

INTEGRATING SPEAKING AND LISTENING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGE CONCEPTS

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Abstract: The practice of integrating listening and speaking in the classroom emanates from a belief that the attainment of proficiency in oral production is associated with listening since learners are plunged into the rich exposure of language input by means of listening tasks. Engaging in meaningful communication puts great demands on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary range. In this regard, listening provides an avenue for coming to good terms with knowledge of language structures, lexical units, phonological awareness and metacognition development. In addition, listening demonstrates overall positive effect on the development of oral production for it allows learners to experience good language models to communicate effectively. The study was designed to explore the influence of listening with a focus on top-down and bottom-up processes on the development of oral production. The present study adopted a quantitative approach and the participants were 45 English as a foreign language (EFL) first-year students. It was found that listening and speaking integrated language activities helped learners arrive at understanding of messages; thus, created the basis for production practice.

Keywords: Listening practice, language skills, communicative competence, integrated language activities.

Introduction.

With the onset of communicative teaching in the 70s, speaking has become a core component in language proficiency development. Like speaking, listening earned its rightful place in the same era despite being relegated to a secondary position for a long time in the language classroom. Later on, a prominent role has been proposed for listening in language education as it provides learners much of the input for language learning. Hinkel (2006) argues that the Communicative Approach places a high value on integrated instruction; thus, the integration of listening and speaking skills can enhance learning and increase learners'

opportunities for production practice. Listening practice provides learners with an opportunity to achieve communicative competence because listening “establishes the good basis for successful communicative exchange” (McLaren et al., 2006, p. 344). Canale and Swain (1980) state that integrated instruction in communicative context considerably impacts the development of grammatical competence. In addition, they highlight that exposure to communicative interaction with a focus on practicing the skills enables learners to attain fluency and comprehensibility. Mart (2018) makes it clear that language learning involves the successful use of language skills for communication. The creation of meaningful communication places a greater emphasis on the use of language skills in tandem. It should be noted that learners must simultaneously attend to listening and speaking in a conversation; therefore, this raises their proficiency, as the teaching of these two skills cannot be conducted in isolation. Engaging in a communication entails receiving, comprehending, and speaking at the same time. Speaking does not take place if the speaker fails to decode the message delivered by his/her interlocutor. By extension, the development of oral production requires the integration of listening and 1 this is a refereed article.

The goal of this study is to reveal whether listening and speaking integrated language activities help learners with the attainment of proficiency in spoken language. Literature Review The development of listening skills has long been neglected in language acquisition as listening was considered as “an ability that would develop without assistance” (Osada, 2004, p.53). Since the role of language input has come into focus in language learning, more attention has been given to listening skills (Vandergrift, 1999). It is now generally recognized that language development without listening leaves little room for speech production. Hubbard, et al. (1983) emphasized the role of listening in speech improvement by stating that “without actually having been taught to listen, a student may be able to express himself orally, but he will never be able to communicate with speakers of English if he is unable to understand what is said to him” (p. 30). The attainment of proficiency in oral production hinges upon four fundamental processes: Conceptualization, Formulation, Articulation, and Self-monitoring (Levelt, 1989). While conceptualization refers to background knowledge, formulation deals with language skills which are considered a requisite to speaking effectively. Articulation draws on pronunciation, whereas self-monitoring focuses on self-repair in speech production. Within this framework, listening is

essential for learners to enhance their background knowledge, vocabulary and grammar repertoire, and accurate pronunciation for advanced language learning. Furthermore, the use of bottom-up and top-down processing for promoting listening skills provides additional opportunities for learners to focus on linguistic form. Listening provides a fruitful venue for learners to experience good language models. The models they are exposed to enable them to “adjust to the speakers’ tempo and active vocabulary” (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 169). Through noticing and conscious awareness, learners can monitor their listening, enhance comprehension, retain listening content, and create meaning. This attention to language opens up a less frustrating route to incorporate what they receive from listening into the development of communicative competence. Moreover, language learners become aware of social and cultural aspects of language for effective communication. The use of language in socioculturally appropriate ways is a great motivating force in language learning for meaningful interaction among individuals (Eun & Lim, 2009). The incorporation of listening and speaking can facilitate metacognition development of learners. Metacognitive knowledge involves thinking about the language learning process; hence, learners can regulate and direct their own learning. Findings indicate that metacognitive awareness can potentially improve learners’ listening skills because it helps them become more motivated as well as influences their listening performance (Goh, 2008; Goh & Hu, 2014; Siegel, 2014; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Wang, 2016). Research also has shown further evidence that indicates the effects of metacognitive awareness on the outcome of listening comprehension in communication (Cross, 2011; Cross, 2015; Goh, 2008; Nakatani, 2005; Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2010; Zhang & Goh, 2006). In addition, the integration of listening and speaking can be used for the advancement of listening content. In the pre-listening phase, for instance, learners stand a better chance of improving comprehension when they are asked to discuss the content for the purpose of perceiving the material. According to schema theory, learners construct meaning by activating their prior knowledge and connect the existing knowledge to activate new learning (Mansouri & Mantero, 2019; Nassaji, 2002).

Exposure to communicative interaction with a focus on listening activities resulted in production quality for Group 2 as the learners reaped the benefits of the listening tasks in terms of fluency, accuracy, and linguistic knowledge which let meaningful communication to take place. Empirical support for this idea comes

from Krashen (1985) who argues that “speaking is a result of acquisition” (p.2). Listening activities created opportunities for the learners in Group 2 to promote their language use in which they combined content and formulation to increase the number of spoken utterances. An advantage of Group 2 was to learn where conversational routines or fixed expressions used by native speakers occur from listening tasks and use them in appropriate situations in their daily communication. Language development takes place when learners notice features of input and incorporate them into their language repertoire (Schmidt, 1990). The instructional disadvantage of Groups 1 and 3 was the lack of activities they experienced. The participants in these two groups did not take part in activities which allowed them to notice new linguistic items and experiment in using them to promote their language competence. Exposure to comprehensible input supports the development of verbal language skills. Advocating this idea, Long (1987) brings our attention to the apparent importance of comprehensible input for improving oral skills and asserts that “speaking ability is fine-tuned by exposure to additional comprehensible input” (p. 922). The fact that the learners in these groups were not prepared to verbalize their ideas when they were required to talk for interpretation impeded their oral performance. It is worth emphasizing that, discussing a wide range of topics without listening to model dialogues did not lead to the improvement of speaking skills for the participants in Groups 1 and 3. Conclusion The present study set out to investigate the influence of listening and speaking integrated language activities on the development of communicative language use. The communicative approach is based on the principle that language learners develop their oral production through receiving and decoding the messages delivered by their interlocutors. The findings indicate that the integration of listening and speaking skills can lead to a notable development in speech production. Exposure to language input by virtue of listening is an essential ingredient not only for conversation skills but also language development. Needless to say, the findings of the study highlight the significance of integrating listening and speaking with a focus on listening activities enables learners to become cognizant of linguistic features and offer them an avenue to practice language. Limitations of the Study A large sample size would be more appropriate to produce more accurate information. The present study was conducted with a limited number of participants. The short duration of the study was another limitation. The researcher had a dual role; instructor and researcher but in order to avoid any personal biases in the study he

played a neutral role to reflect the reality as closely as possible. Additionally, the study ensured the anonymity of the participants who took part in and refrained from presenting the findings in a biased way. Aside from the limitation, the findings provide insights for future research as well. Recommendations for Further Research Some of the participants in the study were more reflective, thus they were able to perform more adequately in response to listening tasks and articulate their ideas; however, a small number of participants needed opportunities to verbalize their thoughts.

While the primary focus of the first group was on listening comprehension, listening comprehension and acquisition was the main focus of the participants in Group 2. Put differently, top-down processing alone was not a very efficient way to create a basis for production practice. In real life listening, both top-down and bottom-up processes operate simultaneously and a combination of these two processes provides additional opportunities for effective oral production. A conversational exchange was created for Group 2 with the comprehension of the received data and the process of decoding it. With this in mind, it is apparent that listening facilitates understanding of spoken discourse (Richards, 2008). The implementation of top-down and bottom-up processing in listening created a sufficient basis for comprehension in the process of listening. The learners made use of pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities to link top-down and bottom-up processes. These activities employed during listening enabled the learners to analyze the linguistic input and arrive at an understanding of messages. Learners can easily utter their ideas when they extract meaning from messages by connecting it to the stored knowledge in their minds. That participants in the second group were involved in preliminary discussions in the pre-listening stage to make predictions about what they are going to hear, which enabled them to activate their prior knowledge that helped them make sense of the listening text. In doing so, they gained encouragement and confidence that extended their conversation skills. The creation of meaning and application of the newly-required knowledge to practice speaking were some of the important roles the learners in Group 2 undertook in the while-listening stage. In the post-listening activities, discussion was encouraged with the help of creating dialogues based on the listening tasks. It can be asserted that all these activities the participants in the second group experienced provided the favorable conditions for speech production. It should be noted that noticing has a crucial role in language learning.

Schmidt (1990) argued that without noticing features of input, learners fail to learn from the input. Schmidt (1990) further stated that a feature which is noticed in the input by learners will appear in their speech later. Simply put, Schmidt found a strong link between the noticing of input features and their later emergence in oral production. With this in mind, the implemented listening activities served as triggers to attract the participants' attention in the second group to a sufficient degree to new linguistic items in the listening tasks. Simultaneously, they enabled the students to incorporate these new mental representations into their language competence which is needed for oral production. Listening therefore triggers language acquisition and paves the way for noticing the new. For that reason, this study indicates a need for further research in which participants are encouraged to use the target language more efficiently. It would truly be beneficial to see future research with an increased number of participants from wider contexts and longer periods of time to gain better insights into the effectiveness of listening and speaking integrated language activities in oral language development.

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