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## On the Impact of Transcription as a Pre-Listening Strategy on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension Ability

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**Meresedeh Massahzadeh**

Department of English Language, College of Humanities  
Islamic Azad University in Rasht, Rasht Branch  
**Iran**

**Dr. Majid Pourmohammadi**

(Corresponding Author)

Department of English Language, College of Humanities  
Islamic Azad University in Rasht, Rasht Branch  
**Iran**

### ABSTRACT

This study intended to probe into a kind of precise research over the effect of transcription, having learners write in advance, and non-transcription based listening tasks on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension. It involved 30 female learners studying EFL at Shokouh English Institute in Rasht. Their proficiency level was determined by Oxford Quick Placement Test to ascertain that they were homogeneous. They were then randomly assigned into two groups (control and experimental) comprising 15 in each. The experimental group received four-week treatment, asking to listen to eight listening drills taken from ESL-lab listening website earlier in time and transcribe them. Meanwhile, the control group was asked to listen to the same listening drills offhand without prior transcribing. Subsequently, learners in both groups answered the oral questions about listening tasks. Having done a posttest, the results were compared to demonstrate the effectiveness of the treatments in the experimental group. Based on the findings, having learners to transcribe in advance was useful to English language teaching methods. In addition, language teachers can utilize transcription as a pre-listening strategy to improve their learners' listening comprehension ability.

**Keywords:** *Intermediate level, Listening comprehension ability, Pre-listening activities, Strategy, Transcription*

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### 1. Introduction

The importance of listening comprehension in daily communication and educational process is something worthwhile to consider. In fact, it is now accepted as the heart of the language and the most frequently used language skill in everyday life (Vandergrift, 2007). Over these last decades, listening has attracted growing interest in foreign or second language learning, leading teachers to look for new and most importantly practical methods to maximize the efficiency of their listening instruction in both EFL and ESL settings.

The importance of listening ability in the world, and technological advances in global communication have made listening by non-natives even more vital (Cahyono & Widiati, 2009). It is necessary for students who learn English as a second or FL to improve their learning abilities of listening.

University exams, school leaving and other examinations now often include a listening component, acknowledging that listening skill is a core component of language proficiency, and also reflecting the assumption that if listening is not tested, teachers will not teach it (Richards, 2005).

EFL learners who are studying English as a FL have very few opportunities to hear the real language; they are not, therefore, accustomed to hearing the language as produced by the native speakers. Consequently, students from the countries like Iran in which English is taught as a FL frequently have great difficulty understanding English spoken to them when they come into contact with native speakers of the language. Moreover, since intermediate Iranian EFL learners lack sufficient background knowledge of English vocabulary as well as native accent, they are



required to use pre-listening activities to better comprehend.

In the line with the above contentions, the present study aims to scrutinize that having learners to transcribe the task in advance gives them time to get the message, digest and parse the words in their mind so as to understand them. It also makes EFL learners aware of many faces of the pronunciation of English spoken by native speakers as well as grammatical structures and equip them harness their stress, be more attentive, boost their self-awareness and better comprehend that listening task. Asking for prior transcription, also gives teachers a more comprehensive insight around how to deal with learners' problems, overcome their blind spots, check understanding and further their learning process. To fulfill the aims of this study, the following hypotheses were proposed:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** There is not any statistically significant difference between listening task with and without prior transcription among Iranian intermediate EFL learners.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** Prior transcribing of listening task does not have any statistically significant impact on the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension ability.

## 2. Literature Review

Listening is by nature the first acquired skill by human beings (Hamidi & Montazeri, 2014). It is a skill in language proficiency which can directly affect other skills and be affected by several strategies (Safarali & Hamidi, 2012). Most people think that being able to write and speak in a second language means that they know the language; however, if they do not have the efficient listening skills, it is not possible to communicate effectively (Yildirim & Yildirim, 2016). In fact, good listening is built on three basic skills: attitude, attention, and adjustment. These skills are known collectively as triple-A listening (Zohrabi & Sabouri, 2015).

Yaghoubi-Notash and Hamrang (2014) investigated the effect of transcript (having text in advance) and non-transcript listening tasks on Iranian intermediate EFL learners' listening comprehension. The findings of their study proved that transcript (having text in advance) improves listening comprehension and ability of learners to recall information. Additionally, students learnt that there was also a need to combine the development of listening ability with the development of reading skill.

In another study Babaei (2008) compared the effects of two types of help options (subtitles and transcripts) in a multimedia listening unit on EFL learners' comprehension of an academic lecture. The experiment revealed that those students who used video and transcripts obtained a higher mean score on the comprehension test than did those who used video and subtitles. Since no study has focused on the role of transcription (process of writing) as a pre-listening strategy on the L2 listening comprehension, the research presented here seeks to explore the gap.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Design

The current study was an experimental study in which the participants of the study were homogeneously selected and then randomly assigned into two groups of control and experimental. Only the experimental group received treatment whereas the control group received a normal routine instruction as they always did. In the following, the participants of the study, the materials and the data collection and analysis procedure will be explained.

### 3.2 Participants

This study involved 30 female learners (within the age of 15-20) who were selected from two different branches of Shokouh Institute in Rasht, Iran. A total number of 50 learners took a sample of Quick Placement Test (QPT) and from among them 30 learners who got the scores within the range of 28-38 were selected as the main sample of this study. Then, they were randomly assigned to two groups of the experimental and the control, each group containing 15 participants.

### 3.3 Instruments

**3.3.1 Proficiency test:** for the purpose of homogenizing, QPT by Oxford University was administered as a proficiency test which included 60 multiple-choice questions, vocabulary reading and language use. It was administered and those who scored 28-38 were selected as the participants of the study at the intermediate level.

**3.3.2 The pretest:** the pretest was administered before the treatments to consider the initial differences existing among the groups with respect to their listening comprehension ability. The listening test that was administered to the learners as the pretest included 20 items and was the listening section of a sample of the Preliminary English Test (PET) taken from Cambridge ESOL.

**3.3.3 The posttest:** in the end, the posttest that was equal in all respects to the pretest but with a slight difference in subject was given to the participants. The aim of exploiting various subjects was controlling the possible testing effect.

**3.4 Data Collection & Analysis Procedures**

The pretest of listening was administered to both groups. After that the experimental group received treatment. Learners in the experimental group were asked to listen to listening comprehension passages taken from ESL-lab listening web site in advance and have transcription. Since it was very important to clearly comprehend whether the participants understood listening tasks, each task was played twice. After the second playing, they were asked to repeat while listening. Afterwards, the participants responded to some oral questions about listening passages which consisted of 40 questions (five questions for each passage) and that lasted 40 minutes in total. Unlike the experimental group, students in the control group were asked to listen to the same listening task without prior transcription. Subsequently, learners in the control group answered the same oral questions about the listening tasks. The gathered data were analyzed via an independent samples t-test between the scores of the control and experimental groups and the results from both groups were compared together as follows.

**4. Results and Discussion**

The summary of the descriptive analysis for the data related to the posttest of the experimental and the control group is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Group Statistics for the Posttest of Listening Comprehension*

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Posttest scores				
Control	15	13.8667	2.09989	.54219
Experimental	15	16.2667	2.01660	.52068

As it can be seen, the mean score obtained from the experimental group (16.26) that received the treatment is highly more than that of the control group (13.86).

*Table 2: The Independent Samples T-test for the Pretest of Listening Comprehension*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
							Lower	Upper	
Pretest scores									
Equal variances assumed	.675	.418	.39	28	.69	.400	-1.68	2.48	
Equal variances not assumed			.39	25.67	.69	.400	-1.68	2.48	

The result of independent samples t-test demonstrated that there was no significant difference in scores for the control ( $M = 13.46, SD = 2.32$ ) and the experimental group ( $M = 13.06, SD = 3.17; t(28) = .39, p = .69$ , two-tailed) in the pretest. The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = .400, 95% CI: -1.68 to 2.48) was small (Eta squared = 0.0054). In other words, the control and experimental groups were approximately at the same level of proficiency in terms of their FL listening comprehension in the administered test at the beginning of the study.

In Table 3, the amount of Sig. (2-tailed) value was (.03) which is significantly smaller than the required cut-off of (.05); it could be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference in the means of the posttest scores of listening comprehension for the control ( $M = 13.46, SD = 2.32$ ) and the experimental groups ( $M = 13.06, SD = 3.17; t(28) = .39, p = .69$ , two-tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference = 2.40, 95% CI: -3.93 to -.86) was small (Eta squared = .2665). The findings revealed that although the two groups were approximately at the same level of proficiency in terms of their FL listening comprehension in the administered test at the beginning of the study, statistically significant differences were found for the results of the posttest. Thus, the first null hypothesis was rejected.

*Table 3: The Independent Samples Test for the Posttest of Listening Comprehension*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
							Lower	Upper	
Posttest score									
Equal variances assumed	.19	.65	-3.19	28	.003	-2.40	-3.93	-.86	
Equal variances not assumed			-3.19	27.95	.003	-2.40	-3.93	-.86	

In order to answer the second research question and to investigate the participants' progress within groups, paired-samples t-tests were run and based on their results, this improvement was statistically significant simply for the experimental group but not for the control group ( $P_{\text{experimental group}} < .05, P_{\text{control group}} \geq .05$ ). In other words, the experimental group that received prior transcription for the



listening tasks made a noticeably higher progression as compared to the control group in the posttest of listening. Thus, the second null hypothesis was rejected, too (see Table 4).

*Table 4: Paired Samples Test*

Groups			Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Mean	SD	Lower	Upper			
Control	Pair 1	Pretest scores	-.40	.82	-.85	.05	-1.87	1	.082
		Posttest scores						4	
Experimental	Pair 2	Pretest scores	-3.20	1.47	-4.01	-2.38	-8.41	1	.000
		Posttest scores						4	

These findings are in line with the results of numerous studies concerning the valuable use of pre-listening strategies. According to Marzban and Abdollahi (2013), dictation as a pre-listening strategy makes EFL learners aware of many aspects of the pronunciation of English spoken by native speakers. Besides, the findings of this study revealed that using transcription provided learners an opportunity to be sensitive toward different aspects of L2 including pronunciation and improved their listening comprehension ability.

The findings were also consistent with the results of research study applied by Rahimi (2008) in which the efficacy of using dictation via elaborating on grammatical, phonological, and lexical points in the passage is approved. He recommended the use of dictation as a pre-listening strategy in the classrooms to speed up the learners' development in regard to the listening comprehension ability. In his study the use of dictation was regarded as an assessment in FL learning.

In the present study like dictation, transcribing in advance can be considered a productive learning device which helped learners having immediate feedback on the nature of performance through concentrating on different aspects of language. In addition, having learners for prior transcription enabled teachers of English to concentrate on learners' deficiencies as the dictation studies might do.

On the contrary, no study has been carried out to examine the effect of transcription as a process of writing in advance. Until recently all research utilized transcription as a way of providing learner texts with the given copy which can be considered as a product. However, transcript in this research focused on the process of

writing, which was a novel and constructive pre-listening strategy.

In fact, although a lot of scholars like Babaei (2008) and Yaghoubi-Notash and Hamrang (2014) emphasized on the significant role of transcript as a facilitator in terms of listening comprehension, their findings were not in agreement with the present study. In the study conducted by Yaghoubi-Notash and Hamrang (2014), learners in the experimental group were asked to listen to listening task with the given copy as a transcript. However, in this study, the researcher played the audio and had listening tasks written so as to investigate the impact of transcription as a process. In this case, the researcher tried to intensify the learnability of different aspects of language. Additionally, autonomous awareness and self-correction of learners were reinforced through writing prior to main listening.

## 5. Conclusion

This study provided data that reflect the essential needs of the classrooms. The results can also provide help to institution language teachers. EFL teachers should also teach their learners how to listen, to reflect on the process of listening and focus on using strategies of planning and monitoring. Learners need to monitor their comprehension as they listen; teachers, therefore, should allow learners listen to the text several times so that learners can focus more attentively to different aspects of language through writing in advance.

As a result of the aforementioned issues, asking for transcription in advance helps learners to listen several times and more carefully in order to recognize and comprehend words and their meaning as well as sentence structure. It also provides learners an opportunity to rehearse more and become effective listeners. Teachers can also benefit through this procedure by finding a more comprehensive perception around how to deal with learners' problems, overcome their blind spots, check understanding and further their learning process.

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