The Impact of Formative Assessment and Remedial Teaching on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension

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Abstract

This experimental study aimed to investigate the effect of formative assessment and remedial teaching on the EFL learners' listening comprehension. The participants of the study were 34 intermediate students- 12 males and 22 females- who were selected from early total of 60 students after taking the Oxford Placement Test as an English language proficiency test. Having taken the test, they were randomly divided into two groups of control and experimental. Students in both experimental and control groups took part in a listening pre-test (PET) and then during eighteen sessions listened to audiotapes of Expanding Tactics for Listening. The students in the experimental group were given a quiz every four sessions followed by remedial teaching. Following the treatment, both groups took part in a listening post-test. An ANCOVA was run not only to compare the performance of both experimental and control groups after the treatment period but also to show whether post-test differences were due to treatment- formative assessment and remedial teaching- effect or their differences in pre-test. The results of ANCOVA revealed that formative assessment and remedial teaching has a significant effect on the listening comprehension of intermediate EFL learners. The results of the present study could help course book designers, educational planners, material developers, foreign language schools, and teachers to make required adaptations to facilitate learning and improving different language skills and as a result benefit students with varying capabilities.

1. The study

This study aimed to answer the following question:
Do formative assessment and remedial teaching have any impacts on intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension?

1.2. Sample and setting

This study was conducted with 34 intermediate students learning English at an English school in Zanjan, Iran. The participants included 17 males and 17 females in two intact classes which were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups. All the participants were in the age range of 18-22.

1.3. Instruments

Following instruments were used to conduct the present study:
1. Preliminary English Test (PET): The listening section of two different versions of PET which provide a practical way of assessing students' level of L2 listening were used as pre-test and post-test.
2. Classroom quizzes: Four formative quizzes were used during the treatment only in the experimental group. Quizzes were teacher-made and syllabus based. Items of the quizzes were in the forms of multiple choice, true/false, and fill in the blank. The function of these formative quizzes was to assess students' mastery of the objectives of the unit.

1.4. Materials

Expanding Tactics for Listening by Jack C. Richards, which is intended for intermediate students, was used as the source of teaching material during class sessions. Students listened to the audiotapes and completed the provided activities.

1.5. Data collection procedures

The two classes were randomly divided into two control and experimental groups. Both groups took the listening part of a PET as the pre-test. The classes were general English classes held for eighteen sessions three times a week lasting 90 minutes each. We devoted 30 minutes to listening each session.

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A typical session for all classes started with a warm-up activity, the function of which was to prepare the class for the main activity and create a rapport between the teacher and the learners. Then, the teacher provided some background information about the materials to be listened during that session. At the next stage, students in both control and experimental groups listened to the audiotapes of *Expanding Tactics for Listening* book and accomplished the provided exercises. The difference was that every four session students in the experimental group took a quiz. These quizzes were administered after the regular class time. Based on the students' performance in quizzes, they had a follow-up feedback or remedial teaching. To improve student's achievement continuously during the teaching period, the researcher adopted the method of assessment paper review with follow-up remedial work or activities at the end of each formative quiz. During paper review, the teacher analyzed the performance of the participants. If two or three of the participants had some problems with a particular point, she attempted to obviate the problematic point through giving oral guidance to individual participants. When the number of these individual feedbacks was limited, the teacher did not keep the book of them and just wrote the area of individual students' difficulty beside their names to be dealt with later. When the number of the students who made mistakes was more than three, the teacher reviewed the problematic points and strategies needed for comprehension of them in the class.

The problems the students faced during listening activities were mostly related to word recognition and vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, as remedial teaching, to help them overcome this problem, we pre-taught the new words that we thought would cause a problem during listening. Second, we had the students listen to each part three times. First, they listened for general meaning, then we explained the meaning of the extra words and expressions they did not understand. As the last activity, we paused at the end of each T-unit and had the students repeat after it. When needed the audial text was replayed and the participants listened to the entire portion or a segment from the portion based on their area of misunderstanding.

After finishing the18th session, the post-test was given to the students in two groups and its results were compared to the results of the pre-test to investigate the effect of formative assessment and remedial teaching on the listening comprehension of the students.

1.6. Design
The present study is a quasi-experimental pre-test post-test control group design.

2. Data analysis
Data analysis was done by SPSS 17 software. A number of descriptive and inferential analyses were conducted on the data. The data were analyzed descriptively using mean and standard deviation. An ANCOVA was run not only to compare the function of both experimental and control groups after the treatment period but also to show whether post-test differences were due to treatment – formative assessment and remedial teaching – effect or their possible variation in the starting point – pre-test. The results were as follows:

Table 1.
The Results of the Participants' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in Control Group

	N	minimum	maximum	mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-test in control group	17	14	20	16.76	1.85
Post-test in control group	17	16	22	18.53	2.00
Valid N (listwise)	17				

Table 2.
The Results of the Participants' Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores in Experimental Group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test in Experimental Group	17	13	19	16.47	1.87
Post-Test in Experimental Group	17	17	25	20.94	2.08
Valid N (listwise)	17				

The equality of the variances between two groups was checked by Levene's test. The test revealed that the underlying assumption of homogeneity of variance for the one-way ANCOVA has been met – as evidenced by $F (1, 32) = 1.580$, $p = 0.218$. That is, $p (0.218) > .05$.

With regard to the null hypothesis of the study, that is, formative assessment and remedial teaching do not affect the listening comprehension of Iranian EFL learners, an ANCOVA was conducted. According to Dornyei [4], in quasi-experimental studies, the use of ANCOVA contributes to the reduction of the initial group differences. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.

As it is shown in Table 3 , the first line shows that the pre-test is significantly related to the post-test ($P< 0.05$) with the magnitude of 0.604. The next line is the indicator of the main effect of the formative assessment and remedial teaching assessment on the dependent variable – listening post-test. After adjusting for pretest scores, there was a significant effect of the group, $F (1,31)= 35.134$, $p < 0.05$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.531$. As P-value is less than 0.05, the difference between two groups is significant and the effect of formative assessment and remedial teaching on L2 listening skill is clear. Therefore, the research null hypothesis was rejected and the answer for the research question was 'YES'. That is, formative assessment and remedial teaching has a significant effect on the listening comprehension skill of Iranian EFL students.

Table.3.
Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), Dependent Variable: Post-Test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	129.831a	2	64.916	38.123	.000	.711
Intercept	12.545	1	12.545	7.367	.011	.192
Pre-Test	80.390	1	80.390	47.211	.000	.604
Groups	59.826	1	59.826	35.134	.000	.531
Error	52.786	31	1.703			
Total	13425.000	34				
Corrected Total	182.618	33				

a. R Squared = .711 (Adjusted R Squared = .692)

3. Discussion and conclusion

Upon completion of treatment, the results of the study indicated that in the experimental group in contrast to the control group, there was a considerable improvement in L2 listening comprehension. Although, both groups show a certain degree of improvement, experimental group outperformed the control group in a statistically significant level and this became evident when having a closer look at the learners' performance in both groups. As the results of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) indicated, the null hypothesis of the study has been rejected. At last, it was concluded that formative assessment can contribute to the improvement of L2 listening comprehension in the Iranian EFL context and learners can benefit to a large degree from constructive feedback. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the use of formative assessment, consisting of frequent, cumulative, and time-restricted quizzes with immediate constructive feedback and remedial teaching had a strong effect on improving the listening comprehension of the Iranian EFL learners which, in turn, allows for continuous readjustment of teaching and learning strategies leading to an improvement of student performance. Findings of the present study were in line with the findings of Black and William [1] who concluded that formative assessment and immediate feedback instruction have a significant effect on children's learning. This study also confirms the William, Lee, Harrison, and Black's [7] study which indicated that formative assessment provided a

deeper and richer description of learners' existing and potential abilities, which enables programs to focus on the personal weaknesses of the students and help accommodate subsequent instructions to learners' existing problems.

The results of students' performance before and after implementation of formative assessment and follow-up instructions in Chun's [3] study which were analyzed through t-test revealed a significant improvement in students' performance after determining their problems and holding follow-up teaching. The findings of the present study are also parallel to their findings. Furthermore, the results of present study support Cheng's [2] study which indicated that not only remedial teaching improves students' scores, but also the procedure is effective in obtaining information in students' learning potential. Similarly, there are also many other studies [5],[6] which all acknowledge the positive effect of formative assessment and remedial teaching on different facets of participants' second or foreign language learning which can be a powerful evidence for the constructive effect of focusing students language deficits.

The present study has shown that a unique combination of formative assessment techniques, along with remedial teaching and readjustment of teaching practices to develop students' listening comprehension can substantially improve their performance in English classes. Implementation of this approach does not require a major allocation of financial and material resources by the educational institutions. The best reward for teachers is experiencing their students' achievement. Students' Success is a motivating and inspiring factor for both students and their instructors. This approach encourages students to work harder to learn more and to inculcate enthusiasm in teachers to continue with their innovative ways. Furthermore, it improves teacher student interaction which itself may trigger learners' active involvement and motivation. When the syllabus for a course is not based in the learners' needs, and the assessment is only summative, teaching becomes a matter of completing the syllabus, and learning becomes a matter of passing the course, which itself is a waste of time and resources. Formative assessment, a form of assessment for leaning (AFL), provides the opportunity for teachers to make appropriate adaptations to meet students' needs; as a result, assessment and consequently learning become goal oriented.

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