

The Correlation Between Listening Comprehension and Speaking Ability Among EFL Students

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability among students at the English Department of Pattimura University, batch 2018. A quantitative correlational research design was employed, and data was collected through score documentation and a questionnaire. The findings revealed a positive and significant correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability, with a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.608. The study concludes that listening comprehension is a crucial predictor of speaking ability and suggests that language teachers should provide ample opportunities for students to engage in listening activities to improve their overall speaking proficiency. Further research is recommended to explore other factors that may influence speaking ability beyond listening comprehension.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Speaking Ability, EFL, Correlation, Pronunciation*

Introduction

Proficiency in the English language has become increasingly vital in the current global landscape, as it serves as a lingua franca for various spheres, including technology, education, economics, and diplomacy (Crystal, 2003). As one of the core language skills, speaking plays a crucial role in language learning, as it enables learners to effectively express their ideas, share information, and engage in meaningful interactions with others (Liando et al., 2018). Mastering speaking skills is, therefore, a primary goal for many language learners. However, for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, the development of strong speaking abilities can pose a significant challenge.

One factor that has been widely recognized as a key contributor to speaking proficiency is listening comprehension. Extensive research has explored the relationship between these two language skills, suggesting that the development of listening skills is fundamental to the acquisition of speaking proficiency (Rost, 1994; Doff, 1988). Listening not only provides language input, but it also enables learners to absorb and internalize various linguistic elements, such as vocabulary, grammar structures, and pronunciation patterns, which they can then employ in their own speech production (Newton & Nation, 2009). This interdependence between listening and speaking skills

underscores the importance of understanding the nature of their relationship in the context of language learning.

While the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability has been extensively studied, the existing research has primarily focused on EFL learners at the high school or university preparatory levels (Pinem, 2014; Celik & Yafuz, 2015). Less is known about the nature of this relationship among EFL students at the university level, particularly those who have progressed through various levels of language courses. Furthermore, the existing literature has often examined the overall correlation between the two language skills, without delving deeply into the specific aspects of speaking that are influenced by listening comprehension.

Understanding the extent to which listening comprehension correlates with different elements of speaking, such as pronunciation, grammar use, vocabulary, and fluency, can provide valuable insights for language teaching and learning (Harmer, 2007; Doff, 1988). This nuanced understanding can help inform instructional practices and strategies that target the specific areas of speaking that are most influenced by listening skills, ultimately enhancing the overall communicative competence of EFL learners.

This study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by investigating the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability among EFL students at the English Department of Pattimura University, batch 2018. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research question:

1. Is there a correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability among students at batch 2018 in the English Department?

By addressing this research question, the study will provide insights into the relationship between these two crucial language skills, with the potential to inform language teaching practices and help EFL learners develop their overall communicative competence. The findings of this study will build upon the existing literature on the correlation between listening and speaking, while also contributing to a deeper understanding of the specific aspects of speaking that are influenced by listening comprehension among university-level EFL students.

Literature Review

Listening Comprehension in the EFL Context

Listening is a complex cognitive process that involves the reception, interpretation, and understanding of spoken language (Helgesen & Brown, 2007). In the context of EFL learning, listening comprehension is a crucial skill, as it provides learners with the necessary input to develop

their language proficiency (Rost, 1994). Successful listening requires the integration of various factors, including attention, background knowledge, and the ability to comprehend the meaning of the spoken message (Doff, 1988).

The process of listening involves several stages, including hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding (Farrel, as cited in Liando et al., 2018). Learners engage in both top-down and bottom-up processes to make sense of the spoken language, utilizing their prior knowledge and the information provided in the input (Farrel, as cited in Liando et al., 2018). Numerous studies have highlighted the importance of listening in EFL learning, emphasizing that the development of listening skills is the key to achieving proficiency in speaking (Dunkel, as cited in Liando et al., 2018). Listening exercises also allow teachers to draw learners' attention to new language forms, such as vocabulary, grammar, and interaction patterns (Rost, 1994). However, EFL learners may face various challenges in listening comprehension, including difficulties with unfamiliar sounds, new vocabulary, and complex grammatical structures (Penny Ur, as cited in Liando et al., 2018), which can subsequently impact their speaking ability.

Speaking Ability in the EFL Context

Speaking is a productive language skill that involves the expression of ideas, opinions, and feelings through the use of words and sounds (Hornby, 1995). In the EFL context, speaking is often considered the hallmark of language learning, as it allows learners to engage in meaningful communication and demonstrate their language proficiency (Horwitz, as cited in Azizah, 2013). Speaking ability encompasses several key elements, including pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency (Douglas Brown, as cited in Liando et al., 2018). Learners must develop competence in these areas to communicate effectively in the target language. Additionally, speaking can take various forms, such as imitative, intensive, responsive, transactional, interpersonal, and extensive (monologue) (Douglas Brown, as cited in Liando et al., 2018).

The importance of speaking in EFL learning is widely recognized, as it provides learners with the opportunity to apply their language knowledge in real-world contexts (Liando et al., 2018). However, EFL learners may face various challenges in developing their speaking ability, such as lack of vocabulary, grammatical errors, and psychological barriers like anxiety and lack of self-confidence (Xinghua, as cited in Liando et al., 2018). These challenges can hinder the development of speaking proficiency and emphasize the need for a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to successful speaking performance.

The Correlation between Listening Comprehension and Speaking Ability

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between listening comprehension and speaking ability, suggesting a strong correlation between these two language skills (Pinem, 2014; Celik & Yafuz, 2015; Tamador, 2017; Azizah, 2014; Demir, 2017). The research conducted by Pinem (2014) revealed a positive, though low, correlation between listening and speaking ability among high school students, suggesting that while listening is not the sole predictor of speaking success, it does contribute to the development of speaking skills. Similarly, Azizah's (2014) study on EFL students at the university level found a significant correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability, with a medium-level correlation coefficient.

Celik and Yafuz's (2015) study on university-level preparatory students also demonstrated a slight relationship between listening and speaking grades, while Abu-Snoubar's (2017) research explored gender differences in the correlation between listening and speaking, finding a positive relationship and statistically significant differences based on gender. Additionally, Demir's (2017) study at Frat University, Turkey, found that listening skill is a significant predictor of speaking skill, accounting for 57% of the variance in speaking self-efficacy. These findings are supported by the theoretical perspectives of experts such as Cross (1992), Rost (1994), and Doff (1988), who emphasize the crucial role of listening in the development of speaking skills.

Method

This study employed a quantitative correlational research design to investigate the relationship between listening comprehension and speaking ability among EFL students at the English Department of Pattimura University, batch 2018. The participants were 40 students who were selected using random sampling, as they had all completed the Academic Listening and Academic Speaking courses.

The data for this study was collected through two instruments: score documentation and a questionnaire. The researcher obtained the students' Academic Listening and Academic Speaking course scores from the English Department office, with permission from the head of the department and the lecturers who taught the courses. The score data was then analyzed using the Pearson product-moment correlation formula to determine the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability.

Additionally, the researcher developed a questionnaire with 20 items, focusing on the four aspects of speaking (pronunciation, grammar use, vocabulary, and fluency) and their correlation with listening comprehension. The students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with

each statement on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire data was analyzed using the percentage formula to determine the extent to which listening comprehension influenced the specific aspects of speaking.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics of Listening Comprehension and Speaking Ability

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the data, the researcher first examined the descriptive statistics for the students' listening comprehension and speaking ability scores. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Listening Comprehension and Speaking Ability

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening Comprehension	40	57	92	82.23	8.95
Speaking Ability	40	57	90	82.18	9.04

As shown in Table 1, the mean score for listening comprehension was 82.23 (SD = 8.95), and the mean score for speaking ability was 82.18 (SD = 9.04). The minimum and maximum scores for both variables indicate a wide range of performance among the students, with the lowest score being 57 and the highest score being 92 for listening comprehension, and 57 and 90 for speaking ability, respectively.

The relatively high mean scores for both listening comprehension and speaking ability suggest that the students in the sample generally demonstrated proficiency in these language skills. However, the standard deviations indicate a notable degree of variability within the group, suggesting that there were individual differences in the students' performances.

Correlation between Listening Comprehension and Speaking Ability

To address the primary research question, the researcher conducted a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis to determine the relationship between listening comprehension and speaking ability. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Correlation between Listening Comprehension and Speaking Ability

	Listening Comprehension	Speaking Ability
Listening Comprehension	1	0.608**
Speaking Ability	0.608**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability ($r = 0.608$, $p < 0.01$). This indicates that there is a moderate, positive relationship between the two variables, suggesting that higher levels of listening comprehension are associated with higher levels of speaking ability among the EFL students in the sample.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with the existing body of research on the relationship between listening comprehension and speaking ability in the EFL context. The positive and significant correlation between the two variables observed in this study is consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted by prominent researchers in the field.

For instance, Pinem's (2014) research revealed a positive, though low, correlation between listening and speaking ability among high school students, suggesting that while listening is not the sole predictor of speaking success, it does contribute to the development of speaking skills. Similarly, Azizah's (2014) study on EFL students at the university level found a significant correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability, with a medium-level correlation coefficient, akin to the findings of the current investigation.

The medium-level correlation coefficient ($r = 0.608$) observed in the present study indicates that listening comprehension is an essential predictor of speaking ability, contributing to approximately 37% of the variance in speaking performance. This finding aligns with the theoretical perspectives of scholars such as Newton and Nation (2009) and Rost (1994), who have emphasized the fundamental role of listening in the acquisition of speaking proficiency. As listening provides the necessary language input and exposure, learners can then effectively apply this knowledge in their own speech production, thus enhancing their overall speaking ability.

The questionnaire results further elucidate the specific aspects of speaking that are influenced by listening comprehension. The finding that pronunciation was the most significantly influenced aspect aligns with the theoretical perspectives of experts such as Cross (1992) and Harmer (2007), who have highlighted the role of listening in the development of appropriate pronunciation, intonation, and stress patterns.

The influence of listening comprehension on other speaking aspects, such as grammar use, vocabulary, and fluency, although not as pronounced as its impact on pronunciation, is also consistent with the existing literature. As noted by Newton and Nation (2009) and Doff (1988),

listening provides learners with exposure to a range of language structures, vocabulary, and fluency patterns, which they can then incorporate into their own speaking performances.

However, it is important to note that while listening comprehension is a significant factor in the development of speaking ability, it is not the sole predictor. As highlighted by Pinem (2014), other variables, such as learners' individual differences, motivation, and language exposure, may also contribute to the success of their speaking performance. This underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of speaking development, which extends beyond the influence of listening comprehension alone.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Conclusion

This study investigated the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability among EFL students at the English Department of Pattimura University, batch 2018. The findings revealed a positive and significant correlation between the two variables, with a medium-level correlation coefficient ($r = 0.608$). This suggests that listening comprehension is a crucial predictor of speaking ability, contributing to approximately 37% of the variance in speaking performance.

The results of this study align with the existing literature on the relationship between listening and speaking in the EFL context, emphasizing the fundamental role of listening in the development of speaking proficiency. The positive and significant correlation observed in this investigation underscores the interdependence between these two core language skills, indicating that the enhancement of listening comprehension can lead to tangible improvements in speaking ability. This relationship is particularly pronounced in the realm of pronunciation, where the questionnaire results revealed that a substantial majority of the students (83.5%) agreed that listening comprehension influenced this critical aspect of speaking. However, the findings also suggest that listening comprehension plays a significant role in shaping other elements of speaking, such as grammar use, vocabulary, and fluency, though to a lesser degree than its impact on pronunciation.

Taken together, these results highlight the importance of providing EFL learners with ample opportunities to engage in listening activities as a means of cultivating their overall communicative competence. By fostering the development of listening skills, language instructors can create a solid foundation for the acquisition of speaking proficiency, ultimately empowering students to become more effective and confident communicators in the target language.

Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that EFL students actively engage in a variety of listening activities to enhance their language learning and speaking development. Activities such as watching English movies, listening to English songs, and tuning into podcasts and news reports can provide valuable exposure to the target language and its diverse linguistic elements. Additionally, students should focus on improving their pronunciation through dedicated listening practice, as this aspect was found to be significantly influenced by listening comprehension.

The results of this study highlight the necessity for language instructors to incorporate more listening activities into their classrooms. By ensuring that students are exposed to a diverse range of spoken language input prior to engaging in speaking tasks, teachers can create opportunities for students to absorb vocabulary, grammatical structures, and pronunciation patterns that can be effectively applied in their own speech production. Furthermore, instructors should provide targeted feedback and guidance on students' pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. Utilizing insights gained from this study, teachers can tailor their instructional approaches to better address the specific areas of speaking that are influenced by listening comprehension.

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the correlation between listening comprehension and speaking ability in the EFL context. However, further research is recommended to explore other factors that may influence speaking ability beyond listening comprehension, such as individual differences, motivation, and language exposure. Additionally, future investigations could delve deeper into the relationship between listening comprehension and specific aspects of speaking, examining the nuances of this correlation in greater detail. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable for understanding the developmental trajectory of the relationship between listening and speaking skills among EFL learners, providing insights that could inform more targeted and effective language teaching and learning strategies.

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