one hour of English lessons. The first and second listening interventions were done in the second week for 4 Al-Arif. The method of the intervention activities was mainly related to the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach to enrich their listening skills. The activity for the first and second listening interventions was making Origami sculptures. This activity involved students listening to instructions and sculpting their origami based on the instructions given. There were two sessions for this activity; the teacher led the first session, and the students led the second session to the students. This was done to enable communicative interaction among the students.

The third listening intervention was Listen and Draw Activity. Students first listened to the verbal description of the images or pictures the teacher gave, and then they would draw what they had listened to. This activity focused on the lexical coverage of vocabulary development and fluency practice within a structured communicative framework. It was also communicative because there was an information gap, and the drawer could not reproduce the drawing unless the speaker's message had been successfully sent and received. The materials for this activity were taken from the book Listen & Draw, A Teacher's Resource Book by Stephen Mark Silvers.

The fourth intervention was listening to Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab activities through esl-lab.com. Students listened to various audio on various topics from this website and completed the tasks related to the audio. This method was used as one of the

interventions to expose them to native speakers' pronunciation and tone, as well as the lexical coverage in different contexts. Students would have to answer objective questions and subjective and Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) questions related to the audio. The fifth and last intervention was the Chinese Whispers activity. This fun and interactive activity allowed students to move around and interact with their peers. Students would whisper the sentences and phrases to each other until the last person in line said them out loud and compared them with the original sentences.

Findings

RQ 1 - Are there any improvements in students' listening skills when Instructional Language Listening Activities are incorporated?

Table 1

Results of the pre-test and post-tests in the experimental group

	Mean
Pre-Test	21.61
Post-test	24.68

There was a clear improvement in the post-test scores in students' listening skills after instructional listening activities were incorporated, which means that this strategy helped them develop their language skills and improve the student's listening comprehension skills.

RQ 2 - Are there any differences between the control and experimental group pre-test and post-test performance?

When analysing the results of the pre-tests, we obtained a p-value of 0.39, which means that the difference between the control and the experimental group was not statistically significant. Therefore, these two groups were comparable. Concerning the post-test results, Table 2 shows a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups after the intervention.

Table 2

Results of the post-tests in the experimental and control group

Post-test		
Group	Experimental	Control
Mean	24.28	21.88
SD	2.244	2.446
P-Value < 0.001		

These results suggest that the intervention with instructional listening activities had a positive impact on students' EFL writing skills, namely the aspects of listening comprehension

and listening for clues. Regarding these aspects, students improved the use of the past tense and increased their vocabulary for giving instructions.

Discussion and Conclusion

The use of instructional activities had a positive impact in enhancing listening skills among form four students. The result indicated improvements in the experimental group after implementing Instructional Language Activities. From the result, it is learnt that instructional listening activities can help upper secondary school students improve their performance in listening tasks or assessments. Furthermore, this listening activity has allowed students to stay focused and alert on the instructional cues that lead them to the answers for the tasks. There are also some significant differences in the student's behaviour, as the students in the experimental group are more excited and motivated to complete the listening assessment compared to the control group during the post-test.

Another future study can be applied, looking into students' perceptions of the intervention. The study can also be expanded by creating surveys on the intervention, and interviews can be done among the students in the experimental and controlled groups.

Significance of Study

Previously, the focus of learning and teaching English here in Malaysia is writing, reading and speaking. Many methods have been introduced and practised throughout the years, but listening activities have always been left behind from these advancements making listening sessions dull and monotonous. Regarding listening activities, teachers always revert to drilling and hope students will improve their listening skills. Based on the word 'skills', there are many factors to consider whilst practising and improving listening.

This study proves that there are more enjoyable and creative ways to conduct listening activities other than simple drilling. It shows that when injected with a few improvisations, a listening activity can be done more engaging and effective, which, in time, can lead to students improving in the skill of listening. This study can open the door to a variety of listening activities which can fuel the interest of both students and teachers alike. This can also help teachers diversify their listening activities approach, which can cater to different types of learners and target specific skills within the listening spectrum.

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