Investigating the Students' Attitudes towards Using the Best Practices in English Listening in the Blended E- learning Environment at Al-Quds Open University

Dr. Insaf Abbas

Al-Quds Open University

Abstract:

This study is an action research project conducted during an English listening course at Al-Quds Open University. The aim of this project was to investigate the students' attitudes towards an intensive listening training course given to second year English major students. The course is a mixture of face to face and virtual classes. The materials used were a combination of textbooks with CDs & videos as well as various e-learning resources uploaded through the Moodle system .The course also involved training students to employ the main listening strategies and a task- based approach. The sample of study consisted of a group of (74) students at QOU/Ramallah Branch and (18) students at Dura in Hebron District in the second semester of the academic year 2011l/2012. The instruments of the study included a weekly working journal which the participants were required to keep during the training to record thoughts, feelings, or comments regarding the listening tasks and strategies used in class and online practice. A questionnaire was distributed at the end of the semester in order to investigate the students' attitudes and reactions towards the training and the e-learning components and resources.

Based on the data obtained from classroom observations, students' journals, and students' responses to the questionnaire at the end of the semester, and from the students' comments on the Moodle website of the course, students' attitudes were analyzed. Findings revealed positive attitudes towards the training as well as towards the use of the listening strategies introduced. Important conclusions were suggested in the light of these findings.

ملخص:

هذه الدراسة عبارة عن بحث إجرائي نُفِّذ خلال تدريس مقرر" مهارات الاستماع في اللغة الانجليزية" في جامعة القدس المفتوحة، وقد هدفت الدراسة الى استطلاع اتجاهات الطلاب حول التدريب المكثف الذي تلقوه أثناء تدريسهم للمقرر المشار إليه، وهو أحد المقررات التي تعطى لطلبة السنة الثانية في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية، وذلك في الفصل الدراسي الثاني للعام الدراسي 2012/2011 . وقد صمم المقرر للمرة الأولى على نمط التعليم الاكتروني المدمج الذي يضم اللقاءات الوجاهية والافتراضية، وكانت المواد المستخدمة في المقرر أيضاً مزيجاً من الكتب والأقراص المدمجة والفيديوهات، إضافة إلى العديد من المواد الالكترونية التي حملت على صفحة المقرر الاكترونية عبر نظام المودل. ولقد شمل المقرر ايضاً تدريب الطلاب على استخدام الاستراتيجيات الاساسية في التدريب على مهارة الاستماع . وشملت العينة الدراسية (74) طالباً من فرع رام الله و(18) طالبا من فرع دورا. وتكونت أدوات الدراسة من استبانة صممت للطلاب لأخذ آرائهم واتجاهاتهم بالإضافة إلى تدوين الطلاب أسبوعياً لملاحظاتهم حول المقرر والتدريب المرافق له في مفكراتهم الخاصة التي يعطونها للمدرس، وكذلك الملاحظات الصفية التي يرصدها المدرس بدوره. وبناءً على تحليل المعلومات التي جمعت من خلال أدوات الدراسة اتضح أن اتجاهات الطلاب حول التجربة كان ايجابيا، وبناءً على نتائج الدراسة أُستخلصت النتائج وقُدِّمت التوصيات المناسبة.

Keywords: listening comprehension, listening strategies,skills integration. receptive skills ,

productive skills, blended e- learning, Moodle.

1. Introduction:

1.1 Language teaching/learning and technology:

Students need to be exposed to the language if they want to learn it and one of the ways of doing this is through listening to it. No doubt, listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life. Hence, this study presents the need for an emphasis on listening comprehension in English language learning/ teaching. There has been a dramatic impact of computers on the discipline of education in general and on language teaching in particular. This has in turn led to paradigm shifts not only in the way we teach English but also in the methods we choose to deliver the material. The new free learning management systems such as the Moodle offered endless new vistas that caused radical changes in course delivery, course materials and teaching methods and strategies. At the same time, these systems are reshaping students' perceptions, immediately transporting them to an enriched online environment. This shift has caused a change in the role of the student as he has become a more independent and interactive learner. Thus, the abundance, availability and ease in use of e-learning resources created a revolutionary atmosphere in language learning.

1.2 Listening comprehension:

According to Morley (1991, p.82), "We can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write." So, listening, as a skill, is assuming more and more weight in SL or FL classrooms. Limited listening input fails to promote face-to-face communication. On the other hand, adequate listening practice could give the learners essential contact with handy input that might trigger their utterances. Teacher talk, listening materials and peer- interaction are vital means for providing this practice.

Listening is a process which requires an active and immediate analysis of the streams of sounds. Listening also involves the desire to listen, as well as the capability to listen. Both must be present with the listener for the successful recognition and analysis of the sound . Language skills are usually divided as 'receptive' and 'productive', Another subdivision is based on interaction whether one way or interactive reception. Reading and writing are one-way skills where learners don't get direct feedback. But in speaking and listening, learners may have their understanding and reproduction checked instantly. Thus active and self-learning take place. Moreover, there is a traditional labeling for reading and listening as "passive" skills. But linguists believe that a listener gets involved in many things such as guessing, anticipating, checking, interpreting, and interacting (Harmer, 2003). Rost (2002) states that listeners "co-author" the discourse and they construct it by their responses. He explains that listening differs greatly from

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reading because reading materials are printed and are permanent enough where the learners are required to interact with the next sentence using the knowledge of the previous one while listening involves also continuous material presentation where students have to respond to the immediate expression. listening is more of a process than a product . It instantly shapes the understanding and utterances of the learners.

Listening is a process that involves understanding what we hear. So, two concurrent actions are demanded to take place in this process. According to many ELT experts like Rost (2002), Nation & Newton (2009), listening includes some component skills which are: recognition of sounds, and words, knowledge of grammatical combinations and rules. knowledge of utterances that act to create meaning, connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues and lastly combining background knowledge to figure out meaning and recall important words and ideas.

Gou (1997) remarks that there are elements that affect listening such as: kinds of input , attention, concentration, speed of presentation, interest and aim of listening, suitable timing and anxiety. Thus, teachers have to pay attention to these factors. Choosing the good practices in listening is vital too. Good strategies are very key elements in enhancing the advantages gained from the listening practice. Tasks preceding, accompanying and following the listening practice add to the advantages gained from the listening practice (Harmer (2003). Vandergrift (2003) showed that strategy development is important for listening training because strategies are conscious means by which learners can guide and evaluate their own comprehension and responses.

Good listening materials and resources are also very decisive in getting the best results from the listening practice. Textbooks , recorded materials, live conversations online materials can all be very vital in getting the good results from the listening practice. Phuong (2011) believes that CALL (computer assisted language learning programs) programs can be very helpful and motivating materials. E-learning resources are getting more and more available and thus they provide endless opportunities for the students to use them and to get maximum advantages from them in very interesting and motivating ways.

1.3 Course description:

The course is titled "Listening Skills". It is offered to second year students of the English language major at Al-Quds Open University. It is a 3-credit-hour course which aims at improving the listening comprehension of the students. Thus, it gives them the opportunity to practice listening to various types of listening materials. Through this training, students are introduced to the basic practices and strategies in listening

comprehension. The materials that have been used for the course are a textbook that has of a variety of listening material and accompanied by various tasks and a CD that has all the listening material. This has been used for in class and home practice. It has been enriched by some suggested supplementary material, some of which are online links. Students meet for two hours every week. Task-based learning is implemented through the practice of a wide range of group and individual practice and activities, both in and out of class.

In the second semester of the academic year 2011/2012, the course design has been transformed into a blended e-learning course for the first time using the Moodle platform. A number of Moodle technology features are utilized such as discussion forums, chats, online assignments. Students now establish a consistent online presence by contributing to electronic discussions and chats. It is hoped that these means will increase the interactive nature of the course and will train the students to be familiar with the tools of e learning. A plentiful number of online resources are available on the course platform providing a wider arena of listening materials for practice. All assignments are submitted electronically by being uploaded to the course homepage. The previous textbook and CD) are now uploaded on the course home page in addition to the other added resources. Virtual classes are now used as well as face to face classes. All these means will help to increase the e learning experience of the students.

1.4 Problem statement and purpose of the study:

The aim of this project was to investigate the second year English major students' attitudes towards the newly- designed blended e learning listening course previously described. The sample of study involved a group of (74) students at QOU/Ramallah Branch and (18) students at Dura in Hebron District in the second semester of the academic year 2012. The instruments of the study included a weekly working journal which the participants were required to keep during the training to record thoughts, feelings, or comments regarding the listening tasks and strategy learning in class and online practice. Based on the data to be obtained from classroom observations, students' journals, and students' responses to the questionnaire at the end of the semester, and from the students' comments on the Moodle website of the course, students' attitudes were analyzed. Findings and conclusions were to be drawn according to the outcomes of the data analysis.

1.5 Significance of the study:

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The study highlights the students' attitudes towards the newly- designed course in listening skills. It gives the impressions of the students towards this experiment. This will in turn be a good indicator in evaluating the course and in working on improving it further in the following semester based on the feedback received from the students.

1.6 Questions of the study:

The major question of the study is : "What are the students' attitudes towards using the best practices in English listening in the blended e-learning environment during their listening course in the second semester of the academic year 2011/2012 at Ramallah and Dura branches at QOU? "

The sub questions for this major question   are:

1. What is the nature of the availability of internet access for the students of the listening course?
2. What is the effect of the intensive listening practice on improving the listening skill of the students in the listening course at QOU during the semester 2011/2012 Ramallah and Dura branches from the students' point of view?
3. What is the effect of the given listening practice on improving the other language skills of these students from the students' point of view?
4. What is the effect of using good listening strategies in the listening practice given to the same students from the students' point of view?
5. What are the attitudes of the students towards using e-materials in their listening practice?
6. What are the attitudes of students towards home listening practice?
7. What are the attitudes of students towards doing the e- activities in the e-learning environment?
8. What are the attitudes of the students towards using virtual classes in the blended e-learning listening practice?
9. Do the students prefer the blended e learning environment or the exclusive face to face environment?
10. Do the students feel they have improved their computer and e-learning skills at the end of the listening course?

2. Review of Literature & Related Studies:

2.1 Importance of practice in listening comprehension:

Most ELT experts agree that exposure to listening to real speakers of English is very essential for improving the students' ability in listening skill. Students should be prepared from the start to understand the speech of native speakers of English speaking at normal rate in a normal manner. The prolonged exposure of students to the slow speech of ESL teachers does not prepare students to understand the natural spontaneous speech of native speakers which is one of the major roles of the EFL instruction. Harmer (2003) also thinks that one of the main reasons for getting students to listen to spoken English is to let them hear different varieties and accents rather than just the voice of their teacher with its own idiosyncrasies. In today's world, students need to be exposed not only to one variety of English (British English, for example) but also to varieties such as American English, Australian English, Caribbean English, Indian English or West African English. Ridgway (2000, p: 180) says "practice is the most important thing in improving the students' listening performance. The more listening we teach, the better, Teach listening comprehension as the major skill; sub skills will take care of themselves as they become automatized. Anderson and Lynch (2003) believe that there are two principal reasons for stressing the importance of listening. First: for many students, it seems to be the most demanding and is therefore a skill that needs a considerable amount of practice and training. Second: it is an area which is in danger of being overlooked in courses for foreign learners.

Anderson (2003) and Moses (2011) also think that the more students listen to English, the better they become at listening to it .The more they listen to English, the better their speaking becomes, the better pronunciation they acquire. Borkowski et. al. (1990) think that L2 listening competence is a complex skill that needs to be developed consciously. It can best be developed with practice when students reflect on the process of listening without the threat of evaluation. Using listening activities to only test comprehension leads to anxiety which debilitates the development of metacognitve strategies. Buck (2001) also emphasizes the need for practice in listening. He presents useful methods and practice material in addition to a sample test at the end. Thus, we must take into account that the level of listening input must be higher than the level of language production of the target learners. So, language teaching pedagogy must incorporate academic and designed listening practice.

- **Related studies on the importance of practice in listening comprehension:**

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During the last two decades, there has been a growing interest in conducting studies that aim at measuring the effect of listening practice on the improvement of the listening skills of learners. Petric (2000) is a good example for this type of study which aimed at exploring the effect of a one-semester program of listening instruction on the development of listening skills of 30 first year students of English at the University of Novi Sad ,Yugoslavia. In order to achieve this aim, the development of the listening skill in two groups of university students of English was compared: one group that received regular instruction at the English Department and the other one that received additional systematic listening training during one semester. This experimental study showed what effect a one semester program of listening instruction had on the development of students' listening skills. The difference between the pre-test and post-test means in the experimental group was statistically significant.

Another similar study was conducted by Wang (2007). It was an action research project in a listening course for the second-year English majors in one university in China. The plan included intensive practice and training in using various interesting materials . The data obtained from classroom observations, students' journals, interviews with students, and students' response to an open-ended questionnaire at the end of the term showed that students developed a fairly high degree of motivation towards practicing listening. Students became more enthusiastic about practicing listening. Students' practicing became more purposeful. Students realized the importance of persistent practice.

Other studies showed that teaching listening develops other language skills as well as listening. Hamid's study (2001) tried to see the effect of listening practice and training on the writing performance of 8th grade students. Her study sample consisted of (112) students from four schools in Palestine divided into a control group and an experimental one. She used listening practice with the experimental group as an entrance to writing tasks. With the other group, no listening material was used. In the post- test, the experimental group outperformed the control group in writing. Hamid proved that listening practice had significantly positive effects. It is an effective means to facilitate and improve writing.

In other domains, some studies looked into other aspects of listening practice. Kavaliauskiene (2008) in his research studied the learners' self-assessment of listening difficulties and challenges in performing listening tests. The participants in this project were (97) university students. The findings gave insights into the practice of developing listening skills. Useful tips for good practice of teaching effective listening skills in a foreign language were offered based on the research data and observation of the students' performance. Kavaliauskiene also emphasized that the individual listening practice is of good importance as it has a number of advantages in learning listening skills.

Another study by Guo (2005) aimed at the investigation of a one-year experiment of teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) at Shanxi University of Finance and Economics. The experiment involved three teachers and 550 non-English major undergraduates of the University, sponsored by the Chinese Ministry of Education. The study aimed to find the effects of good and programmed practice.   Results of the research are of significance and may prove beneficial to English language teaching in Chinese tertiary institutions. All these studies support the idea of the importance of good and well-designed practice.

2.2 Listening strategies:

Most experienced ELT teachers believe that practicing the listening skill has to follow certain strategies to make it productive and effective. Good listening lessons go beyond the main listening task itself with related activities before and after the listening. Usually, the listening practice includes: the phonological code, the syntactic code and the semantic code (Peterson, 2000 and Newton, 2009). Richards (1985, p. 191) indicates while listening, listeners categorize the received speech into meaningful sections, identify redundant material, keep hold of chunks of the sentences, think ahead and use language data to anticipate what a speaker may be going to say, accumulate information in the memory by organizing it and avoid too much immediate detail. Peterson, 2000 ; Harmer (2003) and others believe that we should break the skill of listening into micro-skill components and make sure that our students are aware of what they need to know to understand how to listen .

Successful listening refers to 'the integration of these component skills' and listening is the 'coordination of the component skills'. This shows that listening could be related to interaction. Interactive listening situations include face-to-face conversations and telephone calls in which the listener has a chance to ask for clarification, repetition, or slower speech from conversation partner. On the other hand, non-interactive listening is where the listener is engaged in listening passively to a monologue or speech or even conversation (Anderson, 2003). Some non-interactive listening situations are listening to the radio, CDs, TV, films, lectures etc. and here the listener usually doesn't have the opportunity to ask for clarification, slower speech or repetition (Lavery,2001). Furthermore, Al-Mutawa (1989) explains that there are three levels of listening comprehension : a. the elementary level which deals with sound and meaning of words, the intermediate level which handles short conversation, and the third level or the advanced level where students can deal with lengthy spoken discourse**.** The two levels of listening teachers need to focus upon are:
  - Listening for gist (to get the general idea or meaning)
  - Listening for detail (to get the specific facts).

A good sequence that could be followed in a listening practice would be: introduction, pre-listening, set task, listening, checking task, listening again & checking tasks, leading into other activities (Lavery, 2001). Always make students listen more than once. It is usually advisable to give the questions to the students before they listen so as to know what to focus upon in their listening. Beware of the acoustics in your classroom and of the quality of your machine (Harmer, 2003). Richards (1985) explains that some of the activities that could be used to check listening comprehension are: true- false questions &asking for details, filling certain words or expressions, choosing between words, dictation etc. He (p: 228) believes that tasks should have a purpose and should develop competence in certain abilities in listening and this is the goal of teaching listening skills.

As for the ways of processing the text while listening, we can identify two approaches. One is concentrating on the smaller units of the language and linking them together to get the meaning in the last stage. It is a text- based approach where learners focus on sounds, words and grammar to get the meaning. It is a bottom- up processing (Saha & Talukdar, 2008). The other method is to get the learners to go into a top-down process where learners use their prior knowledge to reconstruct the meaning using the linguistic knowledge as a tool. The background knowledge activates a set of expectations to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. (Nunan, 2003; Guo,1997) stated some of these strategies which develop listening such as listening to all types of materials, improving lexicon strategies, developing particular skills, listening to enjoyable and interesting materials. On the other hand, tasks might be turned to semi-reciprocal if the instructor makes the students respond while checking their understanding through question-answer or discussion and clarification in the class or lab (Anderson, 2003; Ridgway, 2000).

Most ELT experts also stress that it is necessary to teach listening comprehension in integration with other language skills "It is probably best not to have students practice listening in isolation but rather as a multi-task event. We also want students to listen to English as much as possible on their own at home, in their cars and everywhere (Buck, 2001 p.30; Harmer, 2003) . Holden (2003) also explains the necessity for using the strategies in teaching listening. He says that if learners are trained in using certain strategies in listening, they will apply these strategies themselves when they practice on their own. He also says that most commercial listening texts are in fact listening tests. These do very little to develop learners' ability to process and comprehend the material. Thus, teachers are invited to add strategies to these texts to transfer them to learning materials by tasks that call for discussing, evaluating and developing activities. They should use the listening material as a stimulus for writing and speaking (Holden, 2003; Lavery, 2001). Another useful technique is to give homework. In teaching listening,

homework is a must. A listening task between two classes prevents students from forgetting. Encouraging public listening and having notes on them is a free pave to walk in teaching listening which leads to success. Providing tape recording with questions, dictation, or a worksheet to complete may bring the expected results.

Another suggested strategy is cooperative listening technique as it offers advantages over the traditional pedagogy on listening. It allows weak students to learn from more able ones and it reveals a range of strategies that the learners have been using (Oxford, 2002; Djwandono, 2006) . Finally, teachers have to remember that "some activities which are done after the students have listened to a text are not really post listening activities because they are themselves the main purpose of the lesson and the listening is no more than an introduction or stimulus for the planned work (Underwood 1989, p.78). Strategy use positively impacts self-concept, attitudes about learning and attributional beliefs about personal control. Brownell (2002) also thinks that with the advance of technology and new methods of communication where English is the language of communication, listeners of English confront a constantly changing and increasingly complex listening environment.

- **Related studies on the use of listening strategies in listening comprehension:**
The application of good listening strategies by teachers and training students to use them as well have been other areas of focus for studies. Some of these studies concentrated on all possible strategies that could be used including cognitive strategies , metacognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies and their various forms, tasks and applications. Other studies concentrated on one type of strategies. Coskun (2010) conducted a study on the effect of metacognitive listening strategy training on the listening performance of a group of students at a university in Turkey. Two groups, a control group (n: 20) and an experimental group (n: 20), were chosen as the participants of the study. The experimental group received five weeks of metacognitive strategy training embedded into a listening course book, while the other group did not. At the end of the training, a listening test taken from the teacher's manual of the same course book was administered to both groups. The analysis of the test scores showed that the experimental group did statistically better in the test. The implication of the study is that metacognitive strategy training should be incorporated into the regular listening teaching program to help students become more effective listeners.

Hamzah (2009) conducted a study to look into the instruction of socio-affective strategies to Malaysian college students in listening comprehension. First, subjects took an IELTS listening test, served as a pre-test, to be randomized in the control and experimental group. Second, during a period of six weeks, subjects did different IELTS listening exercises. In the experimental group, subjects received explicit instructions to employ socio-affective strategies for 20 minutes every week. They were asked to reflect their feelings and worries either by writing or talking about them. They were encouraged

to communicate with their peers and teacher. During the instruction phase, subjects in the experimental group were required to practice relaxation techniques. The control group, on the other hand, did not receive any explicit instruction from the teacher. Finally, subjects received a post-test. Results of the study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the control group in the post-test. This confirms the positive effects of the use of the socio- affective strategies.

Teng's study (2005) was to look into the instruction of EFL listening strategies to Taiwanese college students. Subjects were one freshman class of about 50 students at a university. The instruments included a listening strategy questionnaire, and a weekly learning diary. First, subjects completed the questionnaire of listening strategies. Second, in the freshman course "English Listening Practice," subjects received instruction and practice in the use of EFL listening strategies for 20 minutes weekly for 15 weeks. Each week two listening strategies were taught with examples and exercises designed by the researcher. In total, subjects were able to learn 30 EFL listening strategies. During the instruction phase, subjects were required to keep a weekly learning journal. Finally, subjects received a post-test on the strategy questionnaire. Results of the study provided empirical descriptions of strategy training for L2 listeners. Results also offered some implications for teaching EFL listening comprehension. The study proposed that systematic strategy instruction resulted in the improvement of strategy use for EFL listeners.

Bahrami, (2010) conducted another study which aimed at examining the influence of task-based activities (four specific types of tasks: matching, form-filling, labeling, and selecting) on the listening ability in students of English as a foreign language and to identify Iranian EFL learners' listening ability. As far as teaching listening is concerned, the findings of this study will help foreign language teachers to choose the appropriate way of teaching listening to EFL learners. Ninety senior Iranian EFL learners of Sadra English Institute in Dorood, Iran participated in this study. The sources of data for this quasi-experimental study included two task-based tests of listening comprehension and a test of language proficiency. Analysis of the findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between the three tasks of "matching, labeling, and form-filling" on the one hand and listening comprehension on the other.

Some other studies tried to spot the problematic areas in teaching listening to EFL students. Bouziri (2007) tried to identify these problems in the Tunisian context. She investigated the listening teachers' attitudes towards the teaching of listening at the tertiary level. She investigated the attitudes of (28) teachers teaching listening at four different universities. The researcher recommended the designing of a listening syllabus that would meet the needs of students which are mostly academic listening ones. Teachers should adopt a teaching approach that develops the listening strategies and skills. Another study that investigated the problems of teaching listening is that of Lisheng (2005). In his study, he made an investigation in Zhanjiang Ocean University,

China to discover what problems the freshmen have and try to find solutions for them. His study found that students' insufficiency of vocabulary affects their listening; students' lack of cultural background hinders them; students' anxiety makes their listening worse& students' being short of listening skills prevents their efficient listening. After the investigation, some measures were taken to help the students to improve their listening comprehension. Students were trained with listening strategies; they were encouraged to build up self-confidence and overcome anxiety; they were helped to have a command of linguistic knowledge, enlarge their vocabulary and get themselves familiar with the background information.

All these studies showed the importance of utilizing the right strategies in teaching the listening skill. They show how the application of good strategies makes the listening practice more efficient and better structured. They also show the importance of making students apply these strategies in their individual practice as well.

2.3 Using technology in listening practice and in providing listening materials:

Technologies of e-learning have become an indispensable component of the educational process. Debski (2003, p. 130) claims that "applications of information and communication technology in L2 (English in this respect) have undergone an evolution both responding to and assisting the advancement of current beliefs about language learning and classroom practice. Many researchers and educators such as Anderson (2004), Garrison (2000, Daniel(2000), Twig (2000) & Laurilard (1997) have also pointed out that technology has considerable benefits that help in improving the quality of the outcomes of education. Lately, there has been increasing interest in utilizing technological methods and materials in the process of listening training and practice especially with the great advancement in technological systems of communications and the abundance of good listening resources that one can get from the various sites on the internet.

As for listening materials, Anderson (2003) thinks that all types of listening skill are valuable and necessary if a learner is to acquire an all round ability to listen effectively in a range of situations to various types of input and for a variety of listening purposes. Peterson (2000) recommends the use of real or live language in teaching listening as it is necessary to comprehend what people say if we want to speak. There are plenty of books and resources that provide listening material and suitable practice that could be used . Dunkel's book (2006) *Intermediate Listening Comprehension* is a good example. The book provides a lot of listening materials in the form of tapes, videos and on line tests. The book could work as a course book. The units include talk about many topics in history technology, science, culture, sociology etc.. There is listening preparation, review of vocabulary and sentences. Post listening includes a variety of task-oriented and enjoyable listening and speaking activities that include comprehension check , listening expansion and discussion. Another series of listening comprehension books is

Tactics for Listening by Richards, J.C. published by Oxford University Press 2004. It is a three- level series: basic, developing and expanding. This series could serve as graded comprehensive listening material for adults and young adult learners. It is for lower; intermediate and advanced levels. Another good textbook is *Targeting Listening and Speaking* by Keith S. Folse and Darren Bologna. (2003) .The book provides short focused activities to help improve the listening and speaking skills for lower level ESL/EFL students.

   Another useful textbook for practicing listening is the book used at Al-Quds Open University titled *Listening Skills* (1994) prepared by Shahir Al-Hassan and Abdallah Shakir. The book is made for English major students. It integrates listening comprehension and study skills. It also provides extensive practice in note- taking, getting general and specific points. The listening tasks take the form of practical exercises such as labeling diagrams, filling in missing information and completing a given layout of a lecture. All materials and exercises are recorded on CDs. There is a wide variety of subject matter which helps in building broad English vocabulary varying from everyday English expressions to subject matter terms.

   In addition to books and recorded materials, there is a wide selection of online materials that provide a wide variety of listening material and practice which students can use on their own . Students should be directed to certain sites and each time it is preferred to assign a task to be done at home using one of these assigned sites. The following are examples for some of the websites that provide good listening practice and activities.

 http://www.englishlistening.com/
 http://www.go4english.com
  http://www. britishcouncil.org/learnenglish
 http://esl.about.com/od/englishlistening/English_Listening_Skills_and_ActivitiesEffective_Listening_Practice.htm
 http://www.esl-lab.com

   The use of videos can also provide an environment for good listening practice. They are more stimulating than CDs because they provide pictures not only sound. The following site http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/ is a very good source of videos and documentaries for all sorts of knowledge. Mass media can be another source that could provide useful and updated listening material. The you tube (www.youtube.com) is a very rich source where we can search for all sorts of themes in language learning and teaching. Some TV shows and films in English could be helpful as they give students the chance to listen to informal everyday conversations in interesting contexts. To sum up listening materials should be well- chosen and well-used and good use for technological resources in this respect is very essential.

Related studies on listening materials and using technology in listening practice:

Recently, there has been an increasing interest in studies on the effect of incorporating technological methods and materials in the process of listening training and practice especially with the revolution in technological systems of communications and the easy access to good listening resources that one can get from the various sites on the internet. Katchen (2003) looked at the incorporation of videos into a two-semester general English class for English majors at a university in Taiwan. This study applied some new techniques and tracks in a freshman listening and speaking course for English majors. Instead of a textbook and CDS, some DVD films were used, with most of the listening and speaking activities throughout the semester based on material in or questions raised by the films. Supplemental activities were posted on the class website in National Tsing Hua University's *e-learn* web platform and other supplemental material was accessible from the instructor's website. Evaluation of the study was done through a pre-test and post-test on listening skills and questionnaires designed to elicit students' opinions on the method of course delivery and the materials. Results indicated that students found this very interesting and beneficial . They showed some improvement also.

Phuong (2011) in his study also aimed at discovering the extent to which Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) activities influence the academic listening skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) of learners, as well as teachers' attitudes towards computer use and their computer skills in language teaching in Vietnamese tertiary institutions. A quasi-experimental design was adopted. The study sustained over three months. The treatment sample of this study consisted of four teachers of listening and their students (in total approximately 100). The teachers were invited to a training workshop on computer skills, and received online resources for their teaching supplements. The experimental classes were taught with these supplementary online resources while the control classes (the other four classes) were supplemented with extra listening books selected by their teacher. The results of the study showed that there was a difference between the listening scores of the students in the experimental classes compared with those of the control group students. The teachers showed changes in their attitudes towards computer use, and gained better skills in selecting effective sources from the internet for listening instruction. The study suggests that computer use in listening instruction should be given much more consideration so as to improve the listening skill of EFL learners, and to motivate both teachers and learners.

Another study that tried to venture the role of new technology in language learning is that conducted by Zhao (2003) at Michigan State University. He made a survey for many experimental studies that utilized new technology in language learning recently. His findings revealed that most of the studies printed in journals although rather limited reported significant positive gains. Jones (2003) from Arkansas University tried in her

study to highlight the students' views on the effectiveness of multimedia annotations (visual and verbal) in assisting them in their comprehension and acquisition of vocabulary from aural texts. English-speaking college students listened to a 3 minute historical account in French presented by a computer program. This study provides qualitative evidence for a generative theory of multimedia learning that suggests that the availability and the choice of visual and verbal annotations in listening comprehension activities enhances students' abilities to comprehend the material presented and to acquire vocabulary. These studies certainly support the very important role for utilizing technological methods and materials in the process of listening training and practice

3. METHODOLOGY:
3.1 Participants of the study:

The participants of the study involved a group of (74) students at QOU/Ramallah Branch and (18) students at Dura Branch in Hebron District in the second semester of the academic year 2011/ 2012.

Table (1) shows the descriptive data for the sample of the study.

Gender	Student total	Percentage
male	16	14.74%
female	76	85.26%
Total	92	100%

This shows that the majority of students are females.

Table (2) below shows the distribution of the sample according to place of residence. It shows that the majority of students are from villages.

Place of residence	Student total	Percentage
City	28	30.43%
Village	58	63%
Camp	6	6.57%

total	92	100%

3.2 Instruments of the study:

The study tried to get the required data through the following instruments:

1. **Questionnaire:** This was the main instrument of the study. It tried to investigate the students' attitudes regarding the new course design .It was divided into three main domains: the students' attitudes towards the listening practice they received, their attitudes towards the listening strategies employed in the training and thirdly and most importantly their attitudes towards the new design of the course which is the blended environment that is a mixture of face to face classes and virtual classes and the online environment of placing the course on the Moodle platform and the online activities and resources provided as was mentioned earlier in the course description.

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire:

The validity of the questionnaire was realized by being revised and evaluated by a number of specialists in the field of English teaching as well as designing e-learning courses who gave their comments and modifications were made accordingly. As for the reliability of the instrument, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient element for the questionnaire was calculated and it was 90%. This proves that the instrument has high validity.

2. Students' journals: The students were asked to write weekly in their journals reflecting on their attitudes regarding the class and the online training. The journal writing aimed at tracing the changes in the students' attitudes towards the practice and training in listening which they received in class and online. The students submitted their journals either in the face to face classes or by writing them online.

3. Class observations: The teacher also traced the students' attitudes through their interaction in class. He tried to have close observations for the students' improvement and change.

3.3 The variables of the study:

The study contained the following variables:

1. The independent variables:

- Gender variable which is divided into two categories: males & females.
- Place of residence variable which is divided into three categories:

a. City   b. Village   c. Camp

- Internet access: at home, work, university lab and internet café .

2. **The dependent variables:**

- The total averages of students' responses to the questions of the questionnaire according to the various domains.

4. **Results of the study:**

4.1 **Results related to the first question of the study which is :**" What is the nature of the availability of internet access for the students of the listening course?" showed that the majority of students used the internet at home (62%). The percentage of students using the net at the university lab was (37%).The percentage of students using the net at internet cafes was (21%).The least percentage was for the students using the internet at work (13%).

4.2 **Results related to the other questions of the study:**

The major question of the study was **"What are the students' attitudes towards using the best practices in English listening in the blended e- learning environment during their listening course in the second semester of the academic year 2011/2012 at Ramallah and Dura branches at QOU?"** There were ten other sub questions related to it as stated earlier in the study. To answer these questions , the students gave their responses to the questions of the questionnaire . These responses were collected and analyzed using the suitable statistical measures.

To answer the major question and the sub questions, the researcher used the average for every statement, domain and the total responses as in tables (3, 4, &5) below.

Table (3) : The average for the effect of listening practice on improving the listening skill of the students in the listening course at QOU during the semester 2011/2012 Ramallah and Dura branches in the blended e learning environment: the first domain

Statement number	statement	means	Standard deviation	Effect degree
First Domain: The Importance of Practice in Listening Comprehension				
1	Listening to English language texts improves my listening ability.	4.45	0.52	very high
2	Listening to English	4.31	0.67	very high

	language texts makes language learning more enjoyable.			
3	Listening practice has to be continuous and intensive.	4.16	0.67	very high
4	Listening practice inside class is essential for improving my listening skill.	3.99	0.80	Very high
5	Listening practice inside class is not sufficient.	3.03	1.25	medium
6	The more I practice , the more efficient my listening skill becomes.	4.02	1.03	very high
7	Listening practice helps me become more familiar with the language.	4.34	0.82	very high
8	Listening to various types of materials improves my pronunciation.	4.29	0.92	very high
9	Listening practice makes me less afraid of listening exams.	4.08	1.23	very high
10	Listening practice helps in improving my speaking skill.	4.33	0.82	very high
Average of the first domain		4.10	0.46	very high

   It is clear from the above table that the degree for the effect of listening practice on improving the listening skill of the students in the listening course at QOU during the semester 2011/2012 Ramallah and Dura branches in the blended e learning environment in the first domain was "very high" on the following statements: (1,2,3,4,6,7,8,9,10) in

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this domain .The total average was very high.(4.16). The degree was medium for statement (5) which indicates that class practice alone is not sufficient while the degree was high for statement (4) which indicated that listening practice inside class is essential for improving the listening skill. Listening practice has to be continuous and intensive got a very high degree and it helps in decreasing the fear from exams: statement (9).

Table (4) : The average for the effect of listening practice on improving the listening skill of the students in the listening course at QOU during the semester 2011/2012 Ramallah and Dura branches in the blended e learning environment: the second domain.

Second Domain: Listening Strategies				
Number	statement	means	S. D.	Effect degree
11	Knowing the correct methods and techniques in listening practice is very important.	4.88	5.00	very high
12	Pre- listening questions are essential in listening practice.	4.07	1.00	very high
13	Reading questions on the text before listening is helpful.	3.07	0.84	high
14	Note- taking while listening distracts my attention.	3.33	1.05	medium
15	You should read the listening material before listening to it.	3.01	1.07	low
16	Listening practice should involve various tasks after each listening.	4.04	1.02	very high
17	Summarizing the listening materials makes my practice more effective.	4.00	1.06	very high
18	Listening to the listening material should be done only once.	2.44	1.41	very low
19	The class practice helped me in doing practice listening more efficiently at home.	3.77	1.01	high

20	Reading the listening material after doing the practice is helpful especially for good pronunciation.	3.93	0.87	high
Average of the second domain		3.72	0.66	high

Table (4) shows that the degree was very high for statements (11,12,13,16,17). The highest degree was for statement 11 "Knowing the correct methods and techniques in listening practice is very important". The degree was high for statements (14,19,20), while statement (18) which says " Listening to the listening material should be done only once" got the lowest. The total average for this domain was high.

Table (5) The average for the effect of listening practice on improving the listening skill of the students in the listening course at QOU during the semester 2011/2012 Ramallah and Dura branches in the blended e learning environment: the third domain.

Third Domain: Listening materials and online listening resources and activities in the blended e learning environment				
Number	statement	means	Standard Deviation	Effect degree
21	The listening material in the textbook and CD provided well – prepared .materials for practice .	4.02	0.72	very high
22	The listening material of the course was varied and contained various forms of listening types and various tasks .	4.04	0.81	very high
23	Practice in class using the listening material in the textbook and other supplementary materials was sufficient and very beneficial.	3.78	0.83	high
24	For home practice, I used only the textbook and CD .	3.34	1.20	medium
25	The online resources provided the students with a wider choice of	3.78	1.10	high

	listening materials.			
26	The online resources offered great flexibility and effectiveness in listening practice.	3.97	0.83	high
27	Using the online resources made me more independent in my practice.	3.97	0.90	high
28	I preferred to do all my practice face-to-face in the class.	3.47	1.12	medium
29	The face-to-face and the online learning worked well together as an integrated blended e learning environment.	3.55	1.18	high
30	I felt uneasy about online learning at the beginning of the course.	3.77	1.06	high
31	The guiding video helped me understand how to use the online course.	3.74	1.03	high
32	The online resources gave me more opportunity for more practice.	3.75	1.14	high
33	I was able to access the online materials without difficulty.	3.60	1.18	high
34	I did not have sufficient time to access all the online materials.	3.60	0.97	high
35	The online materials motivated me to practice listening more and more.	3.69	1.03	high
36	The online activities were interesting and easy to follow.	3.75	1.05	high
37	The videos, images and instructions used in the e-activities	3.54	1.00	high

	were well-designed and suitable for the objectives of the activity.			
38	The online activities were confusing and difficult to understand.	3.44	1.15	medium
39	The forums offered an environment for communication between students.	3.66	0.89	high
40	The videos and images used in the online resources were attractive and stimulating.	3.77	0.96	high
41	The virtual classes offered the chance for more listening practice.	3.68	1.02	high
42	The recordings of the virtual classes were useful to me as a student.	3.58	1.11	high
43	The online environment and resources saved my time and effort.	3.77	0.98	high
44	I felt confident about online learning by the end of the listening course.	3.96	0.93	high
45	I felt that the online learning improved my computer and internet skills.	3.97	1.02	high
46	I would like to study more English courses in the same way.	3.97	1.07	high
Average of the third domain		3.73	0.48	high
Total average		3.85	0.43	high

Table(5) shows that the following statements (23,25,26,27,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,39,40,41,42,43,44,45, 46) got high degrees. This shows that the students felt that the online course was useful to them and they reacted positively towards the blended course. The lowest statement percentage was for statement (28) "I preferred to do all my practice face-to-face in the class." Statement (38) also got a low degree "The online activities were confusing and difficult to understand." This shows that the students did not find problems in dealing with the online activities. The total average was high for this domain.. The total average for all the items in the questionnaire was also high.

4.3 Results related to variables regarding the effect of the place of residence and to the medium of internet access on the students' attitudes:

To get the results for these issues, the researcher stated some questions.
A. Are there statistical differences at ($\alpha <= 0.05$) for the effect of using the best practices in English Listening in the blended e- learning environment during listening course at Ramallah and Dura branches at QOU according to the average total of the domains and the total responses due to the place of residence variable?
   To answer this question, the researcher used the average for the total degree of the three domains and the total of all statements due to the place of residence variable. Table (6) below illustrates this relationship.
   Table (6) The total average of the three domains and all statements according to the place of residence variable.

Total average	city	village	camp
Domain1	4.09	4.10	4.02
Domain 2	3.69	4.02	3.86
Domain 3	3.67	3.76	3.59
Total average	3.77	3.89	3.74

table (6) shows that there are no statistically significant differences at the level ($\alpha <= 0.05$) for the effect of using the best practices in English Listening in the blended e-learning environment due to the place of residence variable.
 In order to calculate the significance degree of differences in the means, the one way (ANOVA) test was used for the place of residence variable. Table (7) below shows the results.

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Table (7) One Way ANOVA for the mean differences in correlation with the place of residence variable.

	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	* Significant
Average Total Domain 1	Between Groups	.04	2	.02	.07	.93
	Within Groups	18.30	83	.22		
	Total	18.34	85			
Average Total Domain 2	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	* Significant
	Between Groups	1.87	2	.93	2.05	.14
	Within Groups	37.86	83	.46		
	Total	39.73	85			
Average Total Domain 3	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	* Significant
	Between Groups	.22	2	.11	.45	.64
	Within Groups	20.27	83	.24		
	Total	20.49	85			

Average Total	Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Degrees of Freedom	Mean Square	F	* Significant
	Between Groups	.32	2	.16	.80	.45
	Within Groups	16.65	83	.20		
	Total	16.97	85			

Table (**7**) shows that there are no statistically significant differences at the level ($\alpha <= 0.05$) for the effect of using the best practices in English Listening in the blended e-learning environment according to the average total of the domains and the total responses due to the place of residence variable.

B. Are there statistical differences at ($\alpha <= 0.05$) for the effect of using the best practices in English Listening in the blended e- learning environment during listening course at Ramallah and Dura branches at QOU according to the average total of the domains and the total responses due to the place of internet access variable?

To answer this question, the researcher used (independent t-tests) to know the significance of the differences on the average total of the domains and the total responses of the tool which measure the effect of using the best practices in English Listening in the blended e- learning environment and the total responses due to the usage of computer with internet access at home, university lab, work, or internet cafe. The results showed that there are no statistical differences at ($\alpha <= 0.05$) due to the usage of computer with internet access at home, university lab., work or internet café.

4.4 Results of students' journals and class observations:

The students' comments in the journal and on the webpage of the course gave an idea about the gradual change in the students' attitudes and the improvement they felt as a result of the practice in the class and the home and online practice . The students also expressed that they benefited a lot from all this practice. The students also indicated which materials they used most in their home practice and how much they benefited from the online resources Furthermore, the students' comments showed how they gradually realized the importance of listening practice. They also said that the practice in using the correct listening strategies helped them benefit more from their home practice.

Class observation also revealed similar results. The teacher noticed how the students improved as a result of the practice and how their familiarity with the listening strategies gradually improved their listening skill. This helped to increase their self-confidence and decrease their fears and anxiety from listening exams.

. 5. Discussion:

As was pointed earlier, listening is a vital skill that is needed to make students able to understand and thus interact. Listening practice is underemphasized in the EFL classroom whether at schools or at universities. Students need to be trained to listen to authentic materials. (Anderson and Lynch 2003) They need to be trained through effective listening strategies. This study examined the effect of training EFL students to listen to a variety of English materials in an organized and well- structured way using the suitable listening strategies to make the practice productive and beneficial. More importantly, the study aimed at evaluating how the students reacted to the new technological means provided for the listening course through the blended e learning environment. The sample of the study i.e. the (92) students in the listening course from two locations at Al-Quds Open University received a considerable amount of listening practice through the whole semester by being exposed to a variety of authentic materials inside and outside class most of which were online resources. According to the responses of the students to the domains of the questionnaire used as the primary instrument of the study , the students realized the importance of persistent practice in class and at home. Their answers related to this aspect got very high results e.g. items: 1,3, 4 & 6 which express the importance of intensive continuous practice. This agrees with the previous studies done in this respect and referred to in this study such as those for Petric, (2000); Wang,(2007); Kavaliauskiene,(2005); Guo,(2005); and Lisheng,(2005). Students in these studies were encouraged to practice and they responded positively to the training and showed improvement. Item 9 which states that the practice helped students become less afraid of listening exams got very high results. This shows the socio- affective influence of practice .This agrees with the studies of: Harmer, (2003); Buck, (2001); Ridgway, (2000) and Guo (1997) and the studies of Guo,(2005) ; Petric (2000); Wang,(2005) and others which show that practice improves the achievement of students and thus increases their self - confidence and makes them less worried and stressed during exams.

The responses of the students got very high rates on items 7,8 &10 which stress the good effect of listening practice on other language skills especially communication skills .This agrees with the opinions of many ELT experts e.g. Deschel ,(2010) who indicates that good listening skills result in better communication skills overall, for listeners and for speakers.

As for the second domain of the questionnaire which focused on the students' attitudes towards using good listening strategies in the listening practice, the students' responses showed that they realized the importance of the training on using these strategies. Items 11,12,13,14,16 &17 which reflect good listening strategies scored very high e.g.(Listening practice has to be continuous and intensive.) and (Pre- listening questions are essential in listening practice.) On the other hand, items: 14.15 & 18 got medium, low and very low scores because they reflect bad listening practices: (Note- taking while listening distracts my attention.), (You should read the listening material before listening to it.) and (Listening to the listening material should be done only once.) . This shows that the students came to realize the good strategies and use them and tried to avoid the bad practices. This agrees with most experts' opinions e.g. Holden& Anderson, (2003), and the studies of Coskun (2010); Chen ((2010); Hamzah,(2009); and Teng, (2005) whose practice in using the good listening strategies benefited the learners a great deal and made them realize the good methods of listening practice.

The third domain and the most detailed one in the questionnaire focused on using listening materials and online resources and activities in the blended e learning environment. In this domain, the responses to the following statements got high rates: (23,25,26,27,29,30,31,32,33,34,35,36,37,39,40,41,42,43,44,45,46) . All these statements expressed the students' positive attitudes about the new design of the course i.e. the blended e learning nature of the course which combined class practice and on line practice provided with plenty of online resources and the webpage of the course on the Moodle platform. Some examples for the responses which got high scores are the following:
  - The listening material of the course was varied and contained various forms of listening types and various tasks .
  - The online resources offered great flexibility and effectiveness in listening practice.
  - The online activities were interesting and easy to follow.
  - I was able to access the online materials without difficulty.
  - The videos and images used in the online resources were attractive and stimulating.
  - The online environment and resources saved my time and effort.
  The students also expressed their encouragement for the virtual classes that were given on line whether by attending them synchronously or by listening to the recordings later on as is shown from their responses to items: 41 & 42: (The virtual classes offered the chance for more listening practice).&
  (The recordings of the virtual classes were useful to me (students).
  Some expressed that they faced some problems in handling the new nature of the course at the beginning of the course as was expressed in their answers to item no.30 which got high scores.(I felt uneasy about online learning at the beginning of the course) Some found some problems in handling the e activities as was expressed in item

38 (The online activities were confusing and difficult to understand.) which got medium scores.

On the whole, the students' responses to the third domain showed that they acted positively towards the course in its new design as was expressed in items: 44 , 45 &:
  - I felt confident about online learning by the end of the listening course.
  - I felt that the online learning improved my computer and internet skills.
  - I would like to study more English courses in the same way.

These results answered the major question of the study and the sub questions also which aimed at investigating the students' attitudes towards this experiment. The results indicated   positive attitudes towards the course and showed that the students felt they benefited from the experience. These results agree with many of the studies conducted about this issue e.g. : Katchen' s (2003) which showed the advantage of using videos in listening practice and Phuong's (2011) which showed the good effects of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) activities on the academic listening skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) of learners. The results of the study also go in line with Zhao's (2003) & Jones'(2003) experiments which showed that utilizing new technology in language learning resulted in positive gains as it made language learning more effective and motivating. Thus it could be concluded that the use of technological means in language learning/ teaching should be encouraged further and further.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations:

This study aimed at examining the students' attitudes towards the role of using intensive practice in improving their EFL capacity in listening proficiency by using all means of in class and home practice in a blended e learning environment. The students in the sample of the study expressed their positive attitudes towards this experiment. This illustrates that the students feel that they can develop their listening fluency and become more accurate comprehenders of English if they receive good listening practice by the use of various types of extended discourse including a wide variety of available materials most of which could be online materials. Good learning and teaching strategies are also essential to guarantee the success of this practice. Suitable new technology should be effectively utilized to achieve this goal. Thus, e learning can provide very helpful means of education in language learning as it opens new vistas for students and teachers to benefit from the plethora of possibilities that it provides.

In this respect , it is recommended that teachers should not ignore practicing the listening skill. It is also quite important to give the students sufficient instruction in the use of helpful listening strategies. Teachers should also help students develop their socio- affective strategies as this will make them more relaxed. The more practice and training the students receive, the more competent listeners they will become. When

teachers encourage the students to keep on practicing, they will make them develop good habits of listening. By practicing more, students will strengthen their language feeling, improve the integrating competence in using English and raise communicative efficiency. It is also necessary that the students' exposure to listening materials be both intensive and extensive, well- prepared utilizing all sorts of effective listening strategies as Harmer& Holden (2003) and others recommend.

Consequently, developing the listening abilities of the learners results in making them more confident of their language competency as Hamid's (2001) and Bouziri's study (2008) showed and as Moses (2011) stresses that the key to fluency in English is through listening competence Hence, it can be said that the way to developing listening and consequently other related language skills is through practice . Furthermore, it is highly recommended that teachers should receive training on how to apply listening practice , how to train learners the necessary listening skills and strategies to reduce the anxiety of students towards this skill. Furthermore, teachers should encourage students to participate in all kinds of extracurricular activities in English, watch TV programs and interesting videos in English. Finally and most importantly, teachers should be trained on how to select suitable appropriate listening materials taking good advantage of the overabundance of online materials and systems that could be efficiently used in the listening practice in particular and in language teaching and learning in general

Finally, more similar studies and on wider scales should be conducted to measure the effect of learning other English language skills using effective practices and intensive training especially. A lot of concentration should be placed on the effect of applying e-learning systems in English language learning and teaching for all levels.

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