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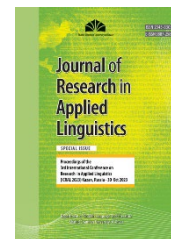
Implementing a Listening Training Program to Improve Future Teachers' English Listening Skills

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Abstract

This article aims to demonstrate the efficacy of incorporating edutainment into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in order to improve the listening skills of future English teachers enrolled in a language university. Edutainment technology, public lectures, and TED Talks are considered within the scope of this study. A total of 18 video lectures were chosen in alignment with the subject matter of the Keynote book. A set of exercises comprising several types of tasks (true/false, matching, filling in gaps, multiple-choice, and open-ended questions) was devised. A pedagogical experiment involving students who are aspiring English teachers at Kazan Federal University was also detailed. The novelty of the study lies in the development of a set of edutainment-based tasks intended to improve university students' listening skills through the utilization of TED Talks and public lectures. We were able to conclude that the utilization of the prescribed series of exercises inspired by TED Talks positively impacts the growth of listening abilities, based on the outcomes of the pedagogical experiment involving fifty second-year students aspiring to become English teachers at Kazan Federal University.

Keywords: TED Talks; English Language; Listening; Future Teachers.

1. Introduction

Since the incorporation of various educational technologies into classroom instruction has become an essential component of instruction, the issue of selecting and utilizing various technologies and their tools has occupied educators' and scholars' attention for a long time. It is important to use edutainment in conjunction with information and communication technologies (ICT) in EFL classrooms. The combination of two processes, education and entertainment, resulted in the development of edutainment as a modern educational technology of the 21st century, which provides knowledge acquisition while producing "useful entertainment" (Kobzeva, 2012). The analysis of a large amount of English and Russian literature revealed that scholars interpret edutainment in various ways. For example, Professor Addis (2002) defines this technology as "a specific activity based on learning while simultaneously satisfying a person's curiosity" (Nazarova et al., 2018). According to Kazanci (2009), this technology is a hybrid genre that relies mostly on visual material in the form of a story or a game, is more informal, and has less in common with a didactic style. According to Popov (2006), this technology adapts all multimedia media to "create" material for the class and mix it with entertainment forms, such as TV programs or computer software.

One of the Russian scholars, Popov, defines edutainment as "learning as entertainment," and the author defines it as "effective knowledge of the world in a playful way." "Learning should be inextricably linked with entertainment," writes Dyakonova (2013), "but the amount of time it is used during the class and which edutainment tool is implemented can be determined by the teacher based on the specific educational situation." Based on the perspectives of English and Russian researchers, it is possible to conclude that the main feature of edutainment is the creation of an educational and entertaining environment through the use of ICT and multimedia tools.

2. Literature Review

Languages are essentially taught to communicate. As a result, language teaching aims to improve students' oral and written communication skills. Students, however, must have language skills in order to communicate effectively. Listening is one of the skills that should be taught before speaking, reading, and writing in language teaching (O'Connor, 1998). Learners would be interested in material for listening skills based on their level. According to Ur (1984), exercises for 'listening skills' are more effective if the participants understand what is being demonstrated. Consequently, it is best to provide students with several types of input, such as video, audio, text, animation, and so on. Furthermore, it is stated that the message, speaker, listener, and setting may all be involved.

In 'listening skills,' the types of activity are 'dialogue,' which includes 'unscripted dialogue' and 'scripted dialogue,' 'authentic dialogue,' and 'monologue,' which can be used to practice when using media in the classroom. Such activities can be carried out to predict the speaker's speech, interpret the words, phrases, and sentences, identify the relevant matters, and determine the speaker's intention. Ampa (2015) conducted preliminary research in two groups of undergraduate students at Muhammadiyah University with the goal of gathering respondents' opinions about interactive multimedia learning materials created with Wondershare Quizreator. The research was carried out using questionnaires distributed to students and interviews with lecturers. Overall, the results show that the majority of students (79.06 percent) are interested in the materials and believe that they can help them learn listening skills. The lecturers are also in favor of using the materials to teach English listening skills (Tenri Ampa, 2015).

3. Methodology

Students develop four types of skills while learning English, some of which are developed concurrently: two receptive skills - listening and reading - and two productive skills - speaking and writing. The following research question was stated in the framework of this article: "Is the use of edutainment effective for developing the listening skills of future teachers during an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class?" According to Azimov and Shchukin's (2009) "New Dictionary of Methodological Terms and Concepts," listening is the semantic perception of an oral message (Yarmakeev et al., 2016). Scientists classify the following as listening difficulties: one-time information presentation, understanding strangers' speech, individual features of voice and speech, use of visual aids, and linguistic (phonetic, lexical, grammatical) difficulties. The audiovisual method, a modern modification of the direct method, is a method of teaching English that reduces the difficulties listed above. To ensure visual-auditory synthesis, it is implemented with extensive use of visual and auditory aids.

Scholars investigate the utilization of diverse audiovisual resources in the context of English instruction at the tertiary level. As an illustration, Rybalko (2019), a Russian researcher, utilized authentic video materials sourced from TED Talks to establish pedagogical conditions that foster the development of autonomous skills in future IT specialists in professional language education (Stognieva, 2019). A space for learning and positive impact is created through the speaker's ability to present the material engagingly, the use of visual and audio aids (photos, illustrations, objects, etc.), and their sincerity and emotion. At this time, more than 4100 TED talks are available (https://www.ted.com/). The following criteria guided our selection of TED talks for second-year students at a language university (Puzatykh, 2018):

1- The TED talk topic broadens the scope of the EFL class and book content. 2- The language complexity of the content is understandable to Upper Intermediate students. 3- The TED talks speaker's language ability (fluency, coherence, expressiveness of speech, etc.); 4- The number of views on TED talks as an indicator of the topic's relevance; 5- The lecture lasts between 4 and 10 minutes.

4. Results

The selection of 18 TED Talks was based on the criteria above and the subject matter of the student's textbook. The edutainment-based exercises were specifically developed for second-year students at Kazan Federal University who aspire to become English teachers in the future. The primary characteristic of the designed exercises is their edutainment-based nature: they foster an atmosphere conducive to learning and enhance motivation; furthermore, students have the flexibility to engage at their own pace: they may pause the video as needed, rewatch specific segments or activate subtitles in the event of comprehension difficulties. Online Test Pad was utilized to develop the exercise systems for each video lecture due to its accessibility and intuitive interface. The exercises that have been meticulously planned will be presented within the context of one of the keynote addresses, "Why do videos go viral?" In this discourse, the speaker introduced

the notion of viral videos and posed an inquiry into the enigmatic nature of certain viral content. Kevin Allocco's TED talk "Why do videos go viral?" was selected to expand upon this subject. The exercises that were formulated comprised the subsequent categories of tasks:

1- True/ false. The objective is to cultivate the student's proficiency in the task-specific semantic processing of information. Does the assertion hold, or is it false? Bear Vasquez uploaded this video, which he had captured outside his Yosemite National Park residence a year ago. 2. Complete the voids: By expanding the student's vocabulary, the objective is to improve hearing and the capacity to discern the required lexical units from the speech flow in accordance with the task. Fill the gaps;

2- It was viewed 23 million times in 2010. 2- And, like "Double Rainbow," it appears to have appeared out of nowhere; 3- But what matters is that an individual or a group of tastemakers took a stand and shared it with a larger audience, accelerating the process; 4- So "Nyan Cat" is a looped animation with looped music; 5- But what matters here is the creativity it sparked among this techie, geeky Internet culture.

3- Matching.

The goal is to develop students' ability to analyze information in order to spot the necessary information in the speech flow in accordance with the task. Sort the topics in the order they appear in Kevin Allocca's talk. 1-Participation; 2-Tastemakers; 3-Unpredictability.

4- Open-ended questions.

The goal is to improve students' ability to understand and isolate individual details and facts in the video lecture's speech stream. A pedagogical experiment was carried out in order to answer the research question. The pedagogical experiment included 50 Kazan Federal University second-year students. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale, the average level of English proficiency is upper intermediate. The experiment was conducted in the context of EFL classes. According to the curriculum, there were 54 academic hours and 215 hours for students to work independently. Because the emphasis was on the development of listening skills, a pre-test with students was conducted at the ascertaining stage of the experiment using the "Listening" section of the international exam First Certificate in English (FCE) from Cambridge University. The maximum number of points that a student could receive for passing the test is 23. Table 1 displays descriptive statistics for the pre-test results.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of a Pre-Test*

Descriptive statistics	
Mean	11,91666667
Median	10,5
Mode	10
Standard deviation	3,369875459
Minimum	9
Maximum	21

The average number of points earned by students on the pre-test is M=11.92, with a standard deviation of 3.37. Students worked with 18 sets of designed exercises during the formative phase of the experiment. The students were also given the international exam FCE from Cambridge University during the control stage of the experiment. The maximum number of points a student could receive was 23. Table 2 contains descriptive statistics on the results of the final testing of students at the control stage.

Table 2. *Descriptive Statistics of the Results of the Final Testing of Students*

Descriptive statistics of post-test results	
Mean	17,33333333
Median	17,5
Mode	14
Standard deviation	3,472838329

Minimum	11
Maximum	22

The average number of points for the post-test is M=17.33, with a standard deviation of σ=3.47. Thus, the average score increased when compared to the entrance test results (M=11.92, σ=3.47), indicating a positive dynamic of learning results. To determine the statistical significance of a positive change in the level of development of future English teachers' listening skills associated with the implementation of the designed set of exercises based on TED talks as an edutainment tool, the following statistical hypotheses were developed:

H_0 – a change in the level of development of future English teachers' listening skills after using a designed set of exercises based on edutainment technology is not statistically significant.

H_1 – A statistically significant change in the level of development of listening skills of future English teachers who used a designed set of exercises based on edutainment technology.

The results of the students' pre and post-tests were used to calculate the criterion. Table 4 contains part of the data used to calculate the G criterion. A "+" sign indicates a positive change in test results, a negative change by a "-" sign, and no change by zero (Table 3).

Table 3. *Calculation of the G Criterion*

Student	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11		50
Pre-test	21	12	9	10	10	11	10	10	9	13	14	…	14
Post-test	22	14	17	14	18	21	17	14	11	19	20	…	21
Difference	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	…	+
	1	2	8	4	8	10	7	4	2	6	6	…	7

Based on the G criterion results, it was observed that the change in the level of development of listening skills of future English language teachers who studied using the designed set of edutainment-based exercises is statistically significant for the p-value=0.05.

5. Discussion

The following points were raised within the context of this study: 1- Edutainment is a technology that contributes to learning and gaining experience in order to form skills and abilities. 2- The audiovisual method makes extensive use of visual and auditory aids to achieve visual-auditory synthesis. 3- A methodology was proposed in conjunction with the techniques of the audiovisual method and the edutainment tool. 4-TED (Technology Entertainment Design) is a project that provides short public lectures (TED Talks) on current topics and contemporary societal problems by leading scientists, artists, and famous personalities from various fields. 5- This research was based on five TED talks criteria: the topic of the TED talks expands the topic of the curriculum; the language complexity of the content for a certain level; the language potential of the TED talks speaker; the number of views of the TED talk; and the duration of the lecture is between four and ten minutes. 6- Eighteen TED talks were chosen to supplement the material presented in the keynote, and a set of exercises was created; the tasks included true/false, fill in the gaps, open-ended questions, and matching types of tasks; the exercises were demonstrated using the unit "Viral videos: how they spread?" and the TED talk "Why videos go viral?" by Kevin Alloco. 7- The significance of the research was shown by an experiment conducted with 50 second-year English language students. As part of their autonomous work, the students were required to complete 18 designed sets of exercises. 8- The non-parametric criterion G was used to demonstrate the validity of the collected data, and statistical significance was defined at p-value=0.05.

6. Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, we can conclude that TED talk audio-video materials have significant linguistic and methodological potential. The created set of exercises is one of the tools for implementing edutainment for the development of listening skills in language university students. Furthermore, TED talks as part of EFL classes form the skill of students' autonomous work, which compensates for the lack of classroom time, contributing to an increase in overall learning effectiveness.

Acknowledgments

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