

USING DICTOGLOSS TO IMPROVE LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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ABSTRACT

This study was an experimental one to use Dictogloss as an Interactive Technique with second Grade, year 8, students at Junior High School 1 (SMPN 1) Lhokseumawe to try to improve the teaching-learning of Listening Comprehension with narrative texts. The study used two classes as the sample: the experimental group (EG) was taught using Dictogloss, while the control group (CG) was taught by a standard technique. To collect the data, tests and a questionnaire were used, then the collected data was analyzed using SPSS. The results showed that the EG students, taught using Dictogloss, achieved significantly better scores in listening comprehension. Moreover, the results from the questionnaires indicated that almost all the students (93%) responded positively towards the use of Dictogloss since it effectively improved their listening comprehension.

Keywords: *Teaching Listening, Dictogloss, Comprehension.*

INTRODUCTION

Listening is considered the basic form of language acquisition. This is proved by a new born baby who starts to acquire language by listening to the voices around her before she starts to speak, read or write. Furthermore, listening is also regarded as the medium through which people get a large portion of their education. As a result, listening is crucial for human language development. This is supported by Krashen (1985) who argues that language is predominantly achieved by receiving understandable input and listening ability is the critical component in

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achieving understandable language input. Listening is a medium for humans to get information as knowledge.

Teaching listening in the classroom is different from real life listening. According to Ur (1998), real life listening fulfills some conditions such as:

- (1) we listen for a purpose and to get certain information,
- (2) we make an immediate response to what we hear,
- (3) we can see or know well the person we are listening to,
- (4) there are some visual or environmental clues as to the meaning of what is heard which comes in short chunks,
- (5) most heard discourse is spontaneous and therefore differs from formal spoken prose in the amount of redundant noise and colloquialism, and its auditory character.

The facts above show that teaching listening is really important in daily life. In junior high school, listening is one of the skills that needs to be mastered by students in learning English. Therefore, English listening comprehension is regarded, theoretically, as an active process in which individuals concentrate on selected aspects of aural input, from the meaning of a passage, and associate what they hear with their existing knowledge.

In SMPN 1 Lhokseumawe, the teacher had taught her students to listen to English but they still got low scores. Only a few reached the passing grade of 75. The teacher was worried about this result because only her top 10 students got over 70 because the English listening comprehension of her students was still low as proven by the scores that her students got on their daily tests. That's why she added the scores from their daily tests to their exam score to improve their points.

Based on observations by the writer with the second grade, year 8, students from SMP N 1 Lhokseumawe, most of the students had difficulties with English listening comprehension. Several factors made them assume that English listening was difficult:

- 1) the students had very limited vocabulary,
- 2) the students knowledge of grammar was poor,
- 3) her students could not understand native speakers speaking at normal speed.

In conclusion, the factors above made difficulties for the students such as:

- a) they had difficulty in identifying the communicative purpose in the listening material,
- b) they had difficulty finding the main idea in the material, and

c) they had difficulty finding specific information in the material they listened to.

Dictogloss is a teaching technique that may help to solve the teaching-learning problems of the teacher and her students as mentioned above. It calls for active participation in problem solving and critical thinking that encourage students to be more active and increase their self-esteem to use English communicatively and to more easily understand the materials being taught. Moreover, the students may have more chances to practice English while learning since they are engaged in activities that stimulate them to use the language.

The Dictogloss technique is a combination of classic teaching techniques where listeners are required to reconstruct a text by listening and noting down keywords. Hence, the students are able to sharpen their English listening comprehension skills using this technique, and it is hoped that it can motivate students to have a good attitude to learning English listening. Vasiljevic (2010, p. 42) has said that Dictogloss is a classroom dictation activity where students listen to a passage, note down key words and then work together to create a version of the original text. The original Dictogloss procedure according to Wajnryb (1990, pp. 7-9) consists of four basic steps – viz:

- 1) *warm-up/ preparation* in which the students find about the topic and do some vocabulary preparation,
- 2) *dictation* in which the teacher either reads or plays the audio of the text three times at a normal reading aloud speed and the students make notes of key words, concepts etc.,
- 3) *reconstruction* in which the teacher asks the students to reconstruct the text they have listened to based on their notes, and
- 4) *analysis and correction* in which the students analyze and correct their reconstructed texts with the teacher's guidance.

Based on the background stated above, the research questions for this study are:

1. Will year 8 students taught by using the Dictogloss technique achieve better results in English listening than those who were taught by using a usual teaching technique?
2. What will be the response of year 8 students towards the use of Dictogloss as an interactive technique for teaching English listening comprehension?

Hence the objectives of this study are:

1. To find out if year 8 English students who are taught using the Dictogloss technique will achieve better results in English listening comprehension than those who were taught by using a usual English listening comprehension teaching technique.
2. To figure out what the response of the sample students will be to the use of Dictogloss as an interactive technique for teaching-learning English listening comprehension.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening Comprehension

Listening and listening comprehension are synonymous. Listening for comprehension is a traditional way of thinking about the nature of listening. The main function of listening in second language learning is to facilitate understanding of spoken discourse. Listening is the ability to identify and understand what someone is saying. Taylor (1981) as cited in Cardona (2013) has said that units are decoded and linked together to form words; words are linked together to form phrases; phrases are connected together to form utterances; and utterances are joined together to form complete meaningful texts. In other words, the meaning is interpreted from the last step in the process.

Nunan (2003) says that listening is a process of decoding the sounds that one hears from the smallest meaningful unit, a phoneme, to a complete text. Furthermore, Brown (2001) has suggested that learning to listen really means learning to respond to and continue a chain of listening and responding.

Cook (1996) has affirmed that listening limitations may be caused not by lack of language, but by lack of memory or vocabulary knowledge. Lynch (1996) has also explained that in order to understand the oral message from the speaker, it is necessary for listeners to gather and incorporate information from several factors, such as phonetic, phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic. Listening that occurs in real time, with no opportunity for repetition, means that what is said may be heard only once in a daily situation, unless the listener asks the speaker to say it again and it is repeated. Thus, the speaker determines the speed of the message; therefore the listener, most of the time, is unable to listen to the message again (Buck, 2001).

Obstacles to Learning Listening

Normally, most people would agree that listening to a radio broadcast of a policy discussion is relatively difficult, while listening to a child reading from a book of fairy stories is much easier. It will usually be easy for one person but more difficult for others depending on the present level of language development of each person and the background knowledge of the topic being presented (Wolvin & Coakley, 1996). According to Anderson and Lynch (1996, p. 40) the first thing that learners have to develop is an ability that will enable them to identify the topic of the conversation and help them to make a relevant reaction. Secondly, learners should also develop an ability to predict the development of the topic as this ability will help them to prepare a suitable response in advance. Thirdly, they ought to recognize and also indicate when they do not understand enough to make a relevant response. Learners have to learn how to cope with the problem of needing clarification by using expressions such as ‘excuse me?’, ‘pardon?’ or ‘Sorry, I don’t understand’ or simply by repeating the speaker’s words questionally ie. raising the voice at the end, to show that they are having problems understanding what the speaker has just said.

Brown and Yule (1983) have also listed some factors that complicate oral language. First of all, the speaker’s style, accent and even the number of speakers affects the understanding of the spoken text. The listener’s role also has an important impact on listening, whether it is participatory or non-participatory, whether a response is required or the listener is an eavesdropper. Another factor is the content of the text and finally whether or not it is accompanied by visual aids for support.

Furthermore, Rixon (1986, p. 36) has argued that the sounds of English are a major problem for the L2 learner making listening the most difficult skill. She lists four sources of difficulties arising from pronunciation viz:

1. The weak relationship between English sounds and the way they are spelt in the written language.
2. Changes in sounds when they occur in rapid, connected speech.
3. The rhythmic pattern of English speech.
4. Different ways of pronouncing the ‘same’ sound.

The problem with sound is that when English is spoken the words are not very clear or emphatic since natural talk is unrehearsed; full of pauses, repetition, hesitation and it can be swift, slurred or even unclearly articulated. Rixon (ibid) shows that words sound different depending on whether the word is spoken in isolation or in connected speech.

Dictogloss

Dictogloss is considered a multiple skill and system activity with a focus on communicating meaning and correct use of grammar (Wajnryb, 1990). Dictogloss is an excellent way of practicing grammar and vocabulary as learners work on combining meaning and form. Wajnryb (ibid, p. 5) has written that Dictogloss is a relatively recent procedure in language teaching, and different from language dictation. He emphasizes the difference between Dictogloss, where learners are listened to a short text read to them at normal speed and reconstruct it in small groups until it has the same meaning as the original text dictation where learners only write down what's just been read by the teacher or just been heard from the audio source. The use of Dictogloss involves students paying attention to all four language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing) and encourages learner's autonomy, co-operation, curricular integration, diversity, thinking skills and alternative assessment techniques (Jacobs & Small, 2003, pp. 2-4).

Jacobs and Small (ibid) reported in their study that Dictogloss does not always have to involve writing sentences and paragraphs. Learners can do other activities based on what the teacher reads to them and asks them to do. For instance, they can complete a graphic organizer in which the facilitator finds or writes a description of a drawing that includes relevant details about vocabulary and concepts of the topic. The authors explained that during the task, first, learners listen to the description and do a drawing based on what they heard; second, they compare their productions with their partners and make a composite drawing per pair and then finally compare their drawing with the original one.

Several studies have considered some stages that describe Dictogloss as an innovative strategy to learn a second language. In addition, Shak (2006, p. 49) has explained in her research on children using Dictogloss that there are five basic stages (*listening, noticing, activity, checking, and writing*) that can be implemented in the teaching-learning process as in the following:

1. Listening stage: in which the teacher prepares learners for the topic of the Dictogloss text via storytelling, listening for the first time and whole class discussion.
2. Noticing stage: this is applied by learners when they take notes while and after listening to the text for a second time at normal speed for reading aloud.

3. Activity stage: this is when learners work together in small groups to recreate texts based on what they remember of what they heard.
4. Checking stage: this is used to analyze and compare the various written versions in a whole class setting, and to check if they are on the right track.
5. Writing stage: this is specially implemented to give the learners the opportunity to produce a similar text individually and demonstrate what they have understood about the reading.

On the other hand, Wajnryb (1990, pp. 7-9) has described in detail four stages of Dictogloss that are implemented the most in teaching listening. Those stages are preparation, dictation, reconstruction, and analysis and correction.

The **preparation stage** is used when the teacher implements the Dictogloss instructions. Teachers must give students clear commands about the tasks that they have to do and organize them into groups before the dictation stage begins. The main goal in this step is preparing learners with known and unknown vocabulary needed for the text they will be listening to by exploiting the warm-up activities in each lesson. This type of vocabulary-centered warm-up makes learners more receptive to listening in the next stage.

In the **dictation stage**, the learners listen to a text read aloud twice. The first time, they are not supposed to note key words; nevertheless, Kondo et al. (2010) have claimed that during the first reading, learners are instructed to grasp the gist of the text but are not supposed to take any notes. During the second listening, they should make notes about the content and the topic as useful tools to help them put the text together in the next stage, the reconstruction stage.

During the **reconstruction stage**, the learners and their teacher work together. In that sense, while the learners proceed to collect notes in groups and work on their version of the text in order to help them check the grammar, textual cohesion, and logical sense, the teacher monitors the activities and points out some possible grammatical errors without providing any actual language inputs.

The teacher conducts **the analysis and correction session stage** in their own preferred style to encourage learners to compare the various versions and to discuss the language choices made. Some examples of the different ways to conduct the analysis and correction step include: using the black/white-board where learners' texts are written for all to see and discuss, using an overhead projector and copying the original

text to be examined to the whole class. It is important to clarify that the original text should not be read by the learners until their own versions have been analyzed.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Dictogloss

Advantages of Dictogloss

According to Vasiljevic (2010, pp. 45-46) Dictogloss has some advantages as follows:

1. Dictogloss is an effective way of combining individual and group work activities. Students listen and take notes individually and then work together to reconstruct their texts. The reconstruction task gives students focus and a clear objective.
2. The Dictogloss procedures facilitate the development of communicative competence between learners. A collaborative reconstruction task gives learners opportunities to practice and use all modes of language in communication. There is turn-taking among them which uses verbal and written confirmation and clarification.
3. The reconstruction stage helps students to develop their strengths and overcome their weaknesses. It helps them to compare input to their own representation of the text.
4. Dictogloss develops strategies for solving problems. It leads learners to help each other in recreating their own version of a text that depends on information from the teacher. The analysis and correction stage enables students to see their linguistic shortcomings where they have done well and where they need to improve.
5. Dictogloss offers a unique blending of teaching listening comprehension and the assessment of students' listening ability. In a Dictogloss task, students need phonemic identification, lexical recognition, syntactic analysis and semantic interpretation. The reconstruction task offers an insight into the students' performance at all stages of the speech perception process. From their notes the learners and their teacher can verify and identify the parts of the text and specific words or structures that may have caused miscomprehensions. Furthermore, the nature of the reconstruction task forces students to listen carefully to other students' input, providing additional opportunities for listening practice.

6. The reconstruction task also promotes the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. Students need to recall the meanings and the written form of vocabulary items introduced at the preparation stage. In addition, students may need to use new words to form complex sentences, and the teacher can direct the attention of the learners to the target language.
7. The reconstruction task can be used to raise the awareness of the students to patterns in the target language. Those facilitate the ability of students to understand and manipulate patterns of textual organization and should make them more sensitive to discourse markers and other cohesive ties in the ESL language that they are learning to acquire.
8. Working in small groups reduces students' anxiety as they only have to perform in front of a small audience. They may also feel more relaxed and confident when they share ideas that represent a group rather than themselves.
9. Dictogloss can build students' motivation in "co-opetisi" (co-operative and competitive) activities. It offers a sense of togetherness, self-confidence and responsibility so they should feel comfortable when doing the activity. Also the competition in the closing activities offers chances for the students to prove and to show their individual ability.

Dictogloss is a technique that can be used in language teaching that has some advantages when it is implemented. It can be summed up that Dictogloss is beneficial to be implemented in the teaching-learning process as it provides opportunities for learners to learn as individuals and in groups while using critical thinking, it also promotes the autonomy of learners which makes them less dependent on the teacher for learning as they also learn to depend on their peers to get or gain knowledge, it includes writing activities which can assist learners to identify what they can do well and what they need to improve on and offers an alternative way for assessing the ability of students.

The Disadvantages of Dictogloss

Besides the advantages of Dictogloss above, there are also some disadvantages of Dictogloss as set out by Alderson (1997, p. 365) as follows:

1. Dictogloss takes a lot of time to apply well in the teaching-learning processes.
2. It may not be so effective with lower level learners.

3. If the dictation is not recorded on tape, the test will be less reliable, as there will be differences in speed of delivery of the text by different readers.
4. The dictation is in fact written passages that are read out aloud so Dictagloss does not help students to understand the difference between oral and written language.
5. The exercises can be unrealistic if the text used was created to be read aloud rather than spoken in dialogue.

Dictogloss has been used in language learning for many reasons. However, the use of Dictogloss has always had two sides; advantages and disadvantages. The worst disadvantage is that learners unfamiliar with this teaching technique may want to write down every word dictated. Moreover learners may be reluctant to discuss and/or correct their texts with other groups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In conducting this study, the writer used an experimental research technique with an experimental group (EG) which was taught using Dictogloss, and a control group (CG) which was taught as per usual with no special treatment. The point studied was the EG students' achievement in listening comprehension which was taught by using Dictogloss. In addition, both of the groups received the same materials, even though they were treated differently.

An experiment typically involves a comparison of two different groups. The method used in this research was experimental research. Gay et al. (2006) define experimental research as the only form of research which can test a hypothesis or establish a cause-effect relationship. Besides, it can also show and explain the links between variables clearly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The data was collected through tests and a questionnaire. Two tests were given to the students, a pre-test on the first day and a post-test on the last day. The objective of the tests was to investigate the students' listening achievement after the implementation of the Dictogloss technique. It was found that the average score of the EG students in the pre-test was only 57 but rose to 77 in the post-test. In addition, the students responded positively to the use of Dictogloss in teaching

listening. The students agreed that Dictogloss helped and motivated them to comprehend listening. Moreover, the result of the data analysis from the questionnaires indicates that almost all the students (93%) responded positively to the application of Dictogloss in teaching listening comprehension.

Discussions

Based on the research findings, the first discussion deals with the improvement after the use of Dictogloss in teaching listening. After the researcher collected and processed the statistical data by using SPSS, the findings showed that the distribution of both the experimental and the control groups' scores on the pre-test were normal and the variance of the scores was also homogeneous. The data from the pre-test showed that both the EG and the CG had the same initial ability, there was no significant difference in their initial listening ability.

However, after the treatments were given, the students who were taught by using Dictogloss achieved better listening scores than those taught by means of the conventional technique. It can be stated that Dictogloss was effective in teaching listening as it could increase the students' listening ability.

Reflecting on the results obtained from the Dictogloss application for teaching listening, it was effective due to several reasons. In a Dictogloss class, the interactions between students are much more natural. A collaborative reconstruction task gives learners opportunities to practice and use all modes of language and to become engaged in authentic communication. There is more turn-taking and students are more likely to use confirmation and clarification strategies. This variety of interaction was found to be more productive in terms of language development than the actual linguistic forms used (Wills & Wills, 1996). The reconstruction task gives students focus and a clear objective. Students are actively involved in the learning process and there are multiple opportunities for peer learning and peer teaching. After the teacher provides a framework for understanding the passage by explaining the background information, co-operative groups can develop more appropriate comparisons or examples that will assist learners with their comprehension (Thornton, 1999).

Dictogloss offers opportunities for co-operative learning. Co-operative learning means students work together to accomplish shared goals. They are given two responsibilities: one is to maximize their own learning and two to maximize the learning of all other group members

(Johnson & Johnson, 1999a). Gardner (1999) has shown that heterogeneously grouped teams bring more benefits than homogeneously formed teams. Due to differences in background and in ways of learning, different people tend to attend to different information in the discourse. This means that members can learn from each other and learn to appreciate the value of variety.

Finally, working in small groups reduced learners' anxiety as they have to perform only in front of "a small audience". Students tend to be quiet and are not used to voicing their ideas in front of the whole class. In Japan, for example, students are often shy and group conscious. They feel insecure about their English ability and rarely volunteer their answers. They seldom initiate conversations, generally avoid bringing up new topics and rarely seek clarification (Burrows, 1996). When asked a direct question by a teacher, an individual student will often turn to her peers and seek advice before producing a response. Students feel more relaxed and confident when they share ideas that represent a small group rather than themselves only.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Conclusions

Based on the results above the students' listening comprehension in the EG improved significantly as compared to those in the CG. In other words, the implementation of Dictogloss considerably improved the students' outcomes for learning listening comprehension.

Furthermore, the results from the questionnaires indicated that the students were interested and had a positive attitude towards the implementation of Dictogloss for teaching listening. The majority of the students strongly agreed to the use of the Dictogloss technique in the classroom. There were only a few students who were not interested in the use of Dictogloss in teaching listening, especially in the application of group learning. However, these students could still adapt to the application of Dictogloss in the teaching-learning activities.

Suggestions

In relation to the teacher's performance, it is suggested that teachers should have a good understanding of the proper application of Dictogloss for teaching listening comprehension so that it can be implemented properly. Moreover, teachers should prepare the materials and the activities to ensure efficiency in the classroom activities during the

teaching-learning processes. Teachers also need to manage the time effectively, so that both the teacher and her students can enjoy the lessons.

More importantly, with the Dictogloss technique, the students need to realize that learning is a two-way process, not only teacher-centered. This means that students can also play a significant role in determining their success in study. Thus, they need to be actively involved in the learning processes. It is also recommended that their English teachers employ various media for teaching listening. This may encourage students to practice listening more in order to improve their ESL achievements. This is due to the fact that most students are more interested in learning when teachers offer materials using a variety of media.

Moreover, the writer suggests that further studies on the application of the Dictogloss technique in listening classes should be done using more time in order to obtain more accurate information on the issue. Further studies are also required to investigate the effective application of Dictogloss technique for other student levels as well as for other English skills in order to enrich our knowledge about the implementation of the Dictogloss technique.

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