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**Using Online Task-Based Learning to Improve
EFL Listening Skills of Secondary Stage
Students in Nigeria**

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Journal of The Faculty of Education- Mansoura University
No. 121 – Jan . 2022

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Abstract:

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of using online task-based learning to improve EFL listening skills of secondary school students in Nigeria. The study used a quasi-experimental design to examine the effect of the online task-based learning on students EFL listening skills. The participants were fifty (50) Nigerian students selected randomly to participate in the study. Intact classes of twenty-five (25) students were used for the experimental and control groups. A self-developed instrument entitled "EFL Listening Skills Test" was administered to determine the baseline and endline performance of the two groups in the pre-post administration of the treatment. The data were analysed using an independent sample t-test. The findings revealed that using online task-based learning has improved students EFL listening skills. It was recommended that the government should ensure adequate provision of teaching and learning facilities such as ICT-integrated classrooms, learner-friendly spaces, premium subscriptions to LMS suites, and adequate provision of networks and internet in schools to foster smooth interactions between the teachers and the students. Teachers' capacity should be adequately built on the effect utilization of the online resources, and their capacity on task-based learning should be improved.

Keywords: Online Task-Based Learning, EFL Listening Skills & Task-Based Listening & Nigeria

Introduction

It is indisputable that teaching and learning of the English language have received wide recognition and acceptance worldwide. English is an international language spoken in many countries as a native, second, or foreign language. It is taught in schools in almost every country. In Nigeria, English is the official language of communication in all correspondence by the government and it is used as a lingua franca in some regions in the country (Richard, 2019). Though Nigeria is a multilingual nation with over 500 native languages spoken locally, English is used as a medium of instruction in classrooms. Furthermore, it has become the language of knowledge, learning, working, business, research, communication, and justice in the whole world.

Historically, foreign language teaching started with the practice developed during the early centuries of teaching Latin and Greek in England and Europe (Dimitrios (2019). Subsequently, language teaching began to emerge as a discipline and profession, and it came into its own as a profession in the 20th century (McLelland & Smith (2020). The idea of "methods" and "approach" to teaching languages was a big part of this change, and teachers and applied linguists spent most of the 20th century looking for better ways to teach languages (Renau, 2016).

In ELT today, listening skills received a major concerns of language teachers because they are the central issues in communicative language teaching. These skills and their teaching approaches have undergone a significant shift from how they were perceived in the past to how they are presently seen in the most recent years (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). In the 70s, listening skills were usually meant to be the ability to stay attentive, repeat what the teacher said, recite a memorized dialogue, or respond to a mechanical drill. In conceptualizing listening, contemporary researchers went beyond staying attentive to grab a message or the ability to repeat or recite a text, but an ability to receive, comprehend, and even go beyond that to speculate on the unsaid part of a text or spoken message.

Based on the researcher's observations of classroom practices, there is a significant undervaluing of listening ability even though it is standard practice for language teachers to provide skill-specific sessions. When there is a time constraint, listening sessions are frequently shortened. Rarely are students assessed on their listening abilities, and as a result, the problems of many poor listeners go undiagnosed. So, it is very important to focus on these skills when teaching students how to communicate and listen well.

Listening is the skill of understanding spoken language. It is an essential skill present in most activities carried out throughout one's life (Willis & Willis, 2019). It is a complex process due to its dual psychological and social nature; it is a psychological phenomenon on a cognitive level inside people's heads and a social phenomenon that develops interactively between people and the environment surrounding them. Listening is considered a complex process that needs to be understood to teach it and, subsequently, evaluate it before integrating it with phonological aspects and with the skill of speaking. (Ansari, 2012).

Despite the importance of listening skills, the researcher observes that secondary school students in Nigeria face challenges and difficulties in their in these skills. The difficulties seem to be associated with the methods that language teachers use so often in classrooms. Most often, the methods

teachers employ are not very suitable; they are traditional methods that have been in use for centuries. Constant employment of such methods, and subsequently, attitudinal resistance to change demonstrated by teachers, seemed to have compounded the students' difficulties. Fortunately, several teaching-learning approaches, models, techniques, and strategies have emerged because of the rapid growth of technology that has cut across all spheres of human life. One of these methods is Online Task-Based Learning (OTBL).

Online Task-Based Learning (OTBL) emerged with the core premise that learning should be based on doing some hands-on experiments and activities online rather than just listening to lessons. Learning by doing is the fundamental focal point in this method, and the more a person learns, the longer he/she retains (Ellis, 2018). Online Task-Based Language Learning is a second language teaching method informed by the latest research findings on second language acquisition. It is an approach in which the preparation of learning resources and instruction sessions is based on the completion of an online task. In online task-based learning, the language content is defined by what learners need to complete as an activity. The tasks can reflect real-world situations because they are closely tied to the learners' actual needs. It can be highly inspiring and beneficial for students. For example, the goal of a lesson or unit is to help students do something like make a reservation, plan a trip, or hold a meeting.

Hence, the present study aimed at examining the use of online task-based learning to improve the EFL listening skills of secondary stage students in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Based on the review of the literature, results of the pilot study and experience of the researcher, the problem of this study is that Nigerian secondary stage students face numerous challenges in listening subskills such as understanding the accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension. These challenges may lead to their outright poor performance in English. Therefore, the researcher proposed the use of online TBLL to help students improve their EFL listening.

Purpose of the Study

This research attempted to achieve the following objectives:

1. Identify the EFL listening skills necessary for secondary stage students in Nigeria

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2. Examine the effectiveness of Online Task-Based Learning in improving EFL listening skills of secondary stage students in Nigeria

Hypotheses of the Study

The following hypotheses were tested

1. There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the control and experimental group in EFL listening skills test in favour of the experimental group
2. There is statistically significant difference between the experimental group's pre-post administration of the EFL listening skills test in favour of the post-administration.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this research would be useful to language the teachers, future researchers, language policymakers, Federal and State governments as well.

1. Teachers would benefit from the findings of the research as it helps them improve their pedagogical practice in language teaching. It also helps them improve their teaching by shaping their teaching styles into student-friendly ones during the class session.
2. Future researchers benefit from the findings of this research as it serves as reference material and a source of secondary data collection when conducting similar research. The suggestions for further research in this research would serve as an eye-opener and a road map for future researchers in getting tips on uncovered areas and gaps left by this research work to build up the gap and promote the scientific inquiry of the teaching profession.
3. Language policymakers would benefit from the findings of this research because it helps them in policy review and the development of better language curriculum content for effective language teaching and learning.
4. The findings of this study will assist federal and state governments in determining the best course of action to implement language policy in schools for the overall improvement of L2 learning and reclaiming the quality and standards lost in schools.

Delimitations of the Study

1. Total number of fifty (50) students were selected to participate in the study. The participants comprised twenty-five (25) experimental group and twenty-five (25) control group.

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2. Listening skills: the study focused on the listening sub-skills such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and listening comprehension.
 3. Online Task-Based Learning: Face-to-Face classroom interaction and combination of online platforms were used to deliver lessons to control and treatment groups for instance, Google Classroom and Google Meets

Review of Literature and the Related Studies

Listening is an important skill in language teaching, as it allows us to internalize linguistic information. Different scholars have provided varying opinions about the concept of listening, with Richard (2019) suggesting that it is an interactive social process involving two sets of activities: hearing the utterances of a speaker and responding to the topic of discussion. Jannah (2015) opined that listening is a creative skill that involves hearing sounds, organizing, comprehending, and exploring the structural and phonological elements of the utterance to arrive at the implicature of the speech or perceived meaning driven by the utterance. Relatively, listening is viewed on the cognitive and social perspectives, with listening being a psychological phenomenon that occurs in people's heads and a social phenomenon that develops through the interaction of humans and their environment (Ansari, 2012). The key to effective communication is attentive listening, as without it, messages are easily misinterpreted and the sender of the message can become frustrated or annoyed.

Recent studies have shown that 45% of time is spent on listening, compared to 30% on speaking, 16% on reading, and 9% on writing (Kazi, 2013). Listening is essential for language acquisition because it provides the required input, and learners cannot acquire anything without the ability to comprehend the specific input. Listening comprehension is a highly integrative skill that plays a crucial role in language acquisition, and awareness and the development of appropriate listening comprehension strategies can assist language learners in reaping the benefits of their language input (Putri, 2018). The listening process consists of six stages as stated by Ford (2022): hearing, attention, comprehension, recall, evaluation, and response. Hearing is the physiological reaction and perception of acoustic pressure resulting from the stimulation of the ear's sensory receptors by sound waves, while attention is the brain's selective perception of stimuli. Understanding involves analyzing the meaning of symbols, while remembering involves storing the message in memory. Evaluating involves weighing evidence, separating facts from opinion, and determining the

presence or absence of bias or prejudice in a message. Finally, responding involves providing verbal and nonverbal feedback to complete the process.

Moreover, Gulam (2020) regarded the listening as skill that involves accurate receiving of information and interpretation of communications. Jannah (2015), however, viewed listening as creative skill that encompasses hearing, organizing, comprehending, and exploring the structural and phonological elements of a speech.

Listening Sub-Skills

Listening is an interpretive process that involves identifying and understanding what the speaker is saying through understanding their accent, pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and grasping their meaning (Namaziandost, Imani, Sharafi, & Banari, 2020). Sub-skills of listening include discriminating between sounds, recognising words, identifying stressed words and grouping of words, connecting linguistic cues to paralinguistic cues, using background knowledge and context to predict and then to confirm meaning, recalling important words, topics, and ideas, giving appropriate feedback to the speaker, and reforming what the speaker has said. Successful listening involves an integration of these component skills, not the individual skills themselves.

Listening Strategies

Listening strategies are a deliberate plan that helps people understand and remember what they have heard (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). They can be classified into four main types: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social. Cognitive strategies are important for listening comprehension, while metacognitive strategies help learners observe and regulate their mental processing, identify comprehension failures, and connect world knowledge to listening content. Affective strategies are concerned with managing negative and positive emotions, while social strategies refer to the learning through daily social interactions (Bao and Guan, 2019).

Listening Activities

Teachers can incorporate activities to help develop students listening skills. Examples include jigsaw listening, song learning, dictogloss, film clip, questions, and which photo. Jigsaw listening involves half the class watching one talk and the other half watching a different talk on the same topic. Song learning involves watching a video of people performing a song and learning the words using pictures and mime. Dictogloss involves taking notes and reconstructing the text. Questions involve counting the number of

words heard and asking the learner to answer them. Which photo involves displaying six photos and reading out a sentence to describe one of them.

Teachers can use activities to enhance students' listening skills, such as listening and drawing a story, listening dialogues, spelling messenger, and role play. Listening dialogues can be done individually or in small groups on larger paper. Spelling Messenger can be done in teams of three, with the first team to complete the word correct winning a point. Role Play can be done as a pair, a trio, or a quartet, with the teacher choosing a scenario related to the current lesson.

Assessing Listening Comprehension

Assessment is an important tool for language teaching and learning, and the consideration of testing and assessing listening ability parallels that of assessing reading. However, the assessment of listening skills is indirect, as listening is rarely practised in isolation and the listener's response to what is heard is a reliable way to assess how much has been comprehended. A review of the recent literature on listening test and evaluation reveals a significant divergence in views about the process that is rooted in different theoretical assumptions of how to derive meaning from a string of language signs and of those elements that considered crucial for achieving comprehension (Abejehu, 2016). According to Haile (2020) the Discrete-Point Approach and Integrative Approach are two approaches to listening assessment that were popular in the 1960s and 1970s, respectively. Discrete Point was based on two beliefs: it was important to isolate one element of language from a continuous stream of speech, and spoken language is the same as written language.

Integrative Approach was based on the belief that the whole of language is greater than the sum of its parts. Common question types in these approaches were dictation and cloze. Communicative Approach was developed due to the Communicative Language Teaching movement and requires the listener to comprehend the message and use it in context. Teachers can use divergent methods to test students listening ability, such as multiple-choice questions, short answer items, gap filling, partial dictation, and yes/no items. Multiple-choice questions consist of two parts: a stem that defines the question or problem, and alternatives or possible responses that include a key, which is the best solution to the question, and a number of distractors.

Short answer items require the examinee to respond with a succinct answer, while gap filling requires test-takers to complete a sentence by

supplying the missing word. Spelling should not be a requirement, but it can cause problems with scoring if the answer is more than a single word.

Challenges of Listening Comprehension

The development of listening ability has received only a slight emphasis in language instruction (Solak & Erdem, 2016), but research suggests the need for language experiences that give opportunities for listening comprehension. Teaching listening aims to help the learner cope with listening in real life, but it has taken many years to give it the importance it deserves (Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian & Nimehchisalem, 2015). Teaching EFL listening skills is challenging for teachers and challenging for students, especially in a foreign language context. To teach listening skills, as stated by Ghaderpanahi (2012), the teacher should state the difficulties and provide controlled listening exercises to help learners distinguish sounds and isolate significant content and informational items for concentration. Questions that require application or inference from the listening exercise information are best used at later stages or more advanced students.

Task-Based Listening

A task-based approach to listening is built on a series of tasks. Listening tasks can be one-way or two-way. In a one-way task, all input comes from an outside source (like a videotape) to the learner, and the learner is responsible for doing something with the input (such as writing down keywords and formulating main ideas).

In a two-way task, some input comes from outside, usually from a partner, and the learner must process that information, then produce comprehensible output to a partner to complete a collaborative task. Both kinds of tasks are helpful in communicatively oriented classrooms because they focus on interactive speaking and listening (Gu, 2018).

For planning purposes, listening tasks can be divided into "pre-listening," "while-listening," and "post-listening" phases:

Pre-listening

Frequently, effective listening tasks involve an explicit "pre-listening" step, which the learner performs prior to hearing the primary input to increase readiness. This step is intended to activate what the learner already knows in order to provide a "advance arrangement" that will assist the learner in anticipating ideas and "pre-structuring" information (Farrokhi & Modarres). The pre-listening phase may involve explicit pre-teaching of vocabulary, grammatical or rhetorical structures, specific pronunciations of phrases, or upcoming concepts.

While-listening

When the student begins to listen to the input, there must be an expectation of immediate action. Rost (2016) asserts the following "while listening" tasks:

- taking guided notes
- completing a picture or schematic diagram or table
- composing questions — any concrete activity the student engages in while listening to demonstrate ongoing monitoring of meaning

This stage of the listening task is typically the most challenging for the teacher to prepare, as it requires the creation of a task requiring minimal reading or writing.

Post-listening

The "post-listening" stage occurs a few moments after the actual act of listening to the text. This is likely an essential component of listening instruction because it allows the student to construct mental representations, develop short-term L2 memory, and increase motivation for repeat listening.

According to Rost (2016), post-listening tasks may include additional reading, writing, speaking, and interaction, such as comparing notes, negotiating a summary with a partner, and formulating responses or questions regarding what was just heard. The entire cycle of pre-listening, during-listening, and post-listening tasks may require 15 minutes for each short extract heard by the students. It is crucial that the cycle can be repeated so that a second and third listening can occur. This repetition of while-listening and post-listening tasks, with some variation, gives students the opportunity to try out new approaches to comprehension.

Methodology

The Quasi-experiment design was used to examine the effect of using online task-based learning to improve EFL listening skills of secondary stage students in Nigeria. Fifty participants were selected from two sets of year II senior secondary classes. Both experimental and control groups consisted of intact classes of twenty-five (25) students. A self-developed instrument titled "EFL Listening Skills Test" was administered to determine the baseline and endline performance of the two groups prior to and after treatment administration. The data were analysed with a t-test for independent samples.

Results and Discussions

The results were compared using an independent t-test to determine if any changes were statistically significant between the two groups. And the results were presented as in the following hypotheses.

Results of the first hypothesis stated that:

“There is a statistically significant difference at the 0.05 level between the mean score of the control and experimental group in EFL listening skills test in favour of the experimental group”

In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher used t-test (see table 1)

Table 1: Comparing the control and experimental group in EFL listening skills test

		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Listening Skills Post-test	Equal variances assumed	3.157	.082	14.570	48	.000
	Equal variances not assumed			13.149	24.896	.000

Table 1 presents the independent t-test results of the students listening skills post-test. The results showed a significant difference in students performance at 0.01 level of significance. Therefore, it is confirmed that OTBL has significant effect on students EFL listening skill in favour of the experimental group.

Results of the Second Hypothesis

“There is Statistically Significant Difference between the Experimental Group’s Pre-Post Administration of EFL Listening Skills Test in Favour of the Post-Administration”

In order to test this hypothesis, the researcher used independent t-test (see table 2)

Table 2 :Experimental Group’s Pre-Post Administration of EFL Listening Skills Test

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	
Phonemic Knowledge (Pretest)	1.448	.235	1.928	48	.060	1.649	.855
			2.077	39.677	.044	1.649	.794
Vocabulary (Pretest)	.030	.863	-.864	48	.392	-1.729	2.000
			-.854	31.410	.399	-1.729	2.024
Listening Comprehension (Pretest)	6.988	.011	-1.121	48	.268	-1.950	1.739
			-1.303	46.437	.199	-1.950	1.497

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	
Grammar (Pretest)	.053	.819	-.753	48	.455	-1.000	1.328
			-.749	31.933	.460	-1.000	1.336
Phonemic Knowledge (Posttest)	.006	.937	12.569	48	.000	9.193	.731
			12.447	31.579	.000	9.193	.739
Vocabulary (Posttest)	14.375	.000	6.487	48	.000	7.430	1.145
			5.377	20.683	.000	7.430	1.382
Listening Comprehension (Posttest)	2.089	.155	6.651	48	.000	5.722	.860
			5.968	24.564	.000	5.722	.959
Grammar (Posttest)	14.818	.000	9.334	48	.000	7.184	.770
			7.551	19.738	.000	7.184	.951

The table 2 presented the independent t-test analysis and the results of the test on the individual components of listening skills. Both the pre-test and post-test results of the different subskills were provided in order to compare the performance levels of the treatment group. In the pretest, the effect size in phonemic awareness was at the 0.06 level of significance; vocabulary was at the 0.3 level; listening comprehension was at the 0.2 level; and grammar was at the 0.4 level. All of these are significantly greater than the 0.05 level of significance. As a result, it can be concluded that there is not a substantial difference in the performance of the two groups in the pretest. The outcome of the post-test, on the other hand, demonstrated a statistically significant effect at the level of 0.01 significance which was less than 0.05. Thus, affirming statistically significant difference between the experimental group's pre-post-administration of the EFL listening skills in favour of the post-administration.

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study can be summarized as follows:

- The experimental outperformed the control group in the post-test. Hence confirming the effect of online task-based learning on the EFL listening skills.
- The experimental group's performance has improved significantly in EFL listening skills in the post-administration of the treatment.

Discussions

The results of the study showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores obtained by the control group and those obtained by the experimental group on the EFL listening skills test, with the experimental group achieving a higher score overall. This provided more evidence that students' EFL listening abilities increase when they participate in online task-based learning.

The findings were consistent with a number of other empirical research that were carried out. For example, Santhosh and Keenakshi (2017) discovered that the listening abilities of students increased after participating in a variety of TBL classroom activities. Their findings favoured the experimental group; as a result of the spontaneous application of task activities, the experimental group members participated more actively in class. It is also consistent with the findings of Akbulut (2014), who provided evidence that TBLT has positive affects not only on the listening abilities of students but also on the atmosphere of the classroom. This is something that is in line with the findings of Akbulut (2014).

This may not be unconnected to the fact that the utilisation of OTBL involves some listening activities that enhance students' learning; the hands-on activities that are engaged in the TBL inspire students and provide them the opportunity to learn by doing. In addition to this, the students benefit greatly from participating in teleconferences, turning in assignments online, and receiving comments on their work.

Conclusion

The findings of the research established empirical evidence that using Online Task-Based Learning improves secondary school students' EFL listening skills. The findings concurred with several previous studies undertaken in language teaching and learning.

Recommendations

Government should provide an optimum environment for EFL teachers and students, including ICT-integrated classrooms, learner-friendly spaces, premium subscriptions of LMS suites, and adequate provision of networks and internet. Task-Based Learning should be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum, teachers' capacity should be built on the effect utilization of online resources, and school management should organize interactive sessions to share experiences and challenges.

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