The Relationship between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and Listening Skill of Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

This article points out the results of a study of the relationship between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and listening skill of Iranian EFL learners. The research was designed so that it would provide answers to the following question:
Is there any relationship between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and listening ability of Iranian EFL learners?
In order to answer the above question, some 60 students at a private language institute in Aliabad Katoul, Iran, were selected at random and then were divided into experimental and control groups. The results obtained throughout the study indicated there was a significant difference between CALL users and nonusers in favor of the experimental group (p<.05). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Key words: CALL, EFL, Listening Skill

1. Introduction

As language instructors, we all know that listening skill has a vital role in the process of language learning; it is the first and the most important prerequisite for speaking skill. Therefore, we are not allowed to ignore the key role it plays in learning new languages.

As Nunan (2000) argued, listening is Cinderella skill in second language learning. All too often, it has been overlooked by its elder sister-speaking. For most people, being able to claim knowledge of a second language means being able to speak and write in that language. Listening and reading are therefore secondary skills—means to other ends, rather than ends in themselves.

As cited in Richards and Renandya (2002), for many years, listening skill did not receive priority in language teaching. Teaching methods emphasized productive skills, and the relationship between receptive and productive skills was poorly understood. Until recently, the nature of listening in a second language was ignored by applied linguists, and it was often assumed that listening skills could be acquired through exposure but not really taught. This position has been replaced by an active interest in the role of powerful theories of the nature of language comprehension, and by the inclusion of carefully developed listening courses in many ESL programs. Some applied
linguists go so far as to argue that listening comprehension is at the core of second language acquisition and therefore demands a much greater prominence in language teaching.

2. Review of the Related Literature
During the past thirty years, theory and practice in language learning and language teaching have changed in some fundamental ways. In retrospect, the four themes that dominated the second AILA Conference in 1969 seem to have been prophetic in pointing the way toward trends in ESL/EFL education during the last quarter of the twentieth century. They heralded new views on the importance of

- individual learners and the individuality of learning
- listening and reading as nonpassive and very complex receptive processes
- listening comprehension’s being recognized as fundamental skill
- real language used for real communication as viable classroom model (in Celce-Murcia, 2001).

In the mid 1960s, three new technological aids came into general use in the classroom—language laboratory, portable tape-recorder and film strip projector. All these were greeted with euphoria in all modern language departments. Extensive use of tapes and equipment was revolutionary for language teachers. The potential offered to language teaching by tape-recorder was enormous - now possible to bring native speaking voices into classroom. Editing and self-recording facilities were now available (in Mirhassani, 2003).

Brinton and Holten (1997) state that media help us to motivate students by bringing a slice of real life into the classroom and by presenting language in its more complete communicative context. Media can also provide a density of information and richness of cultural input not otherwise possible in the classroom, they can help students process information and free the teacher from excessive explanation, and they can provide contextualization and a solid point of departure for classroom activities.

As Sokolik points out, with the development of new technologies, there has been an attendant interest in applying these new technologies in the educational arena, and in making predictions of how they would affect the educational future of our classrooms and students. In forecasting the technological future, it is important to consider what the capabilities of educational computing are, and what can be done in the language classroom that will remain current, even if the technology does not. There is nothing certain about the future of technology, except that it will no doubt become more ubiquitous and powerful (cited in Celce-Murcia, 2001).

3. Method
This study tried to determine if there is any relationship between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and listening skill of Iranian EFL learners. The null hypothesis in this research asserted that there is no relationship between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and listening ability of Iranian EFL learners. In trying to accept or reject the null hypothesis, the researcher employed different T-tests.

3.1. Subjects
In order to conduct the research project, the researcher selected some sixty students, aged 14-38, out of seventy-three students from among four similar classes at a private language institute in Aliabad Katoul, Iran. Their mother tongue was Persian and all of them were upper-intermediate EFL learners. The subjects were divided into two similar classes of 30, one of which was considered as the experimental group and the other as the control group.

3.2. Materials
Tactics for Listening, Developing, (Jack, C., Richards, 2004) was the focus of the present study. The syllabus covered in this study is the same syllabus used by other instructors at different language institutes. This material was available into two forms: (a) hard copy for the control group, and (b) CALL for the experimental group. The CALL CD was designed and developed by the researcher who has been heavily involved in the utilization of modern technologies in EFL and by a team of computer science engineers, who had sufficient experience in computer programming.
3.3. Instrumentation

To make sure that the present study enjoys the needed appropriateness, the researcher applied three instruments:

3.3.1 Nelson Test

In order to check the homogeneity of the groups, a valid test of Nelson was given to the students in the very first session. The total score was 100 points distributed among multiple choice items.

3.3.2 A Proficiency Test

This test is a listening test consisting of some listening items in Tactics for Listening, Developing, (Jack, C., Richards, 2004); it was given to the subjects in the very first session of the semester. The subjects were required to listen and then circle the correct answers, fill in the blanks, write the number of each item,... . The aim of the proficiency test was to measure the participants’ listening ability and competency in EFL before beginning the experimental treatment of using CALL.

3.3.3 An Achievement Test

This test, a listening test, was administered both to the experimental group and the control group in the last session of the semester. The posttest was identical to the pretest as it had the same type of items, number, and structure. The subjects were required to listen and then circle the correct answers, fill in the blanks, write the number of each item,... . The aim of this test was to measure the difference of the subjects’ listening skill and competency in EFL after the study was completed.

3.4 Procedure

To accomplish the purpose of the study, the researcher carried out the following procedure: in this study, the subjects were 73 female learners from among four similar classes.

In this research, three data gathering devices were employed: A Nelson Test, a proficiency test, and an achievement test. Under testing conditions, the subjects were asked to take the Nelson Test; the evaluation of the Nelson test was perfectly objective because each item had only one correct response.

Then, the researcher limited the subjects to 60 on the basis of their scores. The researcher selected the subjects whose scores were one standard deviation below and above the mean. The subjects were divided into two homogeneous groups, considering one as the control group and one as the experimental group. Each group included 30 homogenous female learners.

Then, a proficiency test (as a pre-test), consisting of some listening items in Tactics for Listening, Developing, (Jack, C., Richards, 2004) was administered to the subjects in both groups. Both groups were to listen and then answer the following questions. The goal here was to measure the listening skill of the subjects in both groups.

During the study, the researcher taught each group in 20 sessions (each session 90 minutes). The control group sessions were held on odd days from 4-5:30 p.m. in class No. 101, and the experimental group sessions were held on even days from 4-5:30 p.m. at the same class.

During the 20 session instruction, the researcher presented and practiced all listening activities through the curriculum book, Tactics for Listening, Developing, (Jack, C., Richards, 2004), to the subjects in the control group. However, throughout the same period (20 sessions), the researcher presented and practiced all these listening activities through CALL to the experimental group.

To be sure of the efficiency of the treatment, the researcher administered a post test, an achievement test, both to the experimental and the control group at the end of the semester. The scores based on the result of the pre-and post-
test showed the impact of the two methods. Finally, a T-test was conducted to examine the differences of the mean score of the two groups.

4. Conclusion

Considering the df (degree of freedom) and the level of significance for two-tailed test, if the observed t is computed to be more than the t critical, in each one of the two groups, the null hypothesis is rejected, but if the observed t is computed to be less than the t critical, the null hypothesis is supported. Analysis of calculated T-test provides us with the judgment which allows us to accept or reject the null hypothesis of the present study.

Different T-tests were calculated to compare the means of the two groups on different tests. First, the means of the two groups on Nelson Test were compared. The Nelson test as stated above was given to the students at the beginning of the course to check the homogeneity of the subjects. Then, the means of the two groups on pre-test given to the students at the beginning of the program was also compared and the T-test showed no significant difference and confirmed their homogeneity. Then, to check the null hypothesis, the means of the groups on post-test at the end of the course were also compared.

The results of the pre-test and post-test which served as the statistical basis for the groups and a T-test comparison of group means showed a t value of -9.648. The table of T-critical with 58 degree of freedom for .05 level shows T-critical of 1.96. The T-critical is smaller than the t observed -9.648 > 6.781. Our t value is high enough that we can safely reject the null hypothesis: ‘Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has a significant effect on listening skill of Iranian EFL Learners.’

Furthermore, the obtained t-value provided answer to the research question: "Is there any relationship between Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and listening skill of Iranian EFL Learners."

The data supports a positive answer to such a question. All taken together, the data showed that the subjects in the experimental group did outperform those in the control group and accordingly the null hypothesis was rejected.

References

Fox, J. et al. (eds.) (1990) Educational Technology in Modern language learning, University of East Anglia and the Bell Trust.


