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The Role of Technology in the Development of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Listening Comprehension Skills at Private Higher Education Institutions in Iraq

Naci Yildiz
Extended Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation in Education Sciences

Scientific Supervisor: Nikoloz Parjanadze

(full name)

(Professor, Doctor at International Black Sea University)

(academic title)

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(supervisor's signature)

Experts (full name & academic title):

1. Prof. Dr. Ekaterine Pipia

signature

2. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Mehmet Sahiner

signature

Opponents (full name & academic title):

1. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maia Alavidze

signature

2. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tamar Mikeladze

signature

3. Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maissa Ghazi Mahfouz

signature

INTRODUCTION

General Background Information to Scope of the Study

Listening is an activity in which learners intensify their attention in order to understand something they hear. Listening is the comprehension of speeches of other people. Simply put, listening is the link between sound and structure of meaning. If learners fail to catch speeches, understanding does not occur. Listening focuses on deciphering the message of the speaker; therefore, the language knowledge of learners plays a pivotal role in comprehension.

Recently it has been understood in language learning that learning solely grammar and vocabulary is not enough to develop language proficiency. Accordingly, communicative competence has gained significance in the last two decades. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell (1995) argue that communicative competence has five components, which are discourse competence, linguistic competence, sociocultural competence, strategic competence, and actional competence. All components allow language learners to develop their communicative competence. Therefore, language learning through grammar and vocabulary instruction does not help learners with improvement of communication skills unless communicative aspect of language is focused on, even while teaching grammar and vocabulary, and awareness is encouraged among both teachers and learners that communication is not the domain of speaking and listening skills only. Language learners need comprehensible input to develop their level of language proficiency and listening is a useful skill for learners to provide them with the input they need. Speaking in a foreign language holds an important place because if learners fail to convey their messages, communication does not occur. However, without understanding the speaker, learners cannot respond. Thus, listening is one of the major factors to establish and support communication.

Listening has two main aspects. While bottom-up process focuses on vocabulary and structure to form a meaning, top-down process focuses on an overall idea of the topic in the listening text. In a bottom-up process learners use their linguistic knowledge to decode the messages. However, learners still have difficulties in both processes; for that reason, integration of both processes provides advantages for learners for a better listening comprehension.

The use of technology to develop language skills is gaining popularity in today's world. A great many learners have an opportunity to use a technological tool for educational purposes. Technology can be used to enhance listening skills as well. Learners can be involved in language learning through listening activities outside the classroom if technological devices and relevant methodologies to support language acquisition are implemented. Listening comprehension

significantly develops by listening to texts, and technology can provide learners with a good opportunity to be immersed in listening development outside the classroom.

Listening is not an easy process and when learners fail to understand a text, they are demotivated. For that reason, lecturers should always encourage the learners for better achievement. Learners expect whole-comprehension of listening materials, but lecturers should ensure to explain that if learners understand the main idea, they are considered successful.

Language instructors are in charge of the teaching and learning process; however, through modern approaches teachers are more facilitators; through constructivist approach teachers assume the role of a facilitator, which means that they construct the classroom environment in a way that makes it possible for individual learners to learn the language and develop necessary language skills (Larochelle et al., 1998). Teachers organize the activities to promote listening comprehension of learners. Lecturers are expected to monitor the development of learners and give them feedback when necessary. Lecturers should provide explanations, visual materials, and positive reinforcement for their students. On the other hand, the biggest challenge in teaching listening can be, as Vandergrift and Baker (2015) state, the lack of understanding which learner variables are at play in order to achieve effective listening comprehension; thus, firstly, the scholars, and secondly, the teachers need to increase knowledge and understanding of factors involved in the process of listening so that language instructors are able to provide efficient support to language learners in their endeavours to master listening skills. This issue shapes the basis for the research problem of the current study and is discussed in more details below.

Statement of the Problem

Foreign language learners very often find listening difficult. There are a great many reasons for this. For instance, when language learners do not have adequate linguistic knowledge, and they have difficulty in understanding the listening materials. When the delivery is fast or the pronunciation of the speaker is not clear, learners fail to receive the messages accurately. Listening should be given attention to by learners because learners need comprehensible language input to increase their level of language proficiency. Listening can provide learners with input. However, without comprehension of listening texts, the input is not useful.

Listening is a process that should be done constantly. Learners should always be engaged in listening texts to develop their listening skills. In a classroom environment where there are many students, there might be motivation problems. Besides, the number of listening classes is not enough to enhance listening skills; for this very reason, in order to have a good mastery of the

English language learners need to listen to texts outside the classroom as well. Today, technology allows learners to reach countless listening materials on the Internet and listen to them. Learners use various technological devices to support and promote their own listening comprehension skills. The more learners are immersed in listening, the better listening comprehension they have. Thus, a learner motivation in and outside classroom, the selection of specific teaching and learning strategies and setting up learner-friendly, meaningful and relevant atmosphere molded to an individual EFL learner could be the biggest challenge for a language teacher in the modern language classroom. Accordingly, these issues shape the research problem, which the dissertation aims to address.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

a. To explore the importance of listening in a language learning process, namely, in English as a foreign language acquisition;

b. To explore the advantages of listening comprehension in the process of formation English as a foreign language proficiency and awareness;

c. To investigate the role of technological tools in listening comprehension development;

d. To demonstrate how technological devices could be used to enhance listening comprehension in English as a foreign language classroom;

e. To discuss the role of listening activities for better comprehension in English as a foreign language;

f. To identify factors that hinder listening comprehension;

g. To identify strategies of how to overcome problems with listening comprehension and develop listening skills in EFL students;

h. To define the role of a teacher in constructing a meaningful learning context for EFL learners in order to support them throughout their language acquisition process;

i. To demonstrate how to use listening activities to support EFL students in their endeavours to master English.

Research Questions

The questions were developed based on the vast literature review, which helped to investigate the problem. This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the role of listening in teaching and learning English as a foreign language?

2. What are the characteristics of English as a foreign language listening comprehension?

3. What are the benefits of technology in developing foreign language skills?

4. What is the role of technology in English as a foreign language listening comprehension development?

5. What are effective strategies for developing listening skills?

6. What is the role of listening in boosting communicative competence of EFL learners?

7. What are major components of communicative competence, which affect learners' listening comprehension?

8. What is the role of a teacher in creating a meaningful context while teaching listening skills?

Research Hypothesis

Based on the objectives of the research the following research hypotheses have been formulated:

a. If learners are exposed to technology-assisted listening activities, listening comprehension improves more rapidly.

b. Learners will develop more effective strategies to enhance language awareness if they develop listening skills.

Novelty

This study explored that listening comprehension has a key role in establishment of communication, especially in contexts where English is used as a means of interaction in and outside the classroom. The research is innovative in a sense that it looked at technology as a medium supporting both EFL teachers and learners in their attempts to construct the atmosphere in which the language is used meaningfully to support authentic communication – the communication whose aim is not just formal and planned interaction between teachers and learners, but to create a context which is close to a real life situation where the participants of social interaction choose when and how to filter the information and in which form and when to get involved in the communication. This study has novelty because the findings revealed that learners can develop their listening comprehension through using technological devices. The use of technology is not a novelty by itself, but the dissertation tries to develop strategies for EFL teaching and learning through technology, which will help identify learner characteristics necessary for listening comprehension because little attention is paid to a learner personality and most of the listening activities put emphasis on listening tasks rather than learners themselves. Technological tools help learners not only enhance their listening skill, but also reduce their stress and anxiety.

Significance of the Study

Listening is of primary importance in a language learning process. However, many learners face difficulties while listening to materials. It should be kept in mind that learners cannot respond without understanding the messages conveyed by a speaker. For that reason, without receiving the input through listening, learners fail to produce a language. Foreign language learners are expected to have a good mastery of listening skills, but as they find comprehension of listening materials difficult, they try to avoid doing this type of activities, or they do not give enough attention to this language skill. However, there is a gap in understanding why learners may find listening difficult. As Vandergrift and Baker (2015, p. 392) define, listening comprehension involves decoding and interpretation, and these processes require linguistic knowledge (structures and vocabulary) and global (or as the authors state 'world knowledge') knowledge which presupposes obtaining and enhancing a learner's knowledge of cultures, locations, traditions, contexts; accordingly, the study is important because it tries to develop strategies of how to integrate technology into the classroom which in turn will support learners in obtaining not only linguistic knowledge (which could be obtained through traditional listening activities from any language course-books), but also global knowledge of how language is used by different users in different contexts.

Theoretical and Practical Value

Theoretical and Practical use of the dissertation is as follows:

a) It contributes to the enhancement of knowledge and understanding of different strategies in EFL teaching and learning which support a learner and a teacher through listening learning and teaching;

b) It can be a valuable manual for novice teachers and teacher trainers involved in preparation of EFL teachers;

c) It can be used as a manual for experienced teachers as well those who are involved in continuous professional development and want to refresh their knowledge and understanding of modern teaching methodologies in general and teaching listening in particular;

d) Theoretical value of the research is the fact that it summarizes the existing knowledge on EFL/TESOL teaching and learning.

e) Theoretical value of the research is the fact that the study employs, but does not completely rely on a constructivist approach which means that this model tries to use technology to

build the classroom and learning environment in a way that is closer to everyday real life contexts so that the language learner is exposed to an authentic language use and enhances not only linguistic, but also global knowledge.

Methods of research

The issue under the study is complex in its nature, thus is requires complex approach which cannot be achieved through any single research methodology; accordingly, the dissertation employs a mixed paradigm – both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Within each paradigm the study used specific research methods to collect the necessary data:

- Review and analysis of existing literature on the topic;
- Questionnaires;
- Interviews;
- Experiment;
- Statistical analysis of the obtained data.

Limitations of the Study

The research presents a case study in its broader definition and within the case study framework it uses an experimental approach – sets up an experiment to test the role of technology in an English as a foreign language classroom. However, this study is limited to Ishik University preparatory students, and it covers their ten-week-performance. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all English as a foreign language contexts, but to a limited extent it could be generalized to Iraq, and the research finding and recommendations could be used by teachers working in this context.

Organization of the Chapters

In the first chapter listening is defined and the significance of listening in a language learning process is explained, characteristics of listening comprehension are put forward and how technology could be implemented into a listening comprehension development is stressed.

In the second chapter, strategies for developing listening skills are provided. Factors that hinder listening comprehension are stated. The chapter provides practical considerations on the use of technology in EFL classroom to support learners through their endeavours to master listening skills.

In the third chapter, both qualitative and quantitative data are presented and analyzed. Weekly exam scores of learners are assessed and presented in graphics. Their weekly development is shown in tables.

The chapters are followed by conclusions and recommendations section which provide the researcher's accurate observations based on the obtained primary and secondary data.

CHAPTER 1. LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DEVELOPING LISTENING SKILLS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) ACQUISITION

Defining Listening

Anderson and Lynch (1988) state that the listening is what a listener does to understand a speaker; a listener plays a very significant part in the process of listening comprehension by processing the knowledge he/she has received. Through using what a listener knows about the topic, he/she reaches a comprehension. Underwood (1989) simply defines listening as 'the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear' (p. 1). Mendelsohn (1994) gives the definition of listening from another perspective and concludes that listening is the ability to understand native speakers. Other linguists also define listening in a similar way; for instance, Chastain (1971) defined listening comprehension as the ability to understand a native speaker at regular tone. However, putting an emphasis just on a native speaker could be misleading as English is increasingly intensely used by non-native speakers, especially in contexts where no native speaker is a participant of a communication. Many are the cases when non-native speakers use English as the only means of communication among each other, and these are the contexts, which are well-explained through Kachru's (1985) three-circle classification of English language use – non-native speakers using English as the only media of communication. This argument is in line with Saricoban's (1999) statement in which the scholar puts forward that listening comprehension is the ability to recognize and comprehend speeches of other people. Futhermore, O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) offer a useful and more extensive definition that "listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic resources to fulfill the task requirement" (p.19). These definitions infer that listening is the comprehension of speeches conveyed by other people.

Nunan, (2001, p. 23) stresses that listening is a process which has six stages; hearing, attending, understanding, remembering, evaluating and responding, and they occur in sequence, and brief explanation of these stages could be made as:

➢ Hearing perceives the sounds. In a listening process, learners need to hear in order to listen.
➢ Attention is the focus of brain on selected items.
➢ Understanding is the analysis of meaning what learners hear. Learners need to construct the meaning of the messages by the sender. In this stage background and cultural knowledge, context knowledge and language knowledge will highly contribute to listening comprehension.
➢ Remembering is the stage in which learners keep the information in their minds. Since learners only give attention to information they focus on, they keep only the selected information in mind, so what learners remember will not be the same as what they listen to originally.
➢ Evaluating the message, which learners have received.
➢ Responding is the final stage in which learners get feedback by using verbal or nonverbal feedback. Learners through responding ensure that they have perceived the information correctly.

The Process of Listening Comprehension

Listening occurs through two approaches: bottom-up and top-down process. Even so, listening skills should be taught actively, and as Harmer (2001) suggests it may happen through three models – top-down, bottom-up, and interactive. During a top-down process learners obtain an overall idea concerning the topic of the listening text. Flowerdew and Miller (1992) have developed this idea and written that "these models do not cater to the complexities of the listening process and attempt to introduce a pedagogical model for foreign language listening that encompasses individual, cultural, social, contextualized, affective, strategic, inter textual, and critical dimensions" (p. 24).

To acquire an overall idea of the topic, previous background knowledge of learners plays a critical role. This prior knowledge helps learners to understand the topic better and listeners are able to interpret more easily. At the same time, with the help of prior knowledge learners can predict what will come next. Prior knowledge is also known as schematic knowledge. Celce-Murcia (2001) states that the top-down process helps learners avoid some aspects of the bottom-up process.

During bottom-up processing, learners focus on vocabulary and structure to construct meaning. In this process, learners try to decode the sounds from phonemes to complicated sentences. By

decoding phonemic units, learners form words; by decoding words learners form phrases; by decoding phrases learners form utterances; by decoding utterances learners form a complex communicative meaning. Hedge (2000) stresses that learners comprehend the listening texts through using their language knowledge because learners process sounds into words to accomplish understanding. This process requires learners to have grammatical and lexical knowledge. Learners use their linguistic knowledge to decode the messages (Rubin, 1994, p. 210). However, bottom-up processing has also disadvantages in that learners need to have previous knowledge about the listening text because without this knowledge efficient comprehension might not occur. This argument logically leads to an observation that both top-down and bottom-up approaches require previous knowledge in order to manage accurate comprehension of the listened text; thus there is a necessity for the approach which will combine the benefits of both bottom-up and top-down strategies and ensure to provide the learners with the necessary pre-existing knowledge.

The third view is the interactive processing. Graham (2006) states that learners might encounter some disadvantages during bottom-up and top-down process, and they overcome these disadvantages with the help of interactive processing. In other words, the interactive process facilitates comprehension. It is widely accepted that when top-down and bottom-up processing are combined learners will make use of all background knowledge about the topic, contextual information and linguistic knowledge together which will lead to better comprehension and interpretation. If learners comprehend about the content, they will employ their previous knowledge about it; if the learners cannot comprehend the content, they will employ their linguistic knowledge to decode the messages. This approach indicates that a combination of both processing will bring about better comprehension of the listening text.

Figure 1: Models of listening process suggested by Harmer (2001)
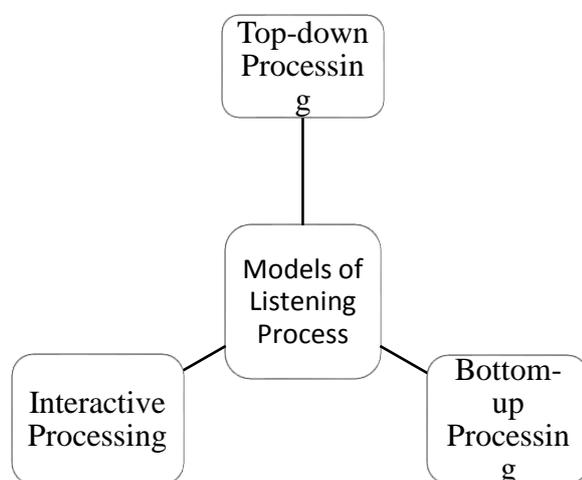
The Role of Technology in Teaching Listening Comprehension Skill

Listening is a significant skill that should not be underestimated by both lecturers and language learners. Learners need input to develop their language proficiency and listening has the capacity to provide learners comprehensible input they need. Through listening to language materials learners learn how its native speakers use language and try to do likewise. Therefore, listening materials are good language samples for learners. Listening comprehension allows learners to utter their messages. Learners learn from native speakers how they need to use language in real settings. Without understanding the speaker's messages, learners cannot respond. For that reason, listening comprehension influences the development of other language skills.

In order to support the formation and expansion of listening skills technology has been widely used in education lately. Learners do not favour traditional methods any longer. However, technology-based education plays a key role in education now. In particular, the use of technological tools encourages language learners towards better learning. Technological materials facilitate comprehension of language materials. Language learners stand a better chance of developing their listening skills if they employ technological tools while learning language. Language teachers by using these devices efficiently in the language classroom can enhance the quality of learning.

CHAPTER 2. PRACTICAL BASIS AND METHODOLOGY OF USING TECHNOLOGY WHILE TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (EFL) LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS

Strategies for Developing Listening Skills

Learning can be controlled through some strategies. Vandergrift (1999) stressed that the enhancement of strategies is significant for listening comprehension because strategies are phenomena that leads learners to value their own understanding.

The term 'strategies' which means 'techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge' (Rubin, 1975, p.43) was first introduced into language teaching and learning by Rubin. Oxford (1990) aimed to involve steps used by learners to make the acquisition easier and to use information, and these steps are as follows: memory strategies (how learners remember language), cognitive strategies (how learners think about their learning), compensation strategies (allow learners to compensate limited knowledge), metacognitive strategies (how learners manage their own learning), affective strategies (learners' feelings) and social strategies (learners interact with

others). Anderson (2003) further develops the term and defines it as "conscious actions that learners take to improve their language learning" (p.3). The scholar argues that these strategies could be observed, for instance, in a case when a learner is taking notes during a lecture to compare the piece of information obtained during the class to another resource; or when a learner is trying to build a mental image of, for instance a learner knows about a topic prior to reading a text in a resource.

Language learning depends on listening. Listening provides the learners with the aural input they need for language acquisition and allows learners to communicate interactively. The process of input depends on the background knowledge of the topic; moreover, the context the type of text also has roles in input processing. The background information assists learners to interpret. When learners have some prior information about the topic, their comprehension develops and input processing facilitates. Therefore, as Sharma (2011, p.13) defines, listener-based strategies require:

- ➢ Listening for the major idea of the material
- ➢ Predicting the cases or incidents in the material
- ➢ Drawing assumptions
- ➢ Cutting

Furthermore, the language of the listening materials has a major role in comprehension. The language level of the material influences input processing. Words, grammar and pronunciation in a listening material are key factors for the establishment of comprehension. These materials must be at the understanding level of the learners. Difficult listening texts will give learners nothing in terms of listening comprehension development. Text-based strategies require (Sharma, 2011, p.14):

- ➢ Listening for specific information
- ➢ Recognizing cognates
- ➢ Recognizing word-order patterns

Rubin (1987) classified strategies into three groups:

- ➢ Learning strategies
- ➢ Communication strategies
- ➢ Social strategies

Learning strategies make contribution to the enhancement of language system. Learners form these strategies to promote learning, so learning strategies influence the quality of learning. Communication strategies and social strategies are not directly related to language learning, but

through these strategies a learner can get engaged in a meaningful communication which is close to a real-life context. O'Malley et al. (cited in O'Malley & Chamot, 1990) classified learner strategies into three groups which are:

- ➢ cognitive
- ➢ metacognitive
- ➢ social/ affective.

Cognitive strategy includes mental manipulation or transformation of language materials, and the purpose is to promote understanding, which will lead to acquisition (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Metacognitive strategy on the other hand includes knowledge about the learning process. It is a strategy that requires learners to think about the learning process. Through this strategy, learners plan their learning; furthermore, learners self-evaluate their learning in this process after the completion of the task. Social/affective strategies include working cooperatively, and question asking.

Metacognitive and cognitive strategies are important to be developed to ensure learning development. O'Malley (1990) argues that learners who do not have metacognitive approaches do not have ability to monitor their progress. These learners cannot direct their learning as a result they cannot evaluate their accomplishments. Cognitive strategies have a subcategory: deductive strategy which refers to application of rules to language comprehension. Learners make deduction in this strategy through applying discourse, sociocultural and structural rules.

Wenden (1998) claims that learners gain the following advantages through metacognitive strategies:

1. Learners have the ability to use learning strategies.

2. Learners learn faster and integrate the knowledge in a better way.

3. Learners consider themselves as continuous receivers and they can appropriately deal with all circumstances.

4. Learners are self-confident to ask for help.

5. Learners investigate and assess why they are attentive learners.

6. Learners can deal with the issue if something goes wrong during the task.

7. Learners 'strategy is in compatible with learning task and they can make adaptations for changing conditions.

Technology-Based Listening Comprehension

We can see that the value and importance of technology increases in this century at a great speed, and it has been recognized as an essential device that simplifies the learning process. Therefore, many academics regard technology as the best means in foreign language learning and teaching for the reason that both hardware and software have the ability to offer learners numerous facilities for the purpose of preferable English with definite instruction (Bork, 1985; Papert, 1980; Ragosta, 1983).

The activities regarding listening comprehension skills that are done in a teaching atmosphere generally go along with audio files (video and audio format) and supplement handouts. At the same time, in order to advance learners listening comprehension skills we can use developed technological tools in classes, such as computer technology with VCDs, DVDs, and CD-ROMs. Moreover, these devices are very motivating and encourage learners to involve in listening comprehension skills.

With the importance of teaching and learning the English language, the need for qualified educators who are capable of using technological devices is increasing in society rapidly day by day. Actually, the number of educators who are able to use up-to-date technological tools is not limited, still most educators prefer the out-of-date (traditional) system (Ghavifekr et al., 2016 (a)). However, traditional approaches cannot prove very much effective with new type of learners, especially EFL learners, who need to have access to up-to-date information through modern teaching and learning methodology; EFL learners are highlighted here because they learn the language with a specific purpose, and accordingly, learning objectives are shaped according to modern demands and requirements (Ghavifekr, 2016 (b)). It can be comprehended from above statements that technological implements play an important role in each part of language learning process, especially, when listening lessons are conducted in big classes.

Szendeffy (2005) argues that technological devices provide learners and educators with excellent accession and integration of material; of course, it is only natural with the technological development as new tools and applications provide better opportunities to construct an effective and efficient environment where active and meaningful learning occurs; modern technology provides teachers and learners with an excellent chance to build a socially constructed atmosphere which is close to real-life situation where language is used in a more meaningful way, closely connected to authentic contexts of language use. McCarty (2005) scrutinized the accessible sources and their role in increasing learners' listening skills in language programs; it is not hard to recognize why internet audio has speedily made a splash now. The sources, which are not directly

labeled as teaching and learning materials, spark learners' curiosity and boost their motivation as learners maintain that they are not learning, but are listening to different items in the target language just for fun and entertainment; besides, they stand a better chance to observe the rationale for doing a listening task or generally, engaging in communication in English, as the interaction becomes meaningful for them; this supports, what earlier on in this passage has been referred to as, meaningful learning in a socially constructed environment; the environment is socially constructed as a learner clearly sees his/her role in the communication as an active and eligible participant, hence learners' increased perception of the necessity for learning follows.

The figure below, developed by the researcher, summarises the technological devices and applications which could be integrated in the teaching and learning process.

Figure 2: Components of Technology Based Listening Comprehension Skill; source: the researcher
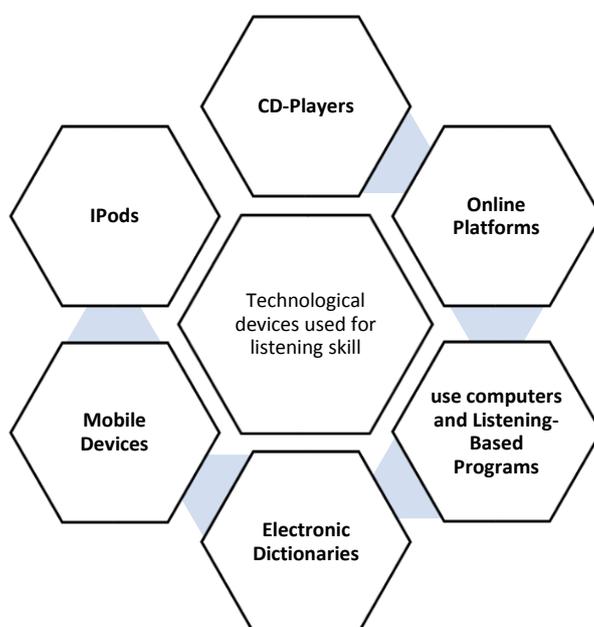
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA

ANALYSIS Research Context

The research was conducted at Ishik University. The university aims to provide quality education to Iraqi students for seven years. The language of instruction at Ishik University is English; therefore, it is essential that all students' language proficiency level be high. To enable learners to have good command of English, Ishik University has preparatory school and students go through an intensive English language programme. After being admitted to the university, students sit a placement test in English and they are grouped accordingly based on their performance in the test.

Research Participants and Sample Selection

The participants of this study were Ishik University preparatory school students. The university administration gave the researcher the permission to hold an experiment at the university. The students were informed about the experiment, and they gave their consent. The students were given a detailed explanation that the participation in the experiment would in no way and under no conditions affect their overall academic performance in any negative way.

The study included two groups: an experimental group and control group. Ishik University sets a proficiency examination for preparatory program students to determine the entrants' English language proficiency level. Based on their scores students are placed in different levels. The Preparatory School of Ishik University had five groups (100 students) of pre-intermediate level. Each group contained 20 students and two of these groups were used for this study, and they were chosen randomly from pre-intermediate level. The selection of pre-intermediate level was determined by the logic that it would allow the researcher to test more variety of strategies, approaches and technology; the experiment was to test different ways of using technology in and outside the classroom and with students with lower language proficiency it would create extra burden on a learner's side. The language level of learners in the groups did not differ largely, so selecting participants from the same level would be more convenient to reach at credible findings.

Research Methodology, Methods and Procedures

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were used at the same time in the study. As acquiring certain knowledge and skills is a social phenomenon, and students' feelings and anxiety as well as sharpening their skills was the fulcrum of the study, qualitative approach was one of the most relevant paradigms to be used in the research. It allowed looking at the teaching and listening process from different perspectives, exploring students', as well as teachers' viewpoints concerning teaching and learning listening skills. The collected data was qualitative in its nature as limited number of interview participants did not allow generalization of the research findings, but gave an insight into the English as a foreign language listening process. The perceptions that supported the hypotheses was analyzed by qualitative study through content analysis of major issues identified in the research. The role of technology on development of listening comprehension of learners was investigated in this study. The performance of learners was carefully observed. This observation required to produce some meanings and qualitative approach was used in this study to draw meaningful results from weekly examination scores learners had for ten weeks during the study. On the other hand, in this study, some numerical data from the students' tests was collected to make comparison between two groups, and quantitative approach

was used to report data results in numerical terms, and this is why quantitative design was used. Furthermore, 10 students and 5 instructors were interviewed. The collected survey data was processed. This survey data gave the researcher the opportunity to compare the findings with the survey data. The experiment lasted for 10 weeks and the procedure is summarised in the table:

Table 1: Activities performed by Learners in Control and Experimental Groups

Experimental Group	Control Group
Learners had weekly examinations, which included 50 questions.	Learners had weekly examinations which included 50 questions.
The level of the listening text was pre-intermediate.	The level of the listening text was pre-intermediate.
Learners listened to two listening materials independently at home or in the context defined by themselves; they could also listen to extra material if they decided to do so.	Learners were given extra listening materials under lecturer supervision in office hours throughout the study.
Learners were provided with some background information about these listening materials, and they were given additional sources where they could find complete pieces of information which they required for complete understanding. Comprehension questions were done in the class.	Learners were provided with background information about these listening materials, and comprehension questions were done in the class.
In addition to in-class activities, learners had pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities while listening to these materials in office hours in the initial three weeks to ensure that they know the techniques of doing this type of activities	In addition to in-class activities learners had pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities in office hours throughout the whole study, and the lecturer (researcher) supervised how they were doing the activities.
Learners listened to materials similar to the exam format once in the weekly examinations; however, they were given additional resources to listen to different pieces.	Learners listened to materials similar to the exam format twice in the weekly examinations under the teacher's supervision following his instructions.

The exam format offered the activities was similar to the ones practiced throughout the week; however, after the third week of the experiment, one exercise would be included in the test the format of which was unfamiliar to students.	The exam format offered the activities similar to the ones practiced throughout the week.

Data was collected in this study through weekly examinations. Learners had weekly listening examinations, and their scores were used as primary data to be analyzed in the study. For ten weeks while the learners in the experimental group focused on listening to more language texts through technological devices independently, the control group focused on listening activities under the lecturer-researcher's supervision using different strategies taught to them during the class and office hours.. Learners in the experimental group had mini listening texts in office hours for the first three weeks only to ensure that they did know how to select listening material and what strategies to use while approaching different tasks; throughout the rest of the experiment they mostly worked independently using the material selected by themselves; though it does not mean that they were left completely on their own; online sessions organized with the help of Skype and Google +, as well as Edmodo, were used for virtual interaction which allowed students to communicate with the lecturer, do interactive activities and seek academic support and advice in case of necessity. Learners in both groups had the same questions in the examinations in all weeks. During the study learners had three tests: pre-test, while-test and post-test. All learners had the same test and their test scores were used as data to provide evidence for their academic performance.

Learners in both experimental and control groups had practice in listening strategies during the weekly tests - pre-test, while-test and post-test activities were practiced. In the pre-test activities they were introduced to the topic of the listening text, and they were provided with some information about the topic to allow them to become familiar with the content of the topic. This facilitated the expansion of their comprehension; the lecturer also explained to them new vocabulary and structures they were not familiar with. In the while-test activities learners did various activities concentrating on the different aspects of comprehension − vocabulary recognition, structure identification, linking words, connecting ideas, listening for details, listening for specific information, listening for gist, general comprehension questions, inference questions,

etc.. In the post-test activities learners were asked to comment on the topic and to answer some questions to ensure comprehension.

In the control group a lecturer-researcher tried to boost students' motivation through constant support that is relying on instructional leadership – providing explanation of new material to students, teaching listening strategies which would ease listening comprehension and improve overall student performance in the test, explaining new structures and unfamiliar vocabulary and trying to select the topics students showed more interest in. Some additional materials were used during the classes or office hours; the sources for these materials were the same as used in the experimental group (BBC learning, podcasts, CNN teaching and learning resources, etc.); however, the difference was in the mode of instruction; as noted above, more direct teaching was used in the control group – teacher explained structures, vocabulary, idiomatic language, etc.

As for the experimental group, motivational component was built through constructivist approach – building the platforms of communication which gave more freedom and autonomy to learners and built the context in which students themselves had more choice of the topics for listening and mode of communication among each other and the lecturer-researcher. The platform of communication was wikis, Facebook and WhatsApp applications which were often used as means of communication in addition to formal classroom environment. What was actively used in the experiment was Skype options – Skype education platform which allowed to set up video-conferencing among students or guest speakers, to hold virtual field-trips and get interesting information through native speakers. The platform allowed active interaction, though to be realistic, students' interaction was slightly limited due to the language proficiency level, cultural aspects, and anxiety at the beginning of this type of sessions. Google + online platform 'Hangouts' was also actively used as a form of interaction, and students could practice their listening as well as speaking skills; BBC learning, especially 6-minutes English was used as a good source of material, as students listened to the English language used in an authentic way by native speakers; the simplified versions of real BBC reports allowed students to feel that they were involved in real interaction and were not doing listening tasks as part of their formal assignment and assessment; CNN learning resources were used in the same way so that students tried to get accustomed to both British as well as American pronunciation. Students were also given recommendation to use podcasts which they could easily download and install in their mobile phones or any other electronic devices.

The difference between the control and experimental groups, as mentioned above, was in the mode of communication between the lecturer-researcher and the students, which is, the students in the

control group found themselves in a more teacher-centered context where additional instruction was given to them – vocabulary, structures and listening strategies were taught to them and their comprehension was checked by the lecturer throughout the office hours (3 additional hours along with regular 4 hours in a week). This was the major difference between the groups. While the students in the experimental group did extra listening independently or while communicating with the lecturer-researcher using online communication, the control group practiced listening additionally in office hours; the question might be raised here, what makes office hours different from regular class hours; throughout office hours a bit more informal environment was created and the students' stress was reduced as they were aware that their performance in the activities done during office hours would not be included in the formal assessment; the reduction of stress led to the students' intensified participation in language activities.

The students in both groups had pre-test in the first week. This test included 50 questions and the topics were again selected from educational conversations or short lectures. In the seventh week students had while-test which included 50 questions. After weekly examinations post-test was conducted, and upon completion of the level at the end of the tenth week, general post-test was administered. The scores of the students were shown in graphics in this study and their achievement rates were discussed as well. Before these tests extra listening materials were not given to students.

Table 3: Timing for pre-, while- and post-tests and strategies followed

Test	Week
Pre-test	1
While-test	7
Post-test	10

Data Analysis

Pre-Research Questionnaire

The lecturer asked the students in both groups what they thought about the development of listening skills in language learning. This questionnaire was conducted before the experiment started to ensure the students' positive disposition to listening. This step was important because without believing in the benefits of listening learners would not be able to sustain their motivation throughout the experiment. The lecturer-researcher provided a brief introduction to the aims,

procedures and final outcomes to be achieved throughout practicing listening; later the students were provided with the questionnaire and the questions reflected the topics which the lecturer covered throughout the introductory session. Students in both groups stated the same ideas. Below the ideas of students in both groups about listening skills are given:

Table 4: Opinions of learners in the groups about listening

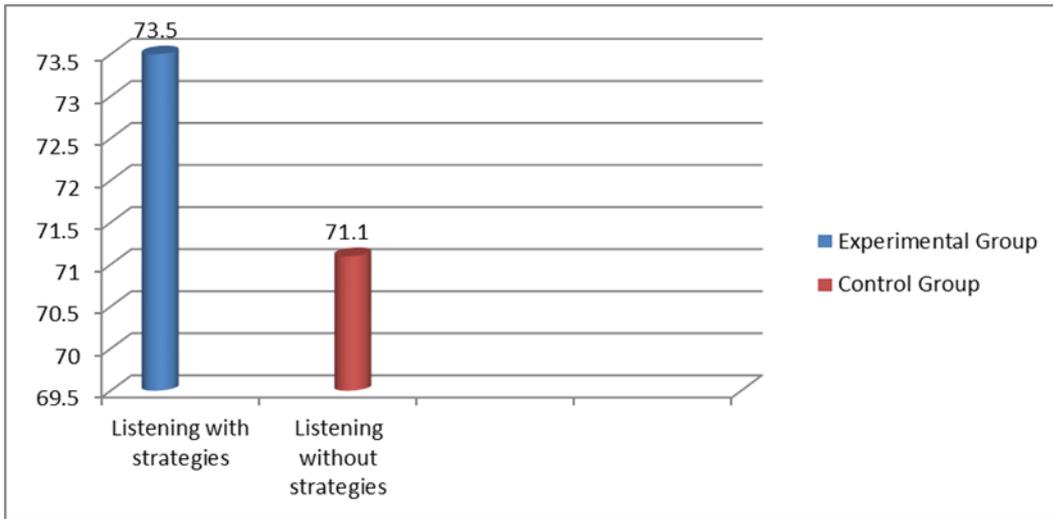| Experimental Group	Control Group
Listening improves fluency	Listening improves fluency
Listening develops vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension	Listening develops vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension
Listening enhances pronunciation	Listening enhances pronunciation
Listening facilitates communication	Listening facilitates communication
Listening promotes other language skills	Listening promotes other language skills
Listening comprehension increases self-confidence	Listening comprehension increases self-confidence

Quantitative Data Analysis

In this subsection, the results of pre-test are given. The maximum grade that could be obtained in the test was 100 points; it contained 50 questions; the scores were organized in a descending order, and the students were randomly given the numbers (coded name) randomly based on their performance; however, this numbering was later consistently used throughout the research.

Using SPSS software, averages of both experimental and control group are calculated. The results are shown in Figure 3.1. Also two groups are compared after first and second week. The obtained results are shown in Figure 3.2 and 3.3.

The pre-test results showed that at the beginning of the experiment both control and experimental groups students showed more or less the same performance in the test; though the experimental group had slightly higher grades, the difference was not significant; besides, the roles for the groups, which one would be control and experimental, were defined prior to the pre-test; accordingly, the group with slightly higher scores was not chosen intentionally as an experimental group.

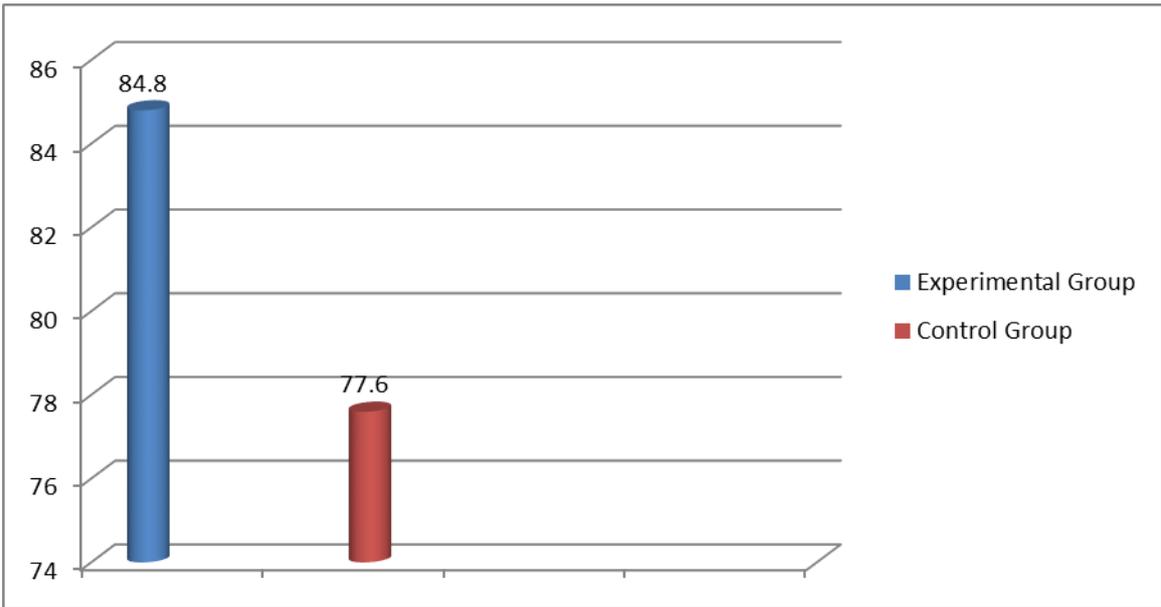**Figure** *3.1***: Average of both groups in pre-test**

The while-test was taken at the end of week 7. Results are given in Figure 3.15. As it is expected experimental group is more successful comparing to control group.
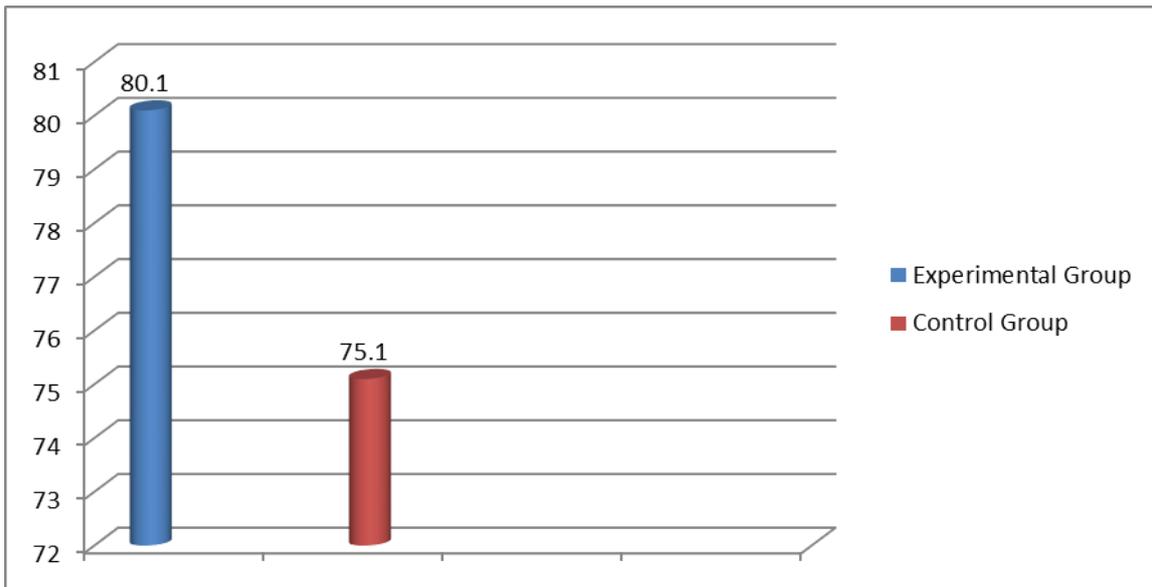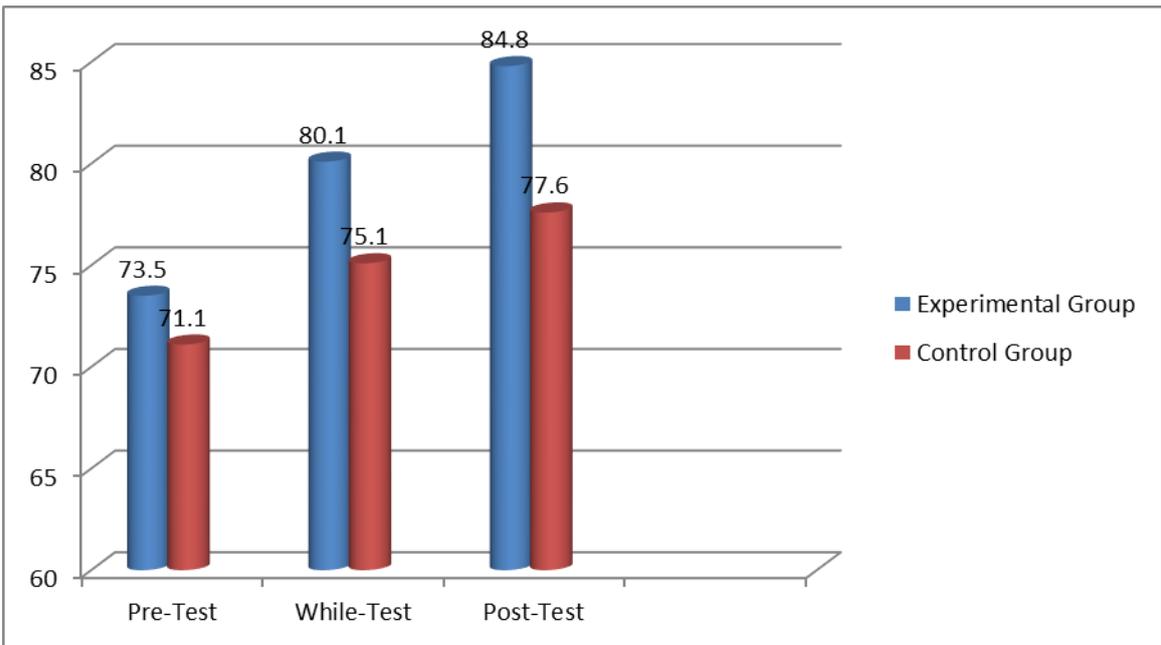

Figure *3.2***: Averages of both groups in the while-test**

We also applied a post-test to the groups. Results are given in Figure 3.22.

Figure *3.3*: **Averages of both groups in the post-test**

Figure 3.**4: Averages of both groups in pre, while and post tests**

In the Paired Samples Statistics Box, the means for pre-test, while-test and post-test are given. The number of participants in each condition (N) is 20. The standard deviation and standard error mean of all test scores for each group is shown in the table as well.

Table 3.1: Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences		Si (2-

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Experimental_Group_Pre_Test - Experimental_Group While_Test	-6.60000	.94032	.21026	-7.04009	-6.15991	-31.389	19	.000
Pair 2	Experimental_Group While_Test - Experimental_Group Post_Test	-4.70000	.97872	.21885	-5.15806	-4.24194	-21.476	19	.000
Pair 3	Control_Group_Pre_Test - Control_Group_While Test	-4.00000	2.42791	.54290	-5.13630	-2.86370	-7.368	19	.000
Pair 4	Control_Group_While Test - Control_Group_Post_Test	-2.50000	.88852	.19868	-2.91584	-2.08416	-12.583	19	.000

The Sig. (2-Tailed) value in our study for all pairs is respectively .000. (If Sig < .01, then the model is significant at 99%, if Sig < .05, then the model is significant at 95%, and if Sig <.1, the model is significant at 90%). In our study P<.01 for all pairs so the model is significant at 99 %. We can conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the means of test scores in both groups. Since Paired Samples Statistics box revealed that the means of experimental group was greater than the means of control group we can conclude that participants in the experimental group were able to learn significantly better than participants in the control group.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Based on the students' and teachers' feedback specific observations were made. Listening is a painful and complicated process in which learners are active if proper mode of teaching and learning is defined and students' interests are taken into consideration. During listening learners try to give meaning to the information they listen to. While listening learners need to use great amount of mental processes because they need to hear and understand the information; besides, learners need to respond. Listening involves comprehension of the input. Learners need to know,

think, use experience and interpret to understand the messages accurately. In the listening process, comprehension is the key factor. Learners need to discriminate between words and grammatical structures and interpret the message. Unless learners understand the conveyed messages, they fail to respond appropriately. Simply put, learners need comprehensible input to develop language proficiency.

Without listening comprehension, learners fail to use written and verbal language accurately. Listening is a crucial factor in foreign language acquisition. Qualitative interviews provided the research with the datum which is in line with Rost's (2001) argument that "a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition" (p.94). When learners do not learn listening effectively and do not possess listening strategies for different types of tasks, listening is often regarded as the most difficult skill. Consequently, listening becomes a source of anxiety for some language learners. Nevertheless, listening has impact on development of language proficiency. Listening develops comprehension skills. Without comprehension, language acquisition does not take place. Accordingly, it can be argued that enhancing comprehension abilities and creating new meaning in language learning are tightly connected concepts. Therefore, listening comprehension bears much more importance than simply ensuring the comprehension of certain messages; it is closely connected to language acquisition and mastering not only listening skills, but grammar, vocabulary, linguistic knowledge, etc.

Listening is the basis for development of language skills. Therefore, listening in language learning should be given utmost attention. Recently technology has been integrated into education and it has taken place in language learning process as well. Technology provides various listening activities for learners. Accordingly, it can be argued based on the students' and teachers' responses in the interviews that computers, and technology in general, can be effectively used in development of listening skills. The use of technology offers language learners a wide variety of listening materials, plus learners can listen to these materials everywhere. The number of materials learners listen to in the classroom is limited, yet, outside the classroom learners can listen to significantly, therefore, technology has the potential to promote listening comprehension skills of learners. Through observing the use of technology by the students involved in the research and based on their feedback it can be concluded that traditional ways of conducting listening classes are no longer favorable. Technological devices can motivate language learners because materials offered through technology as well as learning opportunities help creating a functional environment which constructs positive learning context and provides more autonomy to a language learner – autonomy

to choose mode and pace of learning, select the favorable and interesting content and reduce stress and anxiety. Technology helps learners involve more integrally in the learning process. In addition, learning becomes a more authentic and meaningful process in a context which is constructed through technology by using authentic language material. Learners' competence develops if they listen significantly and technology tools provide learners with an effective opportunity to promote listening competence. Technology enables to integrate all language skills in a relaxed atmosphere if a learner knows how to use technology, and of course, if the use of technology does not create extra workload and is not one more source for anxiety.. Listening in the classroom might be stressful for some learners, but listening outside by technological tools maximize comprehension of receiving messages.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analyzed data obtained throughout the research specific conclusions have been drawn taking into consideration research findings. The study sought answers to the research questions

One of the major research questions was, what the role of listening is in teaching English as a foreign language. The study explained that listening is the link between sound and structure of meaning because during a listening activity learners try to recognize and understand the sounds and only then comprehension occurs. If learners cannot receive language input by listening, development of foreign language proficiency and language awareness is not possible. Listening is a process of receiving the message the speaker sends. The listener needs to decode this message and respond. This shows that listening, rather than being a passive process, is an interactive process. Listeners perceive the meaning and utter, in other words to establish a meaningful communication listeners receive the information, construct meaning and respond. A vast literature review, as well as data obtained throughout the research showed that the formation of listening skills bears crucial importance in the development of other language skills and competences.

Other major questions were, what the characteristics of English as a foreign language listening are, and what the role of listening is in boosting communicative competence of learners. Listening is not simply hearing; it is a more complicated process than hearing. Hearing is receiving the sounds and modifying them in the ear. On the other hand, in a listening process learners need to receive, identify and recognize the sounds. Therefore, listening has been considered as highly-complex problem-solving process. In this process knowledge and competence is required. Learners need to be aware of linguistic knowledge to recognize the words what speakers say. To create meaning learners need competence as well – communicative competence which will allow them to define

how to behave in different context and how identify relevant language units to be used in the process of communication. Technology creates the platform for learners which helps them to find themselves in different contexts close to authentic or genuine language us; this is especially important in case of English as a foreign language because in such contexts students are rarely exposed to the situations where language is naturally used in a human interaction.

In order to help learners receive the message of a speaker, learners need close attention because listening is not an easy process. In this process learners need to reorganize newly acquired information, and they need to form meaning. Learners make context prediction through using some key words. This complex problem solving process may bore language learners. Accordingly, it is advisable that teachers use the methodology through which language is practised rather than key vocabulary is taught in a routine manner. Information communication technology, online tools and platforms can be useful in this respect as well because they provide teaching and learning resources which are developed through the use of genuine cases of authentic language use; besides, online platforms allow learners to connect with native speakers as well and interact with them in more natural and meaningful context; however, care and precaution should be taken here on a language instructor's side; security should be a major concern for teachers and learners while using online tools to interact with people.

The next major research question was about effective strategies learners need to use to develop listening skills. During listening, learners try to give meaning to the information they listen to; therefore, listening is a painful and complicated process in which learners need to be very active. While listening, learners need to use great amount of mental processes because they need to hear and understand the information; besides, learners need to respond. They have to know, think, use experience and interpret to understand the messages accurately. Learners need to discriminate between words and grammatical structures and interpret the message. Unless learners understand the conveyed messages, they fail to respond appropriately. Therefore, teachers need to implement practices which aim at developing students' ability to concentrate on listening materials, discriminate between major and minor information, how to respond in an effective way so that communication is sustained. Accordingly, listening is a crucial factor in a foreign language acquisition because without listening comprehension, learners fail to use written and verbal language accurately in various types of communication. Without comprehension, language acquisition does not take place. Though listening is hard, the use of strategies are useful because they raise learners' awareness. Unless listening strategies are employed, listening comprehension is challenging and ineffective. In other words, the use of effective strategies leads to effective

language learning. Language learners encounter some barriers that hinder their comprehension. The use of strategies allows learners to understand the listening materials more easily through predicting, and drawing inferences.

In the context of EFL teaching and learning, technological devices should be integrated into language classrooms. Language teachers need to know how to use these devices properly. Effective use of these tools will increase quality of learning and teaching process. Learners are familiar with technological devices, so language instruction without technological devices will not bring about efficiency. As it was highlighted many times above, ICT is of crucial importance in EFL context where students need to be exposed to natural language use through different methods and approaches as cases when English is naturally spoken as a means of interaction are very scarce in countries where English has a status of a foreign language.

The development of communication skills is less likely to occur for learners who cannot understand what he/she listens to. Verbal communication requires using the language efficiently. Listening enables learners to communicate effectively in both educational settings and daily life. Pronunciation plays a vital role in communication. Unless words are pronounced accurately comprehension does not take place. Communication requires vocabulary and language structure knowledge. In addition to them, pronunciation allows learners to use language knowledge in an effective and accurate way. Therefore, interaction with native speakers, or listening to authentic language use give students an excellent opportunity to sharpen not only listening comprehension skills, but also practice accurate pronunciation which is close to native-like manner of pronouncing sounds in English.

While listening learners need to perceive the incoming speech and make sense of it. In this process learners learn how to use the language effectively. Once they understand the messages, they will try to respond in the same way, which will contribute to their communication skills development.

Listening is the basis for development of language skills. Therefore, listening should be given utmost attention to in a language learning process. Recently, there has been a growing trend of integrating technology into education, and it has taken place in a language learning process as well. Technology provides various listening activities for learners. The use of technology offers language learners a wide variety of listening materials; besides, learners can listen to these materials everywhere. The number of materials learners listen to in the classroom is limited, yet, outside the classroom learners can listen significantly, therefore technology has the potential to promote listening comprehension skills of learners.

List of Publications

Bingol, M. A., Celik, B., & Yildiz, N. (2014). Smart Phone Assisted Language Learning. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies , 1* (2), 67-71.

Yildiz, N. (2015). Strategies to Support the Enhancement of Listening Comprehension (A Case of Ishik University English Preparatory School). *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region , 1* (1), 87-94.

Yildiz, N., Parjanadze, N., & Albay, M. (2015). The Effect of Question Position on Listening Comprehension: A Case Study. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies , 2* (1), 4-9.

Yilidz, N. (2015). The Role of Listening Skills in Developing Communicative Competence: A Case Study in the Language Classroom. *International Journal of Social Sciences & Educational Studies , 2* (2), 4-11.