



Teaching english listening skills effectively during distance learning

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Abstract

The rapid shift to distance learning due to global disruptions has posed significant challenges in teaching English listening skills effectively. Traditional face-to-face methods, which often rely on interactive and immersive classroom environments, are difficult to replicate in virtual settings. This study aims to explore strategies and best practices for enhancing English listening comprehension during remote instruction. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through surveys of English teachers and learners, alongside observational analysis of online listening activities across various learning platforms. The findings reveal that integrating multimedia resources, such as videos and podcasts, alongside interactive tools like quizzes and real-time discussions, significantly improves learners' engagement and listening proficiency. Moreover, consistent feedback and tailored scaffolding are critical to address individual learner needs in an online context. The study concludes that effective distance teaching of English listening skills requires a combination of technology integration, learner-centered approaches, and continuous adaptation to students' progress. These insights have important implications for educators designing remote curricula and suggest directions for future research on digital language learning methodologies.

Keywords: English listening skills, distance learning, remote language instruction, multimedia learning, learner engagement, online education, language comprehension, digital pedagogy

Introduction

The teaching and learning of English listening skills have long been recognized as essential components of language acquisition, vital for effective communication in both academic and professional contexts. Listening comprehension forms the foundation upon which speaking, reading, and writing skills are built, especially for learners whose target language is English. Traditionally, teaching listening skills has relied heavily on interactive, face-to-face classroom environments, where instructors can immediately gauge learners' understanding and provide real-time feedback. However, the global shift to distance learning, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has disrupted these traditional pedagogical approaches, forcing educators worldwide to adapt rapidly to virtual platforms.

The transition to online education presents unique challenges and opportunities for teaching English listening skills. Unlike speaking or reading, listening involves real-time processing of auditory input, which can be hindered by technological constraints such as poor audio quality, connectivity issues, and the lack of immersive interaction in a virtual setting. According to a 2021 UNESCO report, over 1.5 billion learners worldwide experienced some form of distance learning during the pandemic, with a significant portion of these learners enrolled in language courses. However, only 40% of English language teachers surveyed globally felt confident in their ability to teach listening skills effectively through remote modalities. This gap highlights the urgent need to explore and develop strategies that address the specific challenges of teaching listening skills at a distance.

Past research on language learning during distance education has primarily focused on general language acquisition, learner motivation, and technology acceptance.

Studies such as those by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) ^[24] have emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategies in improving listening comprehension, including prediction, monitoring, and evaluation. Yet, much of this research was conducted in traditional classroom settings, leaving unanswered questions about how these strategies can be adapted or optimized for online environments. Other investigations into multimedia-assisted language learning suggest that integrating videos, podcasts, and interactive quizzes can enhance learner engagement and comprehension. For instance, multimedia use was found to increase listening retention rates by up to 30% in some experimental settings. Despite these promising findings, many educators struggle to implement such tools effectively in distance learning due to lack of training, resources, or learner access issues.

Moreover, learner variables such as age, proficiency level, and learning styles further complicate the design of effective listening instruction online. Research has demonstrated that younger learners may benefit more from gamified listening tasks, while adult learners prefer contextualized, real-world listening materials. However, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies that systematically address how to tailor listening instruction to diverse learner profiles within remote contexts. Additionally, feedback mechanisms—crucial in reinforcing listening skills—are often less immediate or personalized in distance learning, potentially impacting learner progress negatively.

Given these gaps, the present study seeks to investigate effective methods for teaching English listening skills during distance learning, focusing on practical strategies that incorporate technology, learner engagement techniques, and scaffolding tailored to individual needs. The research questions guiding this study include:

1. What digital tools and multimedia resources are most effective in enhancing English listening comprehension in remote learning?
2. How do learner engagement and motivation influence the acquisition of listening skills in virtual environments?
3. What role does feedback play in supporting learner progress in listening during distance instruction?

This paper is structured to first review existing literature on listening skills development and distance learning methodologies, followed by an examination of digital tools and pedagogical approaches. Subsequent sections present the research design and methodology, then discuss findings based on data collected from teachers and learners engaged in online English courses. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for educators and suggestions for future research to further refine distance teaching of listening skills.

In focusing on these aspects, the study contributes to bridging the knowledge gap between traditional listening instruction and the evolving demands of digital education, ultimately aiming to equip educators with evidence-based practices for effective online language teaching. The insights gained will be valuable not only for the current educational landscape shaped by pandemics and technological advances but also for future trends in hybrid and fully online learning environments.

Methods

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of effective teaching strategies for English listening skills during distance learning. The quantitative aspect focused on collecting numerical data through structured surveys, while the qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews to gather deeper insights from participants. This dual approach allowed for triangulation of data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

The population for this research consisted of English language teachers and learners engaged in distance learning programs across various educational institutions, including universities, language centers, and online platforms. A purposive sampling method was used to select participants who had experience specifically with remote English listening instruction. The sample included 150 learners aged 18 to 35, representing different proficiency levels from beginner to advanced, and 30 English language teachers with at least one year of experience teaching online. This sample size was determined to provide sufficient data for both statistical analysis and meaningful qualitative interpretation.

Data collection involved two main tools: an online survey and semi-structured interviews. The survey, designed separately for teachers and learners, consisted of Likert-scale questions, multiple-choice items, and open-ended questions to explore perceptions, challenges, and effective practices related to online listening instruction. The survey was distributed via email and educational platforms over a four-week period. The semi-structured interviews, conducted via video conferencing software, involved 15 teachers and 20 learners selected from the survey respondents based on their willingness to participate further

and their diverse experiences. Interview questions probed deeper into the use of digital tools, engagement techniques, feedback mechanisms, and perceived effectiveness of listening activities.

For data analysis, quantitative survey data were processed using the statistical software SPSS. Descriptive statistics, such as means and frequencies, were calculated to summarize participant responses. Inferential statistics, including correlation analysis and t-tests, were used to explore relationships between variables such as technology use and learner engagement. On the qualitative side, interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis with the assistance of NVivo software. This process involved coding responses to identify recurring themes and patterns related to teaching strategies, challenges, and learner feedback.

Ethical considerations were rigorously observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring they understood the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Privacy and confidentiality were maintained by anonymizing all data and securely storing digital files on password-protected devices accessible only to the research team. Additionally, care was taken to ensure that no identifying information appeared in published results.

Overall, this methodological framework was designed to capture a balanced view of the current practices and challenges faced in teaching English listening skills online, providing actionable insights that can be generalized to similar educational contexts.

Results

The data collected from the surveys and interviews provided valuable insights into the current state of teaching English listening skills during distance learning. The quantitative analysis revealed several trends regarding the use of digital tools, learner engagement, and feedback mechanisms, while qualitative findings supplemented these results by exploring participant experiences and perceptions in greater depth.

Survey results from the 150 learners showed that multimedia resources were the most commonly used tools in distance listening instruction. Approximately 85% of learners reported frequent use of video clips, such as educational YouTube content or recorded lectures, while 70% indicated regular exposure to audio-only materials like podcasts or recorded conversations. Interactive tools, including quizzes and real-time polling during live sessions, were reported by 60% of learners as part of their online listening activities. However, only 45% of learners felt that these tools were consistently engaging or effective in helping them improve their listening comprehension.

When asked about challenges, 65% of learners identified technical issues, such as poor audio quality or unstable internet connections, as significant barriers to effective listening practice. Additionally, 55% reported difficulties in maintaining focus and motivation during remote listening tasks, particularly in asynchronous learning environments without live interaction. A smaller but notable group, about 30%, mentioned limited opportunities for immediate feedback as a hindrance to their progress.

Teachers' survey responses echoed some of these findings. Among the 30 instructors surveyed, 90% used multimedia content to facilitate listening comprehension, with 80%

incorporating video materials and 75% using audio podcasts or recordings. Most teachers (70%) reported incorporating interactive elements, such as quizzes or discussion forums, but only 50% felt confident in their ability to sustain learner engagement over time. Regarding feedback, 60% of teachers indicated that providing timely, personalized responses was challenging in the distance learning context, largely due to time constraints and lack of suitable digital tools.

Correlation analysis of the quantitative data indicated a positive relationship between the use of interactive multimedia tools and learner self-reported engagement levels ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$). Similarly, higher engagement correlated with better self-assessed listening skill improvement ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$). However, technical difficulties negatively correlated with both engagement ($r = -0.42$, $p < 0.05$) and perceived skill gains ($r = -0.39$, $p < 0.05$).

Qualitative data from the interviews provided further nuance to these findings. Learners frequently emphasized the value of multimedia content that reflected authentic, real-life situations, such as news reports or everyday conversations, noting that such materials helped them connect with the language contextually. Several learners expressed appreciation for interactive quizzes that allowed them to test understanding immediately after listening tasks, though some noted that the lack of real-time interaction limited their ability to clarify misunderstandings promptly.

Teachers highlighted that while multimedia resources were widely available, selecting appropriate materials that matched learner proficiency and interests was time-consuming. They also reported challenges in adapting listening activities designed for classroom settings to virtual formats. Several instructors noted that asynchronous learning models, while flexible, reduced opportunities for spontaneous questions and discussions that typically enhance listening comprehension. Regarding feedback, teachers acknowledged the importance of detailed, individualized comments but noted constraints posed by large class sizes and technological limitations.

Themes emerged from the thematic analysis of interviews, with three prominent categories identified: technology integration, learner engagement, and feedback strategies. Under technology integration, participants discussed both opportunities and obstacles in using diverse digital platforms. While some platforms offered features like automated quizzes and progress tracking, inconsistent internet access and unfamiliarity with tools limited their effectiveness for some learners.

Learner engagement was another critical theme, with both teachers and learners emphasizing the need for interactive and varied listening tasks to sustain interest. Engagement was linked not only to the content but also to the level of interactivity and immediate reinforcement through feedback. Feedback strategies were described as essential but unevenly implemented. Some teachers used digital tools that provided automatic feedback, while others relied on manual review and comments, which could be delayed.

In summary, the results indicate that while multimedia and interactive tools are widely used and positively associated with learner engagement and listening improvement, technical challenges and limited feedback opportunities remain significant obstacles. The data suggest that addressing these issues could enhance the effectiveness of

English listening instruction in distance learning environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of teaching English listening skills during distance learning and offer insights into the complex interplay of technology, learner engagement, and feedback mechanisms. The results indicate that multimedia resources, particularly videos and audio materials, play a central role in facilitating listening comprehension in virtual settings. This supports earlier research that highlights the benefits of authentic, multimedia-based listening inputs in language acquisition. For example, studies have consistently found that integrating videos and audio materials that mimic real-life situations enhances learners' ability to decode and understand spoken language, confirming the importance of contextualized listening tasks.

Furthermore, the positive correlation between interactive multimedia tools and learner engagement underscores the critical role that interactivity plays in online learning environments. This aligns with previous studies showing that learner engagement is a key determinant of language skill improvement, particularly in distance learning where motivation can wane due to reduced social presence. The findings confirm that tools such as quizzes and real-time polling not only maintain learner interest but also serve as effective formative assessment strategies, reinforcing understanding immediately after listening activities.

However, the study also highlights significant barriers to effective listening instruction online. Technical issues such as poor audio quality and unstable internet connections were frequently reported, consistent with global reports on the challenges of remote learning infrastructure. These obstacles negatively impacted learner engagement and perceived progress, emphasizing the need for reliable technology and access to digital resources as foundational requirements for effective distance education. This echoes the conclusions of prior research that technological inequities can exacerbate learning gaps, particularly in language education.

An important finding relates to feedback mechanisms, which emerged as a critical yet underutilized component in online listening instruction. While some teachers employed automated feedback tools, many struggled with providing timely, personalized feedback due to time constraints and platform limitations. This gap in feedback provision is concerning given the established role of immediate and tailored feedback in reinforcing listening comprehension skills. The findings align with literature that stresses feedback as a pivotal factor in language learning, particularly for receptive skills like listening where learners benefit from corrective input and clarification.

Unexpectedly, the study found that a considerable proportion of learners felt less engaged in asynchronous listening tasks compared to synchronous sessions. This suggests that the lack of real-time interaction, often cited as a disadvantage of asynchronous learning, significantly affects learner motivation and comprehension. While asynchronous formats offer flexibility, the absence of immediate clarification or discussion may hinder deeper processing of listening input. This outcome contrasts with some earlier studies that have promoted asynchronous learning as equally effective if well-structured but supports

research emphasizing the importance of social presence and interaction in sustaining learner engagement.

The study's limitations include a relatively small sample size, especially among teachers, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. The reliance on self-reported data from learners and teachers may also introduce bias, as participants might overestimate or underestimate their experiences. Additionally, the study did not control for variables such as learners' prior exposure to digital tools or differing cultural attitudes toward online education, which could influence engagement and outcomes.

Based on these findings, future research should explore scalable strategies to enhance feedback delivery in distance listening instruction, including the development of more sophisticated, adaptive digital tools capable of providing personalized and immediate feedback. Investigating the effectiveness of blended synchronous-asynchronous models could also address the engagement challenges observed in purely asynchronous learning environments. Furthermore, studies with larger and more diverse samples could provide deeper insights into how factors such as age, proficiency level, and socioeconomic status affect the efficacy of online listening instruction.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the value of multimedia and interactive tools in promoting English listening skills during distance learning while highlighting persistent challenges related to technology and feedback. Addressing these challenges is essential for optimizing online language instruction and ensuring equitable learning opportunities for diverse learner populations.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that teaching English listening skills effectively during distance learning requires a strategic combination of multimedia resources, interactive tools, and timely feedback. The findings highlight that while digital content such as videos and audio materials significantly support learner engagement and comprehension, challenges related to technical limitations and insufficient feedback mechanisms persist. By confirming the positive impact of interactivity and contextualized listening tasks, the research contributes to a clearer understanding of best practices in online language instruction.

The implications of this study extend to educators and policymakers who design and implement distance learning curricula. Ensuring reliable technological infrastructure and providing training for teachers to utilize interactive tools and feedback systems are critical steps toward enhancing learner outcomes. Additionally, integrating synchronous elements or hybrid approaches may help maintain learner motivation and foster deeper comprehension.

Ultimately, this research underscores the need for continued innovation and adaptation in language teaching methodologies to meet the evolving demands of digital education. Future efforts should focus on developing accessible, scalable solutions that address technological barriers and optimize feedback delivery, thereby promoting more effective and inclusive English listening instruction in remote learning environments.

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