



Impact of Audio-viewing Materials on Iranian Upper-Intermediate EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

Listening comprehension serves as a precursor to speaking and thus it is essentially important in learning a second language. How listening comprehension of EFL learners can be ameliorated has long been an obsession for L2 teachers. This study intended to 1) examine whether the listening comprehension of Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners was significantly influenced by audio viewing materials, and 2) find out whether variables such as age and gender could affect the learners' listening abilities. To meet the objectives of the study, 40 L2 learners studying English at several language institutes in Shahreza were selected, and were included in the study after taking part in an OPT. The participants were then divided into two groups of equal size i.e. the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG). While the former was exposed to the treatment (i.e. audio viewing materials), learners in the latter listened without having access to the scripts. Scores obtained from pretest and posttest enabled the researcher to conduct independent-samples *t* test as well as multiple regression analysis, and come up with the following results: 1) While the level of listening comprehension of the two groups was roughly equal at the beginning of the study, the EG learners outperformed the CG learners on the listening comprehension posttest, which could be attributed to the treatment they were provided with (i.e. access to audio viewing materials), and 2) Multiple regression analysis revealed that the only independent variable which could exert significant influences on the learners' listening comprehension was their access to audio viewing materials, and that gender and age could not significantly affect the learners' listening comprehension scores. The study concludes with pedagogical implications for language teaching.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, Audio viewing materials, Gender, Age, EFL learners

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension plays a significant role in both daily communication and learning process. Yet, improving listening skills has not so far received the kind attention worthy of its importance in language instruction. On the other hand, there are several limitations in obtaining access to the suitable materials. Most notably, the shortage of exposure to real life and authentic situations for natural development of language, as argued by Krashen (1987) could be an important problem for ESL and EFL students. It is thus vital for EFL program designers to prepare students for successful listening in EFL contexts by incorporating authentic listening materials within the EFL courses. Iranian students who study in an EFL atmosphere, lacking the opportunities to gain thorough exposure. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the effects of audiovisual materials on listening comprehension, as well as knowledge of English pronunciation, stress and intonation in Iranian students.

Listening is a basic ability in the first and second language acquisition. It plays a vital role in learning English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL). In a language classroom, listening skills play an important role in the development of other language skills. Therefore, language instructors and students ought to pay attention to the listening ability. Nunan (2002) believed that views toward listening skill have been changed and today the significant role of listening in second language learning is confirmed. In addition, technology has a vital role in teaching; innovative tools and techniques provide teachers with various teaching sources, including video materials, to be enforced in EFL classrooms. To develop students' listening comprehension, video materials can be a learning alternative, since they benefit from dialogues between highly proficient English speakers. Such dialogues not only contribute to listening comprehension, but also enhance learners' pronunciation. Selected English TV series, movies, and advertisements could also increase student's motivation. According to Van Duzer (1998) students listen to relevant and interesting things that give them a high motivation and draws their attention. Therefore, a good selection of video materials can facilitate the learning process. Additionally, as Mocada (2006) stated, adequate video materials will promote integration of different language skills and bring variation to the class routine.

Since using audio-viewing materials in the classroom can positively influence students' language achievement, this study tries to explore whether audio viewing has any effect on the listening comprehension of Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners. This study also intended to stress the needs of the EFL learners in the technology-oriented era and uses the texts and audio-viewing materials related to today interests, needs, and concerns to improve their listening comprehension.

2. Literature Review

Among all language skills, listening is used the most frequently (Morley, 1999; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Winged (1953) found that female students spent 42% of their whole verbal communication time on listening, while 25% of it was spent on speaking, 15% on reading and 18% on writing. Barker, Edwards, Gaines, Gladney, and Holley (1980) confirmed Bird's perspective on the significance of listening and showed that 52.5% of student's whole verbal communication time was spent on listening, while 17.3%, 16.3% and 13.9% was spent on reading, speaking, and writing respectively.

As indicated by Devine (1982), listening is an essential means of approaching thoughts and data. Gilbert (1988) noticed that from kindergarten through high school, students were expected to listen 65-90% of the learning time. Wolvin and Coakley (1988) argued that inside or outside of classroom, listening expends a greater amount of day by day correspondence time than different types of verbal communication. Listening is a fundamental part of all levels of educational advancement for every student (Coakley & Wolvin, 1997; Feyten, 1991; Wing, 1986). It is the most frequently used language skill in a classroom (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1991; Vogely, 1998). Both teachers (Ferris & Tagg, 1996) and students (Ferris, 1998) recognize the significance of listening comprehension for success in academic settings. Various studies have shown that effective listening abilities are more important than reading skills, being more related to academic success (Coakley & Wolvin, 1997; Truesdale, 1990). On the other hand, Dunkel (1991) reported that foreign students' academic success in the United States and Canada depended more on reading skills than listening abilities, particularly for students of engineering, psychology, chemistry, and computer science. This resulted in listening to be less stressed than reading and writing in the classroom. Nevertheless, listening clearly assumes a critical role in lives of individuals. Listening is significantly important for students compared to other language skills in that it is employed as an essential medium of learning in all phases of instruction.

2.1 The Process of Listening Comprehension

Theoretically, listening comprehension is a dynamic process in which the listener consciously chooses parts of aural information, structure significance from sections, and associate what they hear with existing knowledge. Understanding is defined in cognitive psychology research as information processing. The directing structures in the comprehension process are schemata. A schema is "an information structure for representing the generic concepts stored in memory" Rumelhart (1980, p. 34). It can be a means of representing human knowledge about all concepts: those fundamental items, circumstances, and occasions, arrangements of occasions, activities and sequences of actions.

According to cognitive comprehension theory, a schema implies an abstract textual structure that listeners use to make sense of a given text. Linguistic and situational cues, as well as expectations about new information come to the help of listeners in recalling schemata. When a schema is recalled, it will act as a comprehension guide. If the incoming information matches the schema, a listener will succeed in comprehending the text; otherwise, either the information or the schema will be discarded or modified. Two fundamental modes of information processing are defined based on the concept of schema: bottom-up processing and top-down processing. These two can also work together to develop a third mode of processing, i.e. interactive processing. Thus, there are three types of information processing: bottom-up, top-down, and interactive (Byrnes, 1984).

Bottom-up processing is activated by new data. Phonemic units are decoded and connected to construct words, words are connected to construct phrases, phrases are connected to construct utterances, and utterances are connected to construct complete meaningful text. This type of processing is closely related to linguistic knowledge. Phonological, morphological, and lexical and syntactic knowledge are schemata that are hierarchically organized in a listener's mind. A chain of incoming sounds triggers such a hierarchy of schemata and thus, knowledge of words, syntax, and grammar come to play in a bottom-up fashion of processing. Understanding is an interactive process which involves a listener's previous knowledge and text meaning. Yet, "Efficient comprehension that associates the textual material with listener's brain does not only depend on one's linguistic knowledge" (Rubin, 1994, p. 210).

Top-down processing is employing background knowledge in deciphering the meaning of a message. As pointed out by Carrell and Eisterhold (1983), in top-down processing, general predictions are made based on higher level, general schemata, and then the input is searched for information that fits into these higher order schemata. In case of listening, the listener actively constructs (or reconstructs) the original meaning of the speaker by employing new input as clues. In the reconstruction process, the listener employs prior knowledge of the context and situation within which the listening occurs in order to understand listening practice content. "We must realize if the incoming information the listener hears is unfamiliar to him, it cannot evoke his schemata and he can only depend heavily on his linguistic knowledge in LC" (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1983 p. 557)

Interactive processing enhances comprehension by eliminating the disadvantages of the two other processing types. Complex and simultaneous processing of background knowledge, contextual information and linguistic information make comprehension easier. Conversely, if listeners are not familiar with the content of the listening material and are

not proficient enough, they can only rely on linguistic knowledge, especially lexical and syntactic knowledge, to make sense of the information.

Since in dealing with complex input it is required that a combination of parsed segments is kept in short term memory in the process of comprehension, and since this memory might already be loaded with un-encoded elements of the new input, this type of input may be especially difficult to grasp for a second language learner. Spreading activation is the process of making connections between existing knowledge and the new input meaning. In this process, connections are made between knowledge in long term memory and the new meanings in short term memory (Coakley & Wolvin, 1986). Listening comprehension in a second language (L2) consists of receiving, focusing on, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli. It has three parts: the listener who has background knowledge and linguistic knowledge and employs cognitive processes, the content of the aural input, and the interaction between these two (Coakley & Wolvin, 1986). Similarly, Fischer and Farris (1995) regarded listening comprehension as a process of actively forming mental representations of aural text with reference to prior knowledge and new information.

2.2 Listening Comprehension and CALL

Abundant potential language learning materials are available today; audiotapes, videotapes, CD-ROMs, DVDs, educational software, and last but not least, audio and video files downloadable from the Internet have all helped to build up a large body of learning materials for learners (Benson and Voller, 1997, as cited in Carter & Nunan, 2002). What is more important, however, is to be able to select the most appropriate input, create useful chunks of the selected material, and develop support material for learners' self-training.

The reaction of language teachers to this vast pool of materials was developing more structured activities and online exercises (Leloup & Ponterio, 2003). Electronic mail (email), the World Wide Web, and Multiple-user-domains Object Oriented (MOOs) are the most popular uses of the Internet for language teaching. The Internet is also a great help to autonomous learners interested in bolstering their listening comprehension. It provides various audio sources comparable to what is available in text. Regarding the role of computers in language teaching, Szendeffy (2005) argued that computers provide students and teachers with a better integration of materials than tape recorders or videocassettes. "Having examined the available sources on developing learners' listening skills in language classes, it is easier to understand why Internet audio has suddenly become popular now" (Kavaliauskienė, 2008). The significant role of technology is observable in that it improves both the quality and quantity of language learning - Technology increases Language Learning (TELL). "Computer technology can provide the student with the means to control his or her own learning, to construct meaning and to evaluate and monitor their own performance" (Smith 2004, p.1). Bruce (1993) claimed that computers are more learner-centered, i.e. they will put the control of learning more in the hands of the learner, and therefore, modify the nature of learning.

Teachers can also create a relaxed atmosphere for learning by modifying and adopting any CALL learning materials. They can adapt the learning process to learners' needs and levels of competence. CALL materials give learners the autonomy to identify and adopt the kind of strategy that would best suit their learning style, resulting in a facilitated learning process.

2.3 Empirical Studies about Listening Comprehension and CALL

According to Baker and Brown (1984), knowledge of cognition (i.e. knowing what) and regulation of cognition (i.e. knowing how) are the two types of metacognitive ability. The first one is concerned with the learners' understanding of what is going on, while the second one is related to what learners should do to listen effectively. Empirical studies have shown that the difference between skilled and unskilled L2 listeners lies in their use of metacognitive strategies (e.g., Bacon, 1992; Goh, 1998, 2000; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Vandergrift, 1998, 2003).

The first study conducted about listening strategies was by Murphy (1985), in which the listening strategies of skilled and less skilled learners were investigated through think-aloud protocol. Murphy showed that skilled learners used a larger set of different strategies, while less-skilled learners, focused too much on either the text or their personal knowledge, or they were too slow in handling the text information in the listening process. Despite this finding, Murphy could not categorize many of the strategies he had identified, since there was no adequately developed systematic taxonomy of language learning strategies at that time.

Chamot and O'Malley (1987) stated that individual learner differences, e.g. personal beliefs, learning experiences, etc. together with other situational factors e.g. nature of instruction, nature of tasks and target language, determine which strategies learners choose to use.

Henner Stanchina (1987) brought attention to the important roles that metacognitive strategies play in listening comprehension, and in particular the integral role of monitoring. She argued that utilizing syntactic, semantic, and schematic knowledge a matter of effective or ineffective strategy use. According to her, what makes some people proficient listeners is the ability to consciously and constantly transform understanding of the input by using background knowledge and hypothesizing, integrating new information with previous hypotheses, filling the gaps by making inferences, evaluating predictions, and revising hypotheses. Proficient listeners also can recognize failure and recover comprehension by activating appropriate knowledge.

In a study on high school learners of Spanish, Rubin (1988) investigated the effect of different types of listening strategy instruction on performance. She compared the performance of three experimental and two control groups. The results showed that some listening strategies can help learners cope with more difficult material.

Using think-aloud protocol, Chamot and Kupper (1989) investigated the differences between skilled and unskilled high school learners regarding employed listening strategies. They found that skilled learners at the intermediate level relied a great deal on strategies like note-taking, selective attention, self-evaluation, and elaboration (use of world knowledge).

O'Malley et al. (1989) used think-aloud protocol to study listening strategies used by intermediate level high school ESL learners in greater depth. The results showed that skilled listeners appeared to have a plan for what to pay attention to while listening, how to maintain attention, and how to recover attention if distracted. They also tended to approach the text by guessing meaning from context and relating what they heard to their schematic knowledge and personal experience. Less skilled listeners, however, were not able to regain attention after attention breakdown, and they tended to interpret what they heard on a word-by-word basis, making a few connections between new information and their personal experiences.

Erfani, Iranmehr and Davari (2011) conducted a study on the influence of visualization on reading comprehension. They hypothesized that if readers build mental pictures while reading, they will have a better understanding of text meaning. They concluded that making mental pictures is an effective strategy for learners to employ.

Mousavi and Iravani (2012) studied the impact of authentic versus non-authentic video materials on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. In their study, they observed that authentic video materials had significant effects on gaining higher scores in both listening comprehension and proficiency test. Study results emphasized the use of authentic listening materials in an EFL setting which could enhance listening comprehension. They also emphasized that to prepare learners with the real spoken language outside the classroom, instructors are advised to benefit from more authentic listening materials.

Pourhosein Gilakjani (2012) did a study about technology training. He emphasized that by integrating technology into the curriculum, teachers can access useful additional support, preparation, and guidance. However, they need to be trained to gain the necessary technical competence. Since CMC (Computer-Mediated Communication) – the use of computers as a means of communication – promotes active cooperative communication among L2 teachers and their trainers, it is very important to train teachers through communication practice, so that instructions can be delivered to teachers in CALL. CMC can be in different formats such as video chat or other long-distance teaching/learning formats.

Dehghani and Jowkar (2012) conducted a study. Their study is planned to facilitate the method of listening comprehension in EFL environments. Fifty-six Iranian university students were chosen for this study. They were randomly divided into control and experimental groups. The results showed that the experimental group performed considerably better than the control group. The provided video texts helped them in processing and comprehending aural input. Safarali and Hamidi (2012) did a study on the impact of videos containing speakers' gestures and facial clues on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. They concluded that speakers' gesture and facial clues had significantly affected EFL learners' listening comprehension.

3. Research Questions and Hypotheses

Regarding the nature of the problem as stated above and objectives of the study, the following questions were posed:

1. Do audio viewing materials make a significant impact on Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension?
2. Do factors like gender, age, and the students' access to audio viewing materials have any effect on improving EFL learners' listening skill?

Based on the research questions, the following hypotheses were constructed:

(H0)1: Using audio-viewing materials does not significantly affect the listening comprehension of Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners.

(H0)2: Using audio-viewing materials does not significantly affect Iranian Upper Intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension in terms of gender, age, and access to audio viewing materials.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

This study was conducted in English language centers of Shahrazad, Isfahan, Iran. The participants were at the upper intermediate level of EFL. They were divided into two groups: one experimental and one control group. The control and experimental groups consisted of 20 learners each. Table 1 shows details of the participants. The same books were used for both groups, and the course book was Top Notch 1 (A & B).

Table 1. Details of the participants

| | Experimental group | Control group |
|--------|--------------------|---------------|
| Female | 12 | 9 |
| Male | 8 | 11 |
| Total | 20 | 20 |

4.2 Instruments and Materials

The following instruments and materials were used during the experiment and at the time of collecting data:

4.2.1 Oxford Placement Test

The primary instrument used in this study was Oxford Placement Test (OPT). It was employed to determine participants' English level before training period. It was also used to homogenize the participants.

4.2.2 Audio viewing devices

Videos from Top Notch 1 (A & B) by Ascher and Soslow (2007) were used as audio viewing materials in this study which include 30 multiple-choice items.

4.2.3 Pre/posttests

The test which was used in this study is pretest/posttest of listening comprehension including 7 true/false items and 6 fill in the blanks questions. It was a test of listening to determine the learners' level of listening comprehension before and after a two month training period. Pretest and posttest were designed based on videos from Top Notch 1 (A & B) (Ascher and Soslow, 2007). They consisted of 30 multiple-choice items. The reliability coefficients of both pretest and posttest were estimated using Cronbach's alpha ($r=.826$ and $r=.736$ respectively). In this test, participants in the experimental group were requested to choose the best answer from the options according to the statements they heard in the recording. Participants in the control group were asked to work only with traditional books without any audio-visual devices.

4.2.4 Top Notch book

Top Notch 1 (A & B) book was used in English classes participating in this research. The book consists of 10 units and each unit has audio file. A DVD is also attached to the book.

4.3 Procedure

First of all, the researcher asked for the consent of English language centers of Shahreza for their agreements. After agreements were granted, preparing the materials was started. Materials include course books, DVDs, and Audio-visual devices. Then, the research instruments were prepared. The instruments were OPT, pretest and posttests.

A pretest was given to all students three days before the training course began. Consequently, lessons were started. The treatment lasted for 2 months, 4 hours per week. Upon completion of the two-month course, the posttest was administered to all the learners. Table 2 shows the data gathering procedure.

Table 2. Data collection Procedure

| Experimental Group | Control Group |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| Pretest (list. comp.) | Pretest (list. comp.) |
| Pretest (OPT) | Pretest (OPT) |
| Treatment (2 months.) | |
| Posttest (list. comp.) | Posttest (list. comp.) |

The research population of this study was Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners of English at Shahreza English language institutes. Two weeks before conducting the study, the OPT was administered to a total of 80 participants, and based on the results, 40 upper intermediate level participants who scored between 60 to 75 were chosen as the sample to be studied.

Then, seven institutes were selected with 12 classes consisting of 4-8 learners with the same atmosphere and educational conditions. At the onset of the study, a pretest was developed by the researcher, and the participants sat for that test. This test was in the form of multiple choice and contained series of easy to difficult items. In order to choose the correct answers they had to listen to the audio files or watch the DVDs and then answer to the questions.

The classes were held two days a week for two months. The participants in both groups received the treatment at least for 10 sessions, one hour each. Learners in the experimental group were allowed to use audio viewing devices during these two months, while learners in the control group practiced through the ordinary methods of language learning without audio viewing materials. Both the experimental and control groups participated in weekly upper intermediate classes. In every session, they learnt new lessons of the book which were taught by the teacher. The posttest was administered at the end of the course.

5. Results and Discussion

The first research question of this study was "Do audio viewing materials make a significant impact on Iranian upper intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension?" To determine whether audio viewing materials affect EFL

learners' listening comprehension, the pretest scores of EG and CG learners were compared via an independent-samples *t* test. Tables below show the related statistics.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Comparing EG and CG Scores in Pretest and Posttest

| | Groups | <i>N</i> | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|----------|--------|----------|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Pretest | EG | 20 | 5.30 | 1.59 | .35 |
| | CG | 20 | 5.45 | 3.48 | .77 |
| Posttest | EG | 20 | 9.90 | 2.17 | .48 |
| | CG | 20 | 6.75 | 3.36 | .75 |

Table 4. A Comparison of EG and CG Scores in Pretest and Posttest based on the Results of Independent-Samples *t* Test

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|---|-------------|----------|-----------|------------------------|
| | | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i> |
| Pretest | Equal variances assumed | 27.73 | .000 | -.17 | 38 | .86 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | -.17 | 26.60 | .86 |
| Posttest | Equal variances assumed | 9.37 | .004 | 3.51 | 38 | .001 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 3.51 | 32.48 | .001 |

According to the results, there was not a statistically significant difference (p value > 0.05) between pretest scores of EG ($M = 5.30$, $SD = 1.59$) and CG ($M = 5.45$, $SD = 3.48$), $t(38) = -.17$, $p = .86$ (two-tailed). However, comparing the two groups' posttest scores, it was found that the p value was smaller than the alpha level ($.000 < .05$), and thus the difference between the EG ($M = 9.90$, $SD = 2.17$) and CG ($M = 6.75$, $SD = 3.36$) was statistically significant. This leads us to the conclusion that the instruction program provided for the EG was more effective than the one the CG was exposed to.

The logic behind such finding can be related to the nature of audio viewing materials. Listening comprehension, especially when it is accompanied with visual materials, has theoretically been viewed as a dynamic procedure in which people focus on choosing parts of aural/visual information, structure significance from sections, and associate what they hear/see with existing knowledge. Understanding is identified in cognitive psychology research as information processing. Comprehension is realized through schema-directed processes (Rumelhart (1980). Schemata are like packages that contain our knowledge about world concepts: fundamental items, circumstances, and occasions, arrangements of occasions, activities and sequences of actions.

Another logical reason behind such effectiveness could be attributed to the complexity of input materials that may especially be difficult to grasp, since they require a combination of parsed segments in the process of comprehension, creating extra load on short term memory which might already be replete with raw new input.

The second research question was "Do factors like gender, age, and the students' access to audio viewing materials have any effect on improving EFL learners' listening skill?" To find out the possible effects of gender, age, and students' access to audio viewing materials on EFL learners' listening comprehension, multiple regression analysis was conducted.

Table 5. A Summary of the multiple regression model specifications

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-----|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .52 | .27 | .21 | 2.86 |

R Square value in Table 5 shows how much of the variance in listening comprehension is explained by each of the three independent variables under investigation. The value here is .27, which means that gender, age, and learners' access to audio viewing materials explained 27 percent of the variance in listening comprehension scores. Table 6 shows the statistical significance of this result.

Table 6. Statistical Significance of the Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

| | Sum of Squares | <i>df</i> | Mean Square | <i>F</i> | <i>Sig.</i> |
|------------|----------------|-----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Regression | 109.70 | 3 | 36.56 | 4.46 | .009 |
| Residual | 295.06 | 36 | 8.19 | | |
| Total | 404.77 | 39 | | | |

In Table 6, *Sig.* equaled .009, which was smaller than the alpha level ($p < 0.05$), denoting a statistical significance. In other words, gender, age, and learners' access to audio viewing materials could significantly predict listening comprehension. Now it is high time we looked at the Table 7. to see which of the independent variables contributed more to the prediction of listening comprehension.

Table 7. Predictive Power of Gender, Age, and Learners' Access to Audio Viewing Materials for Listening Comprehension

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | <i>Sig.</i> | Confidence Interval for B | | Correlations | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|--------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|----------|-------------|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|---------|------|-------------------------|------|
| | <i>B</i> | <i>Std. Error</i> | Beta | <i>T</i> | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound | Zero-order | Partial | Part | Tolerance | VIF |
| Gender | 1.07 | 1.18 | .16 | .90 | .37 | -1.33 | 3.47 | .13 | .14 | .12 | .59 | 1.68 |
| Age | -.06 | 1.25 | -.009 | -.04 | .96 | -2.60 | 2.48 | -.009 | -.008 | -.07 | .57 | 1.75 |
| Access | -3.19 | .93 | -.50 | -3.4 | .002 | -5.08 | -1.30 | -.49 | -.49 | -.48 | .94 | 1.05 |

Values under standardized coefficients indicate the predictive power of each gender, age, and learners' access to audio viewing materials. The largest value, irrespective of the negative signs, is belongs to learners' access to audio viewing materials (-.50). Access to audio viewing materials thus made the strongest unique contribution to explaining listening comprehension. The relevant *Beta* value for gender was the second highest value out there (.16), indicating that it made less of a contribution. Age had the least predictive value so far as listening comprehension was concerned (-.009).

For each of these variables, their related values under *Sig.* show whether the variable is making a statistically significant contribution to the equation. Among the three independent variables under investigation in this study, learners' access to audio viewing materials was the only independent variable which had a *Sig.* value less than the significance level ($.002 < .05$); This shows that among gender, age, and learners' access to audio viewing materials, just success to audio viewing materials could significantly predict the learners' listening comprehension and the other two independent variables failed to have a significant influence on listening comprehension.

The reason for such prediction might lie in the fact that learners in general, and L2 learners in particular appreciate the use of modern technology, especially when it comes to the application of authentic materials, no matter which age or gender they belong to. Mayer (2003) investigated the role of visual materials in second language learning among EFL learners that used pictorial stimuli corresponding with text, and discovered that using images will facilitate second language acquisition. According to De Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor (2005), students' positive attitudes towards learning affects target language learning. Mutar (2009) argued that using power points facilitate the teachers' job in giving dynamic lectures interesting to the learners.

The findings of this study are in line with those of a majority of previous ones. For instance, Feyten's (1991) conducted a study on ninety students of French and Spanish, of whom 36 were French learners and 54 were Spanish learners. All of the students had enrolled in the summer intensive program at the University of Tennessee. The program included aspects of proficiency-oriented instruction with an emphasis on oral skills. In the pretest, participants were given the video version of WBLT, which they were required to respond to at the beginning of the program. At the end of the program, the subjects were given a Foreign Language Test consisting of an oral interview, a listening comprehension component, and written grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension items. The qualitative data of the pretest was quantified so that the pretest and posttest data were compared. The relationship between listening ability and foreign language proficiency was determined through simple bivariate correlations. The results revealed significant correlations between listening ability and overall FL proficiency.

A number of second language teaching approaches have so far been proposed that emphasize the use of authentic materials. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the popular teaching approaches in which practical use of language in everyday communication, and thus the use of authentic materials, is extremely emphasized. Teachers are encouraged to use different audio-visual materials, including a wide range of photographs and videos, in the CLT classes to create a motivating and authentic class atmosphere (Freeman, 2000). Direct method is another approach that emphasizes the use of various visual materials like pictures and posters in the classroom. Since in these two systems teachers are not allowed to use L1 to explain things, visual materials are the major means of instruction (Freeman, 2000). Silent method believes that learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates instead of remembering and repeating what is to be learned. In this method learning takes place by working with physical objects and solving

problems about concepts to be learned. Use of visual materials facilitates both teaching and learning. Teachers use sound-color chart and color rod to show target language concepts (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

6. Conclusion

Listening abilities play an important role in learning a foreign language. In order to enhance communication skills in a foreign language, it is required that students have access to sufficient input to improve their listening comprehension. Abundant potential language learning materials are available today; audiotapes, videotapes, CD-ROMs, DVDs, educational software, and last but not least, audio and video files downloadable from the Internet have all helped to buildup a large body of learning materials for learners (Benson and Voller, 1997, as cited in Carter & Nunan, 2002). What is more important, however, is the ability to select the most appropriate input, create useful chunks of the selected material, and develop support material for learners' self-training.

The study was in fact an attempt to investigate the impact of audiovisual material on listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners. An attempt was also made to determine if factors like gender, age, and the students' access to audio viewing materials have any impact on EFL learners' listening skill. As mentioned previously, the findings show that the application of audio viewing materials has significant impact on listening comprehension of EFL learners. It was also found that the only independent variable which could exert significant influences on the learners' listening comprehension was their access to audio viewing materials, and that gender and age could not significantly affect the learners' listening comprehension scores.

The findings of this study can provide L2 teachers with guidelines using audio viewing materials in EFL classes to better improve listening comprehension ability of L2 learners. Using audiovisual material has become an integral part of language learning process in L2 classes, and even of services offered by authorities (Swank, 2011). Similarly for Ameh (2012), there is no doubt in the significant role of audio-visuals in assisting students to learn at their own pace, making the learning process meaningful, stimulating and stress-free. Therefore, L2 learners form the second group that can immensely take advantage of such materials in their language development.

The findings are also beneficial for materials developers and syllabus designers to consider the serious inclusion of audio visual materials in the textbooks for all age and gender groups.

The following areas of research can be recommended to those who are interested in pursuing the same line of research: The same variables can be investigated with learners of different proficiency levels so that the results are compared. Further studies can be carried out to investigate the mentioned variables in relation to every language skill individually. Other researchers can also apply computerized form of audio visual devices in relation to language skills and subskills. Gender and age were two individual differences utilized in this study, there are some other individual factors like field dependent/independent which could be investigated in relation to the effectiveness of audio viewing materials.

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