**The Effect of Using Animations on the Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners’ Listening and Comprehension Skill**

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**Abstract**

This research aimed to examine the effects of using English animation on EFL learners’ listening ability. Iranian learners often seek ways to improve their English. One rich source of language input available are animation movies and other multimedia as the source of authentic language input which are effective in increasing language learners’ motivation. Course books and CD‘s offered in English classes are found to be artificial. In fact, the psychological aspects of using animation as teaching materials have been proven by many researchers. Learners lacking in confidence, however, are reluctant to use this resource. The study was conducted on two groups: an experimental and a control group taught conventionally. The study was carried out at the Danesh Language Institute of Dezful- Iran in the year 2015. The participants were 28 intermediate learners, aged 14-18. The results show that there is a significant differences between experimental and control group of students. The study concluded that animation as a kind of multimedia attracts students’ attention, present language in a more natural way that found in course-books which help students understanding and improve their learning skills.

**Key words:** animation, Iranian intermediate EFL learners, listening, comprehension skill.

1. **Introduction**

According to Sarah, N., & Patricia, G. (2009) this old statement is true that “a picture is worth a thousand Words”. The picture and sound of film has the power to seize attention and thinking in a way that word doesn’t. The media especially movies and animations are the authentic source of information in the world today. Moreover, they are the enjoyable source of entertainment and language acquisition. Nowadays, more than 90% of children view TV programs routinely (Christakis, 2009). Some surveys stated that children and young adults ranging from 8 to18 years old spend about 7:38 hours a day using entertainment media (Rideout, Roberts, & Foehr, 2010). On this ground, media have become a significant part of children and young adults’ daily routine. The media has the capacity to affect our beliefs, change our opinions and behavior, and even build some of the most basic human actions we perform everyday (Matsunaga, 2010). For this reason, many scholars prefer to watch the movie as a source to the listening. Audio-visual multimedia as animations can effect on learners’’ motivation for improving their language skills to integrate with the target culture. According to Wu (2002), the goals of learning through movies are to strengthen listening, speaking and interpretation skills and understanding foreign people cultures, behaviors, values, believes and fears. They also have found that animations catch the learners’ interest and it can positively affect their motivation to learn (Kusumarasdyati, 2004). ESL learners have the advantage of living in the target culture, where they receive that daily language input of everyday life. EFL learners, on the other hand, do not get such rich input. Our EFL learners in Iran usually do not get Krashen's famous i + 1, input that is just little more advanced than their comfort level; so their listening is not challenged.  Teachers often hear the following question, in particular from higher level students: "What can I do to improve my English?"  While we may have specific suggestions for specific learners, the usual answer is "Do as much practice as possible."  The problem is, since we are in an EFL situation, there are not always enough native speakers available with whom learners can practice outside of educational environment. There is another source of authentic English available for listening in our living rooms every day. Unfortunately, many of our learners are so sure they will not understand anything that they refuse even to try.  Clearly, learners need training in changing their attitude and in learning strategies to build their confidence in listening to authentic English. However, there still are teachers who are doubtful to bring films into the EFL classrooms because they are uncertain about the educational efficiency of viewing films in class (Li, 2000). The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of media on education and to analyze the effect of using multimedia on development of the students’ learning and comprehension skill. On this ground the study’s question is shaped as: Does the watching animation have an effect on the Iranian intermediate EFL learners’ listening and comprehension skill?

**2. Listening skill**

There are four skills (listening, writing, speaking and reading) that are essential in the learning process of acquiring a foreign language. Therefore, several theoreticians that support the use of strategies to facilitate the practice of the four skills will be mentioned. However, this project was focused mainly on the listening skill, through the implementation of instructional video material. While watching a video, the person is exposed to both audio and visual inputs; for that reason, this project is based on videos to develop listening skills. Listening is obviously a necessary skill when communicating with others, but due to lack of real opportunities to listen to and communicate with native speakers; it is the teachers’ duty to provide other learning situations to improve this skill. Traditional ways of listening to and repeating textbook CDs or recordings may not be interesting or realistic examples of communication. Teachers must look to other tools that are enjoyable to students such as listening to music and watching movies and TV. Watching carefully chosen scenes and clips from English media can provide students with the opportunity to become engaged in both a visual and audio representation of real life situations with the natural vocabulary, phrases, slang, and intonation used by native speakers. As students become interested in the story and characters of what they are watching, their motivation to learn English may increase.

As scenes from English movies and TV series are readily found internationally on internet, it was the aim of the researcher to investigate a way to enhance her students’ listening skills in the English Conversation situation.

1. **Why animation?**

Many of the special characteristics of a good source of language are often not found in the standard textbook. Therefore, using media produced by and for native speakers can provide authentic examples of natural speech and can be used to augment English language lessons. Not only can media provide real life examples of communication, it has been well documented that audio-visuals appeal to multiple learning styles. Cartoons are generally fun for everyone to watch and tend to be more experiential in their application. It is to give a lesson more impact. They can be used to help learners perceive familiar situations or objects in a different way. Visual information in the form of cartoons is usually processed by the right brain which is the holistic, creative, artistic side. On the other hand, the spoken word engages the left side of the listeners’ brain. In contrast, the left brain is analytical, recognizes and interprets words, performs calculations and so on. No matter how interesting and persuasive, for example, a lecture is, after awhile, the learners will feel bored of the same manner of instruction. However, by using cartoons, we attract the visual, as well as the auditory senses of learners and give our teaching the additional effectiveness. In addition, cartoons are also considered as excellent teaching tools because they not only add humor to a topic but also illustrate the idea in a memorable way. Indeed, cartoons make learning an enjoyable and, more importantly, memorable experience because the activities in the teaching and learning process using cartoons interesting and interactive for the learners. This model is based upon three primary assumptions (Mayer, 2001):

1. Visual and auditory experiences/information is processed through separate and distinct information processing “channels.”

2. Each information processing channel is limited in its ability to process experience/information.

3. Processing experience/information in channels is an active cognitive process designed to construct coherent mental representations.

Further, this model is activated through five steps: “(a) selecting relevant words for processing in verbal working memory, (b) selecting relevant images for processing in visual working memory, (c) organization selected words into a verbal mental model, (d) organizing selected images into a visual mental model, and (e) integrating verbal and visual representations as well as prior knowledge” (Mayer, 2001).

1. **Participants**

The participants in this study were 28 male English learners aged from 14 to 18. Their level of proficiency is intermediate. They were divided into two groups, namely experimental and control. Each group consisted of 14 learners. A listening pre-test was administered to measure their listening ability. The participants in the experimental group enjoyed the treatment in which they watched an English animation. The learners in control group were taught by traditional books and audio CDs. At the end of the study, all subjects took the listening post-test. The study took place over two week. The discussions of the findings are presented according to the research questions of the study. The study was carried out at the Danesh Language Institute of Dezful- Iran in the year 2015.

1. **Method**

This study is primarily concerned in improving the quality of the process of teaching and learning, through the use of media, particularly using animation in classroom. For the purposes of this study the controlled and experimental groups were used. A class of 14 students was subject to the experiment and the remaining 14 students served as a control group. Variables were: Independent variable: The use of animations in teaching listening skills. Dependent variables: improving of listening and comprehension skill through using animations.

Research Instruments: 2 units of lesson were planned for the instruction. Two Episodes of English language animation” The Simpsons” were shown to learners. Each video was about 25 minutes in length. The test was used as a pre-test and post-test to study the progress of students’ learning achievement before and after they studied listening through animation.

1. **Procedures**

This study was conducted in four phases. First the most appropriate English movie title with its English subtitle was selected as the material of this study. Second, the processes of administering the pre-and post-tests were done. The details and analysis were done at the final phase.

* 1. Choosing an Appropriate Movie Title

After research through websites and books related to movies and education, it was decided to select an authentic animation appropriate for language teaching and learning. “The Simpsons” seems to be an appropriate choice because it uses an authentic accent and despite being a cartoon, The Simpsonsprovides adequate cultural content and hence easily satisfies our needs.

* 1. Administration of Pre-test listening items

At first, a pre-test of listening including forty English words extracted from the IELTs test were distributed among learners and the learners were asked to fill in blank the answer in their sheets. Questions and answers were provided in English and all the words which were extracted from animation were covered in the treatment phase.

* 1. Showing the Movie for the Treatment Group

The treatment group (experimental group) of this study consisted of 14 participants. All of the participants of treatment groups watched the movie together in their classrooms. The participant of the control groups were taught in a traditional way. The processes of treatment were repeated for two sessions.

* 1. Taking a Post-test at the Final Stage

A post-test consisting of the same words (as in the pre-test phase) was also administered to the participants in both control and treatment groups at the end of the research.

1. **Design of the study**

The research method used in the current study has been an experimental study with the pretest – posttest control group. In other words, both groups received pre-test ( $T\_{1}$) to be homogenized as for their listening ability. After that, the experimental group received treatment (shown as X) while the control group received no treatment. Finally, both groups took a post-test$(T\_{2}$) to find their listening comprehension. The findings reviewed in this study showed significant differences between experimental and control group of students on listening skills using animation as a teaching material. Table 1 shows design of the study.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Pre- test | Treatment | Post- test |
| Was given to both groups | Experimental group (animation)Control group (traditional teaching) | Was given to both groups |

**Table1**: design of the study

The study conducted in Danesh- English institute and a laptop and an LCD projector were obtainable for the treatment in the lab. The open software KM Player, a media performer, was used to play movies. To keep the research trustworthy, the students were not aware about the purpose of the research till they finished the post- tests and they were not permitted to use their dictionaries in exam.

1. **Results**

As the result of descriptive statistics in Table 2 indicates, the mean scores of post-test groups was more than pre-test groups.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Pre- test | Number | mean | SD |
| ex. group | 14 | 20.41 | 3.67 |
| co. group | 14 | 21.81 | 2.57 |

**Table 2**: pre- test table

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Post- test | number | mean | SD |
| ex. group | 14 | 26.41 | 4.06 |
| co. group | 14 | 23.95 | 3.35 |

**Table 3**: post- test table

With comparison between two tables, it can be concluded that the learning achievement of students’ post-test is higher than the pre-test. The students’ English listening comprehension ability increased significantly after learning with the videos. The results gathered from the analyses revealed the answer for the research question of this study that learners who had watched English animations in classrooms had performed better in the listening tests and their scores increased significantly.

1. **Conclusion and discussion**

Various types of audiovisual programs such as cartoons, movies, songs, and documentaries have proved to be effective in increasing the motivation of the language learners. It is also believed that these types of programs are great sources of authentic language input. However, some of these materials may not include the necessary or enough language input to contribute to language proficiency development. the analysis of the cartoons viewed by the language learners indicates that they feature the following modifications: (1) the cartoons contain features that effectively capture the viewer-learner's attention, (2) they present a strong picture-word interconnection, which corresponds with the 'here and now' principle of 'modified' registers, (3) the dialogue of the cartoons is characterized by sentences that are simple and complete, (4) the dialogue contains very few disfluencies, (5) repetition is used frequently, and (6) the rate of speech is relatively low in some cartoons. These adjustments are used in modified speech styles to make the input more comprehensible for the learner (Bahrani T. 2014)

To sum up, this study also found that the class was more attentive and the students were more interested in following the lesson carefully. This might also be because the atmosphere was more relaxed and therefore more conducive to learning. The students were more encouraged and motivated to learn from video than to follow activities in a textbook. The pictures and gestures can support their understanding of the video’s content, and guide them to guess and interpret the meaning of the message conveyed by the speaker even without the support of the audio. The selection of the video content should be appropriate to the level of students’ English proficiency. The topics of the content should be matched to their interests and their background knowledge in order to motivate them to learn. Authentic video material needs to be carefully chosen to ensure the level of difficulty is appropriate and the content is of interest to students. Videos containing difficult vocabulary or ungrammatical or incomplete structures should not be used. Based on the result of this study, it can be implied that video can contribute positively to language learning and processing. It helps learners in developing listening skills, in learning new lexical terms and in encouraging autonomous learning. Video-based instruction can be used to develop students’ listening. Thus, other aspects such as how videos help to improve speaking production should be the subject of further research. A study on using other authentic materials such as movies or news commentaries should be conducted through comparing between two groups of students for promoting other languages kills.

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