The Effects of Task Types (Student as Question Master Task and Prediction Task) on Iranian EFL Listening Comprehension

Abbas Badri[1], Payman Rajabi [2]*, Abbas Bayat [2]

_____

M.A Student, English Teaching Department, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran

PhD. English Teaching Department, Malayer Branch, Islamic Azad University, Malayer, Iran

* Corresponding Author: Paymanrajabi2002@yahoo.com

_____

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of task type instruction on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. To accomplish the purpose of the task the researcher used two different tasks: prediction task and student as question master task. Quasi experimental design was utilized for the present study. To assure the criterion of homogeneity, Oxford Placement test was conducted at the beginning of the study. Forty five students whose scores were between -1 and +1 SD from population mean were selected out of 120 learners. Based on the scores from the Placement test three groups were randomly selected as the control group and experimental groups of the study. Interchange/Passages Objective Placement Test was administered as the pretest of listening comprehension. After that, experimental groups received special treatment by using two different tasks while control group received traditional way of teaching listening comprehension, that is the students listened to the text and then they answer the comprehension questions. Treatment lasted 12 sessions or about two months. Parallel Interchange/Passages Objective Placement Test was administered as the posttest of listening comprehension

The results of the pretest and posttest in data analysis through statistical procedure such as One Way ANNOVA confirmed the superiority of the experimental groups to the control group, and task based instruction helped to improve listening comprehension, resulting in the rejection of the null hypotheses.

Key words: listening comprehension, task-based instruction, prediction task, student as question master task

I. INTRODUCTION

"Both second language acquisition (SLA) researchers and language teachers want to elicit samples of language use from learners. The researchers need these samples to find out how second language learning takes place. In the case of teachers, these samples are important because they serve as the means to help learners to learn and as evidence that successful learning is taking place" (Ellis, 2003, p. 1). He adds researchers and teachers know that the samples they elicit can vary according to the extent to which learners focus on using language correctly or using the language to communicate a message. For example, blank-filling exercises are likely to reflect the learner's attention to accuracy whereas some kinds of communicative activities are more likely to reflect how learners use the L2 to convey message.

He continues that researchers and language teachers both accept the need to get samples of language use as a representation of how learners perform when they don't pay attention to accuracy. It is believed that these samples show learner's ability to use an L2 in real-time communication. But how are such samples of meaning focused language use obtained? The means that both researchers and language teachers have employed are 'tasks'.

Notions of task have developed out of communicative teaching and material development. Brumfit & Johnson (1979, p. 200) define task-oriented teaching as teaching which provides "actual meaning" by focusing on tasks to be mediated by language, and success is judged in terms of whether the tasks are performed.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Research on Task

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) refers to an approach based on the use of tasks as the central unit of planning and teaching in language teaching. Some of its advocates (e.g., Willis, 1996) present it as a logical development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) since it draws on several principles that formed part of communicative language teaching from 1980s (Richard & Rodgers, 1986, p. 223)

In fact, CLT is not a monolithic and uniform approach (Ellis, 2003, p. 28). Howatt (1984) distinguishes a 'weak' and a 'strong' version'. A weak version of CLT which is manifest in the proposals for functional/notional syllabuses developed by Wilkin (1976) and Van Ek (1976) drew

on assumption that the components of communicative competence can be identified and systematically taught. In this respect, a weak version of CLT does not involve a basic departure from earlier methods. Thus, instead of teaching learners the structural properties of language, a weak version of CLT proposes they be taught how to realize the notions of language such as 'time' and 'possibility ', and functions such as 'inviting' and 'apologizing' (Ellis, 2005, p. 28).

In contrast, a strong version of CLT claims that 'language is acquired via communication' (Howatt, 1984, p. 279). That is, learners do not first acquire language as a structural system and then learn how to use this system in communication but rather actually discover this system while they participate in communicative activities. The strong version of CLT provides opportunity for learners to experience how to use language in communication. The strong version is apparent in Krashen and Terrell's (1983) natural approach and also in proposals for teaching centered on the use of tasks (Candlin, 1987).

B. The Role of Task-Based Teaching

The role of tasks has received more support from some researchers in second language acquisition (SLA), who are interested in developing pedagogical applications of second language acquisition theory (e.g., Long & Crookes, 1993). An interest in tasks as the basic unit of second language teaching began when researchers turned to tasks as SLA research tools in the mid-1980s. SLA research has focused on the strategies and cognitive processes used by second language learners. The research has reassessed the role of form-focused teaching. It is assumed that there is no evidence that formal grammar teaching leads to the ability to communicate outside the classroom. Engaging learners in tasks provides a better context for the activation of learning processes than formal grammar teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 223).

C. Criterial Features of a Task

Ellis (2003) assumes that there are some criterial features for the task that capture all the definition mentioned above. These are:

1. Task is a work plan: A task includes a plan for learner activity.

2. A task involves a primary focus on meaning.

3. A task involves real-world processes of language use.

4. A task can involve any of the four language skills.

5. A task engages cognitive processes.

6. A task has a clearly defined outcome.

D. The Importance of Listening in Language Learning

Until quite recently listening comprehension has been neglected with regard to its place in second or foreign language teaching methodology and the development of techniques and materials for use in the classroom (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 69).

Celce-Murcia (2001) argues that listening is the center of language learning nowadays. To develop second language competence, an appropriate aural comprehension is necessary at all levels of instructions. Aural comprehension is the bases for development of oral language within the 'speech chain' of listening and speaking (Denis & Pinson, 1963, p. 1).

Celce-Murcia (2001) assumes that in particular, listening comprehension lessons are an instrument for teaching elements of grammatical structure and new vocabularies to be contextualized in within the body of communicative discourse.

In fact, listening is used more than any other single skill in normal daily life. On average, we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, five times more than we write (Rivers, 1981; Weaver, 1972).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

All participants participated in this study were 120 students. A total number of Iranian EFL students who were studying English at Safir institute in eight different classes in Kangavar were selected in this study. Some of the students were at high school level and some had just finished their high school and they were studying for the university entrance examination. All participants were female, and differed in terms of age. They range from 16 to 19 years old. None of them had ever lived in a foreign country or traveled to an English speaking country. The classes were conducted in the afternoon twice a week and 60 minutes a session.

Oxford Placement Test was administered at the beginning of the semester. Accordingly the number of participants reduced to 45 learners. Among selected participants, two classes i.e. 30 students (2 groups) were selected randomly as the experimental groups, while 15 participants (one group) were determined as the control group of the study. The experimental groups have task-based listening instruction in 12 sessions or about two months while the control group received traditional way of teaching listening comprehension, that is, they listen to the text and then answer the comprehension questions.

B. Instruments

Three instruments were utilized to collect the data in the present study: (1) An Oxford Placement Test (2) Interchange and Passages Placement Test as pre-test, and (3) the Parallel form of Interchange and Passages Placement Test as post-test. A description of each instrument along with its administration is explained in detail below.

The Oxford Placement Test measures a test taker's ability to communicate in English. It provides information about a person's language level. This test is comprised of 60-items. The test is reliable (consistently grading test takers at the right level) and valid (having a strong theoretical basis and having been through a rigorous test design, pretesting and piloting stage). . The reliability of the test was estimated by the researcher, and the reliability was 0.77

Interchange and Passages Objective Placement Test: The test of listening as pre-test and posttest for the study were extracted from "Interchange and Passages Objective Placement Test".

C. Procedures

In summary, the present study was a quantitative research and a quasi- experimental design, because the researcher selected intact classes randomly but he did not choose all the members randomly. After selecting the whole population (N=120), the Oxford Placement Test was administered. Based on the result of this test, participants whose scores were one standard deviation above or below the population mean were selected as target subjects for the study, then the participants (N=45) were divided into three groups. The number of participants for each group was 15 learners. Two groups were randomly assigned to different tasks. The first group was taught based on student as question master task and the other experimental group was taught based on

prediction task. The third group was selected as a control group of the study who received question and answer model of teaching (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 71). Afterward, all participants were given pre-test of listening comprehension. The test was extracted from Interchange / Passages Objective Placement Test. The next phase of the experiment started with some treatment sessions that included two different tasks to experimental groups. Prediction task to one group, student as question master task to another group, while the control group received traditional training i.e., they answer the comprehension questions after they listened to a text (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 71). Also, the teacher provided scaffolding until they became independent. After the treatment sessions came to an end, the parallel listening comprehension test (post-test) was given to the students in all four groups in order to see whether there is any significant difference between students' scores before and after treatment or not (pretest and posttest). Finally, the results of both pretest and posttest were compared for data analysis.

IV. RESULTS

This section outlines the entire technical and statistical procedures involved in the study. It describes all the steps taken by the researcher in the analysis of the relevant data and elaborates on the results. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics encompassed the means, standard deviations. Inferential statistics comprised the application of a one-way ANOVA to test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance.

A. Research questions

The present study tried to answer the questions raised about the effects of task types on listening comprehension.

Q1: Does a 'prediction task' have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?

Q2: Does a 'student as question master task' have any effect on improving Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension?

As mentioned above, 120 learners participated in this study. The participants were female studying English at Safir Institute in Kangavar. Some statistical analyses were run to prove the homogeneity of the participants:

Table 1.Mean of language Proficiency Test (Oxford Placement Test)

Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Range	Minimum	Maximum
35.2417	120	8.83746	36.00	19.00	55.00

All the data including mean, maximum score, minimum score, range, and so on were shown in Table 1.

B. One-way ANOVA in Pre-test

First of all it is worth noting that the one-way ANOVA is used to determine whether there are any significant differences between the means of three or more independent groups. Since there were three groups in the present study, the researcher used one-way ANOVA to compare the means of different groups.

Table 2. Descriptive data for three groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval for Mean Upper Bound	Minimum	Maximum
prediction	15	11.0667	1.57963	.40786	10.1919	11.9414	7.00	13.00
Question master	15	11.6667	1.71825	.44365	10.7151	12.6182	8.00	14.00
control	15	11.3333	2.76887	.71492	9.8000	12.8667	7.00	15.00
Total	45	11.3556	2.05775	.30675	10.7373	11.9738	7.00	15.00

Table 2 provides useful descriptive statistics of pretest for all groups that the researcher compared including the mean, the standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. As you can see the mean for prediction task group is 11.06. The standard deviation is 1.57. The minimum score is 7 and the maximum score is 13, so the range would be 6. In the second group i.e., student as question master group, the mean is 11.66. The standard deviation is 1. 71. The minimum score is 8 and the

maximum score is 14, and the range is 6. Finally, the mean for control group is 11.33. The standard deviation is 2.7. The minimum score is 7 and the maximum score is 15, so the range would be 8.

Table 3. Output of the ANOVA analysis for three groups

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.711	2	1.356	.310	.735
Within Groups	183.600	42	4.371		
Total	186.311	44			

Table 3 shows the output of the ANOVA analysis in pre-test and whether there are any significant differences between the means of three independent groups. Since you can see in this table the significance level is .735(p=.73) which is above 0.05, therefore, there are not statistically significant differences among groups. Therefore, the null hypotheses could not be rejected. The other data indicated in the table was the degree of freedom between groups (2) and within groups (42).

Table 4. Post Hoc Tests: Multiple Comparisons

	(I) tasks	(J) tasks	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	prediction	Question master	-.60000	.76345	.714	-2.4548	1.2548
		control	-.26667	.76345	.935	-2.1215	1.5881
	Question master	prediction	.60000	.76345	.714	-1.2548	2.4548
		control	.33333	.76345	.901	-1.5215	2.1881
	control	prediction	.26667	.76345	.935	-1.5881	2.1215
		Question master	-.33333	.76345	.901	-2.1881	1.5215

C. Reporting the output of the one-way ANOVA

There was not statistically significant differences between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA (F (2.42) = .31 . p= .73). A tukey post-hoc test revealed the mean differences between all groups were not significant. In other word, there were not significant differences between prediction task group and student as question master group (p = .71). There were not significant differences between prediction task group and control group (p =.93). There were not significant differences between student as question master group and control group (p = .90).

D. One way in post-test

Table 5.Descriptive Statistics of Post-test For all Tasks

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
prediction	15	14.8667	1.50555	.38873	14.0329	15.7004	12.00	17.00
question master	15	16.4667	1.12546	.29059	15.8434	17.0899	15.00	18.00
control	15	12.8000	1.85934	.48008	11.7703	13.8297	11.00	16.00
Total	45	14.7111	2.12798	.31722	14.0718	15.3504	11.00	18.00

Table 5 provides useful descriptive statistics for all groups. The data include the mean, the standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. As you can see the mean for prediction task group is 14.86. The standard deviation is 1.50. The minimum score is 12 and the maximum score is 17, so the range would be 5. In the second group i.e., student as question master group, the mean is 16.46. The standard deviation is 1. 12. The minimum score is 15 and the maximum score is 18, and the range is 3. Finally, the mean for control group is 12.80. The standard deviation is 1.85. The minimum score is 11 and the maximum score is 16, so the range would be 5. By a glance at above table, it can be concluded that the means of the groups who were received special treatment i.e., task-based instruction were better than the control group who did not take this kind of treatment.

E. Testing the Null Hypothesis

Following the descriptive statistics of this study, discussed thoroughly above, the hypotheses were put to confirm or reject the relationship between the variables. In order to test the null hypotheses, some steps were taken: To see if task-based instruction had significant effects on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners, one way ANOVA was run on posttest.

Table 7 shows the output of the ANOVA analysis

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	101.378	2	50.689	21.753	.000
Within Groups	97.867	42	2.330		
Total	199.244	44			

Table 8. Post Hoc Tests: Multiple Comparisons in post-test.

	(I) listening comprehension	(J) listening comprehension	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	prediction	question master	-1.60000*	.55739	.017	-2.9542	-.2458
		control	2.06667*	.55739	.002	.7125	3.4209
	question master	prediction	1.60000*	.55739	.017	.2458	2.9542
		control	3.66667*	.55739	.000	2.3125	5.0209
	control	prediction	-2.06667*	.55739	.002	-3.4209	-.7125
		question master	-3.66667*	.55739	.000	-5.0209	-2.3125

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 7 shows the output of the ANOVA analysis and whether there are any significant differences between the means of three independent groups. Since you can see in this table the significance level is .000 (p=.0) which is below 0.05, therefore, there are statistically significant differences between groups. Therefore, the null hypotheses could be rejected. The other data indicated in the table was the degree of freedom between groups (2) and within groups (42).

F. Reporting the output of the one-way ANOVA in Post-Test

There was statistically significant differences between groups as determined by one-way ANOVA (F (2.42) = 21.75 p= .00). A tukey post-hoc test revealed the mean differences between all groups were significant. In other word, there were statistically significant differences between prediction task group and student as question master group (p = .017). There were significant differences between prediction task group and control group (p =.002). There were significant differences between student as question master group and control group (p = .000).It can be concluded that there were statistically significant differences between groups. Therefore, null hypotheses would be rejected, i.e. there were differences between task-based instruction groups and control group.

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the effects of task-based instruction on listening comprehension improvement of Iranian EFL learners. The participants were 45 EFL learners studying English at Safir institute in Kangavar. They were divided into 2 experimental groups and one control group. For doing this study, parallel tests of listening comprehension were used as the pretest and posttest of this study.

The research questions addressed in the present study were whether task-based teaching can lead Iranian EFL learners to greater increase in L2 listening comprehension or not. Using pre-test and post test scores on listening comprehension test and one-way ANOVA were used to analyze the data obtained from this study. Results displayed an increase in students' performance in listening comprehension due to the effect of task-based instruction. The conclusion that may be made from the above statistics analysis is that the participants who were taught based on task generally tended to score higher in listening comprehension.

One of the most important things about these tasks is that they promote learners' confidence by providing them with plenty of opportunities to use language in the classroom without being constantly afraid of making any mistakes. Once they have stock of words they can begin to communicate. And once they begin to communicate, the teacher can help them shape their language so that it becomes more complex and more grammatical. So the more we try to control the language that learners produce, the more learners are likely to be concerned with form rather than meaning, and the less task-like the activity becomes.

Regarding to the first question i.e., "if the prediction task has any effect on listening comprehension improvement of Iranian EFL learners", the researcher found, that the task was very effective for a few reasons:

1. The most important feature of the prediction stage was that it involved meaning-focused language use. Learners used all language resources to enable them to work together to put together a satisfactory outcome.

2. The prediction task led into a listening activity which mirrored the way we listen in real life.

3. Another aspect of the task was that the outcome was open that is, at the end of the task the researcher encountered variety of outcomes.

4. It gave students a reason to engage with the listening text- they really wanted to figure it out for themselves and stayed very focused.

5. The researcher liked it because it allowed him to highlight and review certain forms without needing to get into lengthy explanation of grammar points.

6. The act of comparing their predicted stories with the "official version" provided confirmation of comprehension.

7. The above were achieved in a student-centered manner. The researcher did not have to spend much time explaining.

Regarding to the second question i.e., "if student as question master task has any effect on listening comprehension improvement of Iranian EFL learners", the researcher found, that the task was more effective than the prediction task for a few reasons: This is real personal involvement, with an accompanying increase in confidence and fluency. It was really surprised to see how dynamic the class was as learners started to ask and answer questions: from thoughtful to enthusiastic and laughing.

The researcher likes this task the most, since all students listened to the text for both the gist and to the details individually at home. The question master group prepared questions based on the listening text and the other group(s) prepared answers to the probable questions. When they came to the class the question master group put their questions together to make final lists while the other group(s) pools their ideas to answer the probable questions. This was a golden moment when the question and answer time began. It is exclusively a learner-centered activity.At this time, the researcher acted as a referee. He drew a table on the board and on one column he wrote the number of questions and in another column he wrote positive mark for each correct response and negative mark for each incorrect response. When the first question was asked the other students pool their ideas to decide on the best answer, then one member answer the question. There were a lot of interaction and fun. Sometimes students wanted to be quick in answering the questions' but they made mistakes and her classmates laughed. It promoted a sense of competition.

In brief, implementing aural task-based materials in the language classroom exposed EFL students to real-language use from the beginning of language study. Generally speaking, according to the obtained results, the listening-comprehension skill in EFL students tended to improve through exposure to task-based input. Specifically, the task types of "student as question master and prediction task" not only affected the listening comprehension of the participants and improved it but also the researcher assumes that these tasks correspond to advanced level of language proficiency and they would be suitable for all participants at that level.

REFERENCES

Brumfit, C. and K. Johnson (eds.). (1979). *The Communicative Approach to Language Teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Candlin, C. (1987). Towards task-based language learning. In C. Candlin and D. Murphy (eds).

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Howatt, A. (1984). .*A History of English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Krashen, S. and T. Terrell. (1983). *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom.* Oxford: Pergamon.

Long, M. and G. Crookes. (1992). Three approaches to task- based syllabus design'. *TESOL Quarterly* 26(1): 27-56.

Marianne Celce-Murcia. (2001). Teaching English as a second or foreign Language. Third Edition

Richards, C. R., and T. S. Rodgers, (1986). *Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis. New York:* Cambridge University Press.

Rivers, W. (1981). *Teaching foreign language skills.* 2d ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Van Ek, J. (1976). *The threshold level for Modern Language Learning at Schools*. London: Longman.

Weaver, C. (1972). *Human listening: Process and behavior.* New York: Bobbs-Merrill.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (1996). *A Framework for task-based learning.* Harlow: Longman.

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing task-based teaching.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wilkins, D. (1976). *Notional Syllabuses.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.