

A LITERATURE REVIEW ON THE INFLUENCE OF PORTFOLIO-WORK TOWARDS EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

In the new context of globalization in general and EFL education in particular, those with proficient LC competence of English language will be put at a wonderful advantage and benefit in communicative situations. As a result, EFL learners and teachers have given listening increasing concern and emphasis. This research proposal aims at investigating the application of portfolios as a vigorous strategy to enhance the listening comprehension (LC) of EFL college students. For the most part, core literature related to LC including characteristics of the listening process, factors affecting listening capacity, suggestions for improvement as well as the avail of employing listening portfolios will be desperately investigated with the hope of promoting EFL students' listening skills, which accordingly can help them achieve more success in their LC capacity.

Keywords: *listening portfolio; listening comprehension; EFL; literature review*

INTRODUCTION

Of the four language skills, the majority of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners constantly reckon listening to be the most challenging due to the complication associated with it. Understandably, the practice of teaching and learning listening has never been effortless with EFL practitioners' endeavor in hunting appropriate approaches and EFL students' struggle for LC. The aforementioned picture is a result of being unfamiliar with the native accents of the target language (Ismat, 2013) in addition to the existence of modest listening skills. In the new context of globalization in general and EFL education in particular, those with proficient LC competence of English language will be put at a wonderful advantage and benefit in communicative situations. As a result, EFL learners and teachers have given listening increasing concern and emphasis (Vandergrift, L., 2007; Seldin, P., 2009; Setyo, 2017) while taking into consideration that successful listening skills and effective LC could be only attained over time and with great effort. Praised as an alternative evaluation technique, portfolios are highly appreciated for their efficacious contribution towards EFL students' practice, attitudes and progress in listening skills and LC. A portfolio would be especially helpful with regard to the current situation at my institution where EFL students' fear and lack of listening skills as well as their poor LC performance in the achievement test are obvious. Defined as "systematic, purposeful, and meaningful collections of students' works" (De Fina, 1992) listening portfolios are believed to help students develop their self-reflection and evaluation based on actual problems and progress they have encountered. A listening portfolio looks like any other type of portfolio. It includes pieces of work or assignments that showcase a students' ability. A portfolio can function in a number of ways either as a mini task as a weekly check-in or a midterm or final assessment to see how students have improved their LC and listening skills over the surveyed period. In other words, with listening portfolios, teachers' main target is to have students simply show what they have done and can do regarding their listening proficiency level. In addition, through observations and interviews, teachers are supposed to obtain a general overview of their students' accomplishments, those most useful assignments and an idea of how their students' LC (as well as attitude) has progressed in the area of listening. Based on this, English teachers can decide suitable requirements for their students' listening portfolios, which helps highlight the students' growth in listening area while meeting school testing and assessing requirements if framed properly.

Aware of the importance and advantages associated with the listening portfolios in terms of improving EFL students' autonomous learning and overall achievement while serving as an effective evaluation tool, several EFL educational institutions have recently applied this technique and enjoyed certain benefits. The aforementioned functionalities reveal the reason why portfolios are appreciated as an effective, motivating and fun way to review language and reflect on one's own outcome (British Council, 2008) has recently been popular in EFL classrooms, especially LC lessons. For the

same token, this paper aims to shed light on existing literature as well as research methods in recent academic journal papers related to the application of portfolio-work to improve EFL students' LC competency.

SUPPORTIVE LITERATURE IN 4 EXISTING RESEARCH ARTICLES

Only recently has the narrative of literature regarding applying listening portfolio approach to enhance LC for EFL learners seen its growth in academic field around the globe. There seems to be an overall consensus among authors of the following 4 articles where effective pedagogical approaches, particularly customized listening portfolios (Carrier, 2003), are believed to help promote the comprehension of this language skill.

Article 1: PiriLeeck. (2013). Portfolio-work and its effects on listening comprehension of very young learners. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, Vol. 3(1), pp. 43-56.

In this paper, the author stated that LC at beginners' level does not mean that a learner has to understand every single word. The problem would lie in the fact that productiveskills are generally seen as the only true indicator of accomplishment in language learning by both teachers and learners. The author wished to investigate possibilities of improving his mixed-level students' LC as well as their attitudes toward LC. He argued that LC is "invisible", and there truly exists a subtle connection between a student's correct answers in a listening task and his/her level of comprehension or skill (Flowerdew & Miller, 2006, p. 184). Therefore, a teacher can only assume the cause, and the student's view can be helpful in illustrating the factual situation (Rampillon, 2000). In these cases, a portfolio, which is operated on by single student's active involvement and interaction during the listening process, is a beautiful alternative. With portfolios, students' self-reflection on their accomplishment will hopefully become great motivation for them in mastering this language skill.

The author pointed out that LC which involves different levels of understanding requires different strategies. Therefore, he intentionally included a portfolio with "strategy pages" in his research to see whether this approach can help improve LC for ELF young learners. In line with the perspective of Kolb (2007), the author also affirmed that portfolio work encompasses more than training students' self-evaluation skills. As mentioned in the article, there exist various genres of language portfolios, most of which are text-book independents and have been proved more effective.

Article 2: MelekDemirel, HaticeDuman. (2015). The Use Of Portfolio in English Language Teaching and its Effects on Achievement and Attitude. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 191, pp. 2634-2640.

In these authors' viewpoint, listening portfolios serve as reflection of EFL students' learning autonomy outside classroom and efficacious assessment tools for EFL teachers. To enhance students' listening skill as well as comprehension capacity, EFL teachers are supposed to formulate increasing events where the students have frequent exposure to listening tasks to discover their own limitations and strengths. Based on this, relevant measures, ranging from choosing proper frame for the listening portfolios and appropriate teaching methods could be developed. It has been widely accepted that well-prepared portfolios are of great significance and efficiency in terms of enhancing EFL students' LC and autonomous study.

The authors believed that portfolio application which can be used easily in linguistics education for students at various proficiency levels and age groups contributes to constructivist learning theory (Mıhladı, 2007). The authors also cited a list of portfolio definitions and functions to help clarify this tool's contributions to language learning and teaching. The most worthwhile and strongly related citations to the research topic in this article include those developed by Berberoğlu (2006), Güngör (2005) and Bahar (2006).

Article 3: IrfanYurdabakan, TolgaErdogan. (2009). The Effects of Portfolio Assessment on Reading, Listening and Writing Skills of Secondary School Prep Class Students. *The Journal of International Social Research*, Vol. 2(9), pp. 526-538.

According to Irfan and Tolga (2009), creating realistic tasks is one of, if not the most crucial part of a listening portfolio. Listening to comprehend something created for native speakers in your second language is an overwhelming task or even "stressor" (Hasan, 2000; Graham, 2003), especially when you don't know what you're listening for. Teachers should make sure the students are well-informed of what they are listening so that they are prepared to connect it to their previous experience and knowledge on the topic while formulating necessary data and thoughts. This article's findings revealed positive feedback toward adoption of listening portfolios with evidence of concrete changes in EFL students' study habits and self-evaluation abilities.

The authors stated that the idea of using portfolios as an evaluation instrument is still novel in the authors' home country of Turkey, especially for the purpose of influencing EFL students' listening and speaking skills. In this paper, portfolio is

praised as a fair and practical assessment approach which increases EFL students' responsibility, originality and motive towards their learning as they enjoy greater freedom in developing meta-cognitive strategies (Goh&Taib, 2006) and self-reflection skills. In addition, properly-framed portfolios boost EFL students' interests, motivation and confidence towards learning, which accordingly affirms them lifelong language learners.

Article 4: Ducker, N. (2013). Self-directed Internet-based extensive listening portfolios. *JALT2012 Conference Proceedings*. Tokyo: JALT, pp. 516-526.

Based on his experimental research, Ducker declared that EFL teachers should instruct and set requirements that the students participate in an interactive sort of selection and reflection, instead of just choosing random pieces of work in the listening portfolios. In the other words, teachers should make students responsible for developing the portfolio by choosing relevant materials. Moreover, students are constantly encouraged to think outside-of-the-box, or outside-of-the-classroom, to put their lens on pragmatic evidence. Though better suited to advanced learners, lower level learners can also participate in some extent of self-reflecting on their learning experiences (Chau, 2006) when they're selecting materials, considering their (i) strengths and weaknesses, (ii) favorite strategies and (iii) progress in terms of listening skills and LC.

The author considered diverse websites for suitable language inputs to include in the listening portfolios then decided to choose www.elllo.org for the following reasons: (i) he believed that conversation genre is the most interest-fueling and holds greater value for EFL learners (Yashima, 2002/2009) than the others; (ii) the free and convenient access to numerous conversational themes at varying difficulty levels and of different text length; (iii) a free source of naturally produced language and accents with available scripts and quizzes.

RESEARCH METHOD REVIEW OF THE AFOREMENTIONED ARTICLES

Article 1: PiriLeeck. (2015). *Portfolio-work and its effects on listening comprehension of very young learners. Journal of Language and Cultural Education, Vol 3(1), pp. 43-56.*

With the interest in checking improvements in the overall LC competences of young EFL students through portfolio work, PiriLeeck (2015) conducted the qualitative research design which called for a comparison of a so-called treatment-group with a control one. The idea was to observe the students' changes in terms of their attitude and skills during the practice of regular listening tasks and assignments. The researcher invited a relatively small amount of EFL students as participants and involved them in frequent listening portfolio work both inside and outside lesson time. This favors the idea in my proposed research that listening skills and LC are better attained as well as assessed more concisely through regular practice compared to pure performance on LC tests. In addition, portfolios allow EFL teachers to analyze how their students' progress based on ongoing observations and the students' reflection. For this research, both groups were required to self-evaluate their learning with the same reflection pages though the students of the control-group had not been involved in portfolio work. Like mine, this research design in Piri's study enables not only observation of EFL students' listening progress through on their portfolio work but also their reflection and learning strategies.

Article 2: MelekDemirel, HaticeDuman. (2014). *The Use Of Portfolio In English Language Teaching And Its Effects On Achievement And Attitude. Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences, Vol 191, pp. 2634- 2640.*

In this study, Melek and Hatice (2014) employed the experimental design pretest-posttest with the participation of 31 EFL students, 16 of whom gathered the experimental group and the other 15 formed the control one. This study shares many pedagogical aspects with regard to my proposed research which is also based on experimental design. Although portfolio work is the common concern, these authors conducted research on a smaller size of samples, with younger participants (secondary students) and in a broader scale (4 English skills). Likewise, to collect data, an achievement test which included cognitive questions aimed at assessing EFL students' background knowledge, listening skills and LC levels was prepared. Another point should be noted is that the scale developed by Şahinel (2002) was used in this study to determine the attitudes of the surveyed students while Likert scale is what I mean to apply in my own research. When the scores of the surveyed tests were compared, the authors concluded that portfolio practice had positive effects on EFL students' motivation, overall listening skill and LC. This finding coincides my expected research outcome concerning the benefits of portfolio in terms of EFL students' LC performance and attitudes.

Article 3: IrfanYurdabakan, TolgaErdogan. (2009). *The effects of Portfolio assessment on Reading, Listening and Writing skills of secondary school prep class students. The Journal of International Social Research, Vol 2(9), pp. 527-538.*

Also following the experimental design with two randomly selected treatment and control groups of 22 students each, but in this study, Irfan and Tolga (2009) conducted their survey with Turkish students at younger age (15-16) compared to those involved in my proposed research. The experimental procedures are characterized as follows: (1) the pre-test

was given to both groups under the same conditions before the implementation; (2) the treatment group experienced a semester with portfolio work while the control group operated with the traditional course program; (3) Irfan (one of the two authors) was the teacher in both groups during the experimental stage; and (4) both groups took the post-test by the end of the 12-week implementation. However, after an almost the same surveyed period as mine, the findings were unlike the expected outcome of my research, which indicated that portfolio application had no significant influence on EFL students' listening skills and their LC. This study would have gained greater reliability and validity if the researchers had operated on a considerably bigger size and more focused on portfolio assessment. In addition to unclear descriptions of the research conditions, a detailed explanation of data analysis and presentation could be found nowhere.

Article 4: Nathan Ducker. (2013). *Self-directed Internet-based extensive listening portfolio. JALT2012 Conference Proceedings*, pp. 516-525.

In this paper, Nathan D. (2013) reported an EFL teacher's efforts in providing his students with extensive listening portfolios as supportive language input (Lyddon, 2012) which were used as homework during a full school year. This study involved 24 Japanese college students, who also operated in similar learning conditions as the participants in my proposed research. According to Nathan, the examined teacher showed his great dedication and innovation towards EFL education in many aspects: (i) he developed the listening portfolios by exploiting available (and appropriate) materials on the Internet while giving opportunities for authentic practice; (ii) the listening portfolio work was applied only in the treatment group on a regular basis. Another unique feature of this study lies in the extreme effort of the researcher in selecting from multiple materials on the Internet to design suitable activities and assessment for the listening portfolios. Compared to my research, the sample population in this study is more modest and the main source for compiling listening portfolios was mostly from the Internet. Besides, the students' improvement in listening skills and overall LC performance was also obviously seen after portfolio application period, which matches my project's expected outcome.

CONCLUSION

The usefulness of listening portfolio lies in the fact that it provides EFL teachers with a tool to instruct and facilitate their students develop their level of LC. As reported in the above 4 articles, enhanced autonomous learning ability and dramatic listening improvement among surveyed EFL students were clearly seen at the end of portfolio application. The selected authors all highly appreciate a properly-designed EFL listening portfolio in the aspect that it serves not only as an efficacious learning tool for learners but an efficient means of assessment (Kurita, 2012) for teachers. In light of all the above articles, the qualitative (or quasi qualitative) method is employed to investigate the potential measures to help improve EFL students' listening skills and LC capacity. These researchers, based on their experience, determined the sample sizes, data collection and presentation instruments as well as duration of the research that best reflected their own contexts of EFL teaching and learning. Another common feature clearly seen in all examined articles as well as in mine is the presence of pre-and-post-structured questionnaires and focus interviews. The size of samples, the format of the listening portfolios, the analysis of influential factors, and the number of research cycles might differ among the studies; nevertheless, all aim at attaining effective design of listening tasks to foster EFL students' LC performance. Students tend to favor practical learning activities relevant to their needs and interests as well as their prior skills (Coombe, C. et al, 2004; Hamouda, A., 2013), thus, a pragmatic listening portfolio therefore is likely to engage them, and enhance their overall LC accordingly.

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