

The Lack of the English Lab and Its Effects on Students' Listening Skills: The Case of the Second-Year Students from English Departments in Kinshasa

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ABSTRACT

This article is based on the fact that there is lack of English language laboratory in the institutions of higher education. The research problem is that the students in these institutions have difficulties to develop their listening skills. Since the students in these institutions are taught by non-native speakers of English, they are exposed to a kind of English influenced by the lecturers' mother tongues or French. As English is taught in the institutions of higher education in Kinshasa as a Foreign Language, the English Language Lab becomes indispensable to develop the students' listening skills. Therefore, the research question of this paper is "what are the effects of the lack of the English Language Lab on the students' listening skills?" So the aim of this paper is to investigate into the second-year students' listening skills so as to find out the effects of the lack of the English Language Lab on the students under study. The hypothesis is that the effects are inability to discriminate the English sounds and to grasp the words uttered with high speed. To reach the aim, a listening test was used to collect data and the content analysis was used to analyze them. The results confirmed the hypothesis and the discussion showed that without an English Language Lab, students cannot develop their listening skills.

KEYWORDS

English Language Lab, listening skills, portable English language lab; students' inability; lack; effect.

INTRODUCTION

The lack of the English Language Lab in the institutions of higher education has attracted the attention on the students' listening skills. The research problem is that the students having no English Language Lab have difficulties to develop their listening skills. As these students have no English Lab, they rely on their lecturers' pronunciation which, most of the time, is influenced by other languages such as lingala, kikongo, tshiluba, French, etc.

The aim of this article is to investigate into the second-year students' listening skills so as to find out the effects of the lack of the English Language Lab on them.

Research Question

The investigation into the second-year students' listening skills is based on this research question: "what are the effects of the lack of the English Language Lab on the students' listening skills?"

Hypothesis

To answer anticipatively the above research question, one can assume that the effects are inability to discriminate the English sounds and to grasp the words uttered with high speed.

Methods

To collect data, a listening test was used to test the students' abilities to listen to a video in which native speakers are conversing. The students were asked to listen carefully to the video and answer the questions which could reveal whether their listening abilities are well developed or not.

To analyze the data, the content analysis was used to analyze the students' answers so as to find out the effect of the lack of the English Language Lab on the second-year students' listening skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The main assumption is on the idea of Richards (2015:19) who insists on the fact that "the use of technology in a school is no longer an option but is a core requirement of today's schools. Teachers are expected to be technologically literate just as quality schools are expected to make effective use of the resources technology makes available". Mohammed (2017:86) reports that "the findings proved that using effective language laboratories in teaching English is essential in teaching listening and mastering better features of speaking."

Mahajan and Sharma (2017: 1) state that "Language laboratory is an audio-visual installation used in modern teaching methods to learn the foreign languages". Oleh (2017:7) supports it in saying that "the Language laboratory or the language lab is an audio or audio-visual installation used as an aid in modern language teaching".

Reporting the results of the investigation on the students' listening competences, Pasupathi (2013:125) affirms that *"the effects of the use of technology has improved the students' listening skills and reduced the anxiety in listening to English. This is to say that the ELL impacts on the students' language skills effectively"*. The effects or impact of English Language Lab (ELL) should be positive. This is to say that learners are expected to improve their language skills by using ELL. In case learners do not use ELL, the learning outcome cannot be effective.

The ELL influences on the students' way of speaking and their audition ability as Akhdiyati (2018:8) affirms that *"there is improvement in English listening through language laboratory"*. For Krishna (2021:103) *"nowadays, digital language labs with fine audio quality enable teachers to interact with the whole class simultaneously. These offer students the prospect to enhance their language skills, especially the four LSRW skills that enhance the listening, speaking, reading, and writing aspects of communication"*. This is supported by Nwosu (2019:32) when he writes that *"the language laboratory is an extremely helpful tool for language learning, improving language skills, and particularly practicing and evaluating students' speech in any language. It offers a facility which let the students to listen to a model native speech, repeat, record, listen to their performance and compare it with that model, plus do self-assessment"*. Asningtias (2018: 198) argues that *"Language laboratory used to become a facility that schools boast to the stakeholder that it would facilitate the learning of foreign language better"*. Tyagi (2013: 1) defines the listening skill as *"the psychological process of receiving, attending to constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages"*.

Considering the above assumptions, it is clear to notice that it is mandatory to use the ELL in teaching/learning English. The contribution of this article is to verify these

assumptions in the context of the Democratic Republic of Congo, mainly in Kinshasa, where English language is taught and learnt as a foreign language without any English Language Lab. As the English Language Laboratory (ELL) is an indispensable tool which must be used in universities and colleges to develop students' language skills (LS) and it does not exist in the institutions of higher education, the contribution of this article is to verify whether the listening skills can be developed without an ELL or not in universities and colleges. To say it in another way, the verification of the importance and indispensability of an English Language Lab in an EFL context is the main contribution of this article.

RESEARCH METHODS

This methodology is characterized by the collection of data from the second-year students from the University of Kinshasa known as UNIKIN, National Pedagogical University known as UPN, and Teacher Training College known as ISP/GOMBE. The data are the answers that the students supplied to the listening test. The following are the questions of the listening test.

Watch and listen carefully four times to this video and answer the following questions.

1. How many people are there in this conversation?
2. Where does Samuel live?
3. What does Samuel do?
4. Who is answering questions?
5. Who is asking questions?
6. How is Sam?
7. Is there any person (in this conversation) whose name is Sam-Antha?
8. What relationship do the people talking (in this conversation) have?
9. Where are Sam and his friend going tonight?
10. Will Sam be driving tonight?

Here below are the questions and answers supplied by the ISP students.

Right means the students have given a right answer whereas **wrong** means that the students have given a good answer.

1. How many people are there in this conversation?	Right = 4	Wrong = 17
2. Where does Samuel live?	Right = 2	Wrong = 19
3. What does Samuel do?	Right = 1	Wrong = 20
4. Who is asking questions?	Right = 5	Wrong = 16



5. Who is answering questions?	Right = 9	Wrong = 12
6. How is Sam?	Right = 0	Wrong = 21
7. Is there any person (in this conversation) whose name is Sam-Antha?	Right = 3	Wrong = 18
8. What relationship do the people talking (in this conversation) have?	Right = 1	Wrong = 20
9. Where are Sam and his friend going tonight?	Right = 0	Wrong = 21
10. Will Sam be driving tonight?	Right = 9	Wrong = 12

Here below are the questions and answers supplied by the UPN students.

Right means the students have given a right answer whereas **wrong** means that the students have given a good answer.

1. How many people are there in this conversation?	Right = 7	Wrong = 30
2. Where does Samuel live?	Right = 5	Wrong = 32
3. What does Samuel do?	Right = 5	Wrong = 32
4. Who is asking questions?	Right = 13	Wrong = 24



5. Who is answering questions?	Right = 9	Wrong = 28
6. How is Sam?	Right = 5	Wrong = 32
7. Is there any person (in this conversation) whose name is Sam-Antha?	Right = 12	Wrong = 25
8. What relationship do the people talking (in this conversation) have?	Right = 5	Wrong = 32
9. Where are Sam and his friend going tonight?	Right = 0	Wrong = 37
10. Will Sam be driving tonight?	Right = 17	Wrong = 20

Here below are the questions and answers supplied by the UNIKIN students.

Right means the students have given a right answer whereas **wrong** means that the students have given a good answer.

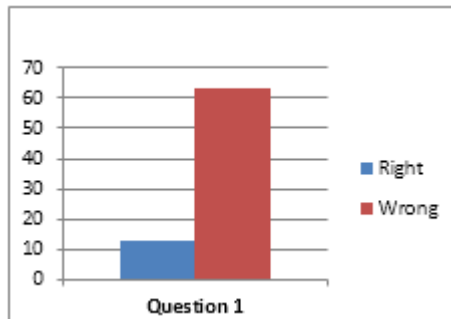
1. How many people are there in this conversation?	Right = 2	Wrong = 16
2. Where does Samuel live?	Right = 1	Wrong = 17
3. What does Samuel do?	Right = 4	Wrong = 14
4. Who is asking questions?	Right = 4	Wrong = 14
5. Who is answering questions?	Right = 4	Wrong = 14



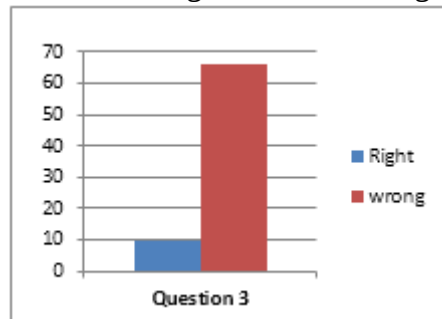
6. How is Sam?	Right = 3	Wrong = 15
7. Is there any person (in this conversation) whose name is Sam-Antha?	Right = 5	Wrong = 13
8. What relationship do the people talking (in this conversation) have?	Right = 3	Wrong = 15
9. Where are Sam and his friend going tonight?	Right = 1	Wrong = 17
10. Will Sam be driving tonight?	Right = 6	Wrong = 12

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

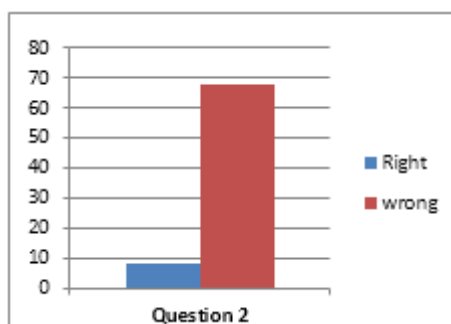
The following results are presented through the histograms. Each histogram indicates the question number and the students' answers. A brief comment is given below histogram



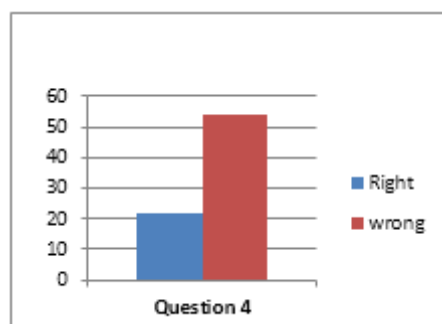
13 students were able to listen to the video.
63 students were unable to listen to the video.



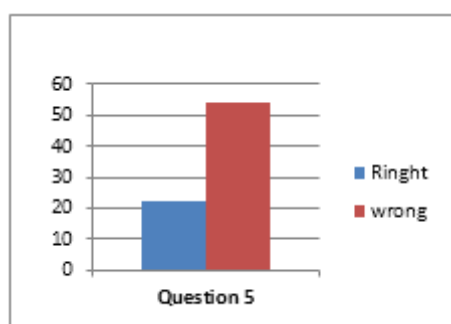
10 students were able to listen to the video.
66 students were unable to listen to the video.



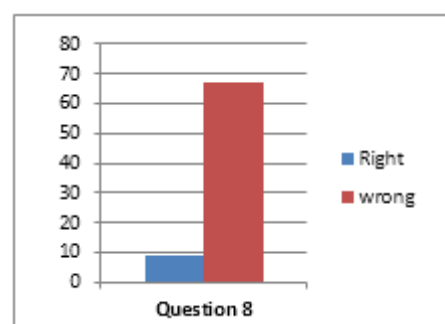
8 students were able to listen to the video.
68 students were unable to listen to the video.



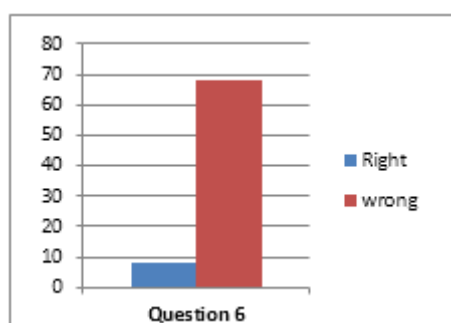
22 students were able to listen to the video.
54 students were unable to listen to the video.



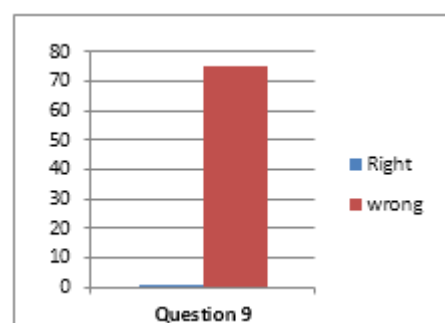
22 students were able to listen to the video.
54 students were unable to listen to the video.



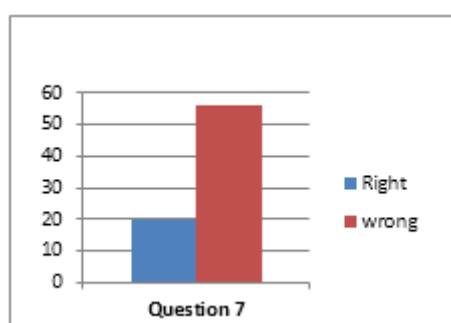
9 students were able to listen to the video.
67 students were unable to listen to the video.



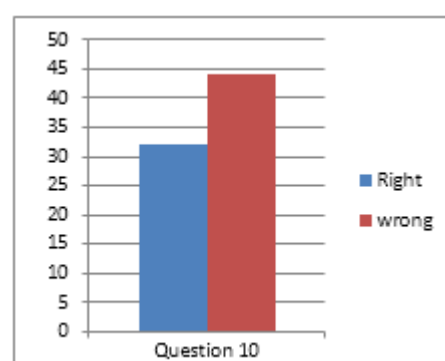
8 students were able to listen to the video.
68 students were unable to listen to the video.



1 student was able to listen to the video.
75 students were unable to listen to the video.



20 students were able to listen to the video.
56 students were unable to listen to the video.



32 students were able to listen to the video.
44 students were unable to listen to the video

To sum up the above results, the calculation of the **right** answers reveal that only 19% of the students for all three institutions of higher education (ISP/GOMBE, UPN, and UNIKIN) are able to listen to native English speakers whereas 81% of the same students are not able to listen to native English speakers. These results reveal clearly that the lack of the English Language Lab at ISP, UPN, and UNIKIN has a negative effect on the students' abilities to listen to a video in which English native speakers hold a conversation. This effect is the students' inability to listen to the native speakers. This is the proof that without an English Language Lab, in the context where English is taught as a foreign language, the students cannot develop their listening skills effectively/ Therefore, an English Language Lab is an indispensable tool for an effective teaching/learning. Students should have much time for listening practice in the English Language Lab.

CONCLUSION

Referring to the remarkable lack of the English Language Lab in the institutions of higher education, this article focused on the students' difficulties to develop their listening skills. This research problem was based on the question "what is the effect of the lack of the English Language Lab on the students' listening skills?" The hypothesis was that the effect is the inability to discriminate the English sounds and to grasp the words uttered with high speed or fluently. This hypothesis was confirmed by the results of the analysis of the questions asked after the students had watched the video four times. As the aim of this paper was to investigate into the second-year students' listening skills so as to find out the effect of the lack of the English Language Lab on their listening skills, the results of the analysis showed that only 19% of the students were able to listen to the native speakers whereas 81% were unable to listen to the native speakers. This fact is the proof that the English Language Lab is indispensable in the development of students' listening skills. Therefore, It was suggested to have a **portable English Language Lab**. This is to say that lecturers can make use of their students' androids, Ipads, tablets, etc to create an ELL in the auditorium. The lecturers can provide their students with appropriate audios and videos which can be shared with students via their devices. These appropriate audios and videos should be used to practice regularly listening so as to develop students' language skills.

Suggestions

As universities and colleges claim that they do not have enough money to install an English Language lab and as the English Language Lab is essential for the development of the students' listening skills, this article suggests a **portable English Language Lab**. This is to say that lecturers can make use of their students' androids, Ipads, tablets, etc to create an ELL in the auditorium. The lecturers can provide their students with appropriate audios and videos which can be shared with students via their devices. These appropriate audios and videos should be used to practice regularly listening so as to develop students' language skills.

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