Exploring the Interplay between listening and speaking skills in English language learning

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ABSTRACT

Listening and speaking are foundational skills in the acquisition of the English language, and their interconnection is widely acknowledged. This study delves into the correlation between the listening and speaking grades of third-semester university students who have undergone two semesters of training in these skills. The instructional intervention involved four hours of teaching per week in the current semester, with mid-term and end-of-semester assessments comprising written and oral tests for listening and speaking, respectively. The final exam results were subjected to analysis and interpretation using SPSS.

Keywords: Listening skill, Speaking skill, Relationship

استكشاف التفاعل بين مهاراتي الاستماع والمحادثة في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية

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الملخص:

تعد مهاراتي الاستماع والمحادثة من أساسيات اكتساب اللغة الانجليزية وارتباطهما معترف به على نطاق واسع. تتناول هذه الدراسة ماهية العلاقة بين مهارة الاستماع ومهارة المحادثة وايجاد معامل الارتباط بينهما. وتتمثل عينة البحث في طالبات الفصل الثالث بكلية التربية ابوعيسى قسم اللغة الانجليزية واللاتي خضعن لفصلين من التدريب في هاتين المهارتين سابقا. استغرق البرنامج التعليمي في هذا الفصل أربع ساعات دراسية أسبوعياً ثم تم تقييم الطالبات بإجراء امتحان نصفي وأخر نهائي تحريري وشفوي للاستماع والمحادثة على التوالي. وحللت نتائج الامتحان النهائي باستخدام برنامج الإحصاء للعلوم الاجتماعية. SPSS

الكلمات المفتاحية. مهارة الاستماع / مهارة المحادثة / علاقة

I. Introduction:

English stands out as one of the most globally spoken languages, integral to technology, trade, and education. Its prevalence necessitates its inclusion in educational curricula worldwide, including my country, where it is taught as a foreign language. Both mother tongue and foreign language acquisition share a common starting point: listening. As the initial step in speech perception involves auditory processing, listening plays a pivotal role in receiving and retaining uttered sounds [1].

The sequence of language skills in the learning process holds significance, with each skill influencing and interacting with the others. A cohesive understanding of the nature of these skills and their interrelations is crucial for a consistent language learning experience. The four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—

are ideally taught in a harmonious order, mutually reinforcing each other.

Listening, as an epistemic process, comprises various elements. It is essential to distinguish between hearing, a psychological process of registering sounds, and listening, a focused and concentrated approach to understanding the conveyed message. Successful listening necessitates specific prerequisites, including attention, background knowledge, and comprehensible material. Learners, to comprehend any message, must actively engage with the speaker or source and possess relevant topic knowledge. Various assessment methods, such as true-false, fill-in-the-gaps, matching, multiple choice, and comprehension or Wh questions, are employed to evaluate learners' comprehension [2].

Observations by educators highlight challenges faced by students in listening classes, categorized into internal and external factors. Internal challenges, pertaining to the listener, include anxiety or tension, hindering concentration on essential details. Additionally, a lack of background knowledge about the subject and motivation in listening classes poses serious issues. Motivation can be bolstered through pre-listening activities. External challenges involve factors like the speaker's speed, listeners' inability to control the pace, and the inability to request repetition. Furthermore, the ambient environment and the quality of recorded materials, with an emphasis on high-quality sound systems, impact learners' comprehension in listening exercises.

The second crucial language skill is speaking, defined as "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts" [3]. Speaking plays a pivotal role in language learning, compelling learners to articulate their thoughts or ideas verbally. Given that language is primarily a means of communication, speaking serves as a tangible metric for assessing learners' proficiency in using a language. Moreover, the significance of speaking extends to its interdisciplinary nature, establishing direct connections with psychological, sociological, and educational concepts. Psychological aspects involve factors such as tension, inhibition, or shyness; sociological dimensions include communication, interaction, and integration, while educational concepts are exemplified by the interplay between input and output.

Speaking is uniquely learner-oriented, relying on individual experiences compared to other language skills. The objective of

honing speaking skills is to empower students to effectively express ideas and convey feelings in English, fostering successful communication both within their community and with individuals from diverse cultures. However, speaking classes, particularly in ESL and EFL contexts, present challenges for educators. Common difficulties include students' shyness and fear of making mistakes, often stemming from inadequate language proficiency (grammar and vocabulary) and motivation. Additionally, challenges arise from a discouraging learning atmosphere, limited speaking time for students, uninteresting teaching materials, and teachers' choices of inappropriate activities or teaching strategies [4].

Speaking is inherently immediate, lacking the luxury of revision or editing, which adds to its inherent difficulty. It becomes evident from this brief exploration that both listening and speaking skills share commonalities and mutually reinforce each other in the learning process. Exploring the interrelationship between listening and speaking skills can provide valuable insights for achieving the highest level of proficiency and fulfillment in language acquisition.

I.1 Literature Review

English language proficiency encompasses four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading are categorized as receptive or passive skills, while speaking and writing are considered productive or active skills. The intrinsic connection between listening and speaking is evident, particularly in the initial stages of human development, where one learns to speak by first listening and then imitating [5].

Numerous scholars have delved into the intricate relationship between listening and speaking skills, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of their interplay. Bozorgain (2012), Feyten (1991), and Richard (2008) underscored the interconnectedness of improving speaking skills with advancements in listening skills [5]. Celik and Yavuz (2015) emphasized the significance of comprehending the nature of linguistic skills and their hierarchical arrangement—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—to facilitate effective learning [2]. Zhang (2009) posited that listening profoundly influences the enhancement of learners' oral competence, attributing improvements in pronunciation, intonation, and stress to exposure to native speakers and authentic materials [6].

In the exploration of the relationship between listening and speaking, Maesaroh's study in Jakarta (2006) revealed a positive

correlation between high listening grades and high speaking proficiency [7]. Similarly, Budianto's investigation into fifth-semester English education students demonstrated that adept listening skills correlated with strong speaking performance [8]. Azizah's correlational study in the third semester of the English Education Department in Jakarta further affirmed a significant link between listening comprehension proficiency and speaking ability, asserting that superior listening skills correlate with enhanced speaking performance [1].

K. Abu-Snoubar's examination of the relationship between listening and speaking grades among Al-Balga Applied University's foreign language students disclosed a positive correlation, reinforcing the notion that proficiency in listening contributes positively to speaking ability [5]. These collective findings underscore the interconnected and mutually reinforcing nature of listening and speaking skills, highlighting their pivotal role in language acquisition.

2. Statement of the problem and research Questions:

The intertwined nature of listening and speaking in the learning process prompts an exploration of their relationship. In the previous term, I taught listening and speaking to 3rd-semester students, observing their grades in both areas. This sparked a question about the rationale for grouping them together as a single subject. To investigate the potential relationship between listening and speaking competence, this paper is structured. The research aims to answer the following question:

Q1: Is there a relationship between listening skills and speaking skills based on the exam results of third-semester students at Abu-Issa College of Education?

I.3. Aims of the Study:

1. To determine if there exists a relationship between listening and speaking skills.
2. To elucidate the correlation between speaking and listening competence.

The significance of the study.

By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to obtain trustworthy information about how speaking and listening are related. The results of this study should also be helpful to English teachers and students in their respective pedagogies, according to the researcher.

II. Research Methodology:

The primary objective of this study is to explore the relationship between listening and speaking by comparing the grades of 3rd-semester students in the final exam. These students have undergone three semesters of listening and speaking courses. The previous semester's results serve as the pretest. Throughout each semester, students attend four hours per week, covering a different subject unit each week. The class employs the PWP (Presentation, Practice, and Production) framework. Various question types, including true/false, matching, and filling in the blanks, are practiced.

In speaking classes, students engage in exercises designed for speaking, such as creating conversation dialogues. Some topics necessitate oral discussions in the class. At the semester's end, students listen to an audio material (4-5 minutes) twice to answer comprehension questions. These questions come in different forms, such as true/false, matching, and fill in the gaps. In the speaking exam, a predetermined number of topics, at least 15, are provided for discussion. Each student chooses a topic to discuss for 3-5 minutes, with one minute allocated for contemplation. Student performance is evaluated by two teachers using a preselected evaluation form.

2.1 Participants:

This investigation involved 30 students in their 3rd semester, evenly distributed into two groups. All participants share Arabic as their native language.

2.2 Data Collection:

To explore the relationship between listening and speaking skills, two exams were devised. The first, a listening exam, featured a carefully chosen audio material, accompanied by pre-listening and post-listening exercises to assess students' comprehension of the given topic. The exam was evaluated on a scale of 35 out of 60. Students listened to the audio material twice, allowing them to concentrate and verify their answers. The selected audio material was sourced from the British Council website, chosen to match the appropriate proficiency level for the students.

The second exam focused on speaking skills. A range of topics was preselected, taking into account students' environments and interests. Each student had the opportunity to choose a topic, take one minute to contemplate, and then speak for three minutes. An established speaking test form was employed to evaluate students'

speaking performance, considering grammatical accuracy, fluency, pronunciation, and comprehension. To ensure objectivity in the evaluation of the speaking exam, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a colleague. The grades were derived by averaging the assessments from both examiners, minimizing subjectivity in the evaluation process.

Data Analysis and Conclusion:

To investigate the potential relationship between listening and speaking skills, a comparison of listening and speaking grades was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Mean scores and correlation coefficients were determined.

1. Listening Grades:

The mean score for the listening exam is 21.3 out of 35, equivalent to 60.6%. The standard deviation is 4.27, with a variance of 18.22. This indicates a relatively spread-out distribution of scores, with some students performing significantly above or below the mean. The highest score is 30, while the lowest is 14. Two students scored above 27, 8 students scored between 22 and 26, 12 students scored between 18 and 21, and 8 students scored below 18.

2. Speaking Grades:

The mean score for the speaking exam is 16.93 out of 30, equivalent to 56.43%. The standard deviation is 4.45, and the variance is 19.86. Similar to the listening scores, the speaking scores display a spread-out distribution. The highest score is 25, and the lowest is 10. Two students scored above 23, 8 students scored between 20 and 22, 12 students scored between 15 and 19, and 8 students scored below 15.

Upon comparing the mean scores for listening and speaking, it is evident that the scores for listening are higher than those for speaking. This discrepancy is attributed to factors that make listening inherently easier than speaking. One significant factor negatively impacting the correlation between the two variables is tension. Students often experience heightened anxiety during speaking exams compared to listening exams. Speaking, being a personal ability, is greatly influenced by individual factors such as anxiety and stress. Moreover, listening is perceived as a passive skill, merely reflecting understanding, making it comparatively easier than the active production involved in speaking. Speaking, viewed as a highly active skill, demands linguistic training alongside communicative and social

skills. In contrast, listening remains a more passive process, facilitating the testing procedure.

Correlation:

A weak positive correlation exists between listening and speaking grades, indicating that students who performed well on the listening exam tended to fare better on the speaking exam. However, there were instances where high performance in one area did not necessarily translate to high performance in the other, and vice versa. The correlation coefficient between listening and speaking grades is 0.32, classifying it as a weak correlation. This suggests that only 32% of the variation in speaking scores can be explained by variations in listening scores, with the remaining 68% attributed to factors such as individual speaking skills, motivation, and familiarity with the speaking topic.

Conclusion:

This study aimed to explore the relationship between listening and speaking skills, revealing a weak correlation between the grades in both areas. The findings suggest that there is no strong positive relationship between listening and speaking abilities.

Limitations of the Study:

To enhance accuracy, a larger and more diverse sample size would be preferable, as the study relied on a limited number of volunteers. Additionally, the study's brief duration may have impacted the comprehensiveness of the results. Further research with an extended timeframe and a more representative sample could address these limitations.

Recommendations for Further Research:

The outcomes of this study underscore the need for further research involving participants motivated to effectively utilize the target language. Future investigations would benefit from a larger and more diverse sample drawn from various contexts and spanning longer durations. This approach would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between listening and speaking skills.

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Listening and speaking grades for 30 third semester students. English Department at Ibu-Isa, Faculty of Education

Participants		Listening grade	Speaking grade
student	1	20	11
	2	27	19
	3	22	12
	4	22	15
	5	21	11
	6	17	19
	7	21	19
	8	21	10
	9	21	20
	10	18	15
	11	25	12
	12	22	24
	13	21	14
	14	17	16
	15	18	17
	16	26	21
	17	27	16
	18	27	20
	19	30	13
	20	18	17
	21	18	13
	22	14	23
	23	18	15
	24	21	17
	25	19	16
	26	16	25
	27	19	12
	28	16	16
	29	28	25
	30	29	25