MENON
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Journal Of Educational Research

A National and International Interdisciplinary Forum for Scholars, Academics, Researchers and Educators from a wide range of fields related to Educational Studies

Florina, July 2012
Issue 1
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http://www.kosmit.uowm.gr/site/journal (ISSN: 1792-8494)
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Listening skills development: The effect of the implementation of an ESAP module

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Abstract
The aim of the study has been to identify the effect of a teaching intervention which was designed with the aim to improve listening skills among Greek tertiary education students on the basis of assessment of their perceived needs and deficiencies.

The adopted approach to enhancing listening skills, which was used for developing the listening component of an ESP syllabus, emerged from the data collected through the students’ questionnaires and interviews as part of a needs analysis project.

Experimental research design was employed; the students’ scores in a pre- and post-test instrument were analyzed by means of ANOVA. The post-intervention data revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in terms of test scores while between-groups comparison indicated statistically significant differences in listening skills performance of the experimental group. The results thus, provide support for the efficacy of the adopted needs-based approach to listening skills development.

Keywords: learner needs; listening; skills development; experimental module

1. The Skill of Listening
Listening comprehension “lies at the heart of language learning” and is considered an important language skill to develop in the language classroom as language learners need to be able to understand native and non-native speakers of English and comprehend a variety of aural input in the target language (Vandergrift, 2007a:191). In fact, listening is a valued interpersonal skill for personal and professional purposes since it is thought to be essential for success in academic and professional fields and career advancement (Flynn, Valikoski, & Grau, 2008:144) which is also the case of the learners in the context at issue.

However, listening skill is described as a complex multidimensional skill (Cooper, 1997) which tends to be identified by language learners as the most difficult language skill to acquire (Hasan, 2000; Kim, 2002; Graham, 2003). It is often reported to be a source of anxiety for most EFL/ESL learners (Elkhafaifi, 2005), a fact which can be adhered to “its implicit nature, the ephemeral nature of the acoustic input and the difficulty in accessing the processes” involved in it (Vandergrift, 2007a:191).

It is considered that the comprehension of aural input involves the construction of meaning by employing linguistic elements i.e. phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic knowledge and non-linguistic elements i.e. knowledge of the context, topic, or general knowledge of the world (Buck, 2001; Rost, 2002; Vandergrift, 2007b). This is an inferential process in which “the listener applies a variety of the different types of knowledge through top-down and bottom-up processes, and it is assumed that successful listening comprehension is the result of a complex interaction between top-level and bottom-level cues” (Staehr, 2009:580).

However, although native language listeners are able to carry out such processes quickly and effectively this is not the case with non-native listeners, who may not possess adequate knowledge of language to automatically process what is heard (Vandergrift, 2004:4). In effect, they need to consciously focus on what they hear to cope with the demands of the situation, as well as the limitations of memory and the speed of delivery of speech (ibid:4-
5), a procedure which is heavily influenced by their language level.

In relation to the major factors which affect listening comprehension a review of research indicated the following: text characteristics, interlocutor characteristics, task characteristics, listener characteristics, and process characteristics all of which need to be dealt extensively within the language classroom (Rubin, 1994).

At this point it should be noted that listening for academic or specific purposes have their own distinct characteristics given their unique focus and context specificity which cannot be ignored. As a result, genre specificity in the teaching of listening is essential since students need to “be made aware of the particular features of the discourse community they wish to become members of” (Dudley-Evans, 1994:149). In this direction, knowledge of the schematic or macro-structure of a particular genre is believed to ease the listeners’ task for making predictions about the content of the prospective aural input which in effect, leads to more effective comprehension (Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Tauroza & Allison, 1994; Dudley Evans & St John, 1994).

The advent of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology, which emphasized the need for effective oral communication (Brown, 1987), sustained the need to systematically develop listening as a skill in its own right in line with the demand for listening in real time to perform communicative tasks and interact with native speakers (Morley, 1999). In this respect, listening instruction has been informed in terms of aspects such as the differences between the spoken and the written discourse, the variable levels of authenticity, and the development of tasks which offer contextualized language use (Brown, 1987). As a result, listening instruction has extended its focus beyond listening to learn that is the product of listening to include the process of listening that is learning to listen (Vandergrift, 2004:3).

2. The study

2.1. The aim and objectives of the study

The purpose for which English will be used, academic or professional, in response to the demands of academic institutions or market forces constitute fundamental aspects of the ESP classroom which inevitably influence course design specification.

The general aim of the present study was to identify the perceived needs of ESP students concerning listening skills and devise materials and tasks which would lead to improvement in the students’ listening performance. More specific the objectives were set as follows:

- To investigate the students’ perceived needs in relation to listening skills development;
- To use this insight to develop the listening component of an ESP course (the focus of the present paper - as part of a skills based approach to ESP course design);
- To trial this experimental material in the ESP classroom, and compare the effectiveness of its implementation to that of the presently adopted course;

2.2. The Participants

The participants involved in the study were 286 Business English students of tertiary education in Northern Greece streamed into the experimental group (N=147), who were
exposed to the needs-based listening skills development and the control group (N=139), who were presented with the usual teaching approach for an academic semester. Their age range was 20-24 years. Also, their level of English language proficiency ranged from false beginner (38.7%) to upper intermediate (46%) and advanced (15.3%) for the experimental group as suggested by their scores in the Oxford Placement Test (OPT); the students in the control group were identified as false beginners (35.4%), upper intermediate (46.9%), and advanced (17.7%) respectively.

In response to the demands of the needs of the learners which are both academic and professional the particular teaching context can be regarded as English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) rather than simply EAP or ESP given its special emphasis on the distinct features of Business English which distinguish it from other disciplines.

2.3. The research instruments

A number of research instruments were used to diagnose the learners’ needs in relation to listening skills, develop materials to enhance listening skills, assess the students’ progress in relation to listening skills. In particular:

2.3.1. The students’ needs analysis project

In the attempt to determine the focus of the needs-based listening component, the students were provided with a checklist of major listening texts, task types and sub-skills and were asked to rank their needs on a scale from 1-5, with 5 being the most important and 1 the least important. The checklist was the result of a negotiated effort and consultation among the ESP tutors and the subject specialists. The items included in the list were thought to be most closely related to the learners’ needs concerning their target discipline.

Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 35 students in an attempt to gain more meaningful insights into the situation.

2.3.2. Data analysis of the students’ needs analysis project

The data derived from the checklist were analyzed by using descriptive statistical methods. Frequencies and percentages for all items were obtained.

The verbal data of the semi-structured interviews, which was analyzed qualitatively, underwent the procedures of data reduction, first and second level coding as well as pattern coding. Codes resulted in groups of categories, ‘labeled’ by a specific name (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then, similar concepts with common characteristics were clustered into themes, so as to reduce the number of categories as shown in table 4.

2.3.3. The ESAP listening skills test.

The focus of the pre- and post-test was to assess listening skills development through a variety of tasks, all designed with the intention of being fair to the test takers in the particular setting, which according to DeKeyser and Larson-Hall (2005:102) helps prevent a possible method effect. More specifically, the tasks reflected real-life professional and academic situations, as closely as possible given the constraints and the artificiality of the testing environment. The idea of ‘authenticity of task’ (Douglas, 2000; Bowles, 2006) was crucial throughout the test. The starting point for any task was a purpose of some kind for which a language user in the real professional or academic world would actually listen, speak, read, or write. Similarly, the types of listening texts used were selected in order to
provide appropriate subject-specific input in line with the demands of such tasks. In particular, the text types used for assessing listening were specialism-and study-related in their content and specialism-related reports and lectures/ seminars/ talks.

The task formats were determined by a skills focus and the most appropriate format to elicit the students’ understanding of the text. The tasks were productive (e.g. note-taking/ notes completion involving answers of no more than three words; prompts with single words) or objective (e.g. True/False answers; multiple matching). All tasks necessitated real time processing on the part of the learners. The format of the test as well as operations tested are presented on table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Skill Focus</th>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>Type of Task</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Listening for writing short answers</td>
<td>Lecture/talk on specialism-related topic (monologue)</td>
<td>Productive task: locating and understanding specific information</td>
<td>Diagram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B Listening to identify a topic</td>
<td>talk on specialism-related topic (dialogue)</td>
<td>Objective task: deciding whether information on a recording corresponds to written information-understanding gist and detail</td>
<td>T/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Listening to identify a topic</td>
<td>Lecture/Seminar on specialism-related topic (monologue)</td>
<td>Objective task: following the development of a narrative</td>
<td>Multiple-Matching</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to establish the reliability of the test, Cronbach a coefficient was estimated and identified as 0.70 for the pre-test and 0.80 for the post-test aggregated for both groups, figures which are regarded acceptable and satisfactory as in general, acceptable reliability indexes range from 0.70 and above (Nunally, 1978).

2.3.4. Data analysis of the ESAP Test

In order to evaluate the effect of the teaching intervention on the students’ listening performance in the ESAP test, scores obtained from the pre- and post-intervention test were analyzed for statistical difference by means of ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) in order to investigate the differences between the mean scores of the examinees per group, experimental and control. The dependent variables were the subjects’ mean scores in listening at the pre- and post-intervention stage.

The independent variables were the experimental and control group and the teaching intervention. Means and standard deviations as well as F-ratios were calculated. The level of confidence for these analyses was set at .05. It should be noted that the development of listening skills was tested on the basis of the additive score of all items in the corresponding part of the test.
4. Results

4.1. Listening skills development: The focus of the needs based course

As far as listening skills development was concerned the students identified the following listening text types as essential to be included in the experimental syllabus component in order of importance (table 2). The students considered it of importance to be able to “listen and follow instructions” (m=4.35); “listen and comprehend recorded materials” (m=4.29); and “listen and comprehend seminars” (m=4.16). It was also strongly indicated that “listening for entertainment purposes” (m=1.08) was not considered by the students, who seemed to acknowledge the nature of the ESP course. As regards the listening process in the target language the participants ranked their needs in listening sub-skills as follows: “understanding main points” (m=4.42); “identifying specific information” (m=4.39); and “listening and keeping notes” (m=4.26). They also considered being trained to identify and “evaluate speaker(s) position” (m=4.14) and to comprehend “speakers with different accents” (m=3.94) essential. In fact, the high means estimated for all sub-skills emphasized the students’ need for extensive training in listening skills development.

Table 2. Mean, Median and Standard Deviation for listening skills development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening Skills</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
<td>394</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.16</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorded materials</td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following instructions</td>
<td>394</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.35</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies, songs</td>
<td>394</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main points</td>
<td>394</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Information</td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of speaker position</td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping notes</td>
<td>395</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.26</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different accents</td>
<td>381</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A detailed account of the students’ responses concerning the focus of the listening skills module of the experimental syllabus in terms of percentages and counts follows in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of students’ needs in terms of listening skills development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening Skills</th>
<th>N.I</th>
<th>L.I</th>
<th>M.I</th>
<th>Q.I</th>
<th>V.I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.8%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>47.0%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recorded materials</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.5%</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following instructions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2. The students’ interviews

Rich insights into the learners’ views concerning ESP training provision were provided through the interviews which complemented the findings of the checklist. The data after being coded resulted in 44 codes which were grouped into 10 categories classified into three basic themes: a) ESP course: reasons for attendance and expectations b) the present situation: an appreciation of the ESP context c) suggestions for better training, presented on Table 4.

4.2.1. The students’ appreciation of the context, expectations, and suggestions

The data from the students’ interview highlighted the significance of the ESP course for the learners’ present and future needs and revealed the mismatch between the learners’ expectations and the present situation establishing the need for redesigning the ESP curriculum in a way that it would effectively meet the needs of the target group of learners. Among the issues raised by the learners is the need for an ESP listening component which encompasses the learners’ subject-specific and academic needs, involves authentic, challenging ESP materials, encourages productive learning in a relaxed atmosphere, focuses on sub-skills development, and caters for any deficiencies of the learners. Also, it needs hardly be argued that the role of ESP teacher should be reconsidered as well.

Table 4. The students’ views about the ESP course

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Themes/ categories</th>
<th>Codes – Coding Patterns</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. ESP: EXPECTATIONS AND ATTITUDES</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile</td>
<td>Gender - Male/ Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Reasons for taking the course | Role of English as International Language ROEIL | 32  
| English for career prospects ENCAPRO | 29  
| English for study purposes – bachelor ENSTUPU | 18  
| English for postgraduate studies ENPOSTU | 19  
| A compulsory module COMMOD | 7  

Expectations from the listening component | Training in field specific listening skills TRFSPLSK | 32  
| Training in academic listening skills TRACLSK | 30  

Preferred materials | Up-to-date subject-specific materials UPSUSPM | 26  
| Relevant to students’ language level RESTLAL | 25  
| Visual and audio materials VIAUMA | 17  

Learning in class | Learn in a relaxed atmosphere LEREAT | 19  
| Arrangements to facilitate task processing ARFATPR | 18  
| Active engagement in ESP ACENESP | 15  
| Interest in participating in ESP INPAESP | 20  

B. THE PRESENT SITUATION: AN APPRECIATION OF THE ESP CONTEXT

Needs Identification | No consideration of students’ present needs NCOSPRN | 21  
| No consideration of students’ target needs NCOSTAN | 23  
| No consideration of preferred ways to learn NCOPRWL | 14  
| No consideration of language competence NCOLACO | 22  

7. Practical constraints | Too large classes TLACLA | 23  
| Non-homogeneous classes- semester NHOCLSE | 18  
| Mixed-ability classes- competence MIABCLA | 17  
| EGP language deficiencies EGLLADE | 16  

C. SUGGESTIONS FOR BETTER TRAINING

8. Developing a needs based listening component | Multi-dimensional needs analysis MUDINAN | 24  
| A course focused on target discipline COFOACC | 30  

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| EAP skills development EAPSKDE | 18 |
| Efficient practice in micro-skills EPRMISK | 11 |
| Focus on skills training procedures FSKTRPR | 18 |
| Guidance in task processing GUTAPRO | 20 |
| Establish self study processes ESESTUP | 11 |
| Consider learners’ individual characteristics COLINCH | 9 |
| Acknowledgement of learners’ strengths ACLESTR | 8 |
| Deal with learners’ deficiencies DELEDEF | 18 |
| Bridge the present-target needs gap BRPTNEG | 11 |

9. ESP Teacher

| Facilitate students during the learning process FSTLAPR | 20 |
| Sensitive to adult learners SEADLE | 22 |
| Trained in Business English TRBUENG | 10 |
| Trained in ESP/EAP issues TESPEAP | 7 |

10. Practical arrangements for the course

| ESP in at least four semesters ESPFOSE | 23 |
| Limit the number of students in class LINUSCL | 21 |
| Streaming students according to competence STSTACO | 17 |
| Preparatory courses for lower level students PRCOLLS | 18 |
| Optional courses – BE Certificates OPCOBEC | 12 |

4.3. The framework for listening skills development: input, instructional focus, main listening activities

The Input for the listening component included both monologues (i.e. attending to seminars, lectures, presentations) and dialogues (client-professional/expert communication) related to the learners’ target discipline or field of study as indicated by the ESP tutors and subject specialists during consultation and negotiation process. In particular, it consisted of: a) spontaneous spoken language delivered by the teacher in class in the form of semi-scripted texts so as to exhibit a certain a degree of authenticity; b) authentic recordings downloaded from the internet to expose the learners to a variety of speakers with different accents and train them to confidently cope with the situation.

In the case considered, the adopted approach to listening skills development is based on the assumptions that “listening serves the goal of extracting meaning from messages” which necessitates the provision of training of both bottom-up and top-down processes in order
for the learners to be able to arrive at an understanding of messages (Richards, 2005:86). It is also acknowledged that all spoken utterances (i.e. words, expressions, syntax) are carriers of meaning to be processed and decoded by the learners who need to be able to “recognize and act on the general, specific or implied meaning of utterances” (Richards, 2005:86).

Among the most essential skills in EAP/ESP contexts is the ability to decode the speech delivered which means understand its overall meaning; to comprehend it, that is be able to identify main from subsidiary points; and efficiently take notes of any important points for future use (James, 1977 cited in Jordan 1998:189). Such listening activities, which call for socially and contextually appropriate responses to spoken texts are in line with the principles of the Communicative Approach to Language Teaching (CLT) (Goh, 2008) and include sequencing tasks, true-false comprehension tasks, summary tasks, and picture identification tasks. In the case of the latter, talks with corresponding context visuals, i.e. photos representative of the setting, and content visuals, i.e. photos, diagrams and/or drawings related to the content of the audio text (Ginther, 2002:34-35) are included. All of them involve various techniques to be used for practicing listening comprehension in the language classroom (ibid). More specifically these are:

- Predicting the meaning of messages
- Identifying key words and ignoring others while listening
- Using background knowledge to facilitate selective listening
- Keeping the broad meaning of a text in mind while listening” (ibid).

These techniques are implemented through the typical sequence entailed in the pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening framework (Richards, 2005:87), where each phase serves a specific function and is linked to the other phases. In particular, Field (2002:245) presented the following format of a good listening practice:

- Pre-listening which sets the context aiming to create motivation;
- Listening either extensively, which is followed by questions on context, attitude of speaker(s) etc.; or intensively when learners have to identify the answers to specific pre-set task/pre-set questions or listen to check their answers;
- Post-listening which allows for the exploitation of functional language and inference of meaning for vocabulary items (Field, 2002:245).

The framework also lends itself for developing listening strategies for coping with problems related to the nature of the listening process and enhancing comprehension, such as the application of cognitive, metacognitive and social-affective strategies during listening along with the development of metacognitive awareness about L2 listening.

4.4. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the teaching intervention

4.1.1. Hypothesis control-The effect of the teaching intervention on students’ performance in terms of skills and vocabulary

This research hypothesis seeks to investigate the effect of the teaching intervention on students’ performance in terms of listening skills. The prediction is that students in the experimental group will demonstrate better performance in terms of higher mean scores at the post-intervention measurement compared to their peers in the control group.
4.4.2. Listening Skills Development at the pre- and post-intervention stage

Listening skills development was analyzed for statistical significance using ANOVA which indicated that there is statistically significant interaction between the experimental and control group (F (1,284)=74.986, P<0.001) at the pre- and post-intervention stages as a result of the teaching intervention. In particular, as shown in table 5, both the experimental and control group achieved statistically significant progress in terms of listening skills development as a consequence of the tuition they had received during the teaching intervention of an academic semester.

Table 5. Comparison of Pre- and Post-intervention measurements per Group for Listening Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>Listening Pre</td>
<td>10.3b</td>
<td>3.37515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening Post</td>
<td>13.8a</td>
<td>3.68172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>Listening Pre</td>
<td>10.1b</td>
<td>3.16603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listening Post</td>
<td>11.0a</td>
<td>3.53243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For each group, means followed by different letter are statistically significant different, at significance level a=0.05, according to the LSD criterion.

In addition, as presented in table 6, since the groups were equal in terms of listening competence in the baseline comparison, given their performance in the ESAP test at the pre-intervention stage, the analysis of variance showed that there was no statistically significant difference of the two groups at the pre-intervention measurement. However, at the post-intervention measurement the experimental group is statistically significant differentiated from the control group as it acquired a considerably higher mean score. Specifically, at the post-intervention measurement the experimental group attained a mean score of 13.8 out of 20 whereas the mean score of the control group was 11.1. In the baseline comparison, the scores of both groups were 10.3 and 10.1 respectively.

Table 6. Comparison of the two Groups at each stage for Listening Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening Pre</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>10.3a</td>
<td>3.37515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>10.1a</td>
<td>3.16603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Post</td>
<td>Experimental</td>
<td>13.8a</td>
<td>3.68172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>11.0b</td>
<td>3.53243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* For each stage, means followed by different letter are statistically significant different, at significance level a=0.05, according to the LSD criterion.

Moreover, the difference of the mean scores for the measurements at the post-intervention and pre-intervention stages for the control group of were 11-10.1=0.9 while the respective measurements for the experimental group were 13.8-10.3=3.5, figures which signify that the estimated relative effect of the teaching intervention was 3.5/0.9=3.9. Consequently, it should be emphasized that the teaching intervention in terms of listening skills development which was provided to the experimental group was 3.9 times more effective
than the conventional teaching intervention provided to the control group in terms of mean scores. In conclusion, the significance of the teaching intervention which was based on the experimental needs based syllabus document is highly valued in terms of listening skills development.

The following figure schematically demonstrates the differences in listening skills development in the two teaching interventions, employed for the experimental and control group respectively, from the pre- to post-intervention stages.

**Figure A. Performance in the pre- and post-intervention stages in relation to the development of listening skills of the experimental and control group**

![Graph showing performance in pre and post-intervention stages]

5. Discussion

The research data highlighted the success of the experimental teaching intervention as suggested by the learners’ enhanced performance in relation to listening skills and indicated the significance of the needs-based approach to ESP course design (Cowling, 2007; Long, 2005; Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; West, 1997) towards optimizing learning conditions.

It should be noted that the students in the experimental group demonstrated better performance in test scores compared to their peers in the control group, who were taught in a traditional approach which viewed listening as ‘a passive activity’, meriting little classroom attention rather than as ‘an active process’ (Vandergrift, 2004:3). This fact underlines the effectiveness of the experimental listening component in meeting the needs of the target group of learners as regards the provision of efficient training in relation to the particular skill.

Furthermore, it cannot be ignored that the status of listening in the case considered has undergone substantial change; from being a neglected skill relegated to passing treatment as a minor strand within the course (i.e. the case of the until recently adopted course) it has now attained (i.e. in the case of the experimental module) to be regarded as a core module within the ESP program (Anderson and Lynch, 1988; Brown 1987; Buck 1995; Mendelsohn, 1998; Vandergrift, 2004). The distinctive element between the two paradigms is the special emphasis placed in the latter case on the procedures which allow for a deeper understanding of the processes the listening process entails (Richards, 2005) on the part of the learners as well as a detailed approach as to how they could be facilitated.
in building up their listening ability (Underwood, 1989) and raising their awareness of skills, strategies and techniques in relation to listening (Underwood, 1989). In this direction, every effort has been made to present listening as a purposeful experience for students who were exposed to the listening texts and tasks with an identifiable purpose in mind rather than in an abstract way.

Moreover, since the ultimate goal of listening instruction was to help the learners cope with the demands of understanding the target language for a variety of purposes either personal or professional it was essential to provide them with authentic listening materials which offer them a range of real-life listening experiences including exposure to speakers with different accents and to different varieties of language (Vandergrift, 2007a). It is considered that the development of listening skills is greatly enhanced through exposure to authentic-type texts which offer a natural speech rate since this way the students can more easily access similar texts when listening for real-life purposes (ibid: 200) which is not the case when exposed to simplified texts only as was the case with the control group (Blanco, 2002; Gallien, 2001). Therefore, the experimental listening component can be clearly regarded as having an impact on the students’ mastery of listening skills development through the provision of a focused approach which exposed them to a variety of discipline specific tasks (Silva, 2004) serving both the students’ immediate academic needs and long-term needs as professionals (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987) and reconceptualizing the link between the language classroom and the real world (Graves, 2008:417).

At this point it should be considered that listening in the ESP language classroom aimed to follow real-life information patterns, therefore, it was not limited to the so-called “one-way listening” which focuses on the process of information receiving but was also extended to involve “two-way listening” where interaction with another speaker takes place (Lynch & Mendelson, 2002).

Although it cannot be assumed of the students to have reached native like proficiency (Stern, 1983:341) concerning their listening skills during a single academic semester, they have made significant progress as indicated by the comparison of their mean scores before and after the teaching intervention. These scores provide evidence for the students having acquired considerable skills and become adequately competent in the process of listening as regards aspects of the target language in their field of study. Also, they are considered to have developed as listeners to engage confidently and efficiently in comprehending spoken exchanges for academic or professional purposes in effect of the focused training they were provided with.

In conclusion, the development and implementation of the needs-based experimental listening component can be regarded as highly effective in enhancing the learners’ performance and promoting their achievement in ESP as more effective listeners.

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Brief biography

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Dora Chostelidou is an EFL teacher in secondary education. She holds a M.A. degree in TEFL and is currently a Ph.D candidate at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Her research interests include teaching EFL and ESP, needs-based course design, syllabus design and curriculum renewal, teacher development, and multilingualism/plurilingualism. She has participated in Greek and International Conferences and has published articles in journals.