

**Utilizing A Competency Approach Based Program to Develop EFL
University Learners' Listening Comprehension Performance**

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the effect of A Competency Approach Based Program to improve EFL learners' listening performance at Misr International University. To achieve the study aim, the researcher adopted the quasi-design of two groups: experimental and control- (40) students at Misr International University, Cairo, Egypt. The participants were divided into two groups. Both groups were pretested to assure that they were homogenous in listening comprehension competencies before treatment. The experimental group was taught using the Competency Approach Based Program while the control group received regular instruction. The instruments included a listening comprehension checklist, a list comprehension test, and a listening rubric. The experiment lasted for 7 weeks in which the researcher implemented the study academic instruments: a checklist, and a test. The results were statistically analyzed using SPSS version three. The following instruments were to collect data: 1) A questionnaire for juries to determine the most important listening comprehension competencies. 2) A pre/post listening comprehension test. 3) A listening comprehension rubric. The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences at ($\alpha = 0.01$) between the mean scores of the control and the experimental groups on the listening comprehension performance posttest in favor of the experimental group. The result reveals that the program had an effect on developing listening comprehension performance. It was recommended that the EFL teachers apply the competency approach-based program to develop EFL learners' listening comprehension performance.

Keywords: Competency Based Approach- Listening Comprehension Competencies

Introduction

Listening is an essential skill in language acquisition. It also plays a vital role in teaching English as a foreign language in non-native English-speaking communities where English is taught as a second language. Students who learn new languages need to practice listening to the spoken form of language to be able to recognize and pronounce the words. In EFL classrooms, developing listening comprehension performance is a must to help students build their vocabulary and improving language proficiency.

It has been proven that children need to listen first and respond to language before they are able to read or talk (Ghaderpanahi, 2012). Rivers states, “Speaking does not of itself constitute communication unless what is said is comprehended by another person. Teaching the comprehension of spoken speech is therefore a primary importance of the communication aim is to be reached” (cited in Osada, 2014).

Listening comprehension encompasses multiple processes involved in understanding of spoken language including recognition of speech sounds, understanding the meaning of individual words, together with the syntax of sentences perceived, involving the prosody with which utterances are produced, and making relevant inferences based on context, background knowledge, and speaker-specific attributes (Smith, 2015).

Research suggests that listening comprehension should be the primary skill in learning a new language. A lot of evidence demonstrates that promoting listening comprehension results in increased acquisition of other language skills and consequently leads to acquisition of the target language (Goh, 2002; Richards, 2008; Cheung, 2010). It is only logical that one cannot give an output (speak) correctly unless one comprehends the input (listening comprehension). Hence, listening comprehension plays a critical role in the cognitive processes that shape output and produce improvement in oral proficiency (Richards, 2008). It is agreed that unlike in L2 reading that can be looked through in leisure, it is impossible to skip active problem-solving phase while comprehending the L2 input (Rubin, 1994; Cheung, 2010; Alizadeh, 2016).

Thus, in reference to the EFL context, if a learner has good listening comprehension ability in English language, it would be very easy for them to listen to the radio, to study, watch films, or communicate with foreigners. Learners should have a lot of practice and exposure to English oral discourse to develop this ability. There is a relationship between listening to a language and learning it. If two learners are compared - one living in a country where the target language is the main language spoken, and the other one living in a country where English is only spoken for academic purposes - the difference is obvious: the first learner can acquire English more easily, effectively, and

rapidly. Consequently, learners need as much audio-exposure to English language as possible, since it is the communication with listening as its natural component that facilitates language acquisition for an artificial bilingual.

Competency-based education (CBE) emerged in the 1970s in the US. It referred to an educational movement that advocated defining educational goals in terms of precise measurable description of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors students should possess at the end of a course of study (Guskey, 2005). CBLT is a teaching approach which focuses on the outcomes of language learning. CBLT emphasizes what learners are expected to achieve with the target language. In other words, the approach sees outputs very importantly rather than the learning process. This means, starting with a clear picture of what is important for students to be able to do, then organizing curriculum, instruction, and assessment to make sure this learning ultimately happens (Wong 2008).

In CBLT, students learn to use the language in authentic situations likely to be encountered outside the classroom. For instance, a student might have to fill out an application form, provide a personal medical history, or give directions on how to complete a specific task (Griffith; Lim, et al). Competency refers to "critical work functions" or tasks in a defined setting (Learning Designs Inc., 2011; Richards & Rogers, 2001).

Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and/or behaviors students must master in a specific content or performance area. – Q.E.D. Foundation. “The capacity/competency is not only the description of a task or action learning. It involves measuring the potential of students and measure knowledge, skills, and ability of application needed to perform a learning task to a certain standard requirement” according to the assessment guidelines of the training capacity of the Australian Commonwealth (2003).

Well-designed competencies include several components. First, they describe the specific knowledge and skills that can be applied to novel and complex situations. Knowledge and skills must have value beyond the classroom because if you teach the principles and how to learn, that knowledge will be useful for a student’s whole lifetime. For example, the ability to understand emergency instructions is important outside of the classroom and that knowledge will be useful for years in the future. Next, each competency must have clear performance criteria that allow students to know where they are and what they need to work on to improve. Each task requires its own specific rubric identifying specific weaknesses and strengths. Finally, the competency must be personalized (Sturgis, 2012).

Therefore, demand from the stakeholders is also leading to the emphasis on competency-based education (Choudaha, 2008). Competency based curriculum

summarizes academic and professional profiles, defines new objectives in the learning process, enhances learning environments and shifts the concept of learning as accumulation of knowledge to learning as a permanent attitude towards knowledge acquisition (Edwards et. al, 2009).

The term "authentic materials" has been defined in different ways. In general, authentic texts are characterized as those designed for native speakers (Tamo, 2009). According to Jacobson et al (2003), authentic materials stand for texts, which are used in classrooms in the same way they would be used in real life. Carter & Nunan (2001) pointed out that authentic materials refer to "ordinary texts not produced specifically for language teaching purposes" (p. 68).

There is an increasing interest in implementing authentic materials in a language classroom (Abu Hatab, 2010) so that the students have opportunities to hear- and practice using the language they will encounter outside the classroom. Also, several research studies have shown students' improvement in language performance as a result of exposure to authentic language in the classroom (Jacobson et al., 2003; Abu Hatab, 2010; Ahmad Mousavi & Iravani, 2012; Ghaderpanahi, 2012). It is expected that employment of authentic listening comprehension material in the Egyptian ESL classroom would considerably improve ELS acquisition in Egyptian students, especially students have

normally little exposure to the authentic English language or interaction with native English language speakers.

Theocratizing various documented findings above, it is evident that exposure of L2 students to authentic audio-material in ESL classrooms is of undebatable benefit for developing listening comprehension skills and achieving effective listening comprehension in artificial bilinguals. Yet, such exposure should be carefully controlled from selecting the authentic material to match the potential listener's various characteristics and to considering the learning ambient settings, in which such material is presented. This predetermines the demand for profound research on the authentic material use for academic purposes and TESL.

2. Context of the Problem:

From the researcher's observation as an English teacher; EFL freshman university learners find difficulties in listening comprehension.

Based on the previous studies, listening comprehension is not given due consideration; however, there is a problem with the learners' listening comprehension performance. Also, improving listening comprehension skills is one of the urgent contemporary educational problems in the field of second language acquisition.

EFL listening ability is viewed as a challenging language talent, particularly in a foreign language situation where genuine practice opportunities

are limited (Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian and Nimehchisalem, 2015). Teaching learners to listen can be challenging for teachers and especially difficult for students to learn. For instance, even students who are proficient in speaking and reading may experience listening difficulties when engaging in a brief conversation with a record (Ghaderpanahi, 2012).

Numerous issues have been raised in the study literature on listening instruction, and it is crucial that educators and language scholars look for innovative alternative pedagogies and instructional strategies to address these issues. These issues are prevalent in most educational environments offering foreign language instruction globally, including Egypt (Ismail et al., 2022)

A pilot study on listening comprehension was piloted and administered to a group of 15 freshman students in Misr International University. The result revealed that students have difficulty in listening skills such as making inferences and identifying details.

The results of the test reveal that a lot of students have problems with listening comprehension. So, it is essential to tackle this problem in order to enhance students' listening comprehension.

3. Statement of the problem:

The problem can be stated in the difficulty encountered by Freshmen students at Misr international to develop their EFL listening Comprehension

performance. The present study attempted to help freshman students' listening comprehension performance using a competency-based approach.

4. Questions of the Study:

1. What are the necessary EFL listening comprehension skills needed for university freshman students?
2. How can a program based on the competency approach be designed to develop EFL freshman students' listening comprehension performance?
3. What is the effect of a competency-based program on developing freshman students' overall EFL listening comprehension performance?

5. Instruments of the study

To achieve the aim of the study the following instruments were administered:

1. A Listening comprehension checklist
2. A listening comprehension test
3. A Listening comprehension rubric

6. Hypotheses of the study

1. There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the overall experimental and control groups' EFL listening comprehension post-test results in favor of the experimental group.

2. There would be a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups for each of the listening comprehension pre and post-test results favoring the post.

3. There would be a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the pre-post administration of the listening comprehension test favoring the posttest.

4. The competency approach-based program would have a large effect on EFL learners' listening comprehension performance.

7.Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

- 1) Developing freshman students' EFL appropriate listening comprehension skills using the competency approach.
- 2) Designing a suggested competency-based program of listening comprehension suitable for first year university students.

8.Significance of the study

1. The EFL students:

It may be helpful for university students to overcome the difficulties they face while listening.

The current study highlights the importance of competency-based education that may motivate the learners and develop their listening comprehension skills.

2. The teacher of English:

It may provide teachers with a systematically designed competency-based program that could help university students to develop their listening comprehension.

3. Curriculum Designers:

It may be helpful to curriculum designers to depend on both authentic materials and situations in their course books to develop EFL learners' listening comprehension.

9. Delimitations of the study :

1. This study will be delimited to a group of 1st year university students at Misr International University as they find difficulty listening and it is a part of their English course.
2. The study will be delimited to develop EFL learners' listening comprehension skills.

10. Definitions of Terms

Listening Comprehension:

Listening comprehension encompasses multiple processes involved in understanding of spoken language including recognition of speech sounds, understanding the meaning of individual words, together with the syntax of sentences perceived, involving the prosody with which utterances are spoken, and making relevant inferences based on context, background knowledge, and speaker-specific attributes (Smith, 2015).

Operationally:

The of the study, listening comprehension is operationally defined as the active process that enables MIU freshman first year university students to

Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT):

In CBLT, students learn to use the language in authentic situations likely to be encountered outside the classroom. For instance, a student might have to fill out an application form, provide a personal medical history, or give directions on how to complete a specific task (Griffith; Lim, et al). Competency refers to "critical work functions" or tasks in a defined setting (Learning Designs Inc., 2011; Richards & Rogers, 2001).

Operationally:

The term is operationally defined as the ability of first year university students to demonstrate desired learning outcomes as being the focus of their learning process.

11.Design of the Study:

- A. Descriptive Design:** to survey literature and previous studies concerning the variables:
1. Competency-Based Approach to frame the study experiment
 2. Listening comprehension performance crystallizes the study skills to be developed.
- B. Quasi experimental:** to investigate the effect of an approach, the study will adopt the quasi-experimental design where two

matched groups will be selected- an experimental group and a controlled group.

12.Participants

Participants of the study were forty students from Misr International University, Cairo, Egypt. Participants were divided into two groups: the controlled group (n=30) and experimental group (n=30). The participants were supposed to be a homogeneous group. As a result, they were anticipated to have a lot in common and not differ greatly in terms of experience or age. The researcher attempted to control some variables to ensure that the improvement of some of the students' listening comprehension competencies could be attributed only to the effect of the competency approach program, also to ensure that both the experimental and control groups were equivalent.

13. Study Variables:

Age: The students were all between the ages of 17 and 18.

Grade: all of the students were freshmen students.

14. Statistical results:

Both control and experimental groups were pre-tested to ensure they were at the same level of EFL listening comprehension skills before starting the experiment. The researcher used the independent sample t-test.

Skills	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t. value	df
Listening comprehension performance	Control	20	17.05	3	10.4	19
	Experimental	20	16.2	2.07		

Table (1)

t-test Result of the Pre-administration of the listening competencies test comparing the experimental to the control Group

Table (1) shows that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the experimental and the control groups, t being (10.4). This shows homogeneity between the two groups. That is to say, the two groups were at almost the same level of performance in the listening competencies. Thus, any variance between the two groups that might happen after the experiment could be attributed to the effect of the experiment. The pre-test scores revealed the participants had an average low proficiency in listening competencies.

Also, the t-test result of the post-measurement mean scores of the control and experimental groups indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the overall experimental and control groups' EFL listening comprehension post-test results in favor of the experimental group as shown in table (2).

Skills	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	t. value	df	sig
Listening comprehension performance	Control	20	18.9	2.6	8.9	19	0.05
	Experimental	20	22.5	3.2			

Table (2)

t-test of the mean scores of the post-measurement of the control group and the experimental group

The Competency-Approach Based Program

To achieve the aim of the present study, the researcher used The Competency-Approach Based Program to develop the freshmen year students' EFL listening Comprehension Skills at Misr International University.

Learning Objectives of the competency-approach based program:

This program is designed to develop listening comprehension competencies for EFL university students. So, by the end of the program the students will be able to improve the following competencies:

1. Listen to understand signpost language
2. Listen to recognize the organization of a lecture
3. Listen to recognize change of sub-topics
4. Listen to predict content from linking words

5. Listen to take and classify notes
6. Listen to find supporting information
7. Listen to make inferences
8. Listen to guess the meaning of the new words from context
9. Listen to distinguish between literal and implied meanings
10. Listen to use language clues to understand the meaning
11. Listen to a podcast interview

Teachers' role

In any approach, teacher roles are closely related to assumptions about language and language learning (Richards and Rodgers, p. 23).

The teachers' role in the CBA has to cope with the requirements of the new method. Since the CBA is an action-oriented approach, it requires teachers in action, teachers who draw on their professional skills in subject matter and methodology, in decision-making, and in social skills to enable learners to be achievers. The teacher is a counselor in that s/he exemplifies "an effective communicator seeking to maximize the meshing of speaker intention and hearer interpretation, through the use of paraphrase, confirmation and feedback" (Richards and Rodgers, p.78).

The teachers' role is also to facilitate the process of language acquisition through an appropriate learning like hypothesis making or hypothesis testing.

We can also say that teachers in a CBA classroom are researchers; an important aspect of their role is watching, listening and asking questions in order to learn about how pupils learn. In brief, the teacher should do more than merely communicate knowledge.

Learners' role

Learning requires the learner to go through a process of personal appropriation. Because of this conception of learning, the learner continually questions his own convictions. These repeated questions lead him to revise his own prior knowledge with one of his classmates. He also searches for information and validates it through consulting various sources and documents.

Consequently, the learner will create different situations of learning in which he interacts with his teacher and classmates. This interaction will help him to find various ways of performing tasks and to assess his progress during the activities and at the end of these activities.

Furthermore, since the CBA is learner-centered, learners are no more passive receivers of knowledge; they play an active rather than a reactive role in the learning process. Students are expected to interact primarily with each other rather than with the teacher (Richards and Rodgers, p.77).

Content:

Week	Session	Content	Duration
Week 1	Session 1	Orientation Session	One hour
Week 2	Session 2	1.Recognize the organization of a lecture 2.Recognize change of sub-topic	Two hours
Week 3	Session 3	1.Follow a sequence of events 2.Understand signpost language	Two hours
Week 4	Session 4	1.Predict content from linking words	Two hours
Week 5	Session 5	2.Listen to take and classify notes	Two hours
Week 6	Session 6	1.Listen to find supporting information 2.Listen to make inferences 3.Listen to guess the meaning of the new words from context 4.Listen to distinguish between literal and implied meanings 5.Listen to use language clues to understand the meaning	Two hours
Week 7	Session	1.Listen to a podcast interview	Two

	7		hours
Week 8	Session 8	Reflection Session	Two hours

Methods and activities:

The program techniques and activities were designed in the light of the program's aim and content. The researcher also reviewed the related previous studies and some aural communication and listening skills books to benefit from the various activities that are used in this program. Also, the program activities are based on the students-centered and communicative approaches. Sudderth (2022) states that student-centered learning builds on students' intuitive understanding of their educational needs to create a meaningful learning environment. Surveys show that students are engaged and motivated. Richards (2005) asserts the importance of Communicative Language Teaching to support the development of students' abilities to use language fluently and effectively.

Evaluation:

The suggested program includes two types of evaluation which are the formative and the summative evaluation.

Conclusion:

The competency-approach based program improved EFL university learners' listening comprehension skills. This was confirmed in the following findings:

a- The experimental group students' means were higher than the control group in the listening test. This was shown through the significant differences between the means of the two groups.

b- In the post-administration of the listening comprehension test, the experimental group students' means were significantly higher than in the pre-application of the test.

c- The competency-approach based program was effective in enhancing the EFL listening comprehension competencies among EFL university students. This was confirmed by the effect size of the treatment on students' listening comprehension skills.

Recommendations:

1. EFL Curriculum designers should pay attention to the effectiveness of using the competency-based approach to develop college students EFL skills.

2. Listening skills should be prioritized to be enhanced from the start of learning a foreign language even when they start their higher education.
3. Teachers should pay too much attention to using CBLT as a new way of the learning process that would support language learning chances.
4. Teaching should be changed from a teacher –centered to a student-centered approach in order to be involved in an active learning environment.

Suggestions for further research:

1. Using the competency approach to develop other competencies such as reading, writing, and speaking.
2. Applying the competency-based approach to develop EFL learners' presentation skills and job-related competencies.

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