

On the Impact of Intensive/ Reactive Performance on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Ability

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Abstract

Listening comprehension plays a significant role in developing foreign language learning and it can be considered as a useful skill to gain sufficient comprehensible input. The current research sought to explore the effectiveness of using reactive/performance versus intensive one on Iranian intermediate English learners' listening comprehension ability. It was carried out at Kish English Language Institute in Tehran among 60 intermediate female learners with the age range of 10-19 through a quasi-experimental research design. The participants were assigned into two groups. First, the pretest was administered to each group. The test was taken from the book 'Four Corners'. Then, one group was exposed to intensive performance and the other group received reactive performance. After ten sessions, a post-test that was the parallel form of the pretest, was administered to the both groups. Finally, the data were analyzed using an independent and paired samplest-tests. Results showed that teaching listening based on intensive performance had a significant effect on learners' listening comprehension. The findings may have some useful implications for language teachers.

Keywords: cross-linguistic and cross-cultural variation, epistemic modality markers, Persian/English, research articles

1. Introduction

Understanding the role of listening comprehension in developing foreign language learning signifies the importance of teaching methods and activities to improve this skill in language classes. According to Tyagi (2013), as a language modality it involves an active involvement of an individual. Listening involves a sender, a message, and a receiver. It is the psychological process of receiving, attending to constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.

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Krashen, Terrell, Ehrman, and Herzog (1984) claim that acquisition takes place only when students absorb enough comprehensible input. The same claim was proposed by Block (1994) who confirmed that listening is vital in language classrooms because it provides input for learners. As an input skill, listening plays a crucial role in students' language development. People acquire language by understanding the linguistic information they hear. Thus, language acquisition is achieved mainly through receiving understandable input and listening ability is a critical component in achieving understandable language input (Krashen, 1985). In addition, Hamouda (2013) believes that without understanding input at the right level, any kind of learning simply cannot occur. Therefore, listening is a fundamental language skill, and as such, it merits a critical priority among the four skill areas for language students.

Helping students develop listening proficiency has always been a particularly difficult aspect of foreign language teaching, not least because listening involves a number of complex, interrelated cognitive processes which must occur simultaneously within fractions of a second for a message to be interpreted correctly. Comprehension at a minimum relies on correctly assigning meaning to sounds, interpreting supra-segmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation to understand the speaker's intended meaning, and use of background, situational, and linguistic knowledge. Since listening is the principle source of foreign language input for most language learners, development of listening as a skill and as a channel for language input is of critical importance in foreign language instruction (Rost, 2001). When it comes to the classroom practice, this emphasizes the roles of effective listening activities that are carried out in language classes and teachers use them to enable learners to infer the intended meaning. In this respect, Brown (1994) categorized classroom listening performance into six types as follows:

(I) Reactive performance: requires the teacher to enable learners to listen to the surface structure of an utterance and to repeat what they have heard.

(II) Intensive performance: emphasizes components of spoken language or listeners' bottom-up level such as phonemes, sounds, words, intonation, discourse markers and grammatical structures.

(III) Responsive performance: focuses on comprehending short stretches of spoken discourse. The teacher asks learners to respond to what they hear from the teacher's speaking immediately.

(IV) Selective performance requires the teacher to enable learners to scan or distract longer stretches of spoken discourse in order to understand their general and global meaning.

(V) Extensive performance is to develop learners' listening at the top-down level; learners are required to understand the spoken language of, e.g. lengthy lectures and conversation generally.

(VI) Interactive performance points out the relationship between listening and speaking; learners are required to participate in discussion and debates, etc.

In this research, the researcher has investigated the effect of reactive versus intensive performance on Iranian English learners' listening comprehension ability to see which one is more influential in promoting the learners' listening comprehension ability. In selecting the design of the listening tasks for the two groups, the form of the participants' responses was considered and the goal was to see which techniques encouraged better development of listening comprehension competence. The main justification for selecting reactive listening performance was that since reactive listening requires little meaningful processing, it might be more advantageous for young language learners. In other words, it was hypothesized that reactive performance plays a significant role in creating interactive class through group or individual drills and therefore it might be effective listening performance for youngsters to assign literal meaning to what they listen. In contrast, the main reason for choosing intensive listening performance was that through intensive technique, teachers might help language learners to use the input they received as the basis for developing their understanding of the meaning. In fact, the researcher aimed to investigate the possible differences between the effects of listening techniques that involve bottom up exercises (i.e.: intensive listening performance) and simple techniques that involve little or no interaction (i.e.: reactive listening performance).

Concerning the intensive performance, it consists of activities that emphasize eliciting, or helping the learner to notice a new language feature or listen to a specific piece of information. It involves listening to shorter and rather difficult listening texts. Intensive performance requires students to understand the meaning of each discourse and, ultimately, to understand every sentence and word. Generally, in intensive performance students have to listen to a text several times or divide the text into paragraphs and sentences to understand each one; or by doing dictation word by word. The goal is for students to understand every sentence (Khazaei,2012).

Kao (2006) in his study examined the influence of intensive versus extensive activities on students' listening comprehension. Instructional materials included taped materials or materials on disk. The results of the study indicated that students' listening skill did improve through instruction of using intensive activities after a whole school year. In another study done by Choi and Johnson (2010), the intensive-based instruction was compared with extensive one on learners' motivation and retention. An online context-based lesson was used. They concluded that extensive-based instruction had more impact on learners' motivation and retention of materials.

Gruba (2012) carried out a research to see the effect of extensive versus intensive activities on listening comprehension ability. In his view, using intensive activities in teaching of listening comprehension skill made it more challenging. Khazaei (2012) conducted a research in which he investigated the effectiveness of intensive and extensive listening teaching methods for EFL learners with respect to their different proficiency level. The results of the analyses showed that intensive technique was more effective for lower level students but less effective for higher-level students, compared to extensive technique. On the other hand, extensive technique showed better results for higher proficiency level students, and not much effective for lower level ones.

Onoda (2012) investigated the effects of Quick Listens and Extensive Listening techniques on EFL learners' listening skill and their self-confidence development. He employed a pedagogical approach that mainly focused on meaning-focused input and fluency development aspects. The participants were asked to listen to an easy and interesting story and were required to listen to or watch self-selected materials for 30 minutes on a daily basis. The results indicated that the approach was successful in developing language learners' listening skills and self-confidence.

Although many researches have been done on listening methods and techniques to enhance listening comprehension, little or no research has been done to investigate a clear comparison between the effects of intensive performance versus reactive one on listening comprehension ability that is the aim of the current research. This study will therefore address the following research question:

RQ: Does intensive performance versus reactive one significantly affects Iranian intermediate English learners' listening comprehension ability?

To answer the research question, the following null hypothesis was formulated:

H0: Intensive performance versus reactive one does not have any statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate English learners' listening comprehension ability.

2. Method

This study followed aquasi-experimental design. The participants were selected from Kish Language Institute in Tehran through administering Oxford placement Test. Next, they were randomly divided into two groups. The first group worked on intensive techniques and the second group practiced reactive listening techniques. Before introducing the specific treatments to the two groups, a pre-test of listening comprehension was given to the both groups to measure their initial listening comprehension ability. After accomplishing the determined treatments to the two groups, a post-test of listening comprehension was administered at the end of the study to inspect the possible differences between and within groups.

2.1 Participants

In the process of choosing the participants for the study, first, an OPT was administered to seventy-one female students who were English learners at Kish Language Institute in Tehran, Iran. Based on OPT test direction (n= 60) intermediate students who scored (31+) in grammar and vocabulary and (8+) in reading part of the test were selected as the main sample for the present study. Then, the subjects were randomly divided into two equal groups (N=30) including the intensive and the reactive groups. All of the participants were at intermediate level. Their range of age was between 10 -19 years old with the mean age of 14.

2.2 Research Instrument

There were four types of research materials in the present study. They are as follow:

a) Placement test

To ascertain the homogeneity of the two groups, a placement test was administrated to establish the participants' homogeneity prior to the study. The modified form of OPT in which the writing section had been removed was administered to make sure the participants were homogenous in terms of their general foreign language proficiency. The modified OPT test contained 50 multiple-choice questions that assessed students' knowledge of key grammar and vocabulary and a reading text with 10 graded comprehension questions.

b) Pre-test and post-test

A pre-test was administrated to both groups to determine the learners' prior knowledge of listening. It was based on the book 'Four Corners' written by Jack C. Richard and David Bohlke(1991) and consisted of 40 multiple-choice items. The total

score was 40 points distributed among the items. Before administrating it, a pilot study was made with 15 learners who were randomly chosen from another institute. The reliability of the pre-test was estimated through KR-20 method that came to 0.84, which was considered acceptable reliability index. The time allocated for the test was 70 minutes. After the treatment, a post- test was administered to both groups to compare the effects of the specified treatments. The listening tests that were used for pretest and post were the same but the items were rearranged for the post- test to eliminate the pretesting effect. The reliability of the post-test was also estimated prior to its administration and equalled to 0.84, which was considered acceptable reliability value. Three instructors validated the test content. Considering the test instructions, the relevance of questions to content, its suitability to the research goals and objectives, the number and arrangement of questions, and the suitability of the time assigned to the test, the team was asked to validate the content of the test.

2.3 Material for the treatment of the study

The material for the treatment of this study included listening passages together with their related audio CD. Listening texts were selected from the book 'Four Corners' series published by the Cambridge University Press Staff.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

The first step in conducting the research was the administration of OPT as the homogenizing tool. It was administered to 60 intermediate EFL learners. After analyzing the results, subjects were randomly assigned into two groups. Prior to the study, a pre-test was administrated to assess the participants' listening comprehension ability. Intensive group received listening instruction through intensive performance for short length discourses and the listening activities were directed in a way to develop the learners' global comprehension through employing bottom- up skills. The teacher played the audio track and the learners listened. They were asked to do transcription of the texts and predict the meaning of words or phrases from the context. They also received instruction on how to use grammatical structures to reach comprehension. The main goal was to assist them to obtain specified understanding of some segments of the listening texts. In comparison, in the reactive group, the programmed listening activities required little meaningful processing and the researcher simply played the same audio CD or presented some texts as model and the learners just repeated what they heard without trying to generate the meaning. After 10 sessions, the posttest was administrated.

2.5 Data Analysis

The numerical data were analyzed through SPSS version 23, using an independent samples T-test on post- test scores of the study and paired samples T-test on pretest and post-test scores of each group. The assumption of t- tests, namely, normality was examined before running the main statistical by computing the Skewness and kurtosis values and obtaining trimmed means. The results of the analyses in Table 1, indicates the normality of the distributions.

Table 1: *Descriptive statistics for the pre and post-test scores*

1.1	Groups		Statistic	Std. Error	
Intensive group	Pre-test scores	Mean	22.13	.70	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		20.69
			Upper Bound		23.57
		5% Trimmed Mean	21.87		
		Skewness	1.19		.42
		Kurtosis	.30		.83
	Post-test scores	Mean	26.40	.73	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		24.90
			Upper Bound		27.89
		5% Trimmed Mean	26.16		
		Skewness	1.25		.42
		Kurtosis	.63		.83
Reactive group	Pre-test scores	Mean	23.76	.88	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		21.95
			Upper Bound		25.57
		5% Trimmed Mean	23.62		
		Skewness	.63		.42
		Kurtosis	-1.18		.83
	Post-test scores	Mean	23.96	.88	
		95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound		22.16
			Upper Bound		25.77
		5% Trimmed Mean	23.83		
		Skewness	.58		.42
		Kurtosis	-1.27		.83

In Table 1, the descriptive statistics for the pre and post-tests were presented. The 5% Trimmed Mean was computed. Then, the original means and the new trimmed means were compared to find the possible differences for the two tests. Since the trimmed means and the original mean indices were not very different for both groups, the values were not too different from the remaining distribution and thus normality was established. Furthermore, the Skewness and Kurtosis values reported in Table 1 were all within the range of ± 2 , confirming that the distributions were normal. After establishing the normality assumption, the t-test was run to investigate if there were

statistically significant differences in the mean scores of the listening comprehension test for the two groups in the pre-test and the post-test. Table 2, displays the results of the descriptive statistics for the pre and post- tests.

Table 2: *Group statistics for the pre and post - test scores of the listening comprehension test*

	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test scores	Intensive group	30	22.1333	3.85722	.70423
	Reactive group	30	23.7667	4.84721	.88497
Post-test scores	Intensive group	30	26.4000	4.00517	.73124
	Reactive group	30	23.9667	4.83153	.88211

For the listening comprehension tests that were administered at the beginning of the study, the mean scores for the reactive group and intensive group were 23.76 ($M_{\text{reactive group}}$) and 22.13 ($M_{\text{intensive group}}$), respectively. Concerning the post-test of listening comprehension, the mean scores for the reactive group and intensive group came to 23.96 ($M_{\text{reactive group}}$) and 26.40 ($M_{\text{intensive group}}$), respectively. Figure 1, depicts the comparison between the means of the two groups on the pre and post- tests of listening comprehension.

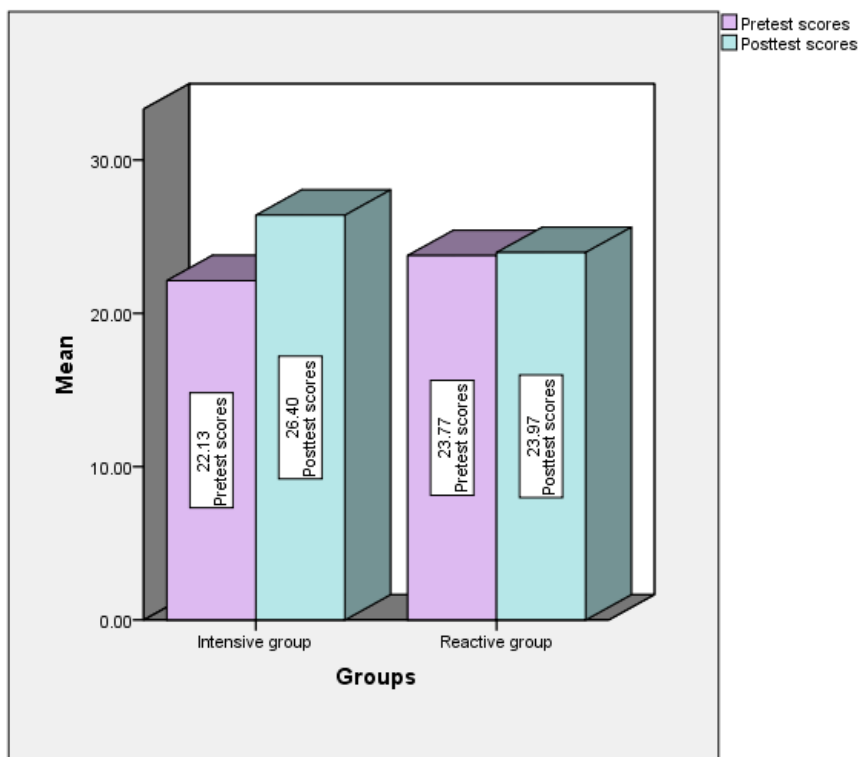


Figure 1. The comparison between the means of the two groups on pre and post- test

As illustrated in Figure 1, the means of the both groups in the pre-test of listening were nearly the same. However, there was some improvement in the listening comprehension of both intensive group and reactive groups at the end of the study. In order to investigate the participants' possible progress within groups, paired samples t-tests were also run, which showed the subjects' progress in pre-test to the post-test that are shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Paired samples statistics for the pre and post-test of listening comprehension for the two groups

Groups		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Intensive group	Pre-test scores	22.13	30	3.85	.70
	Post-test scores	26.40	30	4.00	.73
Reactive group	Pre-test scores	23.76	30	4.84	.88
	Post-test scores	23.96	30	4.83	.88

The mean score of the reactive group for the listening test improved from ($M=23.76$) in pre- test to ($M=23.96$) in post- test; that for the intensive group progressed from ($M= 22.13$) in pre- test to ($M= 26.40$) in post- test. In order to find out if these differences between pre and post-test scores of listening comprehensions were statistically significant, paired samples t- tests were run to the results of the pre and the post-test of listening comprehension for the two groups. The results are represented in Table 4.

Table 4: Paired samples test for the pre and posttest of listening comprehension for the two groups

Groups		Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	SD	Lower	Upper			
Intensive group	Pre-test scores -	-4.26	1.33	-4.76	-3.76	-17.47	29	.00
	Post-test scores							
Reactive group	Pre-test scores -	-.20	.66	-.44	.04	-1.64	29	.11
	Post-test scores							

The mean difference between pre and post-tests for the reactive group was (.20) for the listening comprehension test. In contrast, the mean difference between pre and post-tests for the intensive group in listening test amounted to (4.26). Based on the results of paired samples t-tests, the improvement in terms of listening comprehension was statistically significant simply for the intensive group ($P \leq .05$). In other words, the intensive group made a noticeably higher advance as compared to the reactive group in the post-test of listening comprehension. This implied that the intensive group outperformed the reactive group in post-test of listening comprehension and the

progress within the group for the intensive group was higher than that of the reactive group. This suggested that type of listening techniques and performances (intensive versus reactive) had statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension. Besides, intensive listening technique had been more effective and successful in developing EFL learners' listening comprehension compared to reactive techniques. Following the paired samples t- test, an independent-samples t-test was run to compare the mean scores, on the continuous variable namely "post-test of listening comprehension" for the two different groups of participants (reactive group and intensive groups). The independent-samples t-test explored whether there was a statistically significant difference in the mean scores for the two groups in pre and post-tests.

Table 5: *Independent samples test for the two groups on pre and post-test of listening comprehension*

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	5.37	.02	-1.44	58	.15	-1.63	-3.89	.63
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.44	55.21	.15	-1.63	-3.89	.63
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	4.32	.04	2.12	58	.03	2.43	.13	4.72
	Equal variances not assumed			2.12	56.07	.03	2.43	.13	4.72

The independent samples t- test presented the results of the Levene's test for equality of variances. Since the Sig., value for the Levene's test was smaller than (.05) for both the pre and post-test scores, the second line in the table, which referred to "Equal variances not assumed," was used for both pre and post-tests. For the pre-test scores of listening comprehension, the findings showed that there was no significant difference

in the scores for the *reactive group* ($M = 23.76$, $SD = 4.84$) and the *intensive group* ($M = 22.13$, $SD = 3.85$; $t(58) = 1.44$, $p = .15$, two-tailed) at the beginning of the study. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 1.63, 95% CI: -3.89 to .63) was small (Eta squared = .032). In other words, the two groups were approximately at the same level of proficiency in terms of their listening comprehension in the administered test at the beginning of the study.

For the post-tests scores of listening comprehension, since the Sig. (2-tailed) value was less than .05, there was a significant difference in the mean scores on the post-test scores for each of the two groups. In this study, the Sig. (2-tailed) value was (.03) for the listening comprehension test. As this value was smaller than the required cut-off of (.05), it could be concluded that there were statistically significant differences in the mean of the post-test of listening comprehension for the *reactive group and intensive group* at the end of the study. Based on Table 5, ($t_{\text{listening comprehension}}(58) = 2.12$, $p = .03$, two-tailed), the magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 2.43, 95% CI: .13 to 4.72) was small (Eta squared = .0719). The guidelines (proposed by Cohen 1988, pp. 284–7) for interpreting this value are .1 = small effect, .3 = medium effect, .5 = large effect. Expressed as a percentage, 7.19 percent of the variance in post-test scores of listening comprehension could be explained by types of instruction. The intensive group outperformed the reactive group. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected implying that type of listening techniques and performances (intensive versus reactive) had statistically significant effect on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of the analysis as shown in Tables 4 and 5, intensive performance had significant effect on students' listening comprehension ability. Accordingly, the findings of the present study are in line with the studies conducted by Kao (2006), Gruba (2012), and Ismaili (2013) about the effectiveness of exposure to intensive activities on improving different language skills. The findings of the study support part of the findings of Rost (2001) who claimed that students at all levels of language proficiency might benefit from intensive listening activities. The participants of the present study were at intermediate level of foreign language proficiency and appreciated practicing intensive listening activities. According to the results of the current study as shown in Table 3, the participants in the reactive group also developed their mean score in the post-test that might be related to the positive effects of practicing reactive listening activities. It could be inferred that reactive performance is also effective technique in language learning process, however, not as much as

intensive performance. Therefore, the results are in agreement with the studies done by Taniguchi (2000), Weir and Milanovic (2003), Cervantes and Gainer (1992), Ushiro, (2003), Chang and Read (2006), Chaudron (1983), and Rouhi, Nabavi, and Mohebbi (2014) in which they indicated a significant effect of the repetition on language learning process.

Reactive performance was the simple listening activity that required little meaningful processing and the learners were not successful in generating the meaning; it nevertheless may be a legitimate, even though a minor, aspect of an interactive, communicative classroom. This role of listener, i.e., as merely a tape recorder, is very limited because the listener does not generate meaning. However, reactive performance might be a useful technique to improve EFL learners' pronunciation. Nevertheless, intensive techniques whose purpose is to focus on components, a specified concept, or elements such as intonation, stress, a contraction, a grammatical structure, etc. is a kind of meaningful activity. Intensive performance usually takes place in classroom or language laboratories, and typically occurs when teachers are present to guide students through any listening difficulties and direct them to areas of interest.

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