

WEB-BASED AUDIO MATERIALS FOR EFL LISTENING CLASS

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Abstract: The present study aimed at finding out the response of learners in an EFL Listening class to the use of web-based listening tasks and their academic achievement in the class. The subjects of the study were 22 university students. The method employed was mixed method. Data were collected using questionnaire and achievement tests. The results showed that 90.9% of the learners enjoyed and were interested in the on-line activity. The t-test analyses also showed that there was significant difference between the Means of scores of learners in the midterm test and final test on Listening 1 and Listening 2.

Keywords: web-based, listening, achievement, response

The success of classroom instruction is characterized by the involvement of learners in the learning activities designed by the instructor, the increase of learners' learning motivation, and achievement of learning objectives. To reach this goal, learning activities should be supported by effective learning environments. According to Jegede et al. (1995) there are eight components of effective distance learning environments, namely: interactivity, institutional support, task orientation, teacher support, negotiation, flexibility, technological support, and ergonomics. Among those eight components, five components are under the responsibility of a teacher: interactivity, task orientation, teacher support, negotiation, and flexibility.

To achieve instructional objectives, those five components should be integrated in an instructional process. The integration will increase the opportunity of learners to get involved in the learning activity designed. The integration of those five components will also provide learners with various

activities and will result in positive impact on the part of the learners' achievement.

The involvement of learners in every learning activity during class instruction is very important. It is because the assessment of mastery of English as a foreign language can only be performance-based. Bringing in the right learning model to class results in the positive responses from learners. Theoretically speaking, the learning model chosen by an instructor should be able to accommodate learners' individual characteristics.

One common learning model used by EFL instructors is face-to-face classroom instruction. Learners come to classroom and all activities are carried out in the room. The possible instructional activities conducted are group work, lectures, and discussion. All those activities require direct responses from class members. Some learners, however, prefer giving indirect responses to the topic being discussed. As a result, such learners will be mistakenly identified by their instructor as passive and less capable in working on tasks given in the class.

Such cases are only a few of many weaknesses in merely implementing face-to-face learning model in EFL classes. In other words, face-to-face learning model cannot accommodate learners' individual characteristics. While the fact shows that a class is always heterogeneous in terms of learners' characteristics.

Fortunately, with the help of learning technology, the problem above can be solved. The learning technology, especially the combination of computer and Internet, is a powerful learning tool to facilitate learning. Flexibility is one of the advantages of using Internet for learning (Collis & Moonen, 2004; Sox & Rubinstein-Villa, 2009).

Furthermore, several studies on the use of Internet for learning have been conducted with various results, yet can be grouped into two major findings. The first major findings on the use of Internet for learning have shown that the use of Internet for learning can increase learners' academic achievements and learning motivation (Mockler et al., 2000; Jensen-Lee & Falahey, 2002; Loucky 2005; Suarcaya, 2008; Pan & Huang, 2009). On the other hand, the opposite findings on the use of Internet for learning are shown by Trinder (2002) and Clark et al. (2006).

The empirical findings above show that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is still a favourite alternative for instructors in conducting learning activities to enrich his/her instructional process. Moreover, the use of Internet for learning seems to be a trend for the next coming years as the speed of Internet connection is getting faster, learning tools and

materials on the Internet are more accessible, and curriculums are more flexible that allow for the adoption of various models of online learning.

In relation to the empirical findings above, the present study was conducted to find out the learners' responses and academic achievements on the use of web-based listening materials for Listening 2 course in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class.

METHOD

This study was conducted on the basis of mixed method (Gorard & Taylor, 2004), with more emphases on describing responses from the subjects and additional statistical analysis of the subjects' achievement on midterm and final tests (Sandelowski, 2000). In this case, data from questionnaire is described and is supported by description of results of quantitative analysis using t-test on means difference of scores between the scores of the midterm test on previous Listening 1 the subjects enrolled in their first semester and the scores of the midterm test on Listening 2 the subjects took in the second semester when this study was conducted as well as the scores of the final tests on Listening 1 and 2. The subjects of the study were 22 university students who studied at the English Department and were taking Listening 2 course. The 22 subjects were in their first year enrollment. The data were collected using questionnaire in terms of learners' responses on the use of online listening class and the scores of the midterm and final tests which were downloaded from database at: www.bhsinggrispekerti.org.

The following are findings and discussion on learners' responses, listening achievement, and constraints faced during the implementation of the online Listening class.

FINDINGS

The online listening exercises for Listening 2 were given starting on April 2010. The audio materials uploaded to the website: www.bhsinggrispekerti.org was taken from one resource available from the Internet: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-magazine-reporters.htm>. Exercises were developed using hot potatoes (www.halfbakedsoftware.com/hot_pot.php). The web site has a feature that can log scores of exercises or tests the learners have worked out. This enables instructors to download the learners' scores after working out the listening exercises. Figure 1 shows us the first page of the web site

www.bhsingrispekerti.org. Once a learner arrives at the site, she has to log in. User name and password are provided by administrator.

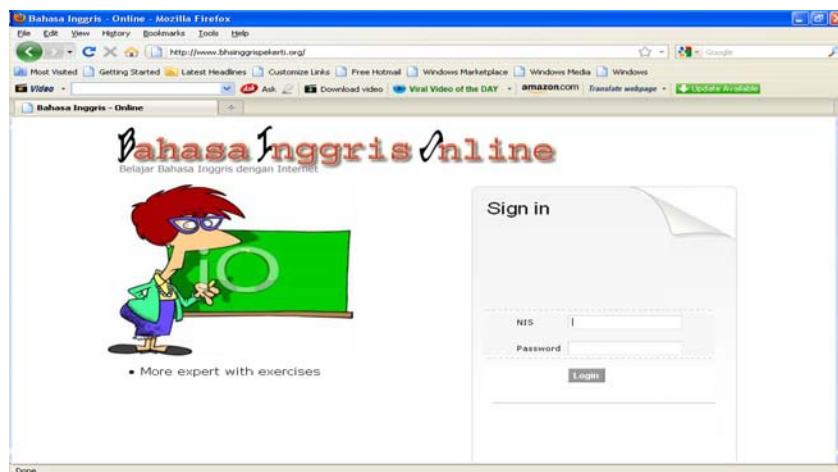


Figure 1. The First Page of www.bhsingrispekerti.org

Once a learner logs in, s/he can start working out the listening exercises. When s/he clicks the exercise menu on the left side of every page after logging in, s/he will be directed to the page of the exercise as shown in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2. Online Exercise Page

The learner should key in his/her user name in the pop up window that appears immediately after entering the exercise page. Then, the object of a media player will show up. In some cases, this object is replaced by a link of the audio file as shown in Figure 2 above. This seems to depend on whether or not there is the software needed in the computer being used. If the later is the case, the learner just needs to right-click the link and she needs to download the file.

Additionally, the site has database that can also record the time the learners log in and work on the exercises. The data about login time is available in a form of bar chart with its time periods. This will enable the researcher to figure out when the learners' online learning activity takes place.

The following are findings on learners' responses, login time, Listening achievement, and constraints faced during the implementation of the online listening class.

Learners' Responses

The use of online exercises is new for the subjects as all courses are normally conducted in a face-to-face interaction. Therefore, when they were told to work on online listening exercises, they felt eager to do the exercises. This means that a face-to-face meeting once a week that consists of 2 x 50 learning hours was replaced by the online activities. Face-to-face meeting was conducted whenever they had problems to be discussed in the classroom. After the online final test was conducted, the learners were asked to fill in questionnaire about their experience in doing the online activities.

The results of the questionnaire indicated that the learners showed positive responses to the online activity. Some of their statements are *The online exercises are easy, I enjoy the online activities, and The online activities are interesting*. As many as twenty-one learners (95.5%) out of twenty-two also feel motivated to do the online exercises. In terms of independent learning, sixteen learners (72%) also perceived that the online exercises enabled them to study independently.

The feedback part of the questionnaire on the online listening exercises also reveals that the learners' responses are also positive despite some technical problems. Figure 3 below shows us the positive response.

15.	If you have further comment, insert it to the next cell.	<p>- Sometimes we're doing the exercises at internet service or warrnet, we get a lot of trouble like the download processing takes along time..</p> <p>- The good think of way to listening online is we can hear the voice clearly; we can pause and play the voice on our own and with that site we can learn about listening lesson without feel boring like learn with the traditional face to face meeting.</p>
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Figure 3. Learner's Feedback-Play and Pause the Record

Figure 3 above shows that though there was a problem with the loading time, the learner still thought the online exercises were still worth doing as with the online exercises. It is because the learner could play and pause the exercise to give them time to think and grasp the material on the record. It is impossible for the learners to operate the self-control feature of play and pause in a language lab because the exercises are controlled by the instructor.

Despite the features of play and pause that should help the learners do the task, some learners complained in the questionnaire on their friends' attempts to cheat while working on the exercises. Few learners were caught by others to search for the listening materials in the Internet. It seemed they could successfully do that and got the script.

15.	If you have further comment, insert it to the next cell.	<p>The online listening 2 class is good for independent learner at home. But if we are in the college and there is an examination like middle test, it better for us to use Lab Audio at college. For some reasons, it is easy to search the material on google. More over we have time to do the exercises. Somebody will search the material before they follow the exam. And it is only for good mark,</p> <p>for us NO! Because we learn for good characters, not for good mark. That's all.</p> <p>" Good Luck Mr. Suarcaya; to make your English class better."</p>
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Figure 4. A Learner's Report on Cheating Behaviour

The response given by one of the learners as shown in Figure 4 above revealed that some learners could locate the file as well as the script. This case raised a new problem which was not anticipated before.

To solve this problem, the original file's name was changed. This strategy was successful in eliminating the problem.

15.	If you have further comment, insert it to the next cell.	I have a comment here based on the use of www.bhsinggrispekerti.org as online tool. It was interesting for me but the other hand it will be better if between students and instructor can meet face to face as usual because if this happen continuously students can not ask their difficulty along they do the exercise by that online tool. If we can meet face to face the study will be effecient.
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Figure 5. A Learner's Feedback for a Face-to-Face Meeting in Between Online Exercises

Though the learners were happy with the online exercises, some still expected to have face-to-face meeting in between the online activities. Figure 5 shows us this. It is true that until the learners had their final test, there were not any classroom meetings conducted with them. However, the learners were allowed to consult individually to the instructor whenever they had a problem.

Login Time

The database shows that the time the learners logged in could be categorized into 4 different periods. The first period is when most of the learners logged in, that is, between noon until late afternoon (12.00-17.00). The second most frequent log in time is the time period between early in the morning until just before noon (06.00-11.00). Then there were also learners who worked on the exercises after midnight (after 00.00-before 6 am). Finally, there were only a few learners who logged in between 18.00-00.00.

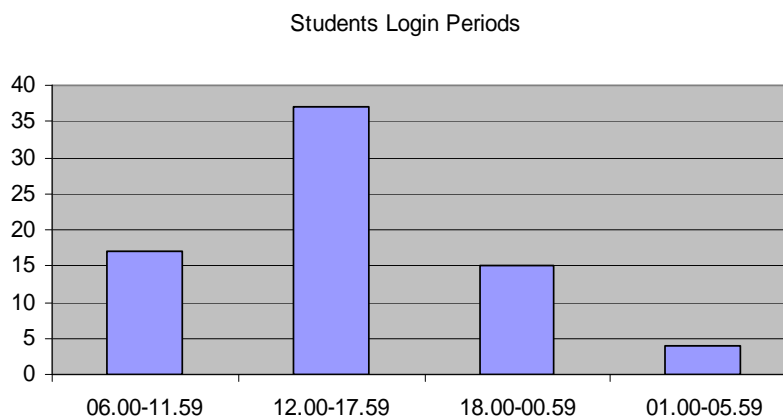


Figure 6: Learners Login periods

The graph in Figure 6 shows that the number of learners who logged in exceeds the number of real learners. This is because a learner can log in more than once. The database logged any information about who and when a learner is online, no matter if the same learner logs in more than once.

From the periods of login time above, it can be seen that most learners logged in after campus time (most of lecturing sessions take time between AB-EF periods) which means that the learners who logged in within a period between 12.00-17.59 worked on the exercises in the internet rental or from their lodging if WiFi connection is available. There is possibility the learners logged in at around 14.00.

Additionally, the second most frequent login time is during campus time. They logged in during break time at around 9, after A-B periods and 11, after C-D periods. The others did the exercises at their convenient time either in the evening (18.00-00.59) and after midnight or early in the morning (01.00-05.59).

Learners' Achievement

The web site was also used to administer midterm and final tests on Listening 2. The results of the test were logged in the database. The mean score for the final test was 82.12 (SD=6.99). Additionally, the mean score for the midterm test was 89.71 (SD=9.67). When the scores of the previous mid and final tests on Listening 1 were compared to the current scores of

mid and final tests on Listening 2, the result of the analyses showed that there were significant differences between the two means of mid and final tests scores. This is shown by Table 1 below.

Table 1. Means difference between scores of mid and final tests

		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1	Mid_1 - Mid_2	-11.87	16.67	3.40	-3.48	23	.002
Pair 2	Final_1 - Final_2	-16.91	13.94	2.84	-5.94	23	.000

Table 1 above shows that there are significant differences between midterm test 1 and 2 as well as between final tests 1 and 2. The differences are represented by t value= -3.48 (Sig=.002) and -5.94 (Sig=.000) for mid tests and final tests respectively.

Constraints

During the implementation of the online audio materials for Listening 2, some constraints were faced. The first constraint was the download time for some of the audio materials. Most learners complained that it took them more time to download the audio than the time allotted to work on the exercise. As a result, they could not obtain their scores because the window of the exercise closed automatically as the session was over. To overcome this problem, the listening exercises were edited using audio editor in terms of length of material and quality of record. In this case, the quality of the audio is decreased that the capacity of the audio file is within hundreds of Kbs. The decrease of the quality, however, does not influence the learning activity.

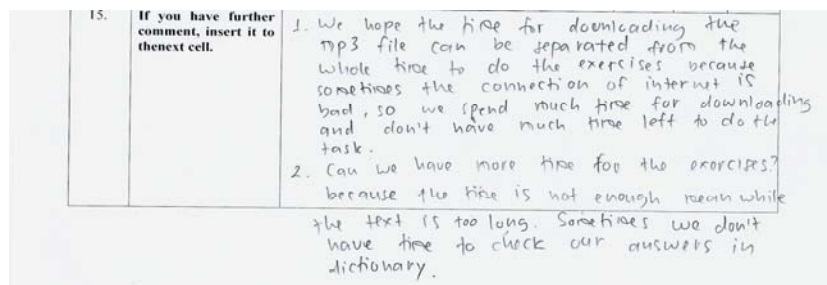


Figure 7: Constraints Faced by Learner

Figure 7 above shows one of the technical problems in managing the online activity. The slow internet connection increased the loading time to play the audio. This significantly decreased the learners' time allotment to accomplish the exercise. Undiksha as well as other internet providers around the campus mostly used wifi connection. The connection is very sensitive to weather change or location where the connectivity is weak. When the weather is cloudy or rainy the internet connection will drop significantly. The same thing happens when the location of access is blocked by walls. These will significantly drop the quality of the wifi internet connection.

The second problem was about saving learners' scores. In the first round of the online activities, some scores of the learners could not be logged into database because of a technical problem. The problem was that when the screen was left idle within 15 minutes or so, the Internet connection would be automatically shut down by the server. This resulted in the failure of score transfer to the database.

To overcome the problem, recordings for later exercises were edited using sound editor that the length of files was no longer than 10 minutes. Having done this, the complaints never showed up anymore.

DISCUSSION

The positive results shown by the findings prove that online exercises for Listening can be an alternative teaching model for instructor besides face-to-face meeting. The learners' responses were very positive on the use of online exercises. There seems to be relationships between internet access, pc/laptop ownership, on the one hand, and the learners' positive responses on the other hand. Having a laptop and Internet access means a learner has at least two types of flexibility in online learning. The first flexibility the learners have is in terms of time (Suarcaya, 2008; Felix, 2004). They can work on the exercises at times of their convenience. The other flexibility the learners have is flexibility in terms of place (Felix, 2004). Being flexible in terms of place means that access to online learning materials is easy to obtain from any place where Internet connection is available.

Additionally, the use of web-based exercises gives opportunity to learners to do something new which has never been done for purposeful learning activities. This also to a certain degree influenced the learners to feel eager to study online.

Furthermore, the results of the t-test analyses show that the learners' means of scores on midterm tests and final tests of Listening 1 with face-to-

face model of instruction and Listening 2 with web-based model of instruction were significantly different. There is a reason for the difference. The midterm and final tests on Listening 1 were conducted in a classroom setting in which strict rules were applied, e.g. to take a glance at a friend's work is considered cheating. There seems to be non-academic factors influencing the learners when working on a traditionally-administered test. One of the non-academic factors that influence the learners' achievement is anxiety (Chen & Chang, 2004). They further stated that being anxious when having a test can significantly influence the result of the test. Besides, a paper-based test is conducted at the same time for the whole learners. Being heterogeneous in nature, a class always consists of learners with different moods and achievement motivation in learning, especially in the case of accomplishing a test.

Pichette (2009), however, argued that there is no significant difference between anxiety the learners had in f2f meeting and in online learning. This means that the online learners can also be affected by this anxiety. It is only the degree of anxiety that is different.

On the other hand, despite the issue of anxiety, the online test provides the learners with flexibility in accomplishing the test. The flexibility offered can be in forms of place and time. With this flexibility, learners can accomplish their test from anywhere as long as there is internet connection. Thus, the test is not identical with a room surrounded by white walls. Furthermore, with time flexibility, learners can work on the test anytime at their convenience. Suarcaya (2008) showed that learners could increase online task accomplishment because they were provided with flexibility in terms of time and place. The case seems also apply in this study. Given time and place flexibilities, the learners could work on the exercises at their own pace to get the best achievement.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To conclude, the study shows that the use of online audio materials for Listening has positive results in terms of learners' responses and achievement. Learners responded that they enjoyed and felt interested in working on online listening tasks. Academically, their achievements on the midterm and final tests also increased. Furthermore, the online learning activities provide learners with alternative of time and places in working on exercises.

The present study was limited to finding out the learners' response and academic achievement with regard to online learning activities. This study,

however, did not discuss the strategy the learners used in maintaining virtual social interaction during online activities. It is therefore necessary to investigate how learners maintain their social interaction while doing online class activities.

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