

USING STORYTELLING TO ENHANCE LOWER SECONDARY STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION ABILITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impacts of Storytelling technique on helping students improve their listening comprehension ability, and students' attitudes toward the use of the technique in listening lessons. The study followed the quasi-experimental research model, with 60 students participated in the control and experimental groups. Data were collected through two instruments including pretest and posttest, and pre and post questionnaires distributed before and after the research period. Findings from the data analysis showed that Storytelling was effective in helping students improve their listening comprehension. Storytelling helped students understand the details of the stories more easily, facilitated students in learning vocabulary and pronunciation, promoted their cognitive process in figuring out the meaning. Students also acknowledged that storytelling made learning listening more interesting to them.

Keyword: - listening comprehension, storytelling, teaching listening, EFL teaching

1. RATIONALE

Under the impact of globalization, the role of English has been raised significantly in Vietnam in recent decades. The language has been commonly regarded as a bridge to connect Vietnam to the world. In schools, English has also become a compulsory subject. Among the four English skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening skill is widely reported as the most challenging one to students with limited English proficiency. Similarly, the majority of students in my class at a lower secondary school in Vietnam also thought listening to be the most difficult skill to acquire. Therefore, in teaching, my colleague and I have been trying to apply different methods and teaching techniques to facilitate them in their listening lessons and helping them improve their listening proficiency. Storytelling was one of the techniques used, which was proved to have positive influence on improving students' ability to listen.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The ability to listen is important in learning a language. It is closely related to the success of other language skill acquisition. According to Rost (1994), if a learner is able to comprehend what they hear, their ability to speak and develop other language skills. Listening comprehension, as defined by Littlewood (1995), is an active process of working out meanings in which language learners should be encouraged to take part.

Storytelling, an activity which is defined as "the art in which a teller conveys a message, truths, information, knowledge, or wisdom to an audience – often subliminally – in an entertaining way, using whatever skills, (musical, artistic, creative) or props he chooses, to enhance the audience's enjoyment, retention and understanding of the message conveyed" (Dudley, 1997), was supposed to be an effective technique to involve young students to actively participate in the process of learning a foreign language. Storytelling sparks students' imagination and interest in learning language skills, builds vocabulary and improves comprehension ability (Barzaq, 2009; Shelly, 2010). In teaching listening, storytelling is potentially beneficial. Storytelling is a form of intensive listening or live listening that provides excellent listening material. When listening to a story, a student can predict what will happen next, and

they also can describe the characters in the story or comment on any parts of the story. Stories create interest (Barzaq, 2009), provide a structure for memorizing material in the course; thus, learners can easily remember separate concepts and difficult definitions exist in the flow of a story. In addition, storytelling improves pupil's concentration and comprehension skills (Sánchez, 2013). A study by Davies (2019) also concluded that storytelling had a place in language learning, especially in listening because it gave students an opportunity to listen to something enjoyable and understandable. From the review of literature, it is proved that the use of storytelling technique makes listening easier for learners can contribute to the development of listening ability.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study followed experimental research design. Participants of the study were divided in to control and experimental group, each of which was a class with 30 lower secondary school students. The former group received no special treatment while storytelling was integrated in teaching listening for the later one in the period of 10 weeks. Before the experimental period, students in both groups took a pretest. At the end of the research period, a posttest was given to both groups to collect data for analysis. Questionnaires before and after the application of storytelling in teaching listening were also distributed to students in experimental group to collect their opinions towards listening before and after storytelling technique was used, also to investigate their attitudes about storytelling and its impacts on their learning of listening skills.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study collected from two types: pre-test and post-tests; pre-intervention and post-intervention questionnaires are summarized as followings:

4.1. Pre-test and post-tests results

Chart 1 below compares two different groups, namely EG (Experimental Group) and CG (Control Group) in terms of the differences in pre-test and post-test results.

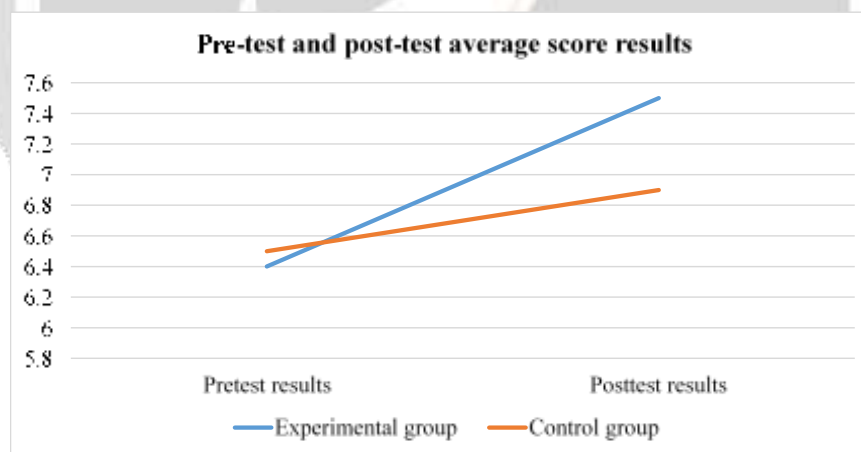


Chart -1: Pre-test and post-test average score results

Figures in chart 1 shows that the results were roughly similar in the pre-test, which somehow proved that students' level of proficiency was fairly equal before the experimental period. In the post-test, both groups achieved better results; however, there was a more significant score gain made by the EG compared to that of the CG.

Table 1 represents students' minimum and maximum scores achieved for the pretest and posttest.

Table -1: Minimum and maximum scores of the pre-test and post test

Group	Test	Minimum score	Maximum score
Experimental	Pre-test	4.5	8.0
	Post-test	6.5	9.0
Control	Pre-test	5.0	8.0
	Post-test	5.5	8.5

As can be seen from the table, either with or without treatment, both groups achieved some improvement after learning listening over a period of time. Significantly, the EG achieved better results than those gained by the CG. In the pre-test, the minimum and maximum scores of the two groups were not distinctly different. To be more specific, the lowest scores were 4.5 and 5.0, respectively, for the experimental and control group, while the maximum scores were both 8.0. However, for the post test, it is recognizable that the figures for both the minimum and maximum scores of the EG were higher than those of the CG. While the minimum and maximum scores of the experimental group were in turn 6.5 and 9.0, the figures for the control group were 5.5 and 8.5. Table 2 below compares the pretest and posttest average scores of the two groups.

Table -2: Pre-test and posttest's average score report

Group	Test	Number of students	Average score	Average score gains
Experimental	Pre-test	30	6.4	1.1
	Post-test	30	7.5	
Control	Pre-test	30	6.5	0.4
	Post-test	30	6.9	

It can be seen from table 2 that the average scores for the pre-test of both groups were slightly different, which was 6.5 for CG and that of the EG was 6.4 before the treatment. After the treatment with the use of storytelling technique, the average score by the experimental and control group were 7.5 and 6.9, respectively. It is recognizable that in the post test, the experimental group's average score was significantly higher than before, while that of the CG only increased slightly. Compared the score gains of the two groups, the score gain by the experimental group was 1.1, nearly three times as much as the average score gain of 0.4 by the other one. This indicated that the intensive use of storytelling reflected positive impact on students' listening skill development.

4.2. Findings from the questionnaires with the experimental group

4.2.1. Findings from the pre-intervention questionnaires

Regarding students' level of interest in learning listening comprehension at school, a significant number of students admitted that they lacked interest in listening lessons. Statistic details are illustrated in the chart below. The chart shows that more than 60% of students thought that listening lessons were only slightly or even not interesting to them. The largest proportion of students (37%) found listening lessons slightly interesting while 27% were not interested in listening. In contrast, only a small number of students found that listening lessons were very interesting (15%) or interesting (22%) to them.

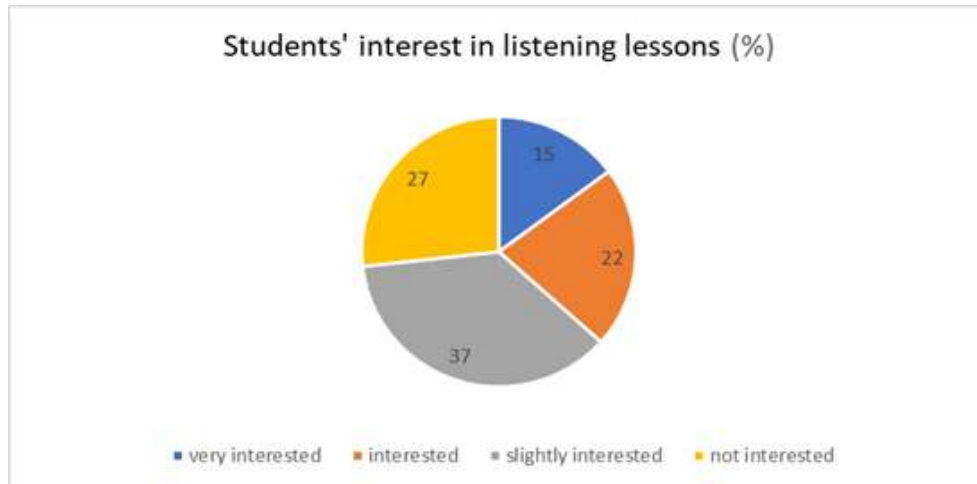


Chart -2: Students’ interest in listening lessons

The students’ lack of interest in listening could be an important factor that affected their participation in listening lessons. Students’ level of attention to listening, are shown in the chart below. According to the figures in the chart, the number of students who admitted that they were very attentive during listening lessons accounted for only 13%, which is the smallest proportion of the chart. In contrast, the figure for those who acknowledged that they were not attentive was a little higher, at 20%. The most significant figure was for students who were only slightly attentive, which accounted for 43% of the students surveyed.

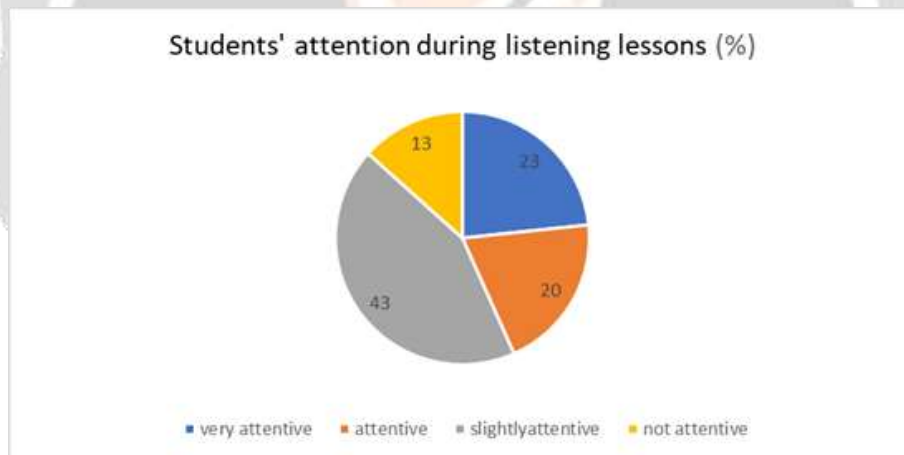


Chart -3: Students’ attention during listening lessons

4.2.2. Findings from the post-intervention questionnaires

To capture students’ attitudes towards the use of the Storytelling technique in listening lessons and the benefits they got from the application of the technique in their classroom, the post-intervention questionnaires were applied. Chart 4 depicts students’ attitudes towards learning listening through Storytelling technique. After the treatment, it was recognizable that students’ attitudes towards learning listening were mostly positive. More students found learning listening with storytelling very interesting (40%) and interesting (34%), a gain of 25% and 12%, respectively, compared to the proportions of 15% and 22% before storytelling was used. Only a total of 26% students found that storytelling was not interesting (3%) or slightly interesting (23%), which was 64% before the treatment period.

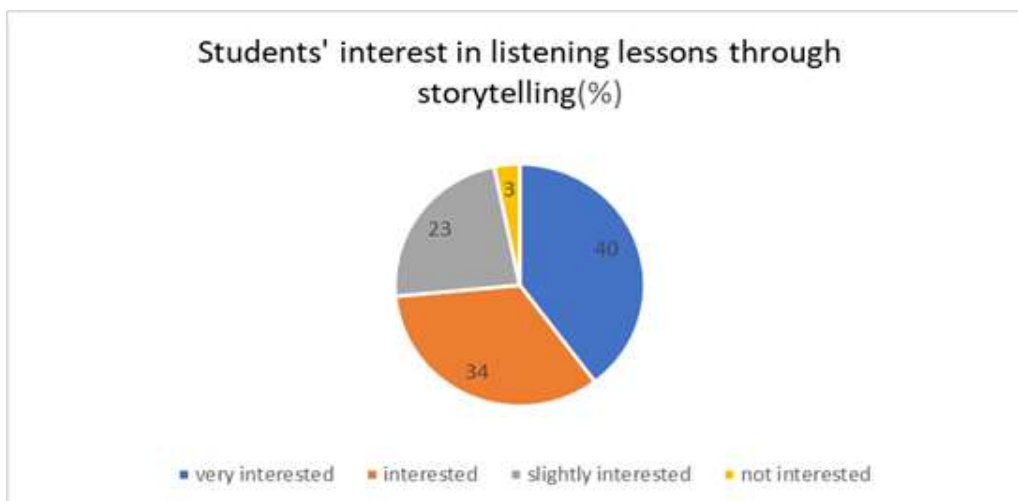


Chart -4: Students' interest in listening lessons through Storytelling

The chart below compared the level of attention that students in the experimental group paid to the listening lessons before and after the treatment period. It is recognizable that there was a change of attitudes towards the listening lessons with and without the use of storytelling technique. When the Storytelling was used, students were much more attentive during the listening lessons. The number of students who were very attentive and attentive in learning increased significantly from 23% and 20% before the treatment to 50% and 33%, respectively, after Storytelling technique was applied. On the contrary, the proportion of students who paid slight attention or no attention to learning listening reduced from 43% to 7% and 13% to 3% in response. The statistics confirmed that storytelling was an inspiring technique that promotes students' interest in listening.

When being asked about the effectiveness of Storytelling in helping students improve their listening comprehension ability, 22 out of 30 students (accounting for 73%) agreed that Storytelling had positive opinion and 100% would like their teacher to continue teaching listening through storytelling. Students also shared their opinions of the benefits they had from learning listening through Storytelling technique.

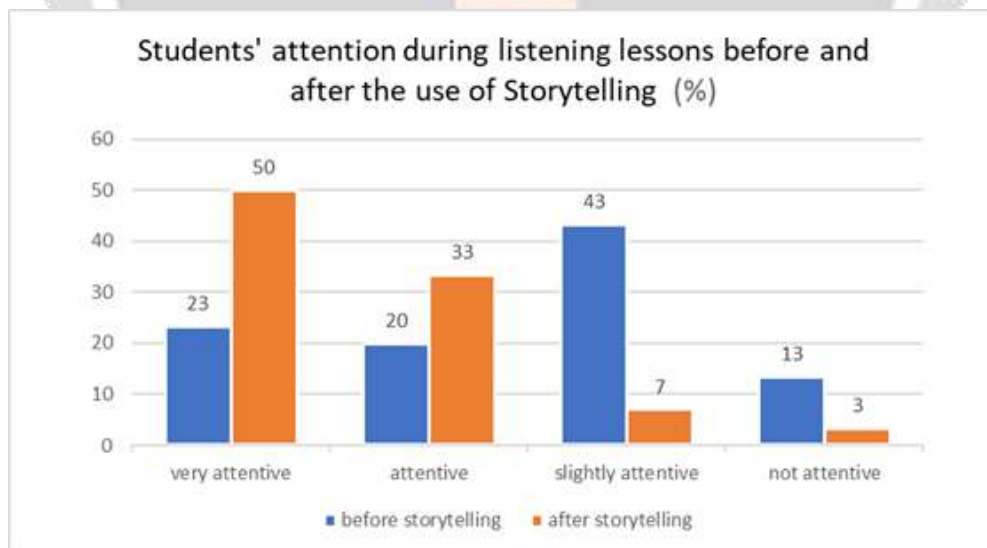


Chart -5: Students' attention during listening lessons before and after the use of Storytelling technique.

The results of this study were quite consistent across a number of previous studies to the point that the participants of this research also found the usefulness of the Storytelling technique for their learning of listening thanks to a

number of benefits. More than two third of students (over 70%) found that storytelling made them more familiar with the pronunciation of the words they learnt and helped them remember the meaning of the new words more easily. The use of the technique also helped students to be better at catching the key words while listening (63%), focusing (66%), and understanding the details of the stories more easily (60%). Besides, storytelling also improved students' vocabulary retention as 56% of them shared that they remembered the words learnt for longer time. Listening to storytelling also facilitated the development of other listening subskill such as the ability to predict due to the fact that students kept imagining and making prediction while listening to a story. Therefore, 63% of students that Storytelling made them more interested in learning listening.

Table -3: Students' opinions about the benefits of learning listening through Storytelling

Benefits of learning listening through Storytelling	Number of students	%
It's easier for me to remember the words learnt from stories.	21	70
I remember the meaning of the words learnt from stories for a longer time.	17	56
I know how to catch the key words while listening.	19	63
I focus better when listening.	20	66
I am more familiar with the pronunciation of the words learnt.	22	73
I can understand the details in the stories I listen to.	18	60
I often predict what happens next when listening to a story.	14	46
Listening to stories can be a form of entertainment for me.	18	60
I feel more interested in learning listening.	19	63

5. DISCUSSION

The study highlights the key point that due to the application of Storytelling, students in the experimental group achieved much better results compared to those in the control group who did not received any treatment. This fact implied that storytelling had positive effects on students' listening comprehension. This finding was similar to a number of the previous studies (Hemmati, Gholamrezapour and Hessamy 2015; Sánchez, 2013; Oluwakemi, 2014). The continuous exposure to listening made students become more familiar with the different aspects of pronunciation such as the pronunciation of individual words, word and sentence stress, intonation, linking, and ellipsis. From this, students also learnt to catch the content words to work out the meanings of sentences instead of trying to listen to every word of a sentence (Mallan, 1992). Another reason is that Storytelling is said to make students more attentive and stay more focused on the story line (Hemmati, Gholamrezapour and Hessamy, 2015). Studying attentively is always one of the important factors that ensure the effectiveness of learning. Storytelling has great effect on sequential thinking (Barzaq, 2009), enhanced the awareness of story structure and help students recall and comprehend more effectively (Phillips, 2000).

All these things facilitate students in listening and explain why students in the experimental group of this study found it easier to understand the details of the listening text, grasp the meaning of the stories they listen to and remember the vocabulary more easily, thus got better marks in the post test.

The continuous attentive exposure to storytelling also facilitated students in learning words, pronunciation, structures, provided them the opportunities to practice listening to interesting contents. Listening through Storytelling, therefore, was considered not only a way to learn listening but also a form of entertainment for a number of students and the majority of the students in the experimental group would like to continue learning listening through this technique.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

This study investigates the impacts of Storytelling technique and its role in helping students at grade 6 improve their listening comprehension ability, as well as students' attitudes toward the use of the technique in listening lessons.

Findings from the data collected showed that Storytelling was effective in helping students improve their listening comprehension ability in general. Especially, it facilitated students in learning vocabulary and pronunciation, helped improve their ability in listening to specific details, got them to practice different listening skills to understand the meaning of stories. After the research period, students in the experimental groups found that the use of Storytelling technique made learning listening more interesting to them. They also received a number of other benefits associated with the use of the technique in listening lessons.

It is recommended that suitable activities for students should be flexibly designed to make students more engaged in listening. To make storytelling more interesting to students, visual aids such as picture illustration, videos, realia can also be used when Storytelling is applied. This is also a good way to make students feel more interested in listening, thus become more attentive to listening. Sometimes, new words can be a possible barrier for students as some new words in a story causes difficulty comprehension, therefore significantly demotivate them. Consequently, teachers should take into their consideration of some sufficient supports, such as providing a glossary for each story or pre-teach the new difficult vocabulary for students to facilitate interpretation of the message. Besides storytelling by teachers, digital storytelling could also be used. This form of storytelling helps visualize the content of stories and is equipped with sounds that make stories livelier and provides new learning experience for students. More importantly, with digital storytelling, students could self-study at home without relying on their teacher's presence.

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