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The relationship between speaking grades and listening grades of university level preparatory students

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between speaking grades and listening grades of university level preparatory students. The students are electric electronic, mechanical and civil engineering students of A1/A2 levels. The students were educated for six hours in a week for each lesson in one term. In the listening and speaking courses a topic based approach is adopted. At the end of the term students were administered a formal written test in listening course that includes a two-minute listening script and comprehension questions in the form of multiple choice and fill in the blanks drills, and an oral speaking exam allowing students to think about on a topic for one minute and speak for two minutes. The exam results of 100 students were analyzed and interpreted using SPSS.

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1. Introduction

In a language learning process it is important to know the order of the skills that should be taught to the learners. Each language skill is connected to one another nurturing themselves also interfering in their development. In order to achieve a harmony and in order not to cause a chaos between skills in learning process, it is crucial to know the nature of the skills and their relations with each other very well. In a successful language learning process, language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – are taught in correct order and are integrated into the learning process in a way that each nurtures one another. Knowing their relations with each other gives the instructors the chance to guide their students' learning process more effectively. Listening skills and speaking skills are the ones

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that should always be kept in coordination with another.

Listening is a cognitive process that involves various factors. It shouldn't be confused with hearing. Hearing is a psychological process, while listening is a cognitive process in which you pay particular attention to what you hear. Hearing doesn't mean listening at all. We hear sounds but we don't listen to them all the time. A successful listening requires certain preconditions such as attention, background and comprehensible input. Learners should attentively listen to the speaker and have a background about the subject that can make the input more comprehensible for listener. Listening can be measured with certain drills. The most common way to understand whether the listeners understand what they hear is comprehension questions about the content of the listening. Also true – false questions and fill-in-the-gaps drills are another to measure listening competence. In listening classes, teachers can experience some problems source of which can be divided into internal and external problems. Internal problems are the ones that stem from the listener and the external ones are generally about the source of listening. One of the biggest internal problems that interfere in understanding the listening is learners' high anxiety. High anxiety causes learner to miss the cues causing him/her to panic and miss the whole part. Also having no background information about the topic of listening makes it difficult to fully understand what they hear. For example a medical student performance in understanding a doctor's speech is better than an engineering student because he/she has background information about the topic. Low quality of listening source and noisy or echoing environment are external factors adversely affecting the listening. The main problem about listening that teachers observe in their classes is lack of motivation. When students are motivated to listen, they can understand what they hear. Motivation is a crucial factor for listening classes. This problem can be overwhelmed with pre-listening activities.

In foreign language learning process, speaking is one of the most important skills due to several reasons. The first reason is that speaking skills are the most concrete parameter showing if the learner speaks the language or not. Since language is communication and mainly conducted by speaking, knowing a language is widely accepted as speaking the language. The second reason why speaking is among the most important skills is its interdisciplinary nature. In other words, speaking skills are directly related to psychology, sociology and education in which speaking is considerably affected by concepts belonging to psychology such as anxiety and inhibition, sociologic concepts such as interaction, integration and communication and educational issues such as input and output relation. The third reason supporting its importance is its individuality since it is much more the learner oriented when compared to other skills. To be brief, speaking skills are quite a complex process in terms of its development within its interdisciplinary nature, vulnerability to individual differences and dependence to several environmental factors. Thus, speaking constitutes a quite complex and problematic field in EFL context, and affected by certain factors.

Speaking skills in the EFL teaching and learning contexts are affected by certain factors, namely internal and external factors. One of the foremost internal factors adversely affecting speaking skills is the learner' over-monitoring themselves (Krashen, 1981). Having interpreted the comprehensible input, learners ponder how to say they want to say in their mind correctly. A speech, usually interrupted by correcting the grammatical mistakes, hinders the fluency, and demotivates the learners. Relevantly to over-monitoring, fear of making mistake is another internal factor for learners. Some learners avoid using language orally with the fear of making mistake and build psychological barriers towards speaking in the target language. There are also certain factors affecting the speaking skills externally. For instance, the lack of comprehensible input in the learning environment is one of the considerable external effects. The learner needs to process the data they gather in their minds to produce something in the target language. The sources that provide comprehensible input such as textbooks, teachers and peers; the curriculum guiding about what to teach and language teaching methods instructing how to teach are all external factors affecting speaking skills. Negative effects of these internal and external factors can be pacified and positive effects can be strengthening with the help of a strong motivation.

As can be understood from the descriptions of listening skills and speaking skills that they have much in common and act as a supplementary in learning process. It would be beneficial to look for the relations between listening skills and speaking skills to exploit the activities to the full.

2. Literature Review

Speaking and listening skills have been researched by many researchers for many year from many aspects and whether there is a relationship between speaking skills and listening skills or not has been the concern of many researchers. Below are the researches that investigate listening and speaking skills in chronological order.

In their study Kitao, & Kitao, (1996) investigate the difficulties in testing speaking. They investigate the idea that

speaking involves a combination of skills that may no correlation with each other. They try to stress how difficult to assess the speaking process and they come up with a conclusion that recording the speaking tasks and then scoring grammar, pronunciation, fluency, content and vocabulary is a way that increase the reliability of speaking assessment process.

Tsou, (2005) regards getting students to respond in a language classroom, especially a foreign language class as a problem that most language teachers face. In his study, he suggests remedies to language learners' reticence, using Taiwanese students as participants. By providing instructions about classroom participation to the students, he wanted to see whether his treatment can increase students' oral participation in class and lead to the improvement of students speaking proficiency and he supported his hypothesis with the data he obtained from his research.

Cheung, (2010) discusses the importance of listening comprehension in learning English as a foreign language and argues that more emphasis should be given to listening comprehension in his study. His study cites significant research findings in SLA and reviews the relationship between listening comprehension and language learning suggesting that listening is prerequisite to other skills and it should be the primary skill to be acquired in language learning.

Bororgian, (2012) regards listening comprehension as the primary channel of learning a language and investigates the relationship between listening and other language skills in International English Language Testing System (IELTS). He puts forward that despite the significant relationship with other language skills, listening comprehension is treated lightly in the applied linguistic research. In his study, to examine the relationship between listening skills with other language skills he had used the outcome of 1800 Iranian participants undertaking IELTS in Tehran and came to the conclusion that there is a close relation between listening comprehension and the overall language proficiency.

3. Research Question

Thinking about the points that listening and speaking skills have in common, it is useful to look for the relations between these skills to arrange the activities and create a more systematic learning process. In order to find out whether there is a relationship between listening skills and speaking skills or not this study was conducted and the research question of this study is as follow:

- Is there any relationship between listening skills and speaking skills comparing the exam results of university level preparatory students?

4. The Purpose of the Study

This study investigates the relationship between listening skills and speaking skills. Listening skills and speaking skills act as a supplementary in learning process that cannot be separated from one another. On the other hand they should be taught in coordination with each other. Knowing if there is a relation between these skills or not and to what extend their relation is would help instructors to emphasize on certain points that is expected to increase the quality of learning process. Also the correlation result of the study gives us the clue about the success or failure of learning process leading us to overview the method, techniques, materials and syllabus used in courses.

5. Method

In this study, it was aimed to find the correlation between speaking and listening grades of university level preparatory students in final exam. Student have taken speaking and listening courses for one term and at the end of the term they took a final exam. At the beginning of the term students had been administered a placement test and A1/A2 level students were chosen as subjects of this study. In listening and speaking courses students met for six hours in a week and for fourteen weeks in one term. A topic based approach is adopted in listening courses. Every week, students listened to short, informative audios and made practices with different drills such as fill-in-the-blanks, matching, comprehension questions, yes-no or true-false questions. In some weeks visual materials were used as well as audio materials. In speaking classes, students practiced conversation dialogues form different topics. Also they made oral discussions about the topics in listening courses. At the end of the term students took a written listening exam and oral speaking exam. In listening exam, a short listening track (2-3 minutes) was used in exam

and students were expected to answer comprehension questions in the form of multiple choice and fill in the blanks drills. In speaking exam, students were given the opportunity to choose from pre-defined topics, thinking for one minute and speak for two minutes. In the evaluation of their speaking performance, grammatical accuracy, fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary use were taken into consideration.

6. Participants

The participants of the study were chosen among preparatory students whose majors were electric-electronic engineering, mechanical engineering and civil engineering. At the beginning of the term all students were administered a multiple choice placement test including vocabulary, translation, comprehension, grammar and dialogue completing questions. According to the results of the placement test 100 students of A1/A2 level were chosen as participants of the study. The native language of all participants is Turkish. They are from the same age group ranging from 18 to 20.

7. Data Analysis and Conclusion

At the end of the term (after 14 weeks), students were administered a written listening exam and an oral speaking exam. Students' listening and speaking exams were evaluated and the correlation between speaking grades and listening grades of university level preparatory students was found as 0,338011124. Also the mean of speaking exam was found as 56,2 and the mean of listening exam was 83,5. Looking at the data we may draw some conclusions. The correlation number between speaking and listening grades tell us that there is little relationship between speaking grades and listening grades of preparatory students. The common sense tells people that there is a high relationship between listening and speaking. The low correlation between listening and speaking underlies some factors. The major factor that negatively effects the correlation between two variables is anxiety. In speaking exams students are more anxious than they are in listening exams. By its nature speaking is an individual skill that is affected much by individual differences such as anxiety when compared to speaking. Also speaking requires a production which is regarded as the last phase of language learning process while listening is just reflection of the comprehension that can be accepted as easier to speaking production. Also speaking is regarded as a completely active action that needs a linguistic background as well as communicative and social abilities but listening is much passive when compared to speaking that makes the exam process easier. The syllabus, methods and techniques adopted and the drills practiced may be another factors causing low correlation between speaking and listening grades. For further study it would be useful to start a new session eliminating the problems above and adopting new techniques and then looking for the correlation between listening and speaking grades again.

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