Using Interactive Approach to Teaching Listening Skills for Lower Secondary School Students

Hanh Pham Thi My[1], Que Nguyen Thi[2]*
[1]Thinh Duc Secondary School, Thai Nguyen, Vietnam
[2]Thai Nguyen University of Sciences, Vietnam

Abstract. The aim of this study focuses on investigating the effects of the interactive approach in teaching listening skills and attitudes of lower secondary students towards the use of the interactive approach in Vietnam. A total of 45 students of grade 7 participated in this action research project. Results of the study reveal that there is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test mean scores of students in listening skills before and after being exposed to interactive approach in an experimental teaching of eight weeks. In addition, students have positive attitudes towards the use of interactive approach in their listening lessons. The study suggests that use of interactive approach yields positive results on students' performance and engagement in listening lessons and therefore should be adopted in teaching to help improve EFL students' learning and mastery of English listening skills.
Key words: interactive approach, listening skills, lower secondary students, Vietnam

Introduction

Interactive teaching is learner-oriented teaching, in which diverse interactive activities take place in an appropriately organized teaching environment, requiring active participation and high self-reliance of learners. In this approach, teachers play the main role of organizing the learning environment and providing support and advice to learners.

Interactive teaching requires a high degree of diverse interaction, positivity, initiative, and self-reliance of learners. However, learners still receive the necessary orientation and help in terms of learning content and methods. The interaction here can be called "active interaction" in the sense of emphasizing the learner's requirement for activeness.

Listening as a process, therefore, required listeners' aware use of strategies and ought to involve the parallel interaction between bottom-up and top-down processing. This interactive manner known as parallel processing required the learner to apply background understanding (top-down) to interpret the meaning and linguistic knowledge (bottom-up) in an effort to differentiate between familiar sounds. The aim becomes for the language listeners to apply parallel processing with the intention to perceive, interpret, and reply to the facts being heard (Lynch & Mendelsohn, 2009, p. 185).

As a teacher of English having an experience of teaching English at a secondary school for many years, the researcher has found that secondary students are generally not interested in listening lessons and they are unwilling to do listening tasks since they claim that the listening tasks are too difficult for them. Therefore, a question arises here is to find out an appropriate approach to help students enhance their listening skill.

From browsing innovative approaches to teach listening skills in the world and in Vietnam, the researcher has found out that interactive approach could be the answer to her EFL teaching context, and therefore want to investigate whether interactive approach significantly improves her students' listening skills and has positive effect on their learning process. Therefore, this study attempted to investigate the effect of this approach on listening skills of grade 7 students at a secondary school in Thai Nguyen province of Vietnam.

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* Corresponding Author

Methodology

The study employs action research approach for data collection and analysis from different sources. First, a period of teaching listening skills involving interactive approach was implemented during 8 weeks of listening sessions with different topics in the new English textbook. After this experimental period, a set of questionnaires were delivered to grade 7 students to investigate their attitudes towards the interactive approach in their listening lessons in their second semester of the academic year of 2021-2022.

The data gathered were described statistically using mean, percentage, T Test pair samples for Means.

Results and Discussion

The following are findings and interpretation of the data with supported research results and evidence.

Difficulties in and Factors Affecting Listening Skills

Question 1: What do you think of English listening?

Table 1. Students' difficulties in listening skill

Students' difficulties	Participants	Percentage
What do you think of English listening?	Very difficult	35.5%
	Difficult	45%
	Neutral	18%
	Easy	1.5%
	Very easy	0%

A total of 45 students participated in the study in which 23 were males and 22 were females. Their ages were 12 and 13 and they were all studying in grade 7 at a secondary school in Dong Hy District, Thai Nguyen province.

It is apparent that learning listening for 7th graders is an not easy task with 35.5% of students thinking that listening is very difficult and 45% finding it difficult. Only 1.5% found it easy and none of them found it very easy. Therefore, it can be understood that a majority of the students have problems with listening skills.

Question 2: Factors affecting the listening skills

Table 2. Factors affecting the listening skills

Factors affecting the listening skills	Percentage
A. Grammar	15%
B. New vocabularies and structures	68.3%
C. Different accents	25%
D. Speaking speed of the speakers	38.3%
E. Unfamiliar topics	51.6%
F. Context	26.6%
G. Poor listening equipment	13.3%
H. Lack of background knowledge on the topic	53.3%

When being asked about the reasons that cause difficulties in listening, students claimed that the biggest problems they got while listening were new vocabularies and structures (68.3%), background knowledge on the topic (53.3%) and unfamiliar topics (51.6%).

Meanwhile, other difficulties like grammar, different accents, speaking speed of the speakers, context, and poor listening equipment accounted for smaller percentages.

Question 3: Why could not you catch up with what the speakers said while listening?

Table 3. Reasons for not catching up with listening

A. They spoke too fast.	56.6%
B. You tried to listen to every word.	61.6%
C. You'd like to translate into Vietnamese.	48.3%
D. Their accent or pronunciation was different from your teacher.	33.3%

According to this table, it was the students' trying to listen to every word that prevented them from listening the most, accounted for the highest percentage of 61.6%. The too fast speed of speakers was in the second rank with 56.6%, followed by the intervention of their mother tongue in translation and difference in accent or pronunciation from what they regularly heard at 48.3% and 33.3% respectively.

Question 4: In listening acquisition, how is your vocabulary?

Table 4. Perception on students' vocabulary level

Good	Efficient enough	Not efficient enough	Poor
8.3%	8.75%	28.3%	46.6%

From Table 4, nearly half of the students agreed that they had poor vocabulary (46.6%) and almost one third of them claimed that their vocabulary was not efficient enough. It is really alarming since vocabulary plays a crucial role in helping students understand any listening input.

Question 5: What do you think of your pronunciation in listening acquisition?

Table 5. Perception on students' pronunciation

A. Good enough to understand listening context	10%
B. Not good enough to understand listening context	63.3%
C. Too poor to understand listening context	26.7%

In Table 5, it was seen that only 10% of students felt that their pronunciation was satisfactory to understand listening context. The number of students who thought that their pronunciation was too poor or not good enough to help them understand listening context accounted for a greater proportion of 90 percent in total. This proved that the students were fully aware of the great impact of pronunciation on listening acquisition and there was far more needed to be done to in their pronunciation to help them master listening skills.

Question 6: What do you think of connected speech (linking, elision) used in listening text?

Table 6. Perception on connected speech (linking, elision) used in listening text

A. Difficult to listen for information	B. Easy to mistake for other words	C. Unable to concentrate on listening
26.7%	43.3%	30%

In this question, 26.7% of the students admitted that they had difficulties in listening for information when there were such elements of connected speech as linking and elision.

43.3% claimed that connected speech made them mistake for other words easily and 30% even indicated that they were unable to concentrate on listening.

Question 7: What do you think of the structures used in spoken language?

Table 7. Perception on structures used in spoken language

A. Understand all the speaker says	15%
B. Don't understand what the speaker says	18.3%
C. Find it difficult and understand some of what the speaker says	50%
D. Misunderstand what the speaker says	16.7%

When being asked about the effect of the use of structures in listening texts, half of the students (50%) found it rather difficult to understand some of what the speaker said. 18.3% of the students did not understand the listening text. 16.7% even stated that they misunderstood what the speaker said. And only 15% understood all the speaker said.

The Effect of Interactive Approach on Students' Listening Performance

Table 8. Comparison of Students' Performance in the Pre-test and Post-test

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	2.8484	12	.23799	.06871
Post-test	4.0693	12	.56758	.16386

As it was shown in the tables above, "the result indicated that the average score of motivation of students in the post-intervention (Mean = 4.0693, SD = .56758) was much higher than that of the pre- intervention (Mean = 2.8484, SD = .23799).

More specifically, the mean score of each question in the pre-intervention and post-intervention was compared and shown as Figure 1. It reveals that the level of motivation is found in the post-intervention were higher than those of the pre- intervention for all items on the questionnaire.

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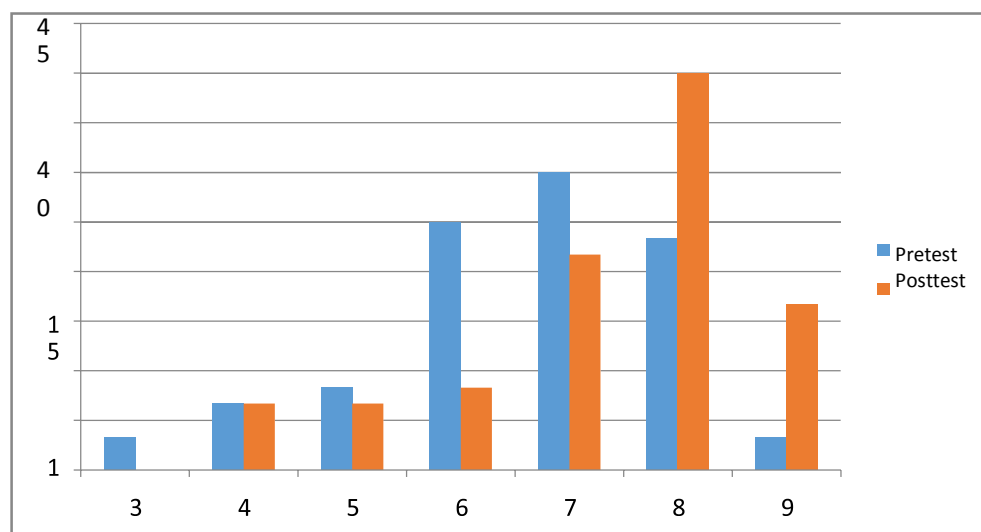

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics of Pre-test and Post-test

As can be seen in Figure 1, while there were 3.3% of the students getting mark 9 in the pre-test, the percentage of those who got mark 9 increased to 16.6% in the post-test. Also, the number of the students who had mark 8 (40%) in the post-test was nearly twice as many as those in the pre-test (23.3%). Moreover, there was 30% of students getting 7 in the pre-test in comparison with 21.7% in the post-test. The proportion of the students getting 6 in the pre-test (25%) outnumbered the one in the post-test (8%). The number of those getting 5 in the pre-test was 8.3% meanwhile there was 6.7% in the post-test. The percentages of students who got 4 were equal in both tests". Unlike 3.3% of those getting 3 in the pre-test, there was no one getting 3 in the post-test.

Table 9. Paired Samples for Means

| | Paired Samples Test | | | | | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | Paired Differences | | | | | |
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Er. Mean	t	df	
Pre-intervention – Post-intervention	-1.23083	.58389	.16856	-7.244	12	.000

It is easy to see that the mean score after the test is higher and the strong positive correlation indicates that students who do well on the first test also do well on the latter.

Table 10. Paired Samples Test

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| | | | | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
		Mean	Std. Deviation		Lower	Upper			
Pair	Pre-test - Post- test	-.767	.890	.115	-.997	-.537	-6.673	59	.000

It is evident from the table that the computed value of t is equal to 0.4427 which is higher than the significant 2-tailed t-value of 0.000. It can be reported that the mean scores of students in the post-test is much higher than those of the pre-test using interactive approach in teaching and learning English listening skills or there is a significant difference between the mean scores of students in the pre-test and post-test using interactive approach. The increased level of performance of the students in the post-test scores also reveals that the students' improvements may also be attributed to the innovation applied by the teacher. The use of interactive approach in teaching English not only motivates students in participating in the lessons more actively but it also helps to develop students' listening competence more effectively.

Results from the Questionnaire after the intervention of interactive approach.

To guarantee the reliability of the above result, the researcher conducted the second questionnaire survey among all the subjects to get their evaluation on the overall teaching course.

When the students were asked about their satisfaction with the learning course, different responses were received as illustrated in the below figure.
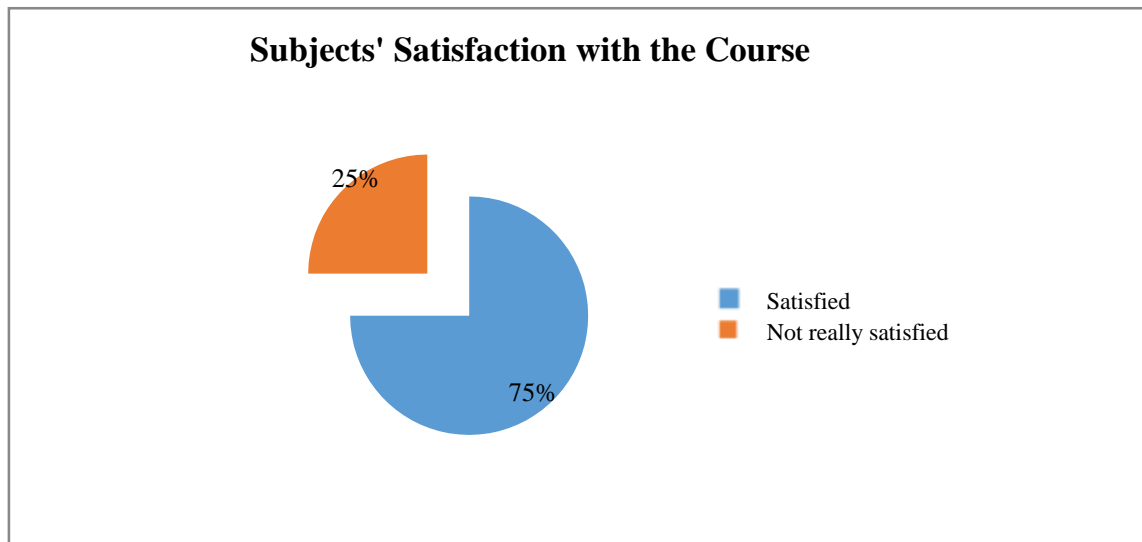
Figure 2. Subjects' Satisfaction with the Course

It could be seen from the figure that the majority of the subjects (75%) experienced the learning course with a feeling of contentment and only 25% of them found the course not really satisfactory. "When required to give explanation for their choice, the former claimed that their listening skills were improved to a greater extent after the course. They gained a new approach to learn listening which they had not realized before. These subjects added that before the course, they had not enjoyed listening lessons and tests for two reasons. The first reason was that most of students did not know how to deal with a listening text, so they were confused and afraid of listening tests. The other reason was that the students had received too general instructions of listening skills so they were confused.

On the contrary, some students were not really satisfied with the course since they saw very little or no improvement in their listening skills or they gained no different knowledge from other listening session they had undergone before.

To better the next courses in the future, the researcher asked the participants to evaluate the learning session based on some criteria. Their assessment was illustrated in the following table.

Table 11. Students' Evaluation of the Learning Sessions using interactive approach

No	Question	Strongly disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Course objectives were clearly defined		1	20	24		**3.51**	0.99	Agree
2	The researcher's teaching was well-organized.		2	20	23		**3.47**	0.95	Agree
3	The teaching course was informative.	1	2	15	17	10	**3.73**	0.68	Agree
4	The researcher's teaching was of sufficient duration.		15	5	25		**3.22**	0.94	Neutral
5	The researcher's teaching provided an excellent opportunity for all			13	24	8	**3.89**	0.88	Agree

	participants to learn how to listen well.							
6	The learning materials (lesson plans, handouts, etc) were relevant and useful.			16	29		**3.64**	1.13	Agree
7	The amount of practicing exercises was sufficient.		6	14	25		**3.42**	0.96	Agree
8	The interactive activities were fun and motivating.		1	2	18	24	**4.44**	1.20	Strongly agree
9	I felt eager to participate in listening lessons.		2	3	20	20	**4.29**	1.07	Strongly agree
10	The way teachers taught listening lessons were effective and suitable for me.			4	26	15	**4.24**	1.07	Strongly agree
	Total						**3.79**	**0.99**	**Agree**

As can be seen from the above table, in general, the learning course being taught with interactive listening approach was positively evaluated by most subjects with an overall means of 3.79 and a verbal interpretation of **Agree**.

To be more specific, students **strongly agreed** that the interactive activities were fun and motivating, they felt eager to participate in listening lessons and the way teachers taught listening lessons were effective and suitable for them with means of 4.44, 4.29 and 4.24 respectively.

In addition, students **agreed** on the effectiveness of listening lessons because of its clear objectives, good organization, rich source of information, useful handouts among others. However, some students suggested that the learning course should be extended so that the students could get more practice for listening skills.

Conclusions

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. the study showed the problems related to students had while listening. They had difficulties in new vocabulary and structures, background knowledge of the topics, unfamiliar topics, the inability to catch up what speakers said, the speed of the talk, students' limited ability of pronunciation as well as listening to stress and intonation. These findings played a significant role in the research. They helped the researcher design adequate lessons during the experimental teaching based on interactive process.

2. With regards to the second research question, it is obvious that there is a significant difference in the post-test mean score of students after the pilot experiment of interactive approach in teaching listening as compared to the pre-test mean score. Therefore, it can be concluded that students perform better in listening skill after being exposed to interactive approaches in listening lessons.

3. In terms of the third research question concerning students' attitudes towards the use of interactive approach, the result shows that most of the students had positive feedback on the use of interactive methods in English lessons. They claimed that interactive approach not only motivated them in listening lessons but also gave them better improvement in their listening skills.

Recommendations

In order to make students engage more in listening lessons as well as to enhance students' performance in listening skills, some issues should be considered as follows.

Firstly, for the listeners the application of interactive activities cannot be successful if the teacher does not explain the tasks and roles of students clearly in integrated into classroom lessons. It is important to make students understand the games' rules, how the games went and what procedures they had to follow. Consequently, when a correct answer is shown, instead of skipping and move to next questions, teachers should explain and give details about the reasons for choosing that answer.

What they are supposed to gain more than competition and enjoyment is learning something new such as vocabulary knowledge after the listening lessons. Therefore, teachers need to help students understand the meaning of all new words as well as its pronunciation so that they can comprehend the spoken language and get familiar with correct pronunciation of words before they listen in order to improve their listening skills.

In addition, motivation is essential in learning any skill and listening is not an exception. It is therefore crucial that teachers should motivate students in all aspects of listening lessons in all three stages of pre, while and post listening so that they will be more interested in the lessons.

Finally, in conducting a listening lesson, it is important that necessary changes should be adopted to enhance the quality of teaching and learning this skill. For pre-listening, sufficient knowledge and context should be provided to students to give them clues of what students are going to listen. Post-listening should not be neglected, instead, there should involve different activities such as problem-solving, summarizing, group discussion or writing as follow-up to enhance students' listening comprehension of the lessons.

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