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THE ROLE OF NEUROLOGY(NEUROSCIENCE) IN OVERCOMING THE DIFFICULTIES OF EFL STUDENTS WITH LISTENING IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper provides information about how to improve EFL students' listening comprehension with the help of techniques and approaches adapted from the field of neuroscience. This paper also discusses the findings of the author in terms of students' listening performance during EFL classes.

Key words: EFL classes, language comprehension, listening, neuroscience, visual memory, visual materials, TED talks

Language skills, mainly listening, are considered one of the most essential parts of learning the English language. Because of the fact that all aspects of a foreign language comprehension is connected to the listening skill, particularly in English, that is to say, the English phonetic system and even the speech organs of native English speakers are totally different from those living in Central Asia. Which is why understanding what is being said in a context of the foreign language plays a crucial role in EFL teaching. There has been a lot in order to improve all of the skills of foreign languages. For example, designing school and university classrooms with the latest technologies in order to make it easy to acquire the English language such as modern



TV sets which are easy to access to the internet and play videos, even sensory gadgets for students to learn.

Tompkins (2002) argues that listening is an important skill for young learners and it is assumed that about 50 percent of classroom time involves listening. In classroom settings, spoken language prevails over written language, especially in the primary stages of language education. Listening and speaking are both active uses of language (Cameron, 2001). However, many learners find it difficult to listen to foreign people even if their comprehension of reading, speaking and writing is excellent. It is a fact that some students often complain that even though they understand well their English teachers during the class as they speak slowly and clearly, they are in trouble of understanding what the native speakers are talking about on the record. Why is this a matter? What is actually wrong in english classes with particularly listening. The first and the biggest problem students are facing is that even though the essence of learning a foreign language, namely improving listening, is widely understood in Uzbekistan, the relevant teaching listening materials haven't been provided.

According to Rubin (1995), "For the foreign language learners, listening is the skill that makes the heaviest processing demands because learners must store information in short term memory at the same time as they are working to understand the information" (p. 8). Furthermore, as she explains, "Whereas in reading learners can go over the text at leisure, they generally don't have the opportunity to do so in listening" (p. 8). O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) claim that "listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constitutes meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge..." (p. 434). Of course, it is evident that the cognitive process of listening is invisible to us. Nonetheless, we might reconsider our approaches to teaching listening if we have a better grasp of the listening process.

The extent to which the methods underlying the generally positive outcomes of such studies have reached classroom practice seems, from my perspective, to be limited, a view that is also expressed by other authors across a range of contexts who



comment on teachers doing listening activities or tests with their learners rather than teaching them how to listen (Suzanne Graham, 2016). This ‘doing’ or ‘testing’ approach dates back a long while in England; thus Chambers (1996) outlines what he sees as the typical approach to listening in foreign language classrooms in that context: learners listen to a text and complete an accompanying exercise, which is then corrected. Listening becomes principally a test of comprehension, typically based on an exercise from a textbook, which, as an examination of such materials indicates, usually requires the understanding of specific details rather than the global meaning of the text (thus probably depriving learners of a sense of achievement if they rarely feel they understand more than a few snippets of class listening materials). This constitutes what Field (2008) calls the ‘Comprehension Approach’ and which, he argues, does little to develop effective listening skills.

There have been some studies involving the use of TED Talks in extensive listening. Takaesu (2017), for example, reported using TED Talks to teach his college EAP (English for Academic Purpose) students whose proficiency levels were quite varied. About 78% of the higher proficiency students felt that the use of TED Talks for extensive listening improved their listening skills. Nearly an equal number of the lower proficiency students (74%) reported improvements in their listening skills. This showed that even though the TED Talk video podcast is a novel media, it is effective in supporting extensive listening practice among language learners.

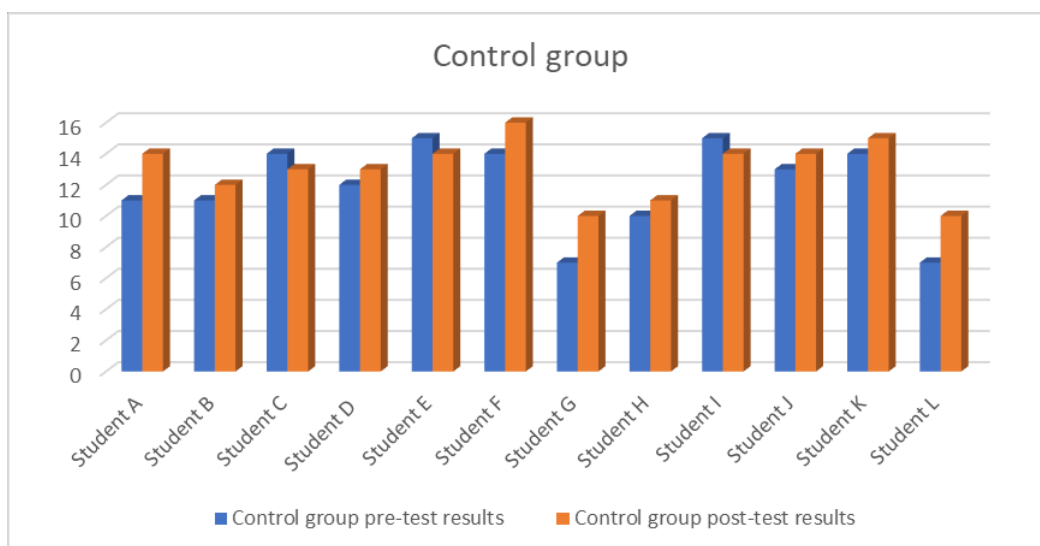
In this research, the subjects were mainly university students studying in two different groups with the same level of language comprehension (B2). Each group consists of 15 students, one is experimental, the next is a control group. The research tool which was used at the beginning of the experiment was an online survey which consists of 10 questions. These questions are mainly based on finding out how frequently students come across challenges with understanding authentic audio materials, what types of materials they prefer to do to improve their listening skills, which topics they are interested in listening to, and challenges they are facing in doing listening tasks. According to the survey, 80% of students are interested in listening to

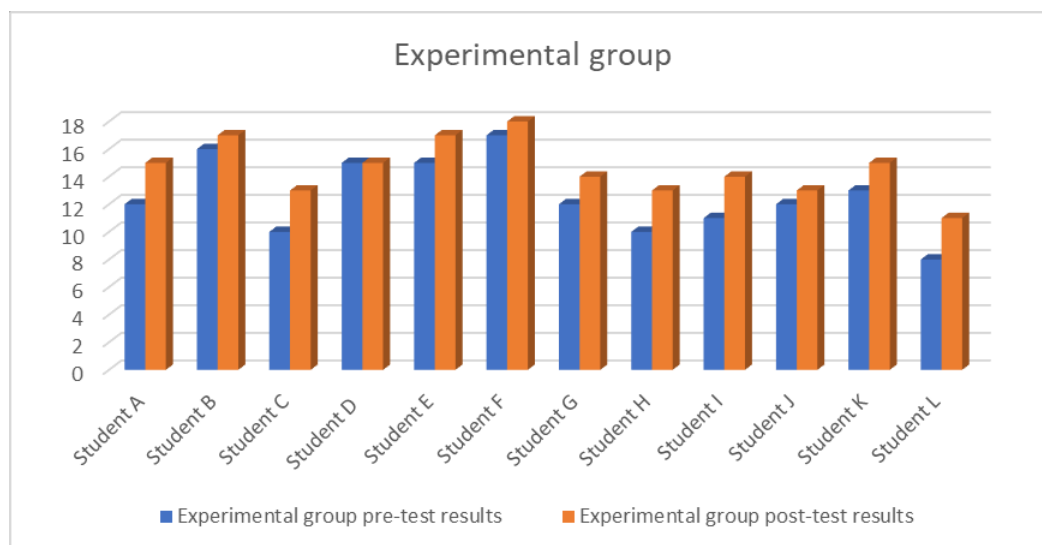


podcasts which are based on current news but often find it difficult to understand the context. They also mentioned that they like to watch things of their interest to improve their language comprehension. In the next step, the author took a pre-test, to check students' overall comprehension in listening. The pre-test consists of 20 questions such as multiple choice, matching information, gap-filling. And the level of the test was around B2, the same for each group. In order to evaluate students' comprehension, scaling system was used.

Score	Level
19-20	C2
17-18	C1
15-16	B2
10-14	B1

According to the pre-test results, students' average listening comprehension was B2 in each group. Each student's result was provided below. And after the post-test, there was a positive improvement on students from experimental group, which means the approaches worked effectively.





Each lesson was designed in terms of students' preferences. Experimental group was taught with the approach that the author was aiming to conduct and control with traditional method. Eight lessons were conducted for each group within several weeks. During the lessons, only authentic materials were chosen and adapted to the class by making up different activities based on the new words, grammar structures, and mainly context. The outstanding thing about the experiment was to use video materials instead of an ordinary listening track. Pre, while, and post activities were applied during each lesson. Additionally, for the vocabulary of the listening task, visual pictures were used made creatively by AI which depict the exact meaning of the words. Those materials helped students to learn new words easily with the help of visual memory based on pictures, and the thing is, students' interest in the listening task increased as the videos contain creative real-life events which also helped them to grab the main theme of the video. Even when some students were asked about the content of the videos, they claimed that they even managed to remember small details because of impact of the moving pictures on them. Apart from that, most students stated that they found doing listening or improving listening with the help of such techniques very straightforward and inspiring.

Regarding to the further investigations, there are wide range of techniques that can be adapted from the field of neuroscience into language teaching, not only for listening but also other skills as well. This can also be achieved by different teaching



tools apart from the visual teaching technique. Also, in order to achieve even more better results, more time and effort may be needed.

In conclusion, this research provided positive outcomes, meaning that using methods and approaches from the field of neuroscience can have benefits in EFL classes once used properly.

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INCORPORATING CURRENT EVENTS AND NEWS ARTICLES IN ESL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This paper is mainly based on improving language learners' reading comprehension with the help of news-based articles taken from the newspapers. It also discusses the research findings regarding to the students' performance during EFL classes.

Key words: a news-based course, news media source, cognitive awareness, news stories.