



THE EFFECT OF COMMUNICATIVE TEST BANK ON DEVELOPING SAUDI EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING SKILLS

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ABSTRACT



Many factors have encouraged the researchers to choose listening skill rather than the other language skills. One factor is that listening skill is considered as a vital element and a key skill for mastering the rest of other language skills. Another factor, it develops the fluency and leads learners to comprehend the secrets of a language. Besides, it is considered as an important factor for grasping the culture of other nations. For all these factors, the following study is conducted to examine the impact of communicative test bank on developing EFL students' listening skills. The sample of the study is a group of fresh Saudi students in the preparatory year at the faculty of Science and Arts, Khulais Branch, University of Jeddah. Through encouraging learners to consider communicative test bank as a tool for developing English listening skills, the researchers hope to reach a significant result that can contribute to the field of education and be a key of further investigation. The methodology adopted in this study is an empirical analytical approach, based on the group targeted. After data obtained and computed, statistical analysis resulted in significant and positive effect of the treatment on the experimental group. In the light of the results obtained, the researchers recommend all teachers, language practitioners and syllabus designers to consider listening test bank as a tool for developing students' listening skills.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Communicative Test Bank, Listening Skill.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Testing communicative abilities of EFL students is widely recommended because traditional testing always focuses on testing the knowledge about language; vocabulary and grammar. However, there is much more of using language than knowing it, the emphasis should be put on language functions rather than language accuracy (Weir, C. J., 2001, 12). The focus in communicative language teaching (CLT) is on fluency rather than accuracy. The emphasis on (CLT) is on the processes of communication, rather than mastery of language. Communication is the main function of language. In recent years, teachers of English all over the world have found a great interest and confidence in adopting the communicative approach. Teachers have to convey the meaning in a functional way using (CLT); by giving examples of real life situations, as students are not interested in sitting for a long time to be lectured. Most of teachers always measure writing-based skills (writing and reading) and ignore the oral-based skills (speaking and listening), in terms of tests construction. Accordingly, students have to take part in meaningful communication in and outside the classroom.

Besides investigating the impact of communicative test bank on developing listening skills, the study aims to draw teachers' and syllabus designers' attention to include these test banks when testing listening skills. It encourages learners to consider the test bank as a tool of language skills development that increases the awareness of the importance of communicative aspects of language and its communicative purposes, and enhances the functional-notional approach that may result in designing some syllabuses communicatively. Hopefully, the study to develop EFL students' listening skills and open new horizons to EFL teachers to consider using communicative activities inside the classrooms. Besides, these regular communicative tests will arouse the students' interests and motivate them to learn more.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. WHAT IS LISTENING SKILL?

Listening skill is one of the two receptive skills besides reading. Usually good communicators listen more than they talk. A wise man talks less and listens

more. Listening is deeper than hearing. It needs more concentration for processing and translating into meanings, whereas hearing stands for the act of sensing or receiving the sounds only without transferring these sounds into meanings.

2.2. WHY A COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH?

In a communicative approach, students can learn the language and use it when they communicate real meaning. Emphasis is on communication rather than accuracy. Lessons are always authentic and practical. The teacher makes use of real-life situations that facilitates communication. His role is facilitating, monitoring and observing the class without intervening. He does not interrupt the flow of conversations neither corrects or gives feedback (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In the same vein, Richards, J. C. et al. (2001, 153-155) insist on teaching languages through communicative approach rather than other approaches because the emphasis lies on receiving the message rather than going into basic details. Among proposed strategies is the use of communicative tests as an integral procedure in the foreign language (FL) classrooms for improving students' communicative skills and learning, even in the absence of feedback. Krashen (1982, 77) assures the role of these tests on the attitudes and behaviours of students in classrooms and their contribution in encouraging students for more engagement in activities inside classrooms. In a study conducted by Hassan (1996: 159-166) about the ways of improving listening comprehension to Arabic speakers in Syria. The findings showed that the important factors which hamper listening comprehension teachers' answers focused on: lack of written script after listening to the tape, noise resulting from classroom condition or poor quality equipment, boring topics, unsuitable materials, lack of discussions, fast speech, informal language and complex upgraded texts. Key areas of the teaching of listening comprehension had not captured the full attention of ESP teacher: the varied of use materials, tasks and activities, visual and written support the integration of listening with speaking, reading and writing interactive listening in groups and the use of video are all poorly used in their classroom. As a way of improvement the study, suggests that teachers take these key areas of listening into consideration



and make use of these finding when training their students in listening comprehension. Brumfit, C. (1985, 45) proposes that teachers have to put in their considerations preparing their students to use language outside classrooms. Whenever a teacher teaches English at whatever level, the purpose should be why does he teach English to a foreign learner? Certainly not only for examinations, but they can use it whenever necessary in real life, outside the classroom. The communicative approach aims at just a real pure creation of activities in the classroom, which promote genuine language used inside and outside the classroom. In this way, learners should be enabled to take part in meaningful communication in the outside world. The researchers also believe that a teacher, a syllabus and the school encourage communication. It doesn't matter whether the language is perfect or not; the teacher should aim at fluency not accuracy. Thus, less attention is paid to structure than to function in order to carry out a communicative purpose.

2.3. FEATURES OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEST

Testing has a very important role to improve teaching and learning. Evaluation is the means by which both teaching and learning functions more efficiently. Broughton, Geoffrey et al. (1978, 146) consider the test as an activity used for the purpose on-going assessment. However, testing is perhaps one of the most misunderstood areas in language teaching and learning. This is due to a kind of miscalculation of instructions and the inadequate methods of assessment. Teachers usually train their students to pass the test, and this might not make them achieve the objectives of the course. From Tony Dudley –Evans and Maggie Jo S. T. John (2003, 214) we can quote: *"All tests have a backwash effect, that is, the test will affect what is taught and how it is taught"*.

The main goal from communicative tests is assessing learners' use of language. A communicative test is the test that focuses on doing the skills rather than knowing them. The focus is on understanding the context and conveying the message clearly rather than language accuracy. Therefore, the communicative tests should express real life situations. Weir, C. J. (2001, 10-13) notes, features of the communicative test represented in that the task should reflect attributes of the activity in real life.

Consideration should be kept into language use and topics selected; the authenticity of tasks and genuineness of texts in tests (realization); and the legitimacy of separate skills testing (innovative through story-line set procedures).

2.4. QUESTION OF THE STUDY

1. Is there statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in their performance in listening skill's test?

3. METHOD

This study is an experimental study, designed based on a baseline empirical analytical method in order to achieve its goal. To answer the questions of the study, qualitative and quantitative data were used. Qualitative details about how participants appreciate the effectiveness of using communicative test bank to develop their listening skills. Quantitative method to see the achievements of the students in the communicative tests.

3.1. SUBJECTS

The data was mainly collected from 40 homogeneous Saudi EFL students in their preparatory year at faculty of Science and Arts, Khulais Branch, University of Jeddah, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. At the time of testing, they had studied English for seven years and their ages ranged from 16 to 18. They were almost of the same place and social background.

3.2. MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

3.2.1. THE TESTS

The researchers have selected these types of tests to check their effects on developing listening skills for the experimental group. Different listening tests were done. A pre-test was done for all students to check their proficiency and whether the sample was equal or not. Three communicative tests were prepared for the experimental group. To check whether the treatment works or not, a post-test was designed as an achievement test for both groups, the experimental and the control.

3.2.2. RELIABILITY & VALIDITY

To measure the post-test's reliability, the researcher chose the "test-retest" reliability. The test was done twice by students. Two weeks were given as interval time between the two tests. The first test was attended by thirty-four students, and the second by thirty-two students. Thirty students did the two



tests. According to Pearson correlations coefficients, the correlations of the scores of the two tests was (0.78). To validate the tool of the study, the test, a pilot run was done. The test was checked and examined by a number of faculty members.

3.2.3. PROCEDURES

Randomly 40 students (selected from different classes). The students were divided into two equal groups; experimental and control. Before the experiment, to see whether they were equal or not and to check the proficiency and the standard level of the two groups, a pre-test was done for the two groups. Also, the experimental group was exposed to three communicative tests whereas the control group was not. After the treatment was over, the researchers designed an achievement test on listening to be administered to the experimental and control groups as a post-test. The treatment took about thirteen weeks. By the end of the experiment, the two groups were exposed to the achievement test to check the impact of the treatment on the experimental group. The students finished the test in a single session that lasted for about 45 minutes.

4. DATA ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, RESULTS AND FINDINGS

After data was collected, analysis, discussions and results of the data were treated by virtue of the instrument used in the study. To investigate the role of the component variables, the SPSS programme was used. To find out the significant influence of the independent variable (the treatment) on the dependent variable i.e. the means and standard deviations of scores of both the experimental and control groups were statistically calculated. T-test was used to analyse the data of the post-test. Then, the data was calculated and tabulated in tables. The question of the study was restated and followed by an examination of the statistical results relating to it.

5.1. RESULTS RELATED TO THE QUESTION OF THE STUDY

Is there statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in their performance in listening skills' test?

To answer the question of the study, whether there is statistically significant difference between the experimental group and the control group in their performance in listening skill's post-test, different statistical procedures were employed. The means and standard deviations of scores of both the experimental and control groups were measured in order to find out the significant influence of the independent variable (the treatment) on the dependent variable.

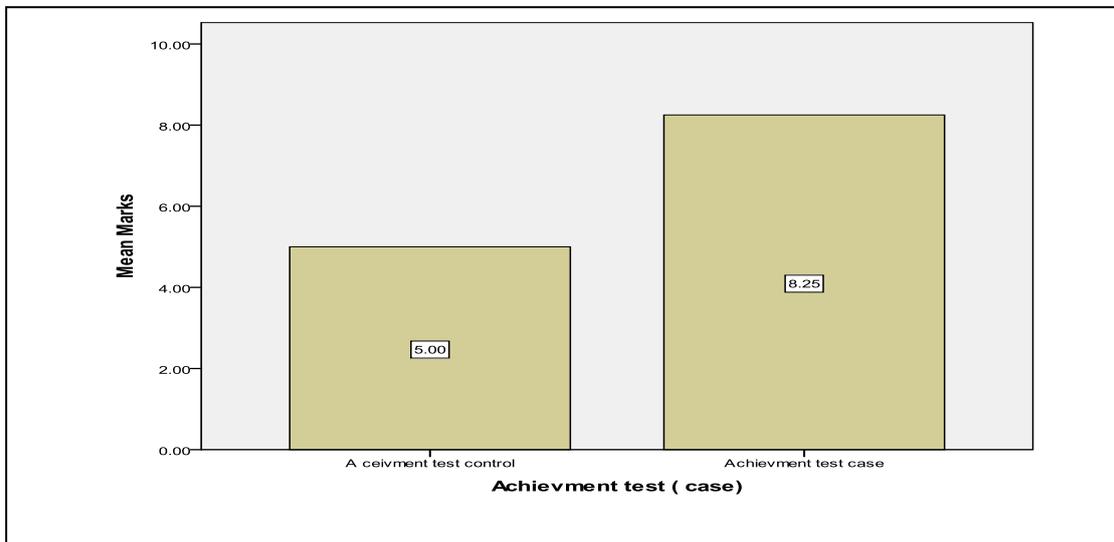
The results of the paired sample show close similarity in the mean scores in the pre-test between the experimental group and the control group, which mean that the levels of all students were similar before the experiment. So, any difference in the mean scores in the post-test will be resulted from the treatment. The results of analysis are reported in table 1, shows the post-test mean scores and standard deviations of the control and experimental groups involved in the study.

Table (1): The Group Statistics of the Achievement Test

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Control Group	20	5.00	2.534	0.566
Experimental Group	20	8.25	1.650	0.369

The results show significant differences found between the mean scores of all the variants. As shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, it is observed that the experimental group obtains higher total of scores rather than the control group in listening skill. It is evident from the mean scores of the control group is 5, whereas the mean scores of the experimental group is 8.25. On the other hand, the standard deviation of the control group is (2.534), whereas it is (1.650) for the experimental group.

Fig. (1): The Group Statistics of the Achievement Test



In addition, the *t*-test for independent samples was used to show the difference between the two groups as shown in Table (2).

Table (2): Independent Samples *t*-test

	Levine's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval for the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.766	0.192	-4.806	38	0.000	-3.25	.67619	-4.619	-1.881
Equal variances not assumed			-4.806	32.66	0.000	-3.25	.67619	-4.626	-1.874

When looking at Table 2, for the independent samples *t*-test, we can check the assumption of equal variances. Moreover, when looking at Levine's test for equality of variances, it can determine the scores of all variants are the same and there are clear variations between the groups.

Comparing the results obtained we find in pre-test, there are statistically significant differences at the 0.45 between the mean scores gained by the experimental group (students receiving the treatment) and those by the control group (students taught by the traditional method) on the achievement test. The pre-test scores for the control group and experimental group on listening skill test were almost the same. That stems from the

differences in mean scores between the two groups 0.45 less than 0.5. On the other hand, the difference on mean scores on the post-test for the two groups on listening skill is 3.25 more than 0.5 to justify that the influence of the treatment on the experimental group is significant and positive. The pre-test mean scores of the control group and experimental group on listening skill test is 0.1 less than 0.5 ($0.1 > 0.5$) to justify that the subjects of the two groups were equal in their educational experience and the scientific level. That is justified by the differences in mean scores between the two groups.



6. CONCLUSION

1. This study demonstrates the utilization of communicative test in listening skill, developed this skill and improved the cognitive field abilities of university students of level one significantly when compared with traditional tests.
2. Practising tests and neglecting mistakes and errors improves learners self-confidence.
3. Communicative listening test banks have vital role on developing listening skills of university EFL students.
4. Students of experimental group are highly motivated throughout the treatment period.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have to be considered:

1. Teachers, have to consider oral-based skills, especially listening, when preparing tests.
2. School administrators and syllabus designers should exploit administering communicative test banks with student's workbooks, and confirm the utilization of these tests among university students as they seemed to have great value.
3. EFL teachers' preparations programmes should provide both EFL teachers school and administrators with training programmes in order to practise communicative activities in and outside the classrooms for the sake of developing their communicative competence as a step towards the establishment of communicative testing ability.

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