



Teaching Listening in the Foreign Language Classroom: Structure- vs. Context-Based Instruction*

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ABSTRACT

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This study compares two different approaches to teaching listening skills (structure-based and context-based instructions), and investigates the effect of two listening comprehension instruction methods applied at the tertiary level in an EFL context in Korea. Based on the components of communicative competence, the structure-based instruction focused on raising the linguistic/grammatical and discourse competence of learners, while the context-based instruction focused on sociolinguistic and strategic competence in improving the students' listening ability. Treatments were administered to two groups of students who were taking an advanced listening course (structure-based instruction) and a conference interpretation course (context-based instruction). Pre-test and post-test scores measuring listening competence before and after the instruction were used to collect data to compare the two groups. Results showed that both the structure-based and context-based instructions were effective in improving the students' listening competence. However, comparison of the two instructions showed that the structure-based instruction appeared to be more effective than the context-based instruction in enhancing listening comprehension. Also, the students' course evaluation scores used to measure student satisfaction were higher in the structure-focused instruction, although the comparison failed to yield statistical significance. Arguments are presented for a communicative grammar approach which incorporates structure-based instruction in listening courses at the tertiary level, along with implications and limitations of the study.

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening is a complicated mental process which involves the listener's perception, attention, cognition, and retention skills. As a result, listening to and understanding a foreign language can be a struggle. For instance, learners often face challenge retrieving the meaning of a word they have heard even when they know the word. Also, listening to a foreign language requires intensive attention and concentration, making "even the shortest break in attention seriously impair comprehension" (Underwood,

1989, p. 24). The inability to understand speech rendered at normal speed leads to lack of confidence and interest in listening to a foreign language, despite its importance in furthering one's advancement in language competence.

Listening comprehension plays a key role in the acquisition of a foreign language, and it is even regarded as a deciding factor which makes "a key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers which relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition" (Rost, 2011, p. 94). Nevertheless, the sophisticated mental process related to listening makes

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it difficult for teachers to teach it in the classroom, and as a result foreign language listening is rarely offered as an independent course in educational settings (Vandergrift, 2007).

Secondary schools in Asian countries which tend to focus on test-oriented instruction make language learning through natural exposure unfeasible and unpractical. As a result, listening instruction and activities in the classroom has largely adhered to the following methodologies: (1) the direct-method approach, focusing on guided question-and-answer exchanges; (2) the grammar approach, focusing on pattern-matching; (3) the audio-lingual method, focusing on repetitive pattern drills; (4) the communicative language teaching, focusing on interactive listening and spoken discourse to complete a task; and (5) integrated approaches, focusing on pre-listening texts, listening for main ideas, details, and follow-up spoken exercises (Flowerdew & Miller, 2004; Rost, 2011). As a result, listening instructions at the secondary level fall short of preparing students advancing to university where an increasing number of courses are taught in English. Suddenly thrust into an environment where they are required to utilize their foreign language listening skills, students face extreme pressure as they are expected to listen to lectures, take part in discussions, and speak to instructors in English (H. Kim, 2015). In the classroom, the highly individualized characteristic inherent to the listening process makes it easy for learners to conceal their weaknesses which instructors may not be able to detect and intervene in a timely manner.

Foreign language listening has received less attention researchwise compared to the other three language skills, i.e., speaking, reading, and writing (Buck, 2001; Vandergrift & Goh, 2009), and still largely remains the least understood area of language teaching (Glisan, 1985), while in the classroom, the instructor faces the challenge of having to decide which teaching approach they should adopt to maximize learning effect.

Considering the crucial part listening plays in communication, both in everyday settings and in the classroom, a discussion for the development of a systematic approach to listening instruction is long overdue. Based on the categorization of communicative competence proposed by Savignon (2008), this study compares two teaching methods, the structure-based approach and the context-based approach in English listening courses in an EFL context at the undergraduate level. Research questions for the study are as follows:

- 1) Were structure-based and context-based instructions effective in enhancing foreign language listening competence?
- 2) Of the two types of instructions, which was more effective in improving listening competence?
- 3) Of the structure-based and context-based courses, which did the students find more satisfying?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Cognitive Process of Listening Comprehension: Bottom-up vs. Top-down

It is obvious that differences lie between the language listening processes in L1 and L2. L1 listening skills acquired as a child are closely linked with general linguistic and cognitive abilities, while FL or L2 listening competence is more often achieved after the cognitive development of the learner has already been complete. Thus, the FL learner must learn new linguistic forms and go through a process of recognizing the differences between one's L1 and L2 (Gathercole & Thorn, 1998) during which "a conceptual redeployment, or a conceptual framework that is already fully developed and in regular use in some other domain of experience or comprehension comes to be used for the first time in a new domain" (Churchland, 1989, p. 237).

The cognitive processes of FL listening can be categorized into two parts: bottom-up and top-down. The former, proposed by Shannon and Weaver (1949) begins from the lower level auditory information to the higher level, i.e., from syllables, words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and finally to meaningful discourse. This approach is predicated on the premise that knowledge about the language itself is necessary for listening comprehension, and focuses on teaching phonetic rules, vocabulary, and grammar. Enhancing the ability to distinguish between similar segments of fluent speech and to match word sounds and its accurate meaning based on grammar and semantics are the objectives of the bottom-up approach. For example, phonetic rules that cause difficulty in listening are identified and explained in class to help learners overcome obstacles that impede understanding. Also, vocabulary and grammar teaching using listening text takes place so that students may understand how rules are directly applied to language usage.

The top-down process, on the other hand, relies on the context and the background knowledge of the listener when processing input. Rather than focusing on linguistic factors that affect the listening process, this approach examines background information and listening strategies to enhance listening competence. For instance, the different styles of speech and how a particular speech should be understood accordingly are emphasized so that students may build relevant schema, understand the structure of discourse, and grasp the main idea of the text. In other words, it is assumed that accurate understanding of different styles of discourse will enable students to catch key information of the listening text. Cultural background information related to the theme of the materials is also explained and discussed to aid comprehension. Strategy training is another element which is exercised through this approach, and includes the teaching of metacognitive, cognitive, and social strategies.

So far, research has produced conflicting results as to which approach is more effective in teaching listening

comprehension. While the current teaching trend puts more weight on training students to focus on the main idea and outline of the listening text (Morley, 1991; Peterson, 2001), Koster (1987) contends that such approach falls short of catching the details and the complete picture of the message. On the other hand, Buck (1995) expressed skepticism on the effectiveness of the bottom-up approach, viewing it as a “necessary but insufficient condition for success” (p. 95).

In the educational setting, these two processes rarely operate exclusively of each other, and both are essential for language learning. Finding a balance between these two approaches depends on the classroom environment including the level of language proficiency of the students and student needs, and the instructor needs to decide which approach to adopt in order to achieve maximum effect.

2. Components of Communicative Competence

“Communicative competence” which was first coined in the 1970s is both the process and goal upheld by the communicative language teaching (CLT) (Habermas, 1970; Hymes, 1971; Savignon, 1972). It represents the ability to use language in a social context, while observing sociolinguistic norms. Learners expand such competence through a wide spectrum of communicative contexts. According to Savignon (2008), communicative competence can be broken down to four elements: linguistic/grammar competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.

Linguistic/grammar competence is related to the ability to recognize and make use of linguistic features including grammar, vocabulary, phonology, phonetics, morphology, syntax, and semantics. This is not limited to being able to merely state grammatical rules, but also to apply the rules to language usage in order to interpret, express, and negotiate meaning.

Discourse competence goes beyond individual words or phrases, and is concerned with the interconnectedness of words and phrases, eventually working towards the formation of a whole meaning. It allows language users to identify isolated sounds and/or words and interpret the meaning of the text. In other words, discourse competence is the ability to combine language structures in order to produce language in cohesive and coherent way.

Sociolinguistic competence is predicated on the ability to empathize and accept other cultures when using language. Simple knowledge of another culture is not enough. One has to understand the setting and topic of the communication, as well as the relationships of the people involved in the communication. It requires the cultivation of cultural flexibility or cultural awareness to actively engage in the negotiation of meaning based on the sociocultural rules (Savignon, 2008).

Strategic competence refers to the ability to recognize and repair communication breakdowns (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Strategic competence comes into motion when

one faces obstacles during language usage, and helps to cope with unfamiliar contexts whose understanding may be affected by factors such as imperfect knowledge of language rules or non-linguistic elements, for example, fatigue or distraction.

Of the four components of communicative competence, linguistic/grammatical and discourse competences are related to the structural aspect of the language, and take the approach of the bottom-up process. On the other hand, sociolinguistic and strategic competences deal with the contextual features, and are closely tied to the top-down process. Savignon (2008) states that each component is indispensable and is interrelated with one another, and that the components cannot be developed independently. In the classroom, however, the instructor has to make a choice on which component to focus on, as the relative importance of the components in the classroom largely depends on the overall communicative competence of the learners, and an emphasis on a particular component in the listening curriculum may yield better improvement among learners.

3. Structure and Context as Separate Constructs in Language Teaching

Prior to probing into the effectiveness of the structure-focused and context-focused instruction approaches, the issue of whether language structure stands as a separate construct from other elements of communicative competence should be addressed. Evidence pointing to its independence is supported through research conducted by Savignon (1972) who investigated the effect of adding a communicative component to a university-level audio-lingual French course. Comparison was made with two other groups which additionally received either cultural information or audio-lingual reinforcement. While the group which received additional communicative component outperformed the other two on the communicative test, it failed to show any difference in linguistic tasks. Thus, the presence of difference on the communicative test but not on the linguistic competence test indicates that a distinction exists between communicative competence and form-based competence.

Also, in a study by Politzer and McGroarty (1983), the communicative competence of Spanish-speaking students in bilingual education programs was examined through a correlational study. The researchers found that low levels of linguistic competence failed to show relationship with high levels of communicative competence. High linguistic competence also appeared to have weak ties with high communicative competence. In addition, students with the same level of linguistic competence displayed a varied degree of communicative competence. Thus, the study, too, reveals that linguistic and communicative competences exist as separate constructs.

In the classroom, the current trend leaning towards communicative language teaching (CLT) which focuses on meaning and communication has overshadowed the need for linguistic components in teaching listening. How-

ever, research on communicative learning has shown that neglect of language forms or grammar results in failure to obtain accuracy and higher levels of language competence (Harley & Swain, 1984; Spada & Lightbown, 1989), and that student knowledge and language use have improved through the inclusion of linguistic components (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997).

One characteristic unique to foreign language education at the tertiary level in Korea further confounds the teaching process in that much of the instruction takes place on the assumption that students have acquired linguistic/grammar competence at least at the basic level during the ten years of English education at the primary and secondary levels. As a result, instructors bypass necessary instruction on language structure, and move on to focus on the acquisition of communicative skills. Considering the empirical evidence supporting linguistic/grammar competence as one of the main constructs of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1982; H. Kim, 2011), a case can be made for reincorporating grammar and form-focused components as key elements in the curriculum and practicum of listening instruction.

III. METHODOLOGY

1. Participants and Setting

The study took place at a university in Gyonggi-do, South Korea, during the fall semester of 2020. The subjects of this study consisted of 29 students: 14 in an

advanced listening comprehension course and 15 in a conference interpretation training course. The participants ranged from sophomore to senior undergraduate students, and both courses had the same instructor. The courses were categorized as elective courses offered to English majors, although they were open to students outside the major. The breakdown of student demographics is shown in Table 1.

A survey on exposure to overseas experience revealed that almost half of students in both courses have travelled abroad at least once, while only one in each course stayed over an extensive period abroad (six months in Germany in the advanced listening course, and one year in Canada in the conference interpretation course). Thus, the degree of overseas experience was more or less the same.

In addition, a needs analysis was administered to identify the students' self-perceived weaknesses and areas they hope to improve. The results are shown in Table 2.

According to the results, students in both courses pointed to lack of vocabulary knowledge as the greatest weakness hindering their listening ability, followed by speed and accent. As for areas of improvement expected from taking the courses, for obvious reasons students in the advanced listening course listed improvement in listening ability while those in the conference interpretation course were looking to improve skills specific to interpretation. One interesting finding is that some students in the advanced listening course had very concrete goals, such as watching video without the help of subtitles or improving their TOEIC scores.

TABLE 1
Student Demographics

	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	Total	English Major	English Major (%)
Advanced Listening	0	0	4 (3)	10 (7)	14	10	71.4%
Conference Interpretation	0	2 (0)	8 (6)	5 (4)	15	10	58.8%

Note. The numbers in the parenthesis indicate the number of English major students.

TABLE 2
Student Needs Analysis

	Self-reported Weaknesses	Areas of Improvement
Advanced Listening	Vocabulary (11) Speed (7) Accent (6) Pronunciation (3)	Listening (14) Speaking (2) Subtitle-free (3) TOEIC (2)
Conference Interpretation	Vocabulary (11) Speed (5) Accent (2) Length (2) Grammar (1)	Interpretation-specific (7) Listening (5) Speaking (3) General English (4)

Note. The numbers in the parenthesis indicate the frequency of responses.

2. Design of Study

A quantitative design was adopted for the comparison of listening skills improvement between the structure-based instruction and the context-based instruction. Both courses took place online for three hours every week for one semester (15 weeks). Lessons were conducted in virtual synchronous classrooms using video conferencing. To secure the validity of the listening comprehension test scores after the treatment, a pre-test (Beaumont, 2005) was administered to both groups before the treatment (see Table 3).

The reason for selecting the Advanced Listening Comprehension and Conference Interpretation Training as the courses to be compared is that these courses faithfully adhere to the instructional approaches set out for this study; the advanced listening course bases its curriculum which emphasized linguistic/grammar and discourse competence, while the conference interpretation course takes the

approach which corresponds with building sociolinguistic and strategic competence.

The Advanced Listening Comprehension course which incorporates the structure-based instruction method is based on the premise that accurate listening comprehension should be predicated on the understanding of language structure and linguistic elements such as vocabulary, grammar, writing mechanics/convention, sentence structure, etc. Students were exposed to a short video in English during class and were asked to work on listening tasks individually or in groups (see Table 4).

Tasks included filling in sentence-level blanks, correcting auto transcriptions, and producing full transcripts. The video format included news, interviews, documentaries, advertisements, speech, and news commentary spoken by speakers with a variety of accents including American, British, Australian, African, Indian, Singapore, Spanish, and German. The instructor compiled, analyzed, and organized the errors made by the learners, and presented them

TABLE 3
Pre- and Post-Test Description and Statistics

	LC1 (Conversation)	LC2 (Conversation)	LC3 (Lecture)	LC4 (Lecture)	
Pre-test	Time	2:56	2:51	5:00	5:56
	Word Count	474	513	748	763
	Words/sec	2.69	3	2.49	2.14
	No. of Items	5	6	5	6
Post-test	Time	2:55	2:30	4:35	5:50
	Word Count	522	467	766	769
	Words/sec	2.98	3.11	2.78	2.19
	No. of Items	5	6	5	6

TABLE 4
Course Materials Statistics (Advanced Listening Comprehension)

Title	Type	Length	Word Count	Speed*
Super-Soul Conversation	Interview	0:01:10	167	2.38
Miss Japan	News	0:01:20	198	2.47
Ageing	News	0:01:56	212	1.82
Nigerian Ballet Dancer	News	0:01:40	215	2.15
Man Fights Nazi Plunder	Documentary	0:06:25	887	2.30
Smile	News Commentary	0:02:52	430	2.50
World Leaders Forum Keynote Speech	Speech	0:04:36	326	1.18
The Indian Room	News	0:03:51	252	1.09
Indian Moms	News	0:02:59	398	2.22
Intel Ad	Advertisement	0:00:30	165	5.50
Francois Holland's Camel	News	0:02:02	389	3.18
Total		0:29:21		

* Speed= Word count/sec

TABLE 5
Course Materials Statistics (Conference Interpretation Training)

Title	Type	Length	Word Count	Speed*
Boudica: Britain's Warrior Queen	Lecture	0:08:06	1056	2.17
Panda Diplomacy	Lecture	0:02:11	264	2.01
HeForShe Campaign	Speech	0:12:22	1219	1.64
UN Security Council Open Debate	Speech	0:07:58	890	1.86
Harvard Commencement Speech	Speech	0:07:33	901	1.99
Interview with Stephen King	Interview	0:07:12	1273	2.95
The Ramallah Concert Speech	Speech	0:04:30	477	1.76
Jane Goodall Keynote Speech	Speech	1:12:00	8170	1.93
Total		2:01:53		

* Speed= Word count/sec

in class for further discussion. As previously mentioned the advanced listening course emphasized the structural aspect of listening competence, incorporating the bottom-up process which focuses on the development of communicative competence, grammatical/linguistic and discourse competences.

The context-based instruction took place at the Conference Interpretation Training course where learners were given English video lectures, speeches, and interviews on various topics to be interpreted into Korean in class (see Table 5).

The instructor provided the script of the video materials so that the students could watch and listen to the speech, and focus on the content of the speech without having to struggle with individual words or phrases that were difficult to understand. During class, learners would listen to a short segment of the speech while taking notes before rendering an interpretation followed by peer-critique and class discussion. Learners also engaged in group activities to summarize the content of the speech and verify the meaning of portions they found difficult to understand. The core of conference interpretation training lies in teaching students to deliver the meaning from the source language into the target language while taking into consideration the cultural factors involved in the communication. It also requires the utilization of one's strategic competence as the risk of communication breakdowns is consistently present during the flow of message delivery. In other words, the main objective of the course was to focus on meaning, to understand the message to its fullest extent, and to search for the most appropriate expression in Korean, rather than to probe into the grammatical/linguistic elements of the message.

Note that the volume of video material exposed to the two groups differs significantly – just over 29 minutes for the structure-based course and over 2 hours for the context-based course. Also, the groups were exposed to materials that differed both in speed and its range, with the learners in the structure-based course dealing with speed wider in range (1.09-5.5 words/sec, average 2.43 words/

sec) compared to their counterparts in the context-based course (1.64-2.95 words/sec, average 2.03 words/sec).

To measure listening improvement after the treatment, students in both courses were given another listening comprehension test (Solorzano, 2006) at the end of the 15-week semester (see Table 3). Also, a student course evaluation, a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire consisting of 11 items was administered for analysis and comparison.

3. Data Collection and Analysis

SPSS version 21 was used to analyze pre-test and post-test scores on listening comprehension as well as course evaluations scores collected from both groups. The descriptive statistics was presented followed by an analysis of inferential statistics. Before comparing the two groups, paired *t*-tests were first conducted to see if each instruction method was effective in improving the students' listening comprehension skills.

A comparison of the pre-tests was made to determine whether the two groups were equivalent on the dependent measure before the treatment was given. To verify whether the pre-tests were necessary, an independent samples *t*-test on the pre-tests of both groups was performed to test homogeneity between the groups.

Next, an independent samples *t*-test on the post-tests was run to determine whether the analysis should advance to a nonequivalent control group pre-test/post-test analysis. If a statistically significant difference is produced despite the non-equivalent nature of the two groups before treatment, this in and of itself renders any further analysis redundant.

A nonequivalent control group pre-test/post-test analysis, or an Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) should be performed when a pre-test is necessary, i.e., when non-equivalent groups are being compared, and when a comparison of post-tests between such groups fails to produce statistically significant outcome. ANCOVA compares two groups as well as within each group through an analysis

of pre-test and post-test scores. An assessment of any changes that might have occurred in either group is made through a comparison of pre- and post-test measures of both groups.

In addition, routine course evaluation administered by the university was collected to analyze and compare learner satisfaction level (see Table 15). An independent *t*-test was performed for the analysis.

IV. RESULTS

1. Effects of Treatment on Listening Competence

Table 6 shows the descriptive statistical outcome of listening comprehension test scores of both groups. The group which received the structure-based instruction scored higher than the context-based group in both the pre-test and the post-test. However, preliminary statistics shows that students in the context-based course made greater improvement than their counterpart (3.13 vs. 1.07).

TABLE 6
Descriptive Statistics on the Pre- and Post-Tests

Group		<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Structure-based	Pre-test	14	18.93	1.94	.52
	Post-test	14	20.00	1.66	.44
Context-based	Pre-test	15	15.40	4.17	1.08
	Post-test	15	18.53	3.04	.79

TABLE 7
Paired Samples Test on the Two Groups

		Paired Differences					<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Structure-based	Pre-test	-1.07	.73	.20	-1.49	-.65	-5.49	13	.00*
	Post-test								
Context-based	Pre-test	-3.13	1.81	.47	-4.13	-2.13	-6.71	14	.00*
	Post-test								

* *p* < .05

TABLE 8
Independent Samples Test (Pre-Test)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means				
		<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Pre-test	Equal variances assumed	2.37	.14	2.89	27	.01	3.53	1.22
	Equal variances not assumed			2.95	20.08	.01	3.53	1.20

* *p* < .05

Prior to ANCOVA, a paired *t*-test for each group was performed to determine whether the treatments were effective in improving students' listening comprehension skills. Results from Table 7 show that both the structure-based instruction (*t* = -5.49, *p* = 0.00) and context-based instructions (*t* = -6.71, *p* = 0.00) were effective in improving listening skills.

Next, an independent *t*-test on both the pre-test and the post-test scores of both groups was executed to determine whether an ANCOVA was necessary.

According to Table 8, the *p*-value of the Levene's test (0.14) indicates that the assumption of equal variances is not violated. Thus, assuming equal variances, results (*t* = 2.89, *p* = 0.01), the null hypothesis of no difference between the two groups must be rejected. In other words, the pre-test scores show that the two groups are not homogeneous and that their pre-test scores should be accounted for in further statistical analyses.

Table 9 shows results from comparing the post-test scores of the two groups. Again, the *p*-value of the Levene's test (0.07) indicates that the assumption of equal variances is not violated. And assuming equal variances, results (*t* = 1.59, *p* = 0.12) indicate that the null hypothesis of no difference between the two groups cannot be rejected. In other words, the post-test scores fail to show any difference between the two groups, and the method of instruction appears not to have any effect on the outcome.

Since the outcome of the *t*-test indicates a possibility that the difference in pre-test scores may have played a role in the lack of statistical difference in the post-test scores, the next step would be to run an ANCOVA. In any

TABLE 9
Independent Samples Test (Post-Test)

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		T-Test for Equality of Means				
		F	p	t	df	p	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Post-test	Equal variances assumed	3.68	.07	1.59	27	.12	1.47	.92
	Equal variances not assumed			1.62	21.97	.12	1.47	.90

* $p < .05$

experiment where there may be variables that confound the results as in this case, ANCOVA is administered to remove the bias stemming from such variables. It is hypothesized that the learners' listening competence before the treatment may have affected the statistically not significant outcome in the independent *t*-test. Measuring this variable and including it in the model make it possible to control for the influence it has on the dependent variable.

Prior to ANCOVA, the Levene's test was performed with the pre-test included in the model as a covariate. Table 10 shows that the Levene's Test was not significant, $F(1, 27) = 4.14, p = .05$. This indicates that the group variances were equal, and that the assumption of homogeneity of variance has been met. Thus, the homogeneity of error variances can be assumed.

TABLE 10
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	p
4.14	1	27	.05

Note 1. Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

Note 2. Design: Intercept + Pre-test + Group

* $p < .05$

TABLE 11
Homogeneity of Regression

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	156.81 ^a	3	52.27	53.32	.00	.865
Intercept	20.32	1	20.32	20.73	.00	.453
Group	1.26	1	1.26	1.29	.27	.049
Pre-test	87.99	1	87.99	89.76	.00	.782
Group*Pre-test	.63	1	.63	.65	.43	.025
Error	24.51	25	.98			
Total	10918.00	29				
Corrected Total	181.31	28				

Note. a. R Squared = .865 (Adjusted R Squared = .849)

* $p < .05$

The homogeneity of regression slopes was also tested (see Table 11). If an interaction term of a main factor and a covariate is significant, the assumption of homogeneity of regression is violated. Here the interaction term (Group*Pre-test) is not significant ($p = .43$). Therefore, the homogeneity of regression is preserved, and the pre-test (listening competence prior to treatment) may be introduced to the model as a covariate.

Having satisfied the assumptions of ANCOVA, a one-way ANCOVA was performed to check inter-group differences. Table 12 shows that after having controlled for the pre-test, a statistically significant difference was shown between the two groups on the post-test, $F(1, 26) = 5.49, p = .027$. Partial eta squared (.174) shows that 17.4% of the previously unexplained variance can be explained by the treatment.

ANCOVA helps to impose a stricter experimental control by taking into account the confounding variables to give us a 'purer' measure of effect of the experimental manipulation. Without taking the pre-test of the students into account, we would have concluded that the treatment had no effect on improving listening competence, yet clearly it does.

TABLE 12
Test of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	156.17 ^a	2	78.09	80.76	.000	.861
Intercept	52.16	1	52.11	53.89	.000	.675
Group	5.31	1	5.31	5.49	.027*	.174
Pre-test	140.59	1	140.59	145.41	.000	.848
Error	25.14	26	.97			
Total	10918.00	29				
Corrected Total	181.31	28				

Note. a. R Squared = .861 (Adjusted R Squared = .851)
* $p < .05$

TABLE 13
Pairwise Comparisons

(I) Treatment	(J) Treatment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	p ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Context	Structure	-1.73*	.51	.00	-2.78	-.69
Structure	Context	1.73*	.51	.00	.69	2.78

Note. Based on estimated marginal means
a. Adjustment for multiple comparisons: Bonferroni
* $p < .05$

Following a statistically significant ANCOVA result, post hoc tests were carried out to see which group showed more improvement (see Table 13). The difference between the two groups was statistically significant ($p = .00$) with structure-based instruction achieving a higher score than context-based instruction.

The estimated marginal means give the adjusted means (controlling for the covariate pre-test) for each group (see Table 14). This means that the effect of pre-test has been statistically removed. From these adjusted means, it is clear that the structure-based instruction resulted in higher listening comprehension test scores after adjusting for the pre-test scores.

TABLE 14
Estimates

Treatment	M	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Context	16.27	.35	15.56	16.98
Structure	18.00*	.36	17.27	18.74

Note. a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Post-test = 19.241

2. Course Satisfaction Among Students in the Two Groups

The course evaluation scores of both groups are listed in Table 15. With the exception of the last item (Q11) which asks about the course itself, all items deal with the instructor's teaching ability. Although the difference was

small, the group which received the structure-based instruction felt a higher level of satisfaction (90.27%) than the context-based instruction group (89.24%). In fact, the former group scored higher than the latter in eight out of eleven items.

TABLE 15
Course Evaluation Questionnaire Items

Course Evaluation Questionnaire Items	Structure-based	Context-based
1. The syllabus was announced in advance at the time of the class registration.	4.42	4.50
2. The instructor was prepared for class.	4.58	4.50
3. The instructor showed enthusiasm in class.	4.58	4.50
4. The instructor explained course concepts in an efficient manner.	4.50	4.50
5. The instructor used effective teaching methods.	4.58	4.50
6. The course stimulated my interest in the subject matter.	4.50	4.43
7. Course material was presented in a clear manner and facilitated understanding.	4.58	4.43
8. The instructor gave satisfactory answers to the students' questions.	4.58	4.43
9. The classes were held as scheduled, and makeup sessions were offered for canceled classes.	4.50	4.43
10. The instructor grades consistently with a standardized evaluation criteria.	4.33	4.43
11. Overall, I am satisfied with this course.	4.50	4.43
Total	49.65	49.08
Percentage	90.27	89.24

A comparison was made through an independent samples *t*-test to test the statistical significance of this difference (see Table 16 and Table 17).

While the structure-based instruction yielded high evaluation scores, statistical analysis failed to show a significant difference between the structure-based ($M=4.51$, $SD=.08$) and context-based group ($M=4.46$, $SD=.04$) at the .05 level of significance ($t=1.94$, $df=20$, $p=.067$).

TABLE 16
Descriptive Statistics for Course Evaluation

Group	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>SEM</i>
Structure-based	11	4.51	.08	.024
Context-based	11	4.46	.04	.044

TABLE 17
T-Test Results

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		<i>T</i> -Test for Equality of Means				
	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	2.85	.107	1.94	20	.07	.05	.03
Equal variances not assumed			1.94	13.93	.07	.05	.03

* $p < .05$

V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study compared two main foreign language instruction methods in their effectiveness in improving listening comprehension skills. The outcome of comparing the two teaching methods – structure-based and context-based instruction – reveals that students in the structure-based instructional setting showed greater improvement in listening competence and higher level of course satisfaction, although the latter lacked statistical significance.

While the structure-based instruction came out as the more effective instructional method, it is important to point out that both instructions were effective in improving listening comprehension skills. In fact, prior to adjusting for the pre-test scores, the raw scores showed that the improvement gap was greater with students in the context-based instruction setting than those in the structure-based course (3.13 vs. 1.07). The improvement of test scores in both groups was all the more impressive given the fact that the difficulty level of post-test was higher than the pre-test (see Table 2).

One interesting issue which was not originally considered as a discussion point at the onset of this study is related to the listening materials used in the courses regarding, in particular, their volume, speed, and type (see Table 3). The total volume of the listening text was much greater in the context-based course (122 mins vs. 29 mins) – as much as four times that of the structure-based instruction. This may be an indication that simply increasing the amount of exposure may not be enough to enhance listening comprehension skills, and that perhaps attention to detail and thorough analysis of the listening text may be needed to upgrade the students' listening competence to a higher level. In fact, such approach may be what students need more nowadays, as access to listening materials is by no means

in shortage, while systemic and customized analysis of the listening process is more difficult to come by.

As for the speed of the spoken texts, exposing students to a variety of speed appears to be more effective than having students work with listening texts spoken in more-or-less consistent and slower speed. The students in the structure-based course were given texts whose speed ranged from a slow-paced text with pauses in between (1.09 words/sec) to a fast-paced advertisement (5.5 words/sec), while the context-based course used materials with relatively consistent speed ranging between 1.64 and 2.95 words/sec.

Also, the different types of spoken text also appear to have affected student performance. As is shown in Table 4, the structure-based course offered a wider range of listening materials (interviews, news, documentary, news commentary, speech, advertisement, etc.) compared to the context-based course which limited the materials to lectures, speech, and interviews. Listening texts which provide additional visual information help students guess and deduce meaning through nonverbal cues which is an important element in effective understanding and communication.

The course evaluation results also revealed an interesting point in that the structure-based course gained a higher score than the context-based course, although the difference was not statistically significant. It is typically assumed that lessons focusing on linguistic form or grammar would attract less interest from the students. However, this was not the case in this study. Such outcome may be attributed to one of the shortcomings of communicative learning approach frequently cited by educators and learners, that is, the lessons often appear unstructured and without concrete objectives (Harmer, 2009). At the tertiary level, students may actually welcome more structure in the lessons, and they appear to be more receptive to

specific learning points to guide them through the course. Setting specific goals, informing students the rationale, and providing directions may give them a concrete sense of knowledge improvement. Context-based instructions may also take note and present specific teaching objectives to the students in order to show the goals and expected growth in proficiency through the lessons.

VI. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Obviously this study has shortcomings which need to be addressed through future research. The sample size and the duration of the experiment should be expanded to see if the same results can be repeated on a larger scale and on a long-term basis. Also, it would be interesting to add student proficiency level as an additional component in future research to determine which group would benefit the most from the two instructional methods. Incidentally, the listening proficiency levels of the two groups in this study differed; the structure-based instruction was given to higher-level students while the context-based instruction was given to lower-level students. Would the outcome repeat itself if each group received the other instruction? The results may have practical value in deciding on the most effective instructional approach for students at different proficiency levels.

The tool to measure listening proficiency also needs to include a wider range of text types. The TOEFL iBT listening tests used in this study consisted of two sets of listening texts: a conversation between two individuals and a one-directional lecture spoken in American English – hardly representative of the English audiovisual context presented in the media today. Future studies should include listening texts using a variety of English accents. Also, the difficulty level of the tests is another issue, as both groups had a relatively high score on both the pre- and post-tests. In fact, the students in the structure-based course scored 86% on the pre-test, and had little room for improvement in the post-test (91%). Tests at a level that is slightly higher than the students' listening proficiency is recommended so that a more accurate change in performance can be measured after the treatment.

This study suggests that the structure-based instruction be recognized as an important element in the English listening classroom as a means to enhance students' listening competence. Awareness of language structure such as linguistic features, grammar, and mechanics enhances learners' language capability, not only in listening but also in the other three skills. Students, especially at the tertiary level, will be able to witness first-hand how these rules are applied in real speech, and to hopefully apply the rules they have learned to their language use. Students at this stage have the ability to actively engage in the decision-making process as to which forms should be used in a given context to make sense of the information they are taking in. Language structure and linguistic features

should no longer be viewed as discrete set of rules separated from actual usage. Rather, it should be introduced in the language learning environment as a key element of an integrated network that guides us toward successful communication. The success rides on whether the instructors who design their courses are able to find the recipe for the right combination.

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