Holistic Approach and Language Teaching: Listening-speaking Development and Self-efficacy in Focus

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Abstract
The purpose of holistic language teaching is the development of the learners' ability to handle both their language oral skills as well as maximizing their life skills. This study aimed to fulfill these objectives through a mixed-methods design, using holistic teaching procedures. The participants of the study comprised 60 Iranian EFL pre-intermediate learners homogenized through Cambridge Placement Test, from a population of 78 students who had been selected by simple random sampling. They were divided into two experimental and control groups (30 students in each group) who received the treatment--a holistic and sequenced series of listening-speaking activities, and traditional teaching instruction, respectively. Four instruments were used to collect the data for analysis: Cambridge Placement Test, a comprehensive test of speaking and listening used as pretest and posttest, a questionnaire to estimate the learners' self-efficacy and finally, an unstructured interview. The findings of the study proved that the experimental group that was exposed to the holistic teaching procedures outperformed the control group, meaning that the participants in this group performed more satisfactorily in both listening and speaking. Moreover, their self-efficacy improved to an acceptable level as they expressed in the interview their satisfaction with the use of holistic teaching procedures. These findings have some implications for both teachers and students concerning the enhancement of language interaction in and outside the English classes.

Keywords: *Self-efficacy, oral skills, holistic teaching, listening-speaking activities*

Introduction

According to Burns and Groves (1997), in many traditional classrooms there is a heavy focus on teaching knowledge about pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse while learners later realize that such knowledge is not sufficient in itself to make them effective communicators in social contexts. They add that learners must learn how to put into action such knowledge in different contexts.

In Iran, language learning is situated predominantly within the traditional approach, with teachers as agents to deliver knowledge based on a behaviorist transmission model. In such an environment, learning means working hard to master the information on the learners' side. The course objectives are limited to proving a measurable knowledge about different aspects of the language and assessment is also carried out accordingly. At the same time, little or no attention is paid to guiding the students in handling stress, anxiety, or embarrassment, which they will face

during the real acts of speaking and listening. Consequently, any failure in learning of this type is often taken to be a students' faults, implying that learners do not work adequately to learn. People seldom question whether the problem might originate from the system, teacher, curriculum, or social and cultural background. This is the point where the main problem emerges. The learners fail to develop self-efficacy appropriately, especially in speaking and listening which are more socially-grounded.

Such mismatch between formal systematic learning experiences and the informal and sometimes conflicting learning experience provided by the home, community, and large society (Wikeley, Bullock, Muschamp and Ridge, 2007) is where learners fail to develop a sustainable self-efficacious image of themselves. Consequently, students increasingly lose interest in studying and learning. At this point, the need for a holistic approach; that is, a dynamic whole language approach that is learner-centered and meaning-focused (Liu, 2011) is felt--an approach which includes learners of varying ability, cultures, and learning styles. The purpose of the holistic development of students is not only to maximize his/her employability after graduation but also to have lifelong benefits and ultimately benefit society as a whole.

As for mastering the oral skill, it is a principal prerequisite to success. In fact, speaking and listening are required for many developmental accomplishments such as attention, memory, language, and motivation. Speaking is also a necessary part of social activity. According to Martínez et al. (1998), being a good speaker in English means that a language learner has gained a functional knowledge of the principles of English writing system too. Speaking and listening actually develop the mind, and the mind must have opportunities to practice.

According to Harmer (2007), communication skills comprise receptive skills and productive skills. Listening and reading are receptive skills, while speaking and writing are productive skills. Receptive skills require the students to receive and process the information but they do not need to produce a language to do this, while productive skills involve the students in the production of a speech, for instance.

Based on the above, the present study aimed to explore the effect of implementing holistic language teaching on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL learners. Besides, the study examined the effect of implementing holistic language teaching on the listening proficiency and self-efficacy of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the possible relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their speaking and listening proficiency was investigated. Eventually, the Iranian EFL learners' attitudes towards implementing holistic language teaching principles were explored. Thus, the following research questions were addressed:

Q1. Does implementing holistic language teaching have any significant impact on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL learners?

Q2. Does implementing holistic language teaching have any significant impact on the listening proficiency of Iranian EFL learners?

Q3. Does implementing holistic language teaching have any significant impact on the self-efficacy level of Iranian EFL learners?

Q4. Is there any meaningful relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their speaking proficiency?

Q5. Is there any meaningful relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their listening proficiency?

Literature Review

According to Gardner (1999), a holistic approach to education encourages an individualized and pluralistic approach that helps learners develop and use all their senses and multiple

intelligences when gathering, processing and recalling information. Actually, holism has recognized the importance of the person and intellectual and vocational development that include the physical, social, cultural, moral, and learning (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi and Liaghatdar, 2012; Miller, 1992). Mahmoudi et al. (2012) and Miller (1992) believe that holistic education can be as paradigms and principles which can be carried out in different ways. They state that holistic education is not only about acquiring basic information and skills, but also about improving the person in all aspects.

There are numerous research conducted on the relationship between holistic language teaching and the development of different language skills, abilities and strategies. Zhang and Austin (2019), for example, have studied the relationship between self-efficacy and English-speaking performance through a holistic approach and have concluded that the level of self-efficacy positively and significantly influences the performance of EFL learners. They have also worked on enhancing self-efficacy through scaffolding and concluded that scaffolding is an influential technic which enhances self-efficacy. In a different study in Iran, Bonyadi et al. (2012), studied the relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy beliefs and their language learning strategy and came to the conclusion that there were significant differences in self-efficacy beliefs among the students, and that the level of self-efficacy is a determining factor in applying certain metacognitive strategies.

Bavaqar (2019) sought to find the relationship between self-efficacy perception of Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking and oral ability. She proved that speaking and oral ability are directly related to their self-efficacy perception. In another study she found out the significant correlation between students' speaking self-efficacy and their speaking performance.

Generally speaking, as Todorova and Todorova (2018) stated, the worldwide spreading of information would be hardly possible without language, which is basic to international and intercultural social interactions. As a result, holistic education may serve as an alternative solution in learning a foreign language by means of developing students in many real-life aspects.

Method

Design of the Study

The study was conducted with a mixed-methods design, using quantitative and quantitative data collection procedures to find answers to the posed research questions. It actually used numerical data of the speaking-listening tests, questionnaire, and qualitative data for the interview. The reliability and validity considerations for all of the employed tools were also observed.

Participants

The population of the study comprised 78 male and female EFL Iranian pre-intermediate learners, aged 16 to 22 years. They had registered in a spring term of an English class in a language institute located in Tehran. To select the most suitable participants for the study, simple random sampling method was used. In order to homogenize the sample, Cambridge Standard Test was run. 18 out of 78 students came to be either too high or too low in terms of English knowledge and so, they were excluded from the study. The remaining subjects (60), established the sample of the study. Based on the objectives of the study and the institute considerations, the sample was randomly classified into two groups: 30 participants formed the experimental group (EG) and 30 participants were assigned to the control group (CG).

Instruments

Three instruments were used to collect the data for the study: Cambridge Placement test, a comprehensive test of speaking and listening that were taken as pretest and posttest, and a related questionnaire to estimate the participants' self-efficacy. It has to be noted that the researcher used a variety of data collection tools in order to ensure the validity of the results.

Procedures

To undertake the principles of the holistic approach and conduct the study, the following six procedures (Goh, Goh and Burns, 2012) were used by the researcher with the treatment group (EG). These procedures were implemented for planning a holistic and sequenced series of listening-speaking activities. The aim was to highlight a number of key concepts with which the participants could achieve their desired objectives.

Stage 1: Focus learners' attention on speaking
a) To encourage learners to plan for overall speaking development
b) *To prepare learners to approach a specific class activity*
Stage 2: Provide input and/or guide planning
Stage 3: Conduct listening-speaking activities
Stage 4: Focus on language/skills/strategies
Stage 5: Repeat speaking tasks
gtage gg*Direct learners' reflection on learning*

The whole duration of the treatment took 28 sessions (42 hours). At the same time, the instructor and the participants agreed on following some out-of-class activities that would boost the natural use of the language. To this purpose, the participants followed certain sets of activities such as film making out of class, gathering out of class in coffee shops and restaurants, visiting museums, theaters and shopping centers, and organizing weekly meetings in different places. During all these activities, the learners were encouraged to communicate only in English and exchange and discuss ideas only in English. Through these situations, the learners practiced the language naturally and got acquainted with the required vocabulary and expressions.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the obtained results and provides explanations related to research questions.

Research Question 1

Does implementing holistic language teaching have any significant impact on the speaking proficiency of Iranian EFL learners?

Table 1 below shows that the mean of the pretest (11.17), has changed to 11.41 in the posttest, meaning that using the traditional teaching method for the CG did not affect the speaking skill of the learners. In other words, the teaching procedures did not help the learners to improve their speaking skills effectively.

Table 1
Paired Samples Statistics (pretest and posttest, CG)

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-speaking scores for the CG	11.1750	30	1.96956	.35959
	Post-speaking scores for the CG	11.4190	30	1.34535	.24563

In the same way, table 2 offers the data for EG who were exposed to the holistic teaching procedures. As it is clear, the mean for the pre-speaking test was calculated to be 11.2, and after receiving the treatment, the mean rose to 13.4, which shows some degrees of improvement. In fact, the change in the mean can indicate the effect of the treatment.

Table 2
Paired Samples Statistics (pre and posttest, EG)

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-speaking scores for the EG	11.2093	30	1.43358	.26173
	Post-speaking scores for the EG	13.4660	30	1.07052	.19545

Table 3 below displays the independent samples *t*-test of pre-speaking for the CG and EG. As it is clear, there is no meaningful relationship between the two pretests of the CG and EG, sig=.939>.05

Table 3
Independent Samples Test for Pre-speaking Test (CG and EG)

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre-speaking P for the CG - Pre-speaking for the EG	-.03433	2.41889	.44163	-.93756	.86889	-.078	29	.939

Table 6 offers the independent samples *t*-test for the posttest of speaking in both the treatment and control groups. As it is clear, there is a meaningful relationship between the two posttests of the CG and EG, sig=.000<.05.

Table 4
Independent Samples Test for Post-speaking Test (CG and EG)

	Paired Differences					T	f	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Post-speaking for the CG - Post-speaking for the EG	-2.04700	1.99254	.36379	-2.79103	-1.30297	-5.627	29	.000

Research Question 2
Does implementing holistic language teaching have any significant impact on the   listening proficiency of Iranian EFL learners?

As the results in table 5 below show, the mean of the pretest was is 10.2 in the pretest, but it changes to 14.3 in the posttest. So, the difference is significant enough to confirm the impact of the traditional teaching method for the CG. In other words, the teaching procedures of the traditional method affected the learners to improve their listening skills effectively.

Table 5
Paired Samples Statistics (pre and posttest, CG)

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Pre-listening scores for the CG	10.2000	30	1.74988	.31948
	Post-listening scores for the CG	14.3000	30	18.13009	3.31009

In the same way, table 6 offers the results of EG who were exposed to the holistic teaching procedures. Here, the mean in the pre-listening test was calculated to be 11.03, and after receiving the treatment, the mean rose to 13.43, which shows some degrees of improvement. In effect, the change in the mean can indicate the effect of the treatment for the EG.

Table 6
Paired Samples Statistics (pretest and posttest, EG)

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean

Pair 1	Pre-listening scores for the EG	11.0333	30	1.99107	.36352
	Post-listening scores for the EG	13.4333	30	1.54659	.28237

Table 7 below shows the independent samples *t*-test for the pre-listening test of the CG and EG. As it is clear, there is no meaningful relationship between the two pretests of the CG and EG, sig=.087>.05.

Table 7

Independent Samples Test for Pre-listening Test (CG and EG)

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pre-listening scores for the CG - Pre-listening scores for the EG	-.83333	2.57419	.46998	-1.79455	.12788	-1.773	29	.087

Table 8 offers below the independent samples *t*-test for the posttest of listening of the CG and EG. As seen, there is no meaningful relationship between the two pretests of the CG and EG, sig=.795>.05.

Table 8

Independent Samples Test for Post-listening Test (CG and EG)

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Post-listening scores for the CG - Post-listening scores for the EG	.86667	18.07023	3.29916	-5.88087	7.61420	.263	29	.795

Research Question 3

Does implementing holistic language teaching have any significant impact on the self-efficacy level of Iranian EFL learners?

To answer this question, a self-efficacy questionnaire was used two times, before and after the treatment. The results are presented below.

Table 9
Descriptive Statistics for pre-administration (EG)

Items	N	Mean	Std. D.
1	30	2.2345	.86465
2	30	3.7612	.70030
3	30	3.2367	.93011
4	30	2.0131	1.5033
5	30	4.0912	.81276
6	30	3.3287	.023234
7	30	1.4325	2.1874
8	30	3.5123	1.2386
9	30	4.0143	.40237
10	30	2.4321	.74001
11	30	3.6264	.91270
12	30	2.2917	.86465
13	30	3.6265	.70030
14	30	2.2143	.93011
15	30	3.6267	1.5033
16	30	2.3214	.81276
17	30	2.7575	.023234
18	30	2.3245	1.5177
19	30	4.6265	.92488
20	30	3.3214	.51177
21	30	2.8333	.53896
22	30	4.0833	.58959
23	30	3.6265	.86465
24	30	2.7917	.70030
25	30	3.3441	.93011
26	30	4.1223	1.5033
27	30	3.2314	.81276
28	30	4.1287	1.3234
29	30	2.2845	1.86465
30	30	3.7612	.7231
Valid N (listwise)	30		

The results in the above Table demonstrate the level of the learners' self-efficacy in the experimental group before the treatment.

Table 10
Descriptive Statistics for post-administration (EG)

Items	N	Mean	Std. D.
1	30	2.3212	.83421
2	30	3.2141	.75367

3	30	2.6131	.87802
4	30	3.0213	.85458
5	30	3.8125	.73852
6	30	3.5412	.91281
7	30	3.0909	.85702
8	30	2.2352	.76685
9	30	3.8636	.98139
10	30	2.8435	.83421
11	30	2.4367	.67967
12	30	2.7727	.64690
13	30	2.9213	.83265
14	30	2.6818	.93765
15	30	2.3142	.89242
16	30	3.1273	.96811
17	30	2.0261	.84762
18	30	3.6236	.92387
19	30	3.5643	.93476
20	30	2.7267	.96967
21	30	2.6193	.92314
22	30	3.3123	.83218
23	30	2.3810	.83421
24	30	3.1942	.75367
25	30	3.1095	.87802
26	30	3.0238	.85458
27	30	4.7143	.73852
28	30	4.8095	.91281
29	30	3.3212	.9812
30	30	4.2141	.45367
Valid N (listwise)	30		

Table 10 above demonstrates the results of post-administration of the questionnaire for the EG. As seen, any increase in the mean level of each item indicates an increase in the self-efficacy level of the learners after the treatment. To know more about the difference between the two administrations of the questionnaire, a paired samples *t*-test was run, with the following results.

Table 11
Paired Samples Test for two administrations (EG)

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-administration of the questionnaire - Post-administration of the questionnaire	-19.63333	9.55017	1.74361	-23.19943	-16.06724	-11.260	29	.000

The results in Table 11 indicate that there is a meaningful difference between the self-efficacy of the learners before and after the treatment.

Research Questions 4 and 5

Q4. Is there any meaningful relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their speaking proficiency?
Q5. Is there any meaningful relationship between EFL learners' self-efficacy and their listening proficiency?
To answer these questions, the EG participants' listening and speaking scores were compared with the scores obtained from their responses to the self-efficacy questionnaire, and paired samples *t*-test was run to determine any potential. The results in the following tables reveal that the higher is the level of listening-speaking achievement among the learners, the higher would be their self-efficacy. In fact, self-efficacy affects the degree of oral-aural proficiency of EFL learners as a result of holistic teaching procedures implemented in the study for the treatment group.

Table 12
T-Test for the speaking levels and responses to questionnaire (EG)

		Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Speaking levels - self-efficacy scores	-68.324	28.223	9.276	-12.044	-48.741	-13.35	29	.000

Table 13
T-Test for the listening levels and responses to questionnaire (EG)

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			

Pair 1 Listening levels – self-efficacy scores	-86.31	15.341	5.327	-82.53	-44.750	-12.44	29	.004

Conclusion

According to Harste, Burke and Woodward (1982), one of the main advantages of the holistic approach to language teaching is that a learner constructs his own understanding of the situation he interacts with and converses with others according his understanding. In fact, a learner becomes aware that the activities he does must be of a great interest to his own life. When he does so, a learner feels safe through the learning process, not fearing blame or sarcasm, and building up his own meanings depending on his own past knowledge to understand the language that he practices. The findings of the current study will have the same implications for Iranian EFL learners in terms of enhancing their listening-speaking performance and self-efficacy. These findings, at the same time, support many previous research conducted on different aspects of language learning (Alashhab, 2000; Al-batayneh, 2004; Azzitawi, 2005; Nimr, 2008). The main problem with all these studies is that they have investigated just one skill or component of the language, while the present study explored the development of both the language skills and learners' self-efficacy as their psychological construct.

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