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The Impact of Training on Improving the English Language Listening Skills

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ABSTRACT:
This study aims at examining the effect of practice and training on the improvement of the students’ English listening skills at the university level. The researcher conducted an experiment in a listening course for English majors at Al-Quds Open University, Palestine in the second semester 2010 -2011 on a group of (74) students. The method used was providing intensive practice and training by listening to all types of listening materials including a lot of on-line materials, media, and by using various types of lis-
tening strategies. A pre-test at the begin-
ning of the semester was given and the
final exam was used as a post-test. The
scores of the two tests were compared to
check the development of the students’
listening abilities. The hours of training
for each student were calculated and the
correlation between the hours of training
and the improvement in the achievement
in the post-test was analyzed using the
suitable statistical methods. The experi-
ment showed significant improvement
in the performance of the students which
varied in degree according to the amount
of practice each student received. The re-
sults showed also that the more practice
in listening comprehension the students
got, the more improvement they achieve.
Hence, the study recommends that prac-
tice in this important skill should be en-
couraged and that training in using the
suitable listening strategies is essential
for improving the level of the students’
listening skill. It is also recommended
that teachers should select appropriate,
various & interesting listening materials
to help the students achieve better results.
Key words : receptive skills , productive
skills, listening strategies,

INTRODUCTION:

Mastering the English language listen-
ing skill is one of the goals of teachers
and students. Although the new English
textbooks for our Palestinian schools
“English for Palestine” contain a lot of
developed listening material, yet this
skill is still neglected in the classrooms
because it is not included in the school
exams nor in the Tawjihi English Exam
(TEE). Furthermore, at the university
level, listening is not practiced suffi-
ciently either (Farris,1993). It is quite
known that listening is the most im-
portant method of communication It
is closely related to speaking since we
cannot speak well if we do not com-
prehend what the speaker says.(Moses,
(2011). This study therefore presents
the need for more emphasis on listen-
ing comprehension in English language
learning/ teaching. According to Mor-
ley (1991, p.82), “We can expect to
listen twice as much as we speak, four
times more than we read, and five times
more than we write.”

Until recently, there has been little
research interest in the listening skill
(Goh,1997 ) There is much more re-
search on reading, writing or speak-
ing. Some of the reasons for this lack
of research interest come from the fact
that speaking was always considered a
more “valuable” skill to focus on in the
classroom; that researchers and teach-
ers have often considered that listen-
ing was something which could just
be “picked up”; and as researchers and
teachers had not been taught listening
themselves, they saw little need for de-
vveloping a specific research agenda or
approaches to teaching listening (Mill-
er, 2003).Fortunately, listening com-
prehension has received considerable
attention in the fields of applied lin-
guistics, psycholinguistics and second
language pedagogy during the last two
decades (Anderson & Lynch, ( 1988);
Rost, (1990); Underwood, ( 1989)). Re-
results of the large body of research have
shown that listening is not a passive
process in which the listener simply re-
ceives a spoken message, but rather a
complex cognitive process in which the listener constructs the meaning using both the linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge. The importance of the listeners’ cognitive and social judgments in the process of listening, in addition to the linguistic knowledge, has been especially emphasized (Rost, 1990; Farris, 1993).

There is now a greater awareness among teachers that we have to help learners develop their listening skills rather than rely on the skill developing itself. Thus, listening as a skill has gained more and more weight in SL or FL classrooms. Limited listening practice affects face-to-face communication negatively. On the other hand, adequate listening practice could give the learners essential improvement in their listening competence (Harmer, 2003). Good listening materials, teachers talk and students’ interactions are essential tools for providing this practice. In our schools, colleges and even in the higher levels, instructors direct students to how to read and write much more than how to speak or listen. It is believed that these skills would be mastered by the learners automatically. Furthermore, listening evaluation is usually excluded from all school examinations. Only written exams are given. This makes teachers ignore the listening skill and concentrate on the other language skills (Mutawa & Kailani, 1989).

1.2 NATURE OF LISTENING AS A SKILL

Listening is a process which requires an active and immediate analysis of the streams of sounds. Listening involves the desire to listen, as well as the capability to listen. Both must be present with the listener for the successful recognition and analysis of the sound (Rivers, 1981). Language skills are usually divided as ‘receptive’ and ‘productive’. Another subdivision is based on interaction whether one way or interactive reception. Reading and writing are one-way skills where learners don’t get direct feedback. But in speaking and listening, learners may have their understanding and reproduction checked instantly. Thus active and self-learning take place. Moreover, there is a traditional labeling for reading and listening as “passive” skills. But linguists believe that a listener gets involved in many things such as guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, and interacting (Harmer, 2003). Rost (2002) states that listeners “co-author” the discourse and they construct it by their responses. He explains that listening differs greatly from reading because reading materials are printed and are permanent enough where the learners are required to interact with the next sentence using the knowledge of the previous one while listening involves also continuous material presentation where students have to respond to the immediate expression. Listening is more of a process than a product. It instantly shapes the understanding and utterances of the learners. Listening is a process that involves
understanding what we hear. So, two concurrent actions are demanded to take place in this process. According to many ELT experts like Rost (2002), Nation & Newton (2009), listening includes some component skills which are: recognition of sounds, and words, knowledge of grammatical combinations and rules, knowledge of utterances that act to create meaning, connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues and lastly combining background knowledge to figure out meaning and recall important words and ideas. Goh (1997) remarks that there are elements that affect listening such as: kinds of input, attention, concentration, speed of presentation, interest and aim of listening, suitable timing and anxiety. Thus, teachers have to pay attention to these factors.

1.4 QUESTIONS OF THE STUDY

The study tries to answer the following questions:
1. Is there an effect for using training in listening to English materials on the achievement of the students in the “Listening Skills” course at Al-Quds Open University / Ramallah Educational Region?
2. Are there statistical differences at \( \alpha \leq 0.05 \) in the students’ performance in the post-test in listening due to the gender variable?
3. Are there statistical differences at \( \alpha \leq 0.05 \) in the listening achievement of students due to the training?
4. Are there statistical differences at \( \alpha \leq 0.05 \) in the achievement of students due to the training period variable?
5. Are there statistically significant differences at the level \( \alpha \leq 0.05 \) in the achievement of students in the course “Listening skills” between the pre-test and the post-test?

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE & RELATED STUDIES

2.1 IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Most ELT experts agree that exposure to listening to real speakers of English is very essential for improving the students’ ability in listening skill. Rivers (1981) believes that students should be prepared from the start to understand the speech of native speakers of English speaking at normal rate in a normal manner. The prolonged exposure
of students to the slow speech of ESL teachers does not prepare students to understand the natural spontaneous speech of native speakers which is one of the major roles of the EFL instruction. Harmer (2003) also thinks that one of the main reasons for getting students to listen to spoken English is to let them hear different varieties and accents --- rather than just the voice of their teacher with its own idiosyncrasies. In today’s world, students need to be exposed not only to one variety of English (British English, for example) but also to varieties such as American English, Australian English, Caribbean English, Indian English or West African English . Ridgway says “practice is the most important thing in improving the students’ listening performance. The more listening the better , Teach listening comprehension as the major skill; sub skills will take care of themselves as they become automatized. (2000, p.180). Anderson and Lynch (2003) believe that there are two principal reasons for stressing the importance of listening. First: for many students, it seems to be the most demanding and is therefore a skill that needs a considerable amount of practice and training. Second: it is an area which is in danger of being overlooked in courses for foreign learners.

Anderson (2003) and Moses (2011) also think that the more students listen to English , the better they become at listening to it .The more they listen to English, the better their speaking becomes, the better pronunciation they acquire. Brownell (2002) also thinks that with the advance of technology and new methods of communication where English is the language of communication, listeners of English confront a constantly changing and increasingly complex listening environment. Buck (2001) emphasizes the need for practice in listening . He presents useful methods and practice material in addition to a sample test at the end. Krashen (1981) explains that “acquisition” takes place as a result of the learner having understood input that is a little beyond the current level of his competence. We must take into account that the level of listening input must be higher than the level of language production of the target learners. So, language teaching pedagogy must incorporate academic and designed listening practice.

**RELATED STUDIES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRACTICE IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION**

During the last two decades there has been a growing interest in conducting studies that aim at measuring the effect of listening practice on the improvement of the listening skills of learners. Petric (2000) is a good example for this type of study which aimed at exploring the effect of a one-semester program of listening instruction on the development of listening skills of 30 first year students of English at the University of Novi Sad ,Yugoslavia. In order to achieve this aim, the development of the listening skill in two groups of university students of English was compared: one group that received regular instruction at the English Department and the other one that received additional systematic listening training dur-
ing one semester.

The research hypothesis was that all students’ listening skills would improve during one semester, but the improvement would be significantly greater in the case of students who receive listening instruction than in the case of students who attend the same number and type of classes without listening instruction. This experimental study showed what effect a one semester program of listening instruction had on the development of students’ listening skills. The difference between the pre-test and post-test means in the experimental group was statistically significant.

Another similar study was conducted by Wang (2007). It was an action research project in a listening course for the second-year English majors in one university in China. After finding that the existing teaching practice in the listening course was not quite interesting and rewarding to his students, the researcher designed a new teaching plan to motivate his students in practicing listening. The plan consisted of three parts: providing students with explicit knowledge about the listening process, listening skills and the general process of improving listening skills at the beginning of the course; modifying ways to manage each session so that each session is a purposeful and growing experience for students through the use of various interesting listening materials and adding two ways to assess students’ learning: news report following a strict format and journal writing. Based on the data obtained from classroom observations, students’ journals, interviews with students, and students’ response to an open-ended questionnaire at the end of the term, students developed a fairly high degree of motivation towards practicing listening. Students became more enthusiastic about practicing listening. Students’ practicing became more purposeful. Students realized the importance of persistent practice.

Other studies showed that teaching listening develops other language skills as well as listening. Hamid’s study (2001) tried to see the effect of listening practice and training on the writing performance of 8th grade students. Her study sample consisted of (112) students from four schools in Palestine divided into a control group and an experimental one. She used listening practice with the experimental group as an entrance to writing tasks. With the other group, no listening material was used. In the post-test, the experimental group outperformed the control group in writing. Hamid proved that listening practice had significantly positive effects. It is an effective means to facilitate and improve writing.

In other domains, some studies looked into other aspects of listening practice. Kavaliauskiene (2008) in his research studied the learners’ self-assessment of listening difficulties and challenges in performing listening tests. The participants in this project were (97) university students. The findings gave insights into the practice of developing listening skills. Useful tips for good practice of teaching effective listening skills in a foreign language were offered based on the research data and observation of the
students’ performance. Kavaliauskiene also emphasized that the individual listening practice is of good importance as it has a number of advantages in learning listening skills. First, a learner can work at one’s own pace. Second, it allows a learner to concentrate on his or her assignment. Third, learners do not worry for not being able to follow everything immediately. Finally, they can analyze their performance and not lose face due to anonymity of one’s performance. He also points out that the implications of a creative approach to developing listening skills are to diversify the listening practice and to make it individual, which is possible by employing online listening facilities.

Another study by Guo (2005) aimed at the investigation of a one-year experiment of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) at Shanxi University of Finance and Economics. The experiment involved three teachers and 550 non-English major undergraduates of the University, sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The study aimed to find the factors influencing English listening comprehension and the strategies to be taken that might improve students’ listening comprehension.

The study also sought new ways of cultivating listening comprehension competence in TEFL in the Chinese context. It analysed the nature of listening and comprehension and the process of listening comprehension. It indicated that among current problems, and their causes in English teaching practice, the most frequent is that of cultural difference and its effect on listening comprehension. According to the practice of TEFL in the University, the author puts forward the teaching approach of “listening based, overall development” and addresses listening comprehension strategies such as distinguishing different stages of listening teaching, matching instruction to students’ individual differences, developing students’ listening comprehension micro skills, and especially focusing on cultural learning in language teaching. Results of the research are of significance and may prove beneficial to English language teaching in Chinese tertiary institutions. Teachers should conduct classroom teaching as much in English as possible and encourage students to participate in all kinds of extracurricular activities in English, ask them to watch TV programs in English and listen to English broadcast on the radio, and join an English club and organize “English corner” activities.

Some other studies tried to spot the problematic areas in teaching listening to EFL students. Bosiri’s study (2007) aimed at identifying these problems in the Tunisian context. She investigated the listening teachers’ attitudes towards the teaching of listening at the tertiary level. An eclectic methodology was adopted based on the quantitative and qualitative analyses as well as on the triangulation of several instruments. She investigated the attitudes of (28) teachers teaching listening at four different universities. The disclosure of the data indicated a product approach reflected in terms of three tendencies: the listening for speaking was the highest then the listening to develop listen-
ing skills and then the listening to understand. The researcher recommended the designing of a listening syllabus that would meet the needs of students which are mostly academic listening ones. Teachers should adopt a teaching approach that develops the listening strategies and skills.

Another study that investigated the problems of teaching listening is that of Lisheng (2005). In his study, he made an investigation in Zhanjiang Ocean University, China to discover what problems the freshmen have and try to find solutions for them. His study found that students’ insufficiency of vocabulary affects their listening; students’; lack of cultural background hinders them; students’ anxiety makes their listening worse& students’ being short of listening skills prevents their efficient listening. After the investigation, some measures were taken to help the students to improve their listening comprehension. Students were trained with listening strategies; they were encouraged to build up self-confidence and overcome anxiety; they were helped to have a command of linguistic knowledge, enlarge their vocabulary and get themselves familiar with the background information. As a result, students’ listening comprehension improved, but there were still problems unsolved. Furthermore, the researcher says that if teachers choose interesting and appropriate listening materials, the students will be more interested in listening. To sum up, all these studies indicate that practicing the listening skill is essential for improving it for students.

2.2 LISTENING STRATEGIES

Most experienced ELT teachers believe that practicing the listening skill has to follow certain strategies to make it productive and effective. Good listening lessons go beyond the main listening task itself with related activities before and after the listening. Usually, the listening practice includes: the phonological code, the syntactic code, the semantic code (Celce-Murcia, 2000 and Newton, 2009). Rivers (1981) thinks that listening passes through these stages: the sound stage then words and phrases then selection level without retention then short term retention and finally long term selection. She thinks that at the intermediate level, students can reach the third stage immediately when listening to something. Richards (1985, p. 191) indicates while listening, listeners categorize the received speech into meaningful sections, identify redundant material, keep hold of chunks of the sentences, think ahead and use language data to anticipate what a speaker may be going to say, accumulate information in the memory by organizing them and avoid too much immediate detail. Celce-Murcia, 2000; Harmer (2003) and others believe that we should break the skill of listening into micro-skill components and make sure that our students are aware of what they need to know to understand how to listen.

Successful listening refers to ‘the integration of these component skills’ and listening is nothing but the ‘coordination of the component skills’. This
shows that listening could be related to interaction. Interactive listening situations include face-to-face conversations and telephone calls in which the listener has a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from conversation partner. On the other hand, non-interactive listening is where the listener is engaged in listening passively to a monologue or speech or even conversation (Anderson, 2003). Some non-interactive listening situations are listening to the radio, CDs, TV, films, lectures etc. and here the listener usually doesn’t have the opportunity to ask for clarification, slower speech or repetition (Lavery, 2001). Furthermore, Mutawa and Kailani (1989) state that there are three levels of listening comprehension: a. the elementary level which deals with sound and meaning of words, the intermediate level which handles short conversation, and the third level or the advanced level where students can deal with lengthy spoken discourse. The two levels of listening teachers need to focus upon are:
- Listening for gist (to get the general idea or meaning)
- Listening for detail (to get the specific facts).

A good sequence that could be followed in a listening practice would be: introduction, pre-listening, set task, listening, checking task, listening again & checking tasks, leading into other activities (Lavery, 2001). Always make students listen more than once. It is usually advisable to give the questions to the students before they listen so as to know what to focus upon in their listening. Beware of the acoustics in your classroom and of the quality of your machine (Harmer, 2003). Richards (1983) explains that some of the activities that could be used to check listening comprehension are: true-false questions & asking for details, filling certain words or expressions, choosing between words, dictation etc. He (p: 228) believes that tasks should have a purpose and should develop competence in certain abilities in listening and this is the goal of teaching listening skills.

As for the ways of processing the text while listening, we can identify two approaches. One is concentrating on the smaller units of the language and linking them together to get the meaning in the last stage. It is a text-based approach where learners focus on sounds words and grammar to get the meaning. It is a bottom-up processing (Saha & Talukdar, 2008). The other method is to get the learners to go into a top-down process where learners use their prior knowledge to reconstruct the meaning using the linguistic knowledge as a tool. The back ground knowledge activates a set of expectations to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next (Nunan, 2003; Guo, 1997). This is a strategy-based approach. Guo (1997, p: 365) stated some of these strategies which develop listening such as listening to all types of materials, improving lexicon strategies, developing particular skills, listening to enjoyable and interesting materials. On the other hand, tasks might be turned to semi-reciprocal if the instructor makes the students respond while checking their understanding through question-answer.
or discussion and clarification in the class or lab (Anderson, 2003; Ridgway, 2000).

Most ELT experts also stress that it is necessary to teach listening comprehension in integration with other language skills “It is probably best not to have students practice listening in isolation but rather as a multi-task event. We also want students to listen to English as much as possible on their own at home, in their cars and everywhere (Buck, 2000; Harmer, 2003) . Holden (2003) also explains the necessity for using the strategies in teaching listening. He says that if learners are trained in using certain strategies in listening, they will apply these strategies themselves when they practice on their own. He also says that most commercial listening texts are in fact listening tests. These do very little to develop learners’ ability to process and comprehend the material. Thus, teachers are invited to add strategies to these texts to transfer them to learning materials by tasks that call for discussing, evaluating and developing activities. They should use the listening material as a stimulus for writing and speaking (Holden, 2003; Lavery, 2001). Learners could be asked to give opinion on the issues that they listen to after they are asked about details and comprehension of the listening material. Another useful technique is to give homework. In teaching listening, homework is a must. A listening task between two classes prevents students from forgetting. Encouraging public listening and having notes on them is a free pave to walk in teaching listening which leads to success. Providing tape recording with questions, dictation, or a worksheet to complete may bring the expected results.

Another suggested strategy is cooperative listening technique as it offers advantages over the traditional pedagogy on listening. It allows weak students to learn from more able ones and it reveals a range of strategies that the learners have been using (Oxford, 2002; Djwandono, 2006) . Farnen (2010) recommends that teachers should encourage their students to give each other constructive feedback to ensure that they are listening and understanding conversations. Finally, teachers have to remember that “some activities which are done after the students have listened to a text are not really post listening activities because they are themselves the main purpose of the lesson and the listening is no more than an introduction or stimulus for the planned work (Underwood 1989, p. 78).

- RELATED STUDIES ON THE USE OF LISTENING STRATEGIES IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION

The application of good listening strategies by teachers and training students to use them as well have been other areas of focus for studies. Some of these studies concentrated on all possible strategies that could be used including cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies and their various forms, tasks and applications. Other studies concentrated on one type of strategies. Coskun (2010) conducted a study on the effect of metacognitive listening strategy training on the listening performance of a group of
students at a university in Turkey. Two groups, a control group (n: 20) and an experimental group (n: 20), were chosen as the participants of the study. The experimental group received five weeks of metacognitive strategy training embedded into a listening course book, while the other group did not. At the end of the training, a listening test taken from the teacher’s manual of the same course book was administered to both groups. The analysis of the test scores showed that the experimental group did statistically better in the test. The implication of the study is that metacognitive strategy training should be incorporated into the regular listening teaching program to help students become more effective listeners.

Hamzah (2009) conducted a study to look into the instruction of socio-affective strategies to Malaysian college students in listening comprehension. First, subjects took an IELTS listening test, served as a pre-test, to be randomized in the control and experimental group. Second, during a period of six weeks, subjects did different IELTS listening exercises. In the experimental group, subjects received explicit instructions to employ socio-affective strategies for 20 minutes every week. They were asked to reflect their feelings and worries either by writing or talking about them. They were encouraged to communicate with their peers and teacher. Moreover, they were trained how to relax and breathe deeply before doing exercises, and finally they were asked to report how they felt about their sleeping at night while in the control group, subjects just did the tasks without receiving any special instruction. During the instruction phase, subjects in the experimental group were required to practice relaxation techniques. The control group, on the other hand, did not receive any explicit instruction from the teacher. Finally, subjects received a post-test. Results of the study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test. This confirms the positive effects of the use of the socio-affective strategies.

Teng’s study (2005) was to look into the instruction of EFL listening strategies to Taiwanese college students. Subjects were one freshman class of about 50 students at a university. The instruments included a listening strategy questionnaire, and a weekly learning diary. First, subjects completed the questionnaire of listening strategies. Second, in the freshman course English Listening Practice, subjects received instruction and practice in the use of EFL listening strategies for 20 minutes weekly for 15 weeks. Each week two listening strategies were taught with examples and exercises designed by the researcher. In total, subjects were able to learn 30 EFL listening strategies. During the instruction phase, subjects were required to keep a weekly learning journal. Finally, subjects received a post-test on the strategy questionnaire. Results of the study provided empirical descriptions of strategy training for L2 listeners. Results also offered some implications for teaching EFL listening comprehension. The study proposed that systematic strategy instruction resulted in the improvement of strategy
use for EFL listeners. Chen (2005) studied the common obstacles or barriers expressed by learners when learning listening comprehension strategies. The investigation involved qualitative procedures in order to elicit common factors or patterns surrounding the difficulties of learning listening strategies. Sixty-four EFL college students in Taiwan voluntarily participated in the listening strategy training. Eight-week training period, concentrating on listening comprehension strategies, was conducted by the researcher. The training included eight two-hour sessions. During each session, one or two related listening strategies were introduced, explained, demonstrated, and practiced. The main strategies consisted of the following: grasping the main idea, key-word strategy, selective attention, using contextual clues, grouping, inference, elaboration, self-monitoring, imaging, note-taking, repeated listening, prediction and previewing. The researcher used interviews to check the attitudes of the learners. After the data analysis, seven major categories of learning obstacles were derived, including 22 minor groups. The categories are: affective barriers; habitudinal obstacles; learning difficulties related to individual learner’s information processing. English proficiency, and beliefs about listening, problems centering around the nature and procedures of strategy use and the listening materials that learners practiced with.

Bahrami, (2010) conducted another study which aimed at examining the influence of task-based activities (four specific types of tasks: matching, form-filling, labeling, and selecting) on the listening ability in students of English as a foreign language and to identify Iranian EFL learners’ listening ability. As far as teaching listening is concerned, the findings of this study will help foreign language teachers to choose the appropriate way of teaching listening to EFL learners. Ninety senior Iranian EFL learners of Sadra English Institute in Dorood, Iran participated in this study. The sources of data for this quasi-experimental study included two task-based tests of listening comprehension and a test of language proficiency. Analysis of the findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between the three tasks of “matching, labeling, and form-filling” on the one hand and listening comprehension on the other. However, no such relationship was observed between the task of “selecting” and listening comprehension. All these studies show the importance of utilizing the right strategies in teaching the listening skill. They show how their application makes the listening practice more efficient and better structured.

2.3 LISTENING MATERIALS

Anderson (2003) thinks that all types of listening skill are valuable and necessary if a learner is to acquire an all-round ability to listen effectively in a range of situations to various types of input and for a variety of listening purposes. Celce- Murcia and MacIntosh (2000) recommend the use of real or live language in teaching listening as it
is necessary to comprehend what people say if we want to speak.

There are plenty of books and resources that provide listening material and suitable practice that could be used. Dunkel’s book, Intermediate listening comprehension is a good example. The book provides a lot of listening materials in the form of tapes, videos and online tests. The book could work as a course book. The units include talk about many topics in history technology, science, culture, sociology etc.. There is listening preparation, review of vocabulary and sentences. Post listening includes a variety of task-oriented and enjoyable listening and speaking activities that include comprehension check, listening expansion and discussion.

Another series of listening comprehension books is Tactics for Listening by Richards, et al, published by Oxford University Press 2004. It is a three-level series: basic, developing and expanding. This series could serve as graded comprehensive listening material for adults and young adult learners. The basic and developing textbooks are to be used for lower levels. Expanding Tactics for Listening is intended for intermediate students who need further practice in understanding everyday conversational language. It could be used as a main text for a listening course and as a complement to a speaking course. The topics have been chosen for their frequency in everyday life and for their interest to the readers. A wide variety of stimulating and useful activities are included to give students graded practice in listening. In every unit, there is a follow-up speaking activity which is related to the theme of the listening task. Another good textbook is Targeting Listening and Speaking by Keith S. Folse and Darren Bologna. (2003). The book provides short focused activities to help improve the listening and speaking skills for lower level ESL/EFL students. Cambridge Skills for Fluency for Adrian Doff & Christopher Jones (2001) is another good source for listening material. It is a listening series which consists of four graded textbooks aimed at developing the learner’s ability to understand real life spoken English through recordings of spontaneous natural speech. Books 1&2 serve for lower levels while books 3&4 are intended for intermediate and advanced learners. The activities are designed to encourage students to draw on their own natural listening strategies and to apply them effectively in the context of language learning. Another useful textbook for practicing listening is the book used at Al-Quds Open University titled Listening Skills (1994) prepared by Shahir Al-Hassan and Abdallah Shakir. The book is made for English major students. It integrates listening comprehension and study skills. It also provides extensive practice in note-taking, getting general and specific points. The listening tasks take the form of practical exercises such as labeling diagrams, filling in missing information and completing a given layout of a lecture. All materials and exercises are recorded on CDs. There is a wide variety of subject matter which helps in building broad English vocabulary varying from
everyday English expressions to subject matter terms. As it is made for an open university, it is designed so that the student can study on his own and is provided with an answer key at the end of each unit. In addition to books and recorded materials, there is a wide selection of online materials that provide a wide variety of listening material and practice which students can use on their own. Students should be directed to certain sites and each time it is preferred to assign a task to be done at home using one of these assigned sites. The following are examples for some of the websites that provide good listening practice and activities.
http://www.englishlistening.com/
http://www.go4english.com
http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish
http://esl.about.com/od/englishlistening/English_Listening_Skills_and_Activities/Effective_Listening_Practice.htm
http://www.esl-lab.com

The use of videos can also provide an environment for good listening practice. They are more stimulating than CDs because they provide pictures not only sound. The following site http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/ is a very good source of videos and documentaries for all sorts of knowledge. Mass media can be another source that could provide useful and updated listening material. Some TV shows and films in English could be helpful as they give students the chance to listen to informal everyday conversations in interesting contexts. To sum up listening materials should be well-chosen and well-used.

RELATED STUDIES ON LISTENING MATERIALS

Lately, there has been increasing interest in studies on the effect of incorporating technological methods and materials in the process of listening training and practice especially with the great advancement in technological systems of communications and the abundance of good listening resources that one can get from the various sites on the internet. Following are some studies that are related to this issue.

Katchen (2003) looked at the incorporation of video into a two-semester general English class for non-majors at a university in Taiwan. This study applied some of Wang’s techniques and tracks in a freshman listening and speaking course for English majors. Instead of a textbook, some DVD films were used, with most of the listening and speaking activities throughout the semester based on material in or questions raised by the films. Supplemental activities were posted on the class website in National Tsing Hua University’s e-learn web platform and other supplemental material was accessible from the instructor’s website. Evaluation of the study was done through a pre-test and post-test on listening skills and questionnaires designed to elicit student opinions on the method of course delivery and the materials. The study was designed with a view to gauging and enhancing the effectiveness of using DVD films to teach listening and speaking skills and how one can use the web to support such an approach. Results indicate that students found this
very interesting and beneficial. They showed some improvement also. Yet, Katchen suggests that a number of issues related to syllabus design and the materials development need to be addressed before DVD films can replace traditional texts and tapes as effective teaching materials.

Phuong (2011) in his study also aimed at discovering the extent to which Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) activities influence the academic listening skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) of learners, as well as teachers’ attitudes towards computer use and their computer skills in language teaching in Vietnamese tertiary institutions. A quasi-experimental design was adopted.

The study was conducted in two phases, the Baseline and Intervention, the latter sustained over three months. The treatment sample of this study consisted of four teachers of listening and their students (in total approximately 100). The teachers were invited to a training workshop on computer skills, and received online resources for their teaching supplements. The intervention classes were taught with these supplementary online resources while the comparison classes (the other four classes) were supplemented with extra listening books selected by their teachers.

The results of the study showed that there was a difference between the listening scores of the students in the intervention classes compared with those of the comparison students. The teachers showed changes in their attitudes towards computer use, and gained better skills in selecting effective sources from the Internet for listening instruction. The study suggests that computer use in listening instruction should be given much more consideration so as to improve the listening skill of EFL learners, and to motivate both teachers and learners.

The effect of the background knowledge of the students on their listening comprehension is another important issue. Sadighi’s study (2006) tried to explore this effect. Two TOEFL preparation classes allocated to EFL students (12 students each) took part in the study. The experimental group received some treatment in the form of topic familiarity, and their background knowledge was activated. Then a 50-item TOEFL test of listening comprehension was administered to both the experimental and the control groups. A statistical analysis of the results provides some evidence in support of the effect of background knowledge on listening. The findings regarding the supportive role of background knowledge are consistent with the findings of the majority of L2 listening studies. It seems, therefore, that educators who advocate the use of advance organizers and other types of pre-listening exercises that activate appropriate background knowledge are making suggestions that are congruent with the research results. It is important for teachers to recognize that students’ existing knowledge contributes significantly to their comprehension and that listening is not a passive activity. Taking time to assess the conceptual base the listeners bring to the text will
enable teachers to go beyond dealing with the linguistic information in order to help students understand and make their learning more meaningful. The result of this study and others indicate that helping students make connections to their previous knowledge help to build a mental framework with which to link the new information might facilitate comprehension.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The population of the study consisted of all the students in the English major at Al-Quds Open University who study one of the required courses at the English Department titled “Listening Skills”. This is around (800) students. The course is offered to students in their second year. It primarily aims at improving their listening ability with their other language skills as well.

3.2 SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

It consisted of all the students who were registered in the “Listening Skills” course for the second semester in the academic year 2010/2011 at Al-Quds Open University /Ramallah Educational Region.

Their number is (74) students divided into three sections (1, 2& 3)

### TABLE (1) THE DESCRIPTIVE DATA FOR THE SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Student total</th>
<th>Class number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35.1%</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%36.5</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%28.4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE (2) THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE ACCORDING TO GENDER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>gender</th>
<th>Student total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>87.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100.0 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that the majority of students are females.

### TABLE (3) THE DESCRIPTIVE DATA FOR THE SAMPLE OF THE STUDY SHOWING THE NUMBER OF TRAINING HOURS DIVIDED INTO CATEGORIES AND PERCENTAGES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training interval</th>
<th>Student total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 17 hours</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 17 and 20 hours</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 hours</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.3 INSTRUMENTS OF THE STUDY

The researcher used a number of instruments to get information for the study. The main ones are:

1. The pre-test in listening skills which was held at the beginning of the semester. It consisted of several types of listening materials such as dialogues, narrative text, reports, news, lecture & dictation & part of a lecture. Each of these listening questions were followed by a number of tasks and questions. The aim of the pre-test was to evaluate the level of the students’ listening proficiency and to check the degree of improvement at the end of the course through comparing this pre-test with the post test.

2. The post-test which was given at the end of the semester and after the students received the training in listening to different materials and doing a number of activities in class and doing a lot of training at home using the materials provided and recommended to them and submitting the assigned tasks. It was the final exam for the Listening Skills course. It was similar in format and type of listening materials to the pre-test. The grades of the two tests were compared to check the amount of improvement the students achieved.

3. A short questionnaire given at the end of the semester where students were asked about the training in listening which they made in class and outside class. The questionnaire asked about the number of hours they spent in training (inside class & outside class) and which materials they chose for their outside class training.

Note: The students received intensive training during the class meetings. This consisted of ten lectures of an hour and a half for each section during the semester (a total of 15 hours). This is explained in more details later in the study and the materials and strategies used as well. As attendance is not obligatory, some students attended all these lectures while others attended some of them. To check this, students had to mention in the questionnaire the number of hours they attended and also class attendance was taken as well. They were also asked about the number of training hours they made on their own at home using the materials and resources the teacher (the researcher) provided for them. The assignments given about some of the material assigned for home practice also gave an indication about the home practice.

The following were the questions of the questionnaire.

Q1: How many hours of class practice did you attend?
Q2: How many hours of home practice did you make?
Q3: Which listening materials did you use most in your home practice?

3.4 THE VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

The study contained the following variables:

1. The independent variables:
   - Section variable: it contained (3) sections: 1, 2, & 3
   - Gender variable: males & females.
   - Total hours of training variable which
is divided into three categories:
Less than 17 hours  b. 17-20 hours  c. More than 20 hours
2. The dependent variables:
- The total of the grades for the pre-test.
- The total of the grades for the post-test.

3.5 STATISTICAL PROCEDURE

The SPSS statistical package was used to analyze the data of the tests. The comparison between the results of the pre-test and the post-test and the relation between the training period and the post-test averages were calculated using the necessary statistical procedures.

4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This study aimed at identifying the results of training on the performance and achievement of the students in “The English Listening Skills” course at Al-Quds Open University / Ramallah Educational Region in the second semester 2010-2011
1. Results of the first and major question of the study.
2. Results of the second question of the study.
3. Results of the third question of the study.
4. Results of the fourth question of the study.
5. Results of the fifth question of the study.

This section presents the statistical data that have been analyzed. The data have been collected through the instruments of the study represented by the pre-test and the post-test and the questionnaire.

The hypotheses have been tested. These were generated from the basic question of the study which deals with the effect of training on the performance and achievement of the students in “The English Listening Skills” course at Ramallah.

4.1 Results of the first and major question of the study: “Is there an effect for using training in listening to English materials on the achievement of the students in the “Listening Skills” course at Al-Quds Open University / Ramallah Educational Region?

To answer the first question, the researcher used the average for every student for the grades of the pre-test and the post-test as in table (4) below:

<p>| TABLE (4) THE DEGREES OBTAINED IN THE PRE-TEST, POST-TEST AND THE TOTAL AVERAGE OF STUDENTS’ ACHIEVEMENT |
|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student number</th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th>Total Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>80.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>84.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>59.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>74.00</td>
<td>95.00</td>
<td>84.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>77.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>61.00</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>67.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>88.00</td>
<td>81.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>85.00</td>
<td>77.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>90.00</td>
<td>82.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>74.00</td>
<td>86.00</td>
<td>80.00</td>
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<td>70.00</td>
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<td>74.00</td>
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<td>13</td>
<td>61.00</td>
<td>76.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>75.00</td>
<td>92.00</td>
<td>83.50</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<td>85.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>82.00</td>
<td>77.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>70.00</td>
<td>79.00</td>
<td>74.50</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>65.00</td>
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<td>71.50</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>62.00</td>
<td>74.00</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>81.00</td>
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<td>59.00</td>
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<td>66.00</td>
<td>67.00</td>
<td>61.00</td>
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<td>33</td>
<td>91.00</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>72.00</td>
<td>82.00</td>
<td>86.50</td>
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<td>71.00</td>
<td>86.00</td>
<td>79.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>62.00</td>
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<td>89.00</td>
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<td>46</td>
<td>70.00</td>
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<td>47</td>
<td>71.00</td>
<td>82.00</td>
<td>76.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>80.00</td>
<td>75.50</td>
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<td>72.00</td>
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<td>81.00</td>
<td>75.50</td>
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<td>77.50</td>
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<td>58</td>
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<td>84.00</td>
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<td>65.00</td>
<td>82.00</td>
<td>76.00</td>
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<td>61</td>
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<td>90.00</td>
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<td>67.00</td>
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<td>72.50</td>
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<td>76.00</td>
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<td>67</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>79.00</td>
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<td>71.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>40.00</td>
<td>52.00</td>
<td>46.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>73.00</td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>78.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>65.00</td>
<td>74.00</td>
<td>69.50</td>
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<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>58.00</td>
<td>77.00</td>
<td>67.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>60.00</td>
<td>84.00</td>
<td>72.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>61.00</td>
<td>78.00</td>
<td>69.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General total Average</td>
<td>69.11</td>
<td>80.78</td>
<td>74.95</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that the students’ achievement in the post test improved to a big extent from that in the pre-test as a result for the practice the students received. This agrees with many of the studies referred to in this respect where students showed improvement after receiving the listening training and practice e.g. Petric,(2000); Wang,(2007); Guo,(2005). It also agrees with what ELT specialists recommended e.g. Harmer & Anderson (2003).

4:2 The results of the second question of the study “Are there statistical differences at (α <= 0.05) in the students’ performance in the post test due to the gender variable?” To answer the second question the researcher used the t-test to find out the significance of the differences on the final grade of the tool of the study to measure the post achievement in the course “Listening skills” due to the gender variable. The results were as stated in table (5) below.

The table shows that there are no statistical differences at (α <= 0.05) between the means of students’ achievement in the post-test due to gender.

4:3 Results of the third question: “Are there statistical differences at (α <= 0.05) in the achievement of students due to the training?” To answer this question, the researcher used the T-test to know significance of the differences in the total grade for the instrument of the study by measuring the mean of the students’ grades in the pre-test and the post-test. The results are illustrated in table (6) below.

**TABLE (5) THE MEAN OF MALE AND FEMALE ACHIEVEMENT IN THE PRE- AND POST TESTS AND T-VALUE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>(Mean)</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>76.33</td>
<td>11.54</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>1.89-</td>
<td>0.062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>81.40</td>
<td>6.87</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistically significant at (α <= 0.050).

**TABLE (6) THE T TEST FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE STUDENTS IN THE PRE-TEST AND THE POST-TEST.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exam</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Test</td>
<td>69.11</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>16.77-</td>
<td>00.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test</td>
<td>80.78</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is evident from table (6) above that there are statistically significant differences at 
(α <=0.05) for the total grades in the achievement of the students in the pre- 
and the post-test in the course “Listening skills”. The mean for the pre- 
test reached (69.11) while the mean for the post- test reached (80.78). Testing 
this previous hypothesis showed that training had a positive effect on the 
achievement of the students. This result agrees with the results of the previously 
mentioned studies such as those of Petric, Wang, Kavaliauskiene, Guo, and 
Lisheng whose studies proved the good results for practice and training on the 
students’ performance in the listening skill.

4.4 Results of the fourth question “Are 
there statistical differences at (α <= 
0.05) in the achievement of students 
due to the training period variable?”

To answer this question the researcher 
used the average for the total degree of 
the post- test grades in correlation with 
the period of training variable. Table (7) below illustrates this relationship.
In order to calculate the degree of dif-
ferences in the mean square, the one 
way (ANOVA) test was used for the 
training period variable. Table (8) bel-
low shows the results.

**TABLE (7) THE TOTAL POST- TEST AVERAGE OF THE STUDENTS 
ACCORDING TO THE TRAINING PERIOD VARIABLE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Less than 17 hours</th>
<th>Between 17 and 20 hours</th>
<th>More than 20 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72.86</td>
<td>81.33</td>
<td>83.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE (8) THE RESULTS FOR THE ONE WAY ANOVA FOR THE MEAN 
SCORES IN CORRELATION WITH THE TRAINING PERIOD**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Source of Variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>Degrees of Freedom</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Significant*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>494.51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>247.25</td>
<td>4.62</td>
<td>0.012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>3798.03</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>53.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant on the level*( α <=0.05)

Table (8) shows that there are statistically significant differences at the level 
(α <= 0.05) for the effect of the training period variable on the students’ performance and the post test achieve-
ment in the course “Listening Skills”. Furthermore, to know the significance 
of these differences, the LSD (Least Square Differences) test was used. Ta-
ble (9) below illustrates this.
TABLE (9) THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AVERAGES ACCORDING TO THE TRAINING PERIOD IN CORRELATION WITH THE TOTAL GRADE OF THE POST- TEST

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training Period</th>
<th>Less than 17 hours</th>
<th>Between 17 and 20 hours</th>
<th>More than 20 hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 17 hours</td>
<td></td>
<td>*-8.48</td>
<td>*8.68-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 17 and 20 hours</td>
<td>*9.22</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 hours</td>
<td>*8.68</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.746-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table (9) shows that there are statistically significant differences at the level (α<=0.05) for the averages of the post-test in correlation with the period of training for the two groups: the first with the training between 17-20 hours and the second group with the less than 17 training hours in favor of those having more than 20 training hours in the post-test achievement. There are also statistically significant differences in favor of those having more than 20 (more than less than 17) training hours in the post-test achievement. Thus, it is clear that having more training hours gave a positive effect in the post-test achievement. This result is in accordance with what many experts in the ELT field think such as Jeremy Harmer who says that “the more students listen to English, the better they become at listening“ and Buck who emphasizes the need for practice. The related studies mentioned earlier agree with this result as well such as (Wang’s (2007); Hamid’s (2001) and Kavaliauskiene’s (2008) studies.

4:5 Results of the fifth question “Are there statistically significant differences at the level (α <=0.05) in the achievement of students in the course “Listening skills” between the pre-test and the post-test?” To answer this question, the researcher used the means and the standard deviation for the pre-test and the post-test and the significance for the correlation between them as is shown in table (10) below.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post-Test and Pre-test Average Total</th>
<th>Pre-test Average</th>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Pearson Correlation</th>
<th>Significant *</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.11</td>
<td>9.12</td>
<td>80.78</td>
<td>7.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://digitalcommons.aaru.edu.jo/hujr_b/vol7/iss2/11
Table (10) shows that there is a statistically significant correlation at the level ($\alpha <=0.05$) for the total grade of the students’ pre and post achievement in the “Listening Skills” course. From this table, we can see that there is a strong and very positive correlation between the achievement of the students in the two tests. This correlation reached (0.758) This shows that the students really benefited from the training they made in preparing themselves for the post-test. This result agrees with the results of the studies of many researchers who emphasized the positive effect of listening practice e.g. Petric, (2000); Guo,(2005); Anderson and Holden,(2003).

6.DISCUSSION

As pointed earlier, although listening is a vital skill that is needed to make students able to understand and thus interact. Listening practice is under emphasized in the EFL classroom whether at schools or at universities. Students may be able to listen to lectures usually given by their non native English teachers. Yet when they are encountered by real communicative language discourse, they may not be able to handle the situation. Thus, they need to be trained to listen to authentic material. (Anderson and Lynch 2003) They need to be trained through effective listening strategies. This study examined the effect of training EFL students to listen to a variety of English materials in an organized and well-structured way using the suitable listening strategies to make the practice productive and beneficial. Thus, the study served this purpose. The sample of the study i.e. the (74) students who received a considerable amount of listening practice through being exposed to a variety of authentic materials inside and outside class over the whole semester showed significant improvement as a result of this practice. This agrees with the previous studies done in this respect and referred to in this study such as Petric, (2000); Wang,(2007); Kavaliauskiene, (2005); Guo,(2005); and Lisheng,(2005). Students in these studies were encouraged to practice and they responded positively to the training and showed improvement.

MATERIALS AND STRATEGIES USED IN THE LISTENING TRAINING

The main textbook used in this practice was the textbook of the course referred to earlier titled Listening Skills (Al-Quds Open University publications). The book has a variety of listening materials which included lectures, news, dialogues, narrative texts, scientific and literary texts. Another major textbook was one of the series Tactics for Listening by Richard J.C.(ed.) (The Expanding Level). The listening materials in this book have a good variety that included topics about business, jobs, friends, travel, holidays, media, fashion, news reports etc. The students were provided with the listening material in these textbooks. In the listening practice, the students were often given pre-listening questions, while-listening tasks and post-listening activities. The while-listening questions were usually given to the students before
they listened so as to know what to focus upon in their listening. The listening was usually repeated more than one time and new tasks were assigned after each listening. Various activities and tasks were given to make the training pedagogically and communicatively purposeful. Some of these activities were interactive and cooperative to encourage students to work together. Using these strategies made the students feel more relaxed and less stressed. This goes in accordance with many of the studies that dealt with the effect of training the students the necessary listening strategies and how when students learn these tasks they can apply them to their individual listening outside class. These tasks also help to maximize the benefits the students get from practice. This agrees with most experts’ opinions e.g. (Rivers, 1985; Holden & Anderson, 2003), and the studies of Coskun (2010); Chen (2010); Hamzah, (2009); and Teng, (2005) whose practice in using the listening strategies benefited the learners a great deal. The benefits that the students also got from using technological materials and online resources agree with the results that Katchen (2003); Phuong, (2010) and Sadighi (2006); Bronwell, (2002) got in their studies where they used various forms of technology in their practice.

In an attempt to integrate language skills, listening, tasks were often combined with reflective after listening writing and speaking activities. This coincides with what ELT experts recommend in this respect “Good listening skills result in better communication skills overall, for listeners and for speakers.” (Deschel 2010). Some of the training was conducted in the internet lab to have better acoustics and to provide access to online materials. The researcher made sure to create a suitable listening environment especially during the tests which were mostly conducted in the computer lab to ensure the sound quality.

A lot of the listening material used or suggested for the training was in the form of online resources e.g. videos & audios. Students were directed to certain listening sites and materials. In most times, students were assigned tasks to be done at home using one of these sites to encourage them to use them. An example of this was directing the students to some documentaries, videos and other audio listening materials and giving the students tasks on these subjects: e.g.: http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-truth-about-vitamins/
http://esl.about.com/od/englishlistening/English_Listening_Skills_and_ActivitiesEffective_Listening_Practice.htm
http://esl.about.com/od/englishlistening/a/listen_tips.htm
http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish

In their answers to the question in the questionnaire about the material they used most in their home listening practice, most of the students said they used their main textbook most. They also used the material provided from the listening textbook The Tactics for Listening (The Expanding Level). They said they mostly referred to the websites related to the home assignments given.
Some said they also listened to some news broadcasts and reports on English TV channels especially AL-Jazeera. This shows that the variety of listening materials helps in creating more opportunity for the students to improve their listening skills. This provides extensive exposure to diverse resources. To sum up, good listening strategies are essential to be used to make the practice fruitful. Very good care should also be given to the choice of materials to ensure they are authentic, suitable and interesting.

**THE ACHIEVEMENT IN THE POST TEST AND ITS RELATION TO THE TRAINING MADE**

The study used a pre-test and a post-test. The post-test was the final exam. The results of the two tests were compared to check the amount of improvement the students gained after receiving the listening practice. The amount of training which differed from one student to another as is explained in the data given in table (7) was correlated to the amount of improvement each student gained in the post-test using the suitable statistical methods. The figures showed that those who had the most in class and outside class practice (more than 17 hours) gained the highest total averages in the post-test (83.33) and those who made less than 17 hours of practice received a total average of (72.86) in the post-test. The hours of training outside class were shown not only from what the students said in their answers but was further checked by the submission of home assignments given to them about some of the recommended online materials.

The study also showed that there is a significant correlation between the achievement of the students in the pre-test and the post-test. This correlation reached (0.758). The calculated mean for the pre-test was (69.11) while it was (80.78) for the post-test. This shows that the students’ achievement in listening comprehension really improved after the practice they made in preparing themselves for the post-test. This result goes in line with a good number of studies and pedagogies that stress the importance of using practice to improve the achievement of the students e.g. Harmer, (2003); Buck, (2001); Ridgway, (2000) and Goh (1997) and the studies of Guo,(2005); Petric (200); Wang,(2005) and others.

**7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Listening comprehension is a vital part of the English language acquisition process. It is needed for interaction and communication. Yet despite its importance, it is the least stressed skill in the EFL classroom. This results in causing frustration for EFL learners as they will not be able to understand spoken language or follow conversation with native language speakers. Therefore, it is the teacher’s task to get his students exposed to listening materials of all types, i.e. academic English, conversational English in everyday situations, public speeches, news, interviews etc. In this regard, a lot of practice is needed to make the learners get accustomed to understanding all these kinds.

This study aimed at examining the role of using intensive practice in improving
the EFL learners’ capacity in listening proficiency. The learners in the sample of the study showed considerable improvement in their achievement in the post-test, which was given to them at the end of the training course, when it was compared to their achievement in the pre-test which was given to them prior to their exposure to the listening practice. This illustrates that EFL learners can develop their listening fluency and become more accurate comprehenders of English if they receive good listening practice in various types of extended discourse including a wide variety of available on line materials. This coincides with the studies referred to in this study such as those of Guo, (2005); Wang, (2007); Hamid, (2011); Coskun (2010); Chen (2010) and Teng, (2005). This also agrees with most experts’ opinions e.g. Rivers, (1981); Holden and Anderson, (2003), and the studies of Coskun (2010); Chen (2010); Hamzah (2009) and Bahrami (2005) whose practice in using the listening skills efficiently benefited the learners a great deal and improved their listening skills.

In this respect, it is recommended that teachers not ignore practicing this important language skill. It is also quite important to give the students sufficient instruction in the use of helpful strategies. Teachers should help students develop their socio-affective strategies as this will make them more relaxed. The more practice and training the students receive, the more competent listeners they become. When teachers encourage the students to keep on practicing, they will make them develop good habits of listening. By practicing more, students will strengthen their language feeling, improve the integrating competence in using English and raise communicative efficiency. It is also necessary that the students’ exposure to listening materials be both intensive and extensive, well-prepared and utilizing all sorts of effective listening strategies. As Harmer & Holden (2003) and others recommend.

Consequently, developing the listening abilities of the learners results in making them more confident of their language competency. It will also result in the development of their other language skills especially the speaking skill which is related strongly to their understanding of the oral discourse to be able to communicate and the writing and reading skill as Hamid’s (2001) and Bosiri’s study (2008) showed and as Moses (2001) stresses that the key to fluency in English is through listening competence. Hence, it can be said that the way to developing listening and consequently other related language skills is through practice. Furthermore, it is highly recommended that teachers should receive training on how to apply listening practice, how to train learners the necessary listening skills and strategies to reduce the anxiety of students towards this skill. They should also be trained on how to select suitable appropriate listening materials.

This study has been conducted on a small scale. Thus, more extensive studies are needed on this issue and other related issues such as the relation between the improvement of listening and other skills. These studies have to
be conducted on the school and university levels. More studies on students’ problems in listening are needed too. Attitudes of students towards the use of listening resources including online resources also are to be investigated as well.

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