Improving English Listening Skills of IELTS Students through Smart Phones

Zulfiqar Ali Shah[*], Abrar Ahmed[**], Asif Ikram Anjum[***]

ABSTRACT: *Exponential growth can be seen in language learning with the invention of smart phones. Portable, innovative and readily available technological devices such as smart-phones open a new horizon of opportunities for language learners to have their own computer tools in their pockets anytime and anywhere. The present study investigates the effectiveness of smart phones for enhancing the listening skills of IELTS students. Twenty IELTS students were chosen from The Future Makers College, District Gujranwala. They were given a consent form to read and sign. After taking pre-test, they were taught for three weeks through smart phones. Data was statistically analyzed through SPSS version 18.Results proved that the students improved a lot in post-test. Paired samples T test was used to find out statistically significant difference in the performance of the students. Structured questionnaire was also administered to know their attitude and experience of using smart phones for enhancing listening skills. Significant increase in motivation of IELTS students was also found.*

Keywords: IELTS, technology, smart-phones, listening skills, ESL

Introduction

A smart-phone is defined as a cell-phone that includes additional software functions with advanced smart computing system. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is the concept of employing mobile (simple and smart) phones for the process of Language Learning. Although MALL is still in its infancy in Pakistan but it has really got attention of English Language practitioners around the globe. Students of the present era are continually connected with the entire world, through latest technologies, for informational and educational needs. Use of smart-phone is a relatively new technology in education and educational researchers are still exploring its possibilities. While learning a second or foreign language, it is extremely important not only to speak the language but also to understand the language. However, there is a rare chance to communicate with the native speakers in order to practice speaking and listening. Usage of smart phones

---

[*]   *Assistant Professor, Institute of English language and literature, Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur.*
    (Corresponding *author E-mail address: zulfiqar.shah@salu.edu.pk)*
[**]   *Lecturer Punjab Group of Colleges.*
[***]   *Lecturer, CIIT, Lahore*

to bridge this gap is not less than a blessing. According to Chinnery (2006), "in the recent years, a lot of attention is being paid on the use of Smart-phone especially for the educational purposes."

With the passage of time, teaching of English language is becoming more and more challenging for the teachers who are always trying hard to devise innovative ways of teaching English language. In a study by Thornton and Houser (2003), it was observed that Japanese, especially youth, use smart-phones for all the educational purposes and they were found reading books on their cell phones also. Students learn everything through cell phone quite interestingly because of the multifarious opportunities of learning which they could avail anytime and anyplace and it was appealing to note that they were thinking that smart phone helps them to manage their learning because of the screen size (Chen & Kinshuk, 2008). Smart phones promote situated learning because they are social tools and they can be taken anywhere. For example, if a person comes across a doctor, he can easily have the relevant medical vocabulary with the help of smart phone. Situated learning theory tells that learning process can be maximized when material is relevant from the context's point of view and immediately available as well (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Another important advantage which is quite evident about smart phones is that they can decrease the distance of classroom and outer environment and promote learner autonomy (Reindeer & Lewis 2008). Smart phones provide learners a real life opportunity of listening practice and give them a better exposure of target language. The study therefore is designed to answer the following research questions.

1- Are smart phones efficient in improving English Language Listening skills of IELTS students?

2- What is the attitude of the students towards enhancing listening skills through smart phones?

Literature Review

In the process of learning English language, listening skill is always given secondary importance. In spite of the fact that listening skill plays an important and most critical role in language learning, still it is the least focused area. According to Cook (1996, p. 69), "L2 learners have cognitive deficits with listening that are not caused by lack of language ability but by difficulties with processing information in the second language". A research conducted by Rivers (1992, p. 18) suggests that "listening involves active cognitive processing – the construction of a message from phonic material".

Three stages about the aural perceptions of any message were distinguished by Rivers as follows:

1) Listeners must recognize in phonic substance, sound patterns in bounded segments related to phrase structure. At this stage students are dependent on echoic memory, which is very fleeting.

2) Listeners must immediately begin processing, identifying the groupings detected according to the content of our central information system.

3) Listeners recycle the material they organized through immediate memory, thus building up an auditory memory which helps to retain the segments listeners are processing.

Collaborative as well as active learning has been enhanced by the usage of smart phones in the field of language learning and teaching. The process of learning listening skills of English language can be enhanced effectively by using smart phone technology in language classroom. Podcasting can be used in learning English language listening skills using smart phones because it provides authentic learning exposure. According to Thorne and Payne (2005), "Podcasting provides the language learners, real life speech sample and authentic materials" (p. 167). Stanley (2006) explains that podcasting is not only a source of authentic material and but also is a kind of supplement to the text books. Language learners can have extensive listening practice by using podcast through smart phone both inside as well as outside the classroom. Smart phone applications such as podcasting are linking the formal and informal language learning and hence it teaches the learners that how to use their inside classroom activities in their real life situations.

Furuya and Ohta (2004) found that language learning outcomes were much more improved through language learning materials' practices through smart-phones. Their study showed that the language learners were ready to learn for several times a week and now, they preferred to use outdoor places than inside in the classroom. Constantine (2007) concluded the major advantages of smart phone podcasting as follows:

- Students were in range of global listening and it was a great exposure of listening practice

- Students could have exposure of new language with different expressions

- Students were exposed to different new voices with authentic materials

Kang and Kim (2007) presented a model for the development of materials of smart phone contents for English language teaching and learning. This model was a blend of e-learning and traditional teacher with traditional training in the classroom. It consisted of five continued steps to improve English listening and vocabulary skills using TV dramas. The first step was the classroom activity on Monday and from Tuesday to Saturday; same activity was done on their smart phones at their own selected time and place. The results showed that the listening and vocabulary skills of students were improved quickly because they were exposed to real life situations in TV dramas. Huang and Sun (2010) developed and organized a system to improve the listening skills of language learners. They developed a website which was daily uploaded with different sort of audio and videos materials for listening practice. They also analyzed the capacity of smart phones for listening practice and they concluded that the listening skills of students were improved to a great extent. Through many smart phone applications, students can have access to a lot of authentic material data for listening practice. A lot of authentic material in the form of radio or TV programs is now accessible to language learners and teachers for listening practice. Different smart phone applications can also be downloaded for listening practice which can be source of interest and encouragement for language.

An overall view of many research projects and studies shows that smart phones are definitely of utmost importance for language learning. This technology is much more effective and useful for language learning as compared to almost all other major latest technologies available to language learners. It has a great potential for providing new, innovative and interesting ways of language learning. It is much more capable to provide authentic materials and opportunities for extensive listening practice.

Research Methodology

This is an experimental study done on one group by obtaining pre and post design study data. Gass (2010, p.7) describes experimental research as, 'a way of determining the effect of something on something else'. Mackey and Gass (2005) gave an account of experimental research design as 'a typical experimental study usually uses comparison or control groups to investigate research questions (p, 146). Dornyei (2007) quoted Johnson and Christensen, (2004) as saying, ' the common feature of experimental designs is the fact that certain consciously manipulated processes take place in a tightly controlled environment in which only the target variables are varied while others are kept constant'(p, 116).

For the present study, a consent form was given to all the students; they read and signed the document. After this, a pre-test was taken and then a formal coaching started. After giving a coaching of three weeks, a post-test

was conducted on the same pattern of pre-test. A structured questionnaire was also administered to IELTS students to get their feedback about the usage of smart-phone in enhancing the listening skills.

Q.1: Are smart phones efficient in improving English Language Listening skills of IELTS students?

Statistically, significant difference is seen in the mean score and standard deviation of the same group in Pre-test and post-test results as shown in Table 1.

Q.2: What is the attitude of the students of IELTS towards enhancing listening skills through smart phones?

This question as well as second hypothesis was answered in the light of the responses collected from the questionnaire administered to the students. The questionnaire was administered to get their views and experiences about the usage of smart phones for the enhancement of listening skills.

Data Analysis

Mainly two research questions were addressed in the present study regarding use of smart phones in teaching English listening skills:

Are smart phones efficient in improving English Language Listening skills of IELTS students? What is the attitude of the students of IELTS towards enhancing listening skills through smart phones?

The following detailed analysis is made on the data received:

Table 1
Mean Score and Standard Deviation for Listening Skills in Pre-Test

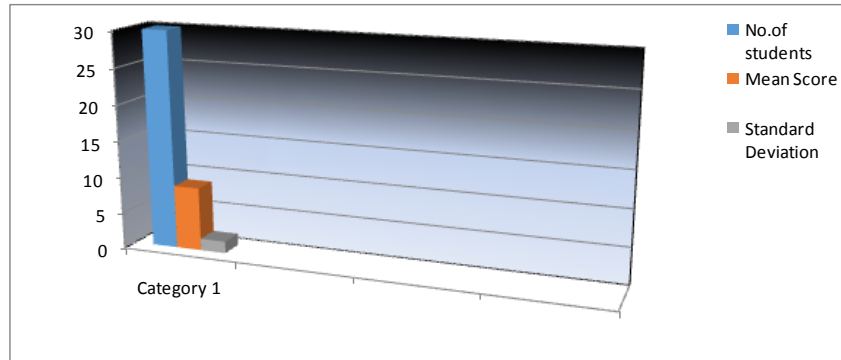| Variable	No of Students	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Listening skill	20	3.633	0.614
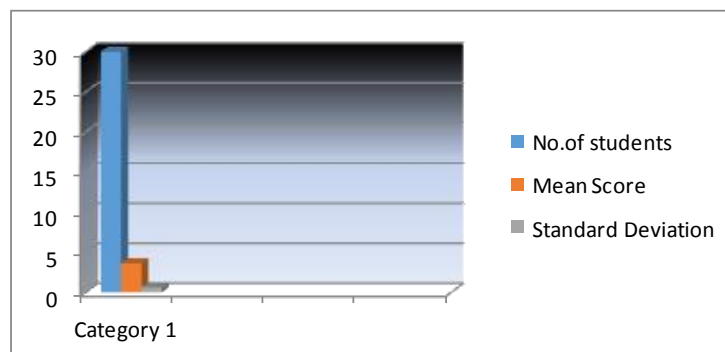
Post-test results show a significant increase in the mean score of the students as is clear in table 2 and table 3.
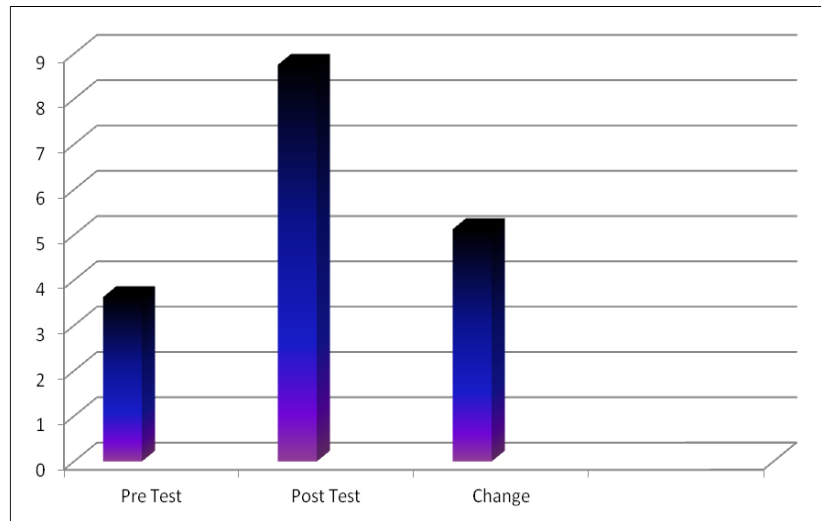
Table 2

Mean Score and Standard Deviation for Listening Skills in Post-Test

Variable	No of Students	Mean score	Standard Deviation
Listening skills	30	8.76	1.63

Table 3

Mean Change in Scores of Listening Skills for Students of IELTS

Variable	Pre-test	Post-test	Change
Listening skill	3.63	8.76	5.13

For further analysis, paired samples *t*-test was also used. There was found a considerable change in the mean scores of IELTS students p = .000 this sig 2 tailed value shows that there was significant change in the score of pretest before teaching through smart phone and in the post test after teaching through smart phone. Hence values show that language learners who got treatment through smart phone improved a lot. To check out the

improvement in the scores researcher also conducted effect size. Effect size was 2.23.Statistically, there was found an evident change in score of listening portion of IELTS students. After analyzing the data it was clear that, using Smart phone technology for teaching English listening skills was very useful. Results of study showed that if such a new and innovating technology is used at initial education level, great results can be obtained.

Table 4

Paired Samples Statistics

		MEAN	N	STD. DEVIATION	STD. ERROR MEAN
Pair 1	Pre	3.6333	30	.61495	.11227
	Post	8.7667	30	1.63335	.29821

Table 5

Paired Samples Correlations

	N	CORRELATION	SIG.
Pair 1 Pre and Post	30	.427	.019

Q.2 What is the attitude of the students of IELTS towards enhancing listening skills through smart phones?

This question as well as second hypothesis was answered in the light of the responses collected from the questionnaire administered to the students. The questionnaire was administered to get their views and experiences about the usage of smart phones for the enhancement of listening skills.

Table 6

Student's Questionnaire Analysis

QUESTION	YES	NO	NOT SURE
1. Are you satisfied with the teaching environment and facilities available there?	100%	--------	--------
2. Do you think smart phone technology is interesting?	90%	---------	10%
3. Is your efficiency enhanced by employing smart phone to learn Listening skills?	90%	5%	5%
4. Do you feel a boost in interest while enhancing listening skills through smart phone?	90%	5%	5%

5. Do you think that your motivation level increases through the usage of smart phones?	85%	5%	10%
6. Did your understanding improve through Smart phone?	85%	10%	5%
7. Do you find Smart phone helpful in enhancing scores of IELTS students?	85%	--------	15%
8. Can employment of Smart phone provide better ways in learning English (Listening Skills)?	90%	5%	5%
9. Do you want to keep on enhancing Listening skills through Smart phone technology in future?	95%	---------	5%
10. Employment of Smart phone is more student-centered than teacher centered. What's your opinion?	100%	--------	--------
11. What's your opinion about the effectiveness of using Smart phone in Language learning?	100%	---------	---------
12. What's your opinion about adoption of Smart phone technology in teaching of Language in Pakistan?	90%	5%	5%

In the first item of the questionnaire, it was asked about the satisfaction level and facilities which were available to them in the research process. And it was found that all the students were satisfied while experiencing the teaching of listening skills through Smart phone.

In the next item of the questionnaire, it was asked about their interest in the study. Almost 90 % students were very much satisfied with the process of learning through such an innovating device i.e. smart-phone. Students showed a keen interest in this methodology. They had more options to learn not only in coaching center but also at home whereas 10% of the students responded negatively and said that employing smart phone for learning English language listening skills is not that useful.

While giving an answer to third item of the questionnaire, 90 % of the students considered that there efficiency was certainly enhanced by learning through Smart phone because this type of learning was very flexible. One possible reason was that students were given the audio material in their own smart phones so it was available for students at their homes for practice of listening. Second reason was that now they were not bound to learn only from a specific source. Now they could learn on their own without waiting for the dissemination of knowledge from class teacher. 5% of the students were not acknowledging Smart phone methodology because they did not like this mode of learning. The possible reason could be the resistance to adopt technology due to rigidity. While 5% of the students considered that there efficiency was not enhanced and improvement was little and they did not want to give credit wholly to Smart phone methodology.

In fourth item of the questionnaire, students were asked about their interest development while learning through Smart phone. 90% of the learners felt an enhancement in their interest because they were crazy to learn English by such an interesting technology Smart phone. Students were punctual during the process of teaching through Smart Phone and it was the major effect but at the same time 5% of the IELTS students were not giving it proper weight age because they were facing some problems due to their lack of confidence in learning with Smart phones while 5% students were not sure.

Students were asked in fifth item of the questionnaire, whether their motivation level was increased or not. Understanding level and marks of 85% of the IELTS students were improved so they were satisfied. They were also motivated due to the innovativeness of Smart phone methodology. 5% of the IELTS students gave their negative answer. While some of the students about 10% of the learners were not sure about what they felt.

In the above table, 85% of the IELTS students gave their opinion that their understanding level was certainly increased and it was very much clear from their attitude of learning listening skills in the class room, their results also show the same thing. About 10% of the IELTS students though that their understanding level was not improved. It was possible because they were new to this type of learning. About 5% of IELTS students had not clear view about the improvement of understanding level.

A majority of students such as 85% of the IELTS gave their verdict in question number seven that grades can easily be improved by employing smart phone in English language listening skills learning. It was found by having a comparison of marks of pre-test with post-test marks of the students. Due to less improvement in marks,15% of them were not sure whether smart-phone methodology could increase their marks or not. So, it

was difficult for them to say with certainty that smart-phone methodology could increase their marks.

90% of the IELTS students gave their opinion that there is nothing about that smart- phone provides many new and innovating ways to learn English language listening skills and a possible reason could be that they could have comprehensive listening practice at any time. While 5% of the students considered traditional ways better because they had the habit of reading from the book and were reluctant to change it. And 5% of students were not sure about it.

Students were asked in the ninth question whether they want to keep on learning English language through smart-phone. 95% of the students responded positively to this question because they were very impressed by this method. And 5% students were still not sure about it.

About employment 100% of the students said "YES" for tenth question. They gave their opinion that Smart Phone provides more chances to the students than traditional ways. They also said that range of learning ways in this methodology is quite large. It makes learners autonomous. They can learn anything, anywhere, at any time.

Researcher asked in eleventh item of the questionnaire by the students of IELTS that what they think whether this new method can be proved effective in Pakistani perspective or not. All the students were of the view that this technology should be employed in future also.

Responding to last question, 90% of the students suggested that even in Pakistani society teachers should use smart-phone comprehensively. By using this methodology, language teachers can be successful not only in Pakistan but also at international level. 5% students were against this methodology, they were in favour of traditional ways. 5% students were not sure whether this methodology should be adopted or not.

Findings

Most of the students found Smart phone as an interesting tool and had felt a significant improvement in the interest, motivation and understanding.

A few ones could not improve much. There can be several reasons behind this. There may be one reason that students were not familiar with this device and method in learning and they were having a negative response towards any method other than traditional ways. Their attendance and marks reveal that they were often absent or not seriously interested in studies.

Most of the students acknowledged Smart phone methodology as an efficient methodology for learning English listening skills. This methodology can not only improve marks but also solve classroom discipline and attendance problems of the students. This study became very popular among all the IELTS students because there were more chances of learner's autonomy than ever before. This study was highly appreciated by the students as it is totally learner-centered. They wanted to adopt it in their normal teaching as it was convenient for any type of learners. That's why most of the students wanted to continue it in future. They also suggested this methodology to be inducted on regular basis at a very early stage. Furthermore, they suggested that English language teachers of Pakistan should get more and more trainings of this methodology to make its induction successful. Using smart phone as a language learning tool can generate wonderful results.

Conclusion

This study proves to be very significant in finding out the usefulness of Smart phone for enhancing listening skills of IELTS students and it also proves very helpful to gauge the increase in level of motivation of IELTS students. It also gives a clear view point of almost all the learners towards employing Smart phone for enhancing listening skills of IELTS students.

This type of language learning provides flexible, interesting and innovative ways of learning so students were very excited and their motivation level increased to a great extent through smart phone. Most of the students participated actively in teaching and learning session because of their increased interest. This has been proved by this study that smart phone can be very effective device for teaching English listening skill to IELTS students. This methodology gave all the students a great satisfaction and they were happy to have it in language learning. It was an alarm for students who were still learning by using traditional methods. In this type language learning students are bound to learn in the classroom only rather they can learn and do extensive practice even outside the class, wherever they like. There was not a great familiarity of this methodology for the teachers but they were ready to accept and use it in future if found consistently useful in different settings.

By using smart-phone for learning listening skills clearly gave a boost to their grades. Before the commencement of their teaching phase through smart-phone their scores were not as satisfactory as it is clear from their pre-test but after having been taught through smart-phone they got good scores. That's why, IELTS students were highly satisfied with it wanted to adopt it

even in the learning of skills other than Listening. The researcher had to face many problems also during research process and the most important one was the availability of smart phones for all the IELTS students.

In the end, it can be concluded that smart-phone is an effective technology to teach English listening skills to IELTS students. This study sets a new platform for the researchers in future to come forward and find out more about Smart phones in the Language teaching and learning sphere.

References

Chen, N., & Kenshuk.(2008). Effects of short term memory and content representation type on smart language learning. *Language Learning and Technology, 12,* 93-113. Retrieved   from ERIC database (EJ815245).

Chinnery,G.(2006). Going to the MALL: Smart assisted language learning. *Language learning and technology*, *10*(1), pp. 9-16.

Constantine, P. (2007). Podcasts: Another source for listening input. *The Internet TESL Journal.13*(1). Retrieved January 29, 2007 from the World Wide Web   http://iteslj.org/Techniques/ Constantine-PodcastListening.html.

Cook, V. (1996). *Second language learning and language teaching.* London: Arnold.

Dornyei, Z. (2007) *Research methods in applied linguistics* Oxford: Oxford University Press .

Furuya, C., Kimura, M.,& Ohta, T. (2004). Smart language learning – A pilot Project on language style and customization.*Proceedings of World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education, Association for the Advancement of Computers in Education,* 1876-1880.

Gass, S. (2010) Experimental research. In Paltridge, B. and Phakiti, A. (Eds.). *Continuum companion to research methods in applied linguistics* London: Bloomsbury.

Huang, C., & Sun, P. (2010).*Using smart technologies to support smart multimedia English listening exercises in daily life.* Paper presented at the international conference on Computer and Network Technologies in Education, Beijing. Retrieved August 2, 2010, from the World Wide Web http://nhcuer.lib.nhcue.edu.tw/bitstream/392440000Q/649/1/120.pdf.

Kang, N-H., & Kim, J-Y. (2007). Smart contents for teaching and learning English listening skills and vocabulary using TV Drama. *English Language Teaching, 19*(1), 113-134.

Lave, J., & Wenger, W. (1991). *Situated learning. Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Mackey, A., & Gass, S. (2010) *Second language research: Methodology and design.* New York: Routledge.

Reindeers, H., & Lewis, M. (2008*).* Pod quests, language games on the go. In M. Andrade (Ed.), *Language Games.* Alexandria: TESOL.

Rivers, V. M. (1992). *Communicating naturally in a second language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stanley, G. (2006). Podcasting: Audio on the Internet comes of age. *TESL, EJ*, 9(4), 1-7.

Thornton, P., & Houser, C. (2005). Using smart phones in English education in Japan. *Computer Assisted Learning*, *21*, 217-228.

Thorne, S., & Payne, J. (2005). Evolutionary trajectories, internet-mediated expression. *CALICO*, *22*(3), 371–397.