

## **The Effect of Language Lab on Improving the Students' Comprehensive Listening**

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الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستماع الاستيعابي، البرنامج التحضيري الجامعي، المختبر  
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### **Abstract:**

The present study is devoted to investigate the effect of language lab existed in all English departments, Iraqi Colleges on improving the listening skill. The study is accomplished on forty students, second year, English department, Al-Yarmouk University College as a sample.

The study is experimental and aims at finding the effect of language lab which is used as an audio aid on improving the students' listening skill turning on mastering English phonology. The sample is divided into two groups: experimental and control. The two groups utilized from the same educational environment except for the lab which is exclusively used by the experimental group.

The experiment has lasted for three weeks, two lab hours a week (namely six experimental hours) during the academic year 2017-2018.

The study hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the two groups in the teaching-learning phonology. The test was the instrument of the study. A Pre-test and post-test were conducted to find the difference in the

student's achievement. The result of the tests revealed the positive effect of the lab using on improving the students' listening skill.

Due to the obtained result, the study presents different recommendations and suggestions for further studies.

### اثر مختبر الصوت في تحسين مهارة الاستماع الاستيعابي لدى طلبة الكلية مصلح الدين نصيف

#### المستخلص:

الدراسة الحالية مخصصة للبحث في فاعلية مختبر اللغة الانكليزية السمعي والموجود في كافة اقسام اللغة الانكليزية- الكليات العراقية في تحسين مهارة السمع لدى طلبة الكلية. انجزت الدراسة متطلباتها على عينة تكونت من اربعين من طلبة المرحلة الثانية- قسم اللغة الانكليزية في كلية اليرموك الجامعة.

الدراسة الحالية هي بحث تجريبي يهدف لإيجاد اثر مختبر الصوت والمستخدم كوسيلة سمعية مساعدة في تحسين مهارة السمع والذي يؤدي بدوره الى اتقان الطالب لعلم الصوت. قسمت عينة الدراسة الى مجموعتين: الضابطة والتجريبية. خضعت المجموعتان لنفس الظروف الاكاديمية باستثناء استخدام المختبر والذي انفردت باستخدامه المجموعة التجريبية. بلغت مدة التجربة ثلاث اسابيع بمعدل ٣ ساعة نظرية لكلا المجموعتين و ٢ ساعة مختبرية للمجموعة التجريبية فقط خلال العام الدراسي ٢٠١٧-٢٠١٨.

افترضت الدراسة بعدم وجود فرق ذو دلالة احصائية بين المجموعتين في اتقان علم الصوت. استخدمت الدراسة وسيلة الاختبار لإنجاز متطلباتها. تم اجراء اختبار قبلي واختبار بعدي لمتابعة الفرق في نتائج الطلبة. اظهرت نتائج الاختبار الاثر الايجابي لمختبر الصوت. في ضوء النتائج قدمت الدراسة استنتاجاتها وطرحت مقترحاتها للدراسات المستقبلية.

#### Preliminary

Language is four skills to be mastered: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In so, listening is the first skill of language acquisition. It may be said that listening is the dynamic skill that is automatically developed without helping or coaching. Babies commit many acceptable mistakes while they are imitating their mother's speech. These mistakes are gradually reduced and spontaneously are extinguished as they have healthy ears or suffer from no mental defect. In this scope, Phillips, and Phillips (2011:109) state that children are born with the ability of acquisition. This ability works since they are 5 years and over.

Comprehensive listening, from another hand, may be considered as a receptive assignment to the students who learn the non-native language. Learning is not the same matter of acquisition. The correct utterance is expected with the process of acquisition but not with the process of learning. Learners may fail what he\she learns. So the field of comprehensive listening is an issue to be considered.

Wolvin and Coakley (1996:4) argue that the main role of listening to the purpose of communication starts with the realization that listening is the first skill of language to be mastered. Therefore, the improvement of listening skill plays a vital role in mastering the language. In other words, this statement means that listening is not just to comprehend speech, but it actually leads to other skills acquisition especially in communication, as it said good listeners are good speakers (ibid).

### **The problem**

It may be said that a considerable number of learners who intend to learn a non-native language may fail or could not able to master it or at least languages overlap takes place. This is because they are totally affected by the features of their first language. So the problem here is how to avoid the effect of the mother tongue and how to produce a correct pronunciation of words in the non-native language (English language in our case).

Morley (2001:69) states that there is much argumentation about which theory or method is suitable to be used in this field. He adds that almost all works remain stable when it is accomplished in both theoretically and practically. This statement confirms the important role of practical learning (namely the language lab) in developing the comprehensive listening skill of Iraqi students.

### **The Aims of the study**

The study aims at:

- 1-Providing an experimental study about the role of listening skill in mastering the English language, and
- 2-Investigating the effect of language lab on improving the comprehensive listening skill.

### **The hypothesis**

The study hypothesized that there is no positive effect of the lab using as an audio aid on improving the student's listening comprehension. In other words, statistically, there is no significant difference between the learners who are studying phonology by the lab as audio aid and those who are studying phonology without a lab.

### **The Instrument of the Study**

A test is the instrument of the study. It is expected that the test shows a remarkable result through which the experiment can be judged. The test will be applied twice; before the experiment (pre-test) and after the experiment (post-test).

### **Limits of the study**

The study is experimental and is limited to the second year, English department, Al-Yarmouk University College. It is devoted to investigating the effective role of using the language lab on improving the students' listening comprehensive skill.

### **Proposition**

Listening is the first skill of language to be mastered. Mastering of listening skill may open the door to facilitate the mastering of the other skills (namely speaking, reading and writing). It is expected that listening may be improved typically through language laboratory. Language laboratory assists the instructors in terms of facilitating foreign language teaching and delivering the phonological instructions to the learners through several doses over the academic year.

## **Types of Listening**

Wolvin and Coakley (1996:4) state that listening, in general, can be rating into five types, as follow:

1- Discriminative listening. It is the lowest level of listening. This type needs no great effort to be improved. It is a matter of distinguishing between the different sounds. An example is the recognition of the mother to the crying of her baby as a stimulus to be responded.

2- Comprehensive listening. It is extended than the discriminative of the stimulus. It is a matter of grasping the message. An example is listening to a lecture or a report. In this sense, it needs to a speech with a developed vocabulary as a stimulus, a memory, and concentrating from the listener.

3- Therapeutic listening. It is more extended from the above-mentioned types. It is a matter of encouraging the listener to shift from listening to speaking. In other words, therapeutic listening demands the listener to provide the speaker with an opportunity to go on speaking.

4- Critical listening. This type of listening is used to decide whether something is acceptable or unacceptable. An example is an acceptance or the refusal of the execution of a student when he did not attend a lecture. In this type, the listener is required to make an evaluation of the presented excuse.

5- The appreciative listening. This type demands the ability of discrimination and comprehension from the listener to be able to appreciate the speech. An example is listening to a piece of music or a tale. In other words, this type of listening is used to enjoy or to obtain relaxation from what being heard.

Comprehensive listening means listening for understanding which is resulting behaviors. The process of speech understanding demands the listener to be engaged in a chain of behaviors. For example, the listener has to receive, attend, perceive, interpret and respond to what he\she listens (ibid).

Michael et al (1989:12) explain the types of comprehensive listening as follows:

- 1- listening with no response. This type of listening takes place when the listener hears some insignificant speech that deserves no response. Undoubtedly, there are different real situations in our everyday life in which one present no response.
- 2- listening with a short response. This type is represented by listening to a long conversation of a common speech that is broken into bits (dialogue for example or monologue). Each bit requires a short response.
- 3- listening with a long response. This type is represented by listening to long units. The listener is required to understand the long unit and try writing, reproducing, answering, expanding or summarizing the unit.
- 4- studying or discussing listening to. The learner here is required to do the process of comparing and arranging the parts of the speech and then start analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating it.

### **Types of Language Laboratory**

Nicholas (1984:7) identifies four types of language labs as follows:

- 1- Conventional lab. This type is the primitive one in the field of language teaching. It is supplied with a tape recorder and some cassettes recorded with the sounds of the target language. This type is a common one and spread though it is with poor output because of the difficulty of identifying the speaker's voices. In this type, distraction is expected to take place.
- 2- Lab with a little sophistication. It is the conventional lab but it is equipped with some equipment like a headset. Students are wearing a headset while they are listening to the sound of the native speaker recorded on the cassette. With this equipment, distraction is reduced and clear listening takes place.
- 3- Modernized lab. This type is equipped with a device of the electronic system. This device works in two phases, the first works as an audiocassette to present the sound of the native speaker while the other phase works as a recorder to record the student's utterance. The device also has the system of repeating

(playback) the two sounds in order to help the student make a comparison.

4- Language lab with computers. The materials to be learned are fed into the system of the computer and are displayed due to the courses to be taught by using headphones.

5- A Web Lab. This type is equipped with computers that are linked to the network. This type works due to two bases; transaction and interaction. A transaction refers to the obtaining of the social communicative skill. An example is listening to a collection of people debating and arguing a certain social matter. Each member of this collection takes a part in this debating. Whereas the interactional base refers to listening for the purpose of doing some behavior. An example is someone asking others to do him a favor. Hedge (2000:236) on his side, adds a third base which is the base of participant listening. An example is listening to the conference or seminar.

It is clear that the distractions are extinguished in the modernized labs. In spite, there are many other common distractions lead the listeners to fail in learning. Distractions like:

- 1- The nature of the syllabus or the method of presentation.
- 2- The emotional status. Hating the subject for example or disregarding it because the subject is so difficult or so easy. This status may create a negative attitude of the learner toward the subject to be taught. Creating a positive attitude is highly recommended to raise the listener's desire to learn.
- 3- Environmental distractors. This may be divided into external and internal. An example for external is what the listeners see while they are listening. For instance the passing of somebody while listening or the raising of an odd sound while listening (animal sound, persons' speaking, baby's crying, etc.). The internal distractor exists within the side of the listener. It is represented by tiredness, sickness, etc.

For the purpose of the present study, the above-mentioned distractors were considered during the experiment. The students were satisfied with the syllabus, a positive attitude about the subject and the experiment were created and the most important

thing was the perfect location of the lab and the good equipment which the lab contains. These properties prevent environmental distractors to take place.

### **The Procedures**

The sample of the study is the second year, English department, Al-Yarmouk University College. Forty students are selected from forty-three. Three students are excluded from the experiment because they are wobbling in attending the class and are always absentees. The sample is chosen intentionally for different reasons and as follows:

- 1- Second year students are more mature in the College than those of the first year who study phonology,
- 2- They are 40 students in number who are the exact number of students the researcher needs to do his experiment,
- 3- The research and the sample are familiar to each other because he works as an instructor at Al-Yarmouk University College, and
- 4- The students are more familiar and experts with the phonological subject than those of the first year. So the experiment expected to be held smoothly.

The sample is randomly divided into two groups: control (20 students) and experimental (20 students). The two groups are of the same number. They are familiar with the college in general and with the lab in practical because they are in their second year. The experimental group is described as a group (A) whereas the control group is described as a group (B).

The experiment has lasted for three weeks during the academic year 2017-2018. The sample (two groups) is given the same educational circumstances. The items which have been studied are long and short vowels, strong and weak syllable, and fricatives and affricatives sounds. The items are studied theoretically for the two groups.

A test is designed to be applied to the sample (control and experimental). The test is designed due to their textbook (English Phonetics and Phonology by Peter Roach, Third



Edition, 2000). This is to avoid the possibility of outside knowledge the student may know. The test contains three questions. The first question concerns with long and short vowels and consists of four items. The second deals with strong and weak syllable and consists of three items. The third tackles fricatives and affricatives and also consists of three items. See Appendix A.

The questions of the test are grading from the easiest to the difficult. The test is out of (20 marks). It falls in ten items (2 marks rendered each item). To ensure validity, the test is displayed to experts who are specialized in the field of English phonology. Their comments and recommendations are highly considered.

About test validity, Gronlund (1956:77) ensures that the most important quality to be considered when selecting or constructing an evaluation instrument is validity. Koul (1984:122) states that if the test measures what it claims to measure then it is valid. Schofield (1972:51) and Heaton (1983:5) state that a valid test measures what it claims to measure and nothing else.

There are four types of validity: face, content, construct, and empirical validity (Heaton, 1975:135). The most important kinds of validity in relation to the construction of an achievement test are: content and face validity (Mehrens and Lehmann, 1973:153), thus content validity and face validity have been used in conducting the experiment of the present study.

Content validity should demonstrate the test measures a representative sample of the behavior or content domain which one wishes to measure. It is usually based on human judgment. One can also consult experts and use the homogeneity of these judgments as criteria. Face validity may be described as "the way the test looks to examinees, test administrators, educators, and the like". In this sense, face validity refers to whether the test looks like it is measuring what it is supposed to measure. Face validity must be exposed to a jury of experts to determine its validity.

As for the reliability of the test, Freeman (1965:66) states that "reliability should receive approximately the same rank when the test is administered on the second occasion"

There are mainly five methods to confirm the reliability, internal consistency method, the alternate test method, empirical method, testing, and re-testing method, and the half-spilled method. The study doubts test and re-test method for the following reasons:

- 1- There is a good chance of conducting the tests twice (before and after the experiment) because the students of the sample are from the same location at Diyala province,
- 2- The test can be applied in the same classroom under the same educational circumstances, and
- 3- It is easy for the researcher to gather the same students twice to conduct the same exam because the researcher is an instructor at the same College where the students study.

For the purpose of the present study, the test is considered as a pretest and applied on the sample to acquaint with their achievements before starting the experiment. The following table explains the sample's achievement:

**Table (1)**  
**The Mean, Variance, Standard Deviation, and T-value for the Level of Students' Achievement in the Pre-test**

| Group        | No. of Subjects | Mean | Variance | Standard Deviation | t-value     |             |
|--------------|-----------------|------|----------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
|              |                 |      |          |                    | Tabular     | Comp.       |
| Experimental | 20              | 67.2 | 158.1    | 12.57              | <b>2.04</b> | <b>0.06</b> |
| Control      | 20              | 67.5 | 170.1    | 13.04              |             |             |

The mean score of the experimental group, i.e., group (A) was **(67.2)**, whereas the mean score of the control group, i.e., group (B) was **(67.5)**. The calculated t-value was **(0.06)**,

whereas the critical t-value was **(2.04)** at (0.05) level of significance and (38) degree of freedom. It is clear that the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the two groups in the variable of students' achievement before starting the experiment.

The same materials are restudied. The experimental group studied these items theoretically and practically in the lab, whereas the control group studied the same items only theoretically.

The experiment has lasted for three weeks, two lab hours a week (namely six experimental hours) during the academic year 2017-2018.

After finishing the six lab hours, and regarding the hypothesis of this study, which is read as follows: **There is no significant difference between the learners who are studying phonology by lab as audio aid and those who are studying phonology without lab**, the sample (namely group A and B) has exposed to the same test for the second time (posttest). This is to see whether there is a significant difference between the achievements of the two groups. In other words, it is to check the hypothesis of the study. The following table explains the sample's achievement out from the same test as posttest:

**Table (2)**  
**The Mean, Variance, and T-value for the Level of Students' Achievement in the Post-test**

| Group        | No. of Subjects | Mean | Variance | t-value<br>Comp.<br>Tabular |
|--------------|-----------------|------|----------|-----------------------------|
| Experimental | 20              | 49.8 | 42.6     | 3.901<br>2.042              |
| Control      | 20              | 40.5 | 71.1     |                             |

After the application of the t-test formula, the researcher found that the calculated t-value was **(3.901)**, whereas the tabulated t-value under (38) degree of freedom and at (0.05) level of significance was **(2.042)**. It is clear that the calculated t-value is higher than the critical one; this indicates statistically that there is a significant difference between the two groups, and that the experimental group is better than the control group in their performance. Accordingly, the hypothesis of the study has been rejected.

### **Conclusions**

The study collected the data through pre-test and post-test which is applied to the sample. Throughout the results of the test, the study proved the positive effect of using language lab on improvement the students comprehensive listening as the experimental group achieved higher marks than the control group.

This indicates that the improvement of the experimental group in terms of competence and performance may be attributed to the following reasons:

- 1- The experimental group which is practiced listening in the language lab is benefited from the lab showing a significant difference between them and the control group that studied the same materials with the traditional method in terms of comprehensive listening. In other words, they made use of listening to the native speaker. Due to Michael (1989:13), listening is a skill of receiving, attending, perceiving, interpreting and responding.
- 2- The experimental group became able to recognize the features of the utterance produced by the native speaker. In other words, the native speaker became their model in pronunciation rather than their instructor.
- 3- Another reason is that listening to the pronunciation of the native speaker is really interesting as compared with the instructor's. This is because speaking demands aspects higher than the message of practice on merely listening. Speaking needs speaker's sympathy and interaction with the text. These

two factors can be performed by native much better than the instructor.

### **Recommendations**

Due to the findings, the study recommends the necessity of using the language lab for the following reasons:

- 1- Comprehensive listening can be improved through listening practice in the lab,
- 2- Listening to a native speaker as a model of pronunciation leads to mastering the listening skill as in real life,
- 3- Listening to the native speaker is a good opportunity to listen to different accents and moods, and
- 4- Listening to a standard English in the lab is attractive and helps the students to utter the sounds and words correctly. In other words, listening to a standard English by native speaker provides the student with self- confidence of repeating and pronouncing.

### **Suggestions**

In light of the results, the study suggests the following:

- 1- A Similar study to investigate the effect of the lab on the achievement of preparatory schools, and
- 2- A study that investigates the effect of showing English movies on the improvement of students; listening comprehension.

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### **Appendix (A)**

#### **The Test which is Distributed to the Sample of the Study**

**Answer the following questions. Each item is rendered 2 Marks.**

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#### **Q1/ Long and short vowels**

- a-What are the difference between long and short vowel?
- b-What are the similarities between long and short vowel?
- c-Do you think that the long and short vowels have the same aspiration? Why?
- d- Identify the long and short vowels in the following words:  
**up, moon, good**
- 

#### **Q2/Strong and weak syllables**

- a- Mention the criterion of the weak syllable.
- b- Mention the criterion of the weak syllable.

- c- Identify the weak and the strong syllable in the following words:  
**Monkey, Bacon.**
- 

**Q3/ Fricatives and affricatives**

- a-What are the differences between fricatives and affricatives?  
b- Mention the fricatives consonants.  
c- Mention the affricative consonants.