Listening with Intent: Using Itunes U Language Course to Develop Active Listening Skills for Gifted and Talented Students

Abdel Rahman Ibrahim suleiman[1], Mohd Firdaus Bin Amran [2], Zulkarnin Bin Zakaria[3], Nor Adlyizan Bin Theis [4]

[1]Kolej Permata insan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA
[2]Kolej Permata insan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA
[3]Kolej Permata insan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA
[4]Kolej Permata Insan, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia Bandar Baru Nilai, 71800 Nilai, Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA

Abstract

Teaching foreign language takes another step with the emergence of mobile applications and websites taking the classroom experience beyond the four walls of a traditional one. Interactive and well-developed applications such as Duolingo, Hello Talk, WiP learning, Mindsnacks and Babbel, offer new language learning experience to current generation of students. The mobile apps create interesting environment and good space to practice and use the language. This study investigated the efficacy of iTunes U on improving listening skill of foreign languages taught to the gifted and talented students of Permata Insan College, Islamic Science University of Malaysia. There were 47 Foundation Three (15 years old) students of the college who participated in the iTunes U courses for Arabic and English subject. The students later were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to gauge their attitude and perception towards the courses that covered the listening skill lessons. The finding showed that the iTunes U listening lessons managed to help the students developed their skill and awareness on the listening aspects of both languages. The use of uploaded short videos and the discussion about them managed to enhance their listening ability and quality since they were more alert and conscious in their conversation and listening effort. The positive perception towards such listening lessons in iTunes U courses augurs well for the use of online language learning platform for the gifted and talented students.

Keywords: Gifted Students; Listening Skills in Foreign Language; iTunes U Language Course.

1. Introduction

The internet and ICT play a central role in our life, work and education today. Almost every aspect of our has the influence and control of the internet of things. Human and technology cannot be separated now that the way we live is wired to the available ICT infrastructure connecting our life. The reliance on mobile phones, gadgets and equipment cannot be denied as the world now live in the 'always on' 24-7 fast-moving life routine. The internet has allowed the social networks to be created and thus producing a virtual world that connects people globally. Individuals define themselves in such networks so that they communicate with other people sharing same or different cultural backgrounds/dimensions through powerful communication (Tiryakioglu, Erzurum, 2011).

Opportunities provided by the Internet today—long range informal communication has strong impacts as it changes the landscape of the global community across the geographical boundaries such as politics, finance and education. The emergence of new innovations and popularity of information technology and social media are affecting classroom practice as well as ICT becomes the education backbone, is adopted as teaching tools and materials. Social networking is built on the idea of how people should know and interact with each other (Zaidieh, 2012).

It gives people the power to share, making the world more open and connected such as virtual learning, distance learning, flipped learning and blended learning which is used by many college and education institutions. Currently,

the apps and websites provide useful tools that education could benefit. With the ability to control them, educators have the suites of applications that would enhance knowledge and science (Zaidieh, 2012).

Apple had invented iTunes U as another alternative platform for education and online learning. Educators have the chance to utilise another type of social network or closed education network (CEN) which is available to those using the Apple products and services. It is interesting to study the current trend in the use of this e-learning platform as this paper would investigate and analyse the impact of iTunes U on listening skill in learning foreign language in Permata Insan College.

2. Literature review

2.1 Gifted education

There are many different definitions of giftedness and talent, giftedness, intelligence, and talent are fluid concepts and may look different in different contexts and cultures. Even within schools, you will find a range of beliefs about the word "gifted" which has become a term with multiple meanings and interpretations.

Among the renowned theories in intelligence was the one discussed by Renzulli (1997). He stressed on the fact that gifted behaviour occurs when there is an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits: above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation), and high levels of creativity. Another expert in gifted education, Gagné (2003) thinks that all talents are developed from natural abilities through learning influenced by inner and outer catalysts. The main component of Gagné's model refers to the meaning that applies to the two terms being used to differentiate the component being highlighted. The distinction could be applied in many forms. Depending on context, the term 'giftedness' could refer to high cognitive abilities, and the term 'talent' could be for all other forms of excellence (e.g., arts, sports, technology).

The Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT) was created to take advantage of that distinction between the two; it became the basis for new differentiated definitions of these two terms. GIFTEDNESS designates the possession and use of outstanding natural abilities, called aptitudes, in at least one ability domain, to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers. TALENT designates the outstanding mastery of systematically developed abilities, called competencies (knowledge and skills), in at least one field of human activity to a degree that places an individual at least among the top 10% of age peers who are or have been active in that field (Gagné, 2008).

Within the DMGT, natural abilities or aptitudes act as the "raw material" or the constituent elements of talents. It argues that the presence of talents necessarily implies the presence of well above average natural abilities; in most situations, one cannot become talented without first being gifted, or close to the minimum giftedness threshold. The reverse is not true: high natural abilities may remain just gifts, and not be translate into talents, as shown by the phenomenon of academic underachievement among intellectually gifted children (Gagné 2009).

The implication of the model is that while very young children may have gifted potential that may be later expressed as specialised talents. It is not useful to identify specific domains where a young gifted child could end up developing talent. For example, a four-year-old child may show a capacity to create elaborate paintings that show a strong sense of colour and form. These may be based on abilities such as perceptual sensitivity, creativity and imagination, capacities to observe and focus, and to learn. These abilities could form the basis of talent in other domains such as music, science, writing, architecture, and technical skills.

2.2 Listening skill

In real life face-to-face communication, listening is involving complex interpretative processes. It deals with meanings as the outcome of conversation, while in the foreign language learning environment, listening would be a pillar of target language acquisition, and a skill that is a fundamental part of foreign language communicative competence (Meskill, 1996).

Recent practice in listening instruction make us of multimedia materials as resource input. However, some types of students consider listening as a difficult skill and teachers argue it is tough to teach the ability to kids. Pronunciation, for instance, differ greatly from the way they are spelled (Bloomfield et al, 2010). Students have to recognize the words and understand the meaning at the same time. The difficulty in learning pronunciation hinders the overall understanding of the conversation. In short, spoken discourse would play a great part in motivating language learning process (Osada 2004; Field, 2008),

2.3 Itunes U In Education

Apple's iTunes U organizes courses and learning contents online and they can be accessed through iPhones and iPads. There are thousands of available courses developed from around the world. From university professors to individuals, the courses were created to allow learning from anywhere and anytime. The free educational materials

from schools, libraries, historical centers and learning associations are popular contents made available in the system. It has notes, assignments, course books, tests and many others. (Andrew Laughin 2013).

Currently, iTunes U offers educational contents from around 800 universities and colleges (Jacky Yap, 2013). There are lectures available as podcasts, films, slideshows, PDFs, audiobooks and exhibit tours. Leading universities including Duke, Yale, Cambridge, MIT and Oxford managed to enroll more than 100,000 students in single iTunes U courses. For example, Ohio State University's Matthew Stoltzfus was joined by more than 100,000 students in his General Chemistry course in its first year (Nishtha Kamal, 2013). More than 1,200 universities and colleges, K-12 schools and districts host over 2,500 public and thousands of private courses.

In 2014, Apple updated iTunes U, bringing educators and student's great new tools to build and experience educational content on iPad. Teachers using the free iTunes U app can create, edit and manage entire courses directly on iPad for the first time. Course creators had the ability to directly add content and learning materials from iWork, iBooks Author or any of the over 75,000 educational apps available for iPad" (Keller, 2014).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Respondents

This study involved Permata Insan College (KPI) in Islamic Science University of Malaysia, conducted during the first semester of 2017. This qualitative study explored students' perceptions on the effectiveness of iTunes U on improving their listening skill. Students in Foundation 3 shared their feedback on their foreign language learning experience using the online course. The students have been using iPad and iTunes in many courses. It involved assignments and tasks prepared in English and Arabic language modules. The interactive modules were designed to focus on their listening skill. After completing the tasks prepared for listening, the students responded to 10-item questionnaire asking various aspects of listening skill tasks and exercises.

3.2 Data analysis

This research was designed as a mixed method where survey and interview were conducted to explore respondents' attitudes and perceptions on iTunes U and its effectiveness for listening skill improvement. The questionnaire was prepared by the researcher looking at three aspects. It contained three parts—demographic information of the students (age, gender); eight open-ended items with four level Likert scale; and the final part comprising three open-ended questions to allow participants to write their perception on iTunes U effectiveness on listening skill.

3.2.1 Building of Questionnaire Items

The survey was developed based on the research questions for this study. The research questions are:

1.   How does iTunes U improve students' English and Arabic listening skill?

2.   What are the challenges in using iTunes U?

3.   What are the effectiveness of iTunes U on learning English and Arabic language?

The items in the survey have been organized to gauge the overall perception in these areas:

3.2.2 Section A: open-ended items

A.   Advantages:

1.   Showing videos in iTunes U improve my understanding for the topic.

2.   Pronunciation can be learned from listening to posted audios in iTunes U.

B.   On Challenges:

1.   IPad given has enough storage capacity.

2.   The internet coverage is suitable for downloading videos.

3.   I am proficient in dealing and learning through iTunes U.

C.   On Effectiveness:

1.   I feel that I manage to improve my listening skill after using the iTunes U modules.

2.   I feel that my listening skill has improved in my conversation.

3.   Overall, I feel that iTunes U is effective in developing listening skill.

3.2.3 Section B

These questions were posted as open-ended question and respondents share their own ideas in the space given:

1. In your opinion how does iTunes U help in the overall improvement of your language skills?
2. What are the main challenges in using iTunes U?

4.0 Findings and Discussion

There are four sections in the findings. First the demographic data, then followed by the respondents' experience learning through iTunes U. Further responses were recorded using the eight close-ended items mentioned before. It covered the advantages, challenges and effectiveness of iTunes U.

4.1 Demographic information

There were 20 students – 12 males (60%) and 8 females (40%) as respondents for the questionnaire and they are in 15 years old. The gender composition was representative of the general population of foundation 3 students in the college. The respondents are from different levels of proficiency in English and Arabic language. They were made of excellent, average and low achievers and they were familiar with iPad.

4.2 Respondents learning through iTunes U

Based on the response received, 15 out of 20 (75%) respondents signed on to iTunes U habitually with the regular visit of '3-5 times a day' and spending 'more than 2 hours a day' while just 3 out of 20 (15%) chose 'one or twice every week' and 'not as much as a hour day by day' which demonstrated that they sign on to iTunes U rarely. This data is useful to give researchers an idea that all respondents are familiar with iTunes U, which means that they are interested with the features in iTunes U, and spending a lot of time either reading, listening and watching video. When the experience of the respondents was considered, the data collected based on their perspectives are valid because they were responding based on the experience of using the language courses.

4.3 iTunes U and Gifted Students

Items 1-2 in Section (A) of the questionnaire were posed to discover the respondents' perceptions of iTunes U in improving their listening skill. The findings are grouped into four categories (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) to represent the cumulative data percentage as shown in the table 1 below:

No	Item	S. agree	Agree	Disagree	S. Disagree
1.	Showing videos in iTunes U improve my understanding for the topic.	(9) 45.0 %	(6) 30.0 %	(3) 15.0 %	(2) 10.0 %
2.	Pronunciation improves from listening to posted audios in iTunes U	(14) 70.0 %	(6) 30.0 %	--------	---------

Table 1 Response on listening on iTunes U

From the table above, 75% respondents agree that iTunes U improve their understanding for the given topic which answered the first research question of how iTunes U improve their English and Arabic listening skill. They learned correct pronunciation of the words and it encouraged them to focus more on listening which is the key to understanding because correct listening leads to good reading and understanding. More than 70% respondents strongly agreed that listening for iTunes U helps them learn correct pronunciation in both languages and another 30% agreed with the statement. Meanwhile, 45% respondents strongly agreed that the audio and video helped them and additional 30% agreed that videos posted in iTunes U enhanced their understanding in the topics given. The language courses reflected the vital idea on self-learning hypothesis among the gifted students.

And from the qualitative data from the first question, the students agreed iTunes U courses improve their listening skill because they could apply self-learning and they can control the frequency of their learning time until they are satisfied with it. One respondent (i7.Ny) shared that "iTunes U help me do my mind plan for the reading task according to the reading topic," and another respondent (i17.Nf) claimed that now she could improve her understanding of what people say in Arabic because she used iTunes U lessons that, "after I listened many times to the audios and videos, I could improve my understanding with what people say in Arabic and it boosts my confidence further." In conclusion, the students believed the videos and audios could help them in their listening ability.

4.4 Challenges in using the iTunes U Course

Items 3, 4 and 5 in Section A were issues and challenges respondents might face when they engaged in iTunes U to learn the languages. The table below summarised the response.

No	Item	S. Agree	Agree	Disagree	s. Disagree
Table 2 Challenges in using the iTunes U Course					
1	iPad has enough storage capacity.	(0) 0%	(2)10%	(15)75%	(3) 15%
2	The internet speed is suitable for downloading videos.	(10)50%	(4)20%	(6)30%	(0)0%
3	I am proficient in dealing and learning through iTunes U.	(2) 10%	(6)30%	(5)25%	(7)35%

Contrary to what the researcher predicted, 89.4% of the respondents stated that the potential issues were not relevant in their dealing and accessing of the iTunes U courses. Their responses were reflected below:

1. The storage capacity: Majority of students thought the storage of their iPad was a big issue as it could affect the files and contents that they could download from the internet. One student (i12Mz) said that, "my iPad is not enough when I did my assignment using iMovie", and another (i20Am) responded that "we can't keep all materials because the device will be very slow".

2. The internet coverage: Speed and connection stability were the main complaint as 50% of respondents strongly agreed that the internet coverage was enough, and the area was all covered in the college, but 30% of them disagreed and they believed that WIFI coverage was not suitable for large number of students, while 20% of respondents agreed that WIFI coverage was not sufficiently provided. One student (i9Ak) said that "unstable internet access disappoints me especially in language class because we use online dictionary and during preparation, some time we have question we need to ask the lecturer." Another student (i12Mz) revealed that, "some time we need to upload the videos or audios and when the internet access is slow, it will take some time, or the process failed."

3. Proficient in using iTunes U: This question showed that some students lack training to deal with iTunes U courses (35% respondents). Another 40% were either agree or strongly agree with this statement and one student (i19Hb) complained that "I'm not so good in dealing with iTunes U, I need training to improve my skill." Some students such as (i19Hb) and (i4Ss) disclosed that they could not deal efficiently with iTunes U but they were quite slow in managing the tasks and assignments. Many would recommend that more training would make them better in the iTunes U courses.

- Respondent (i9Ak) mentioned that there was no clear system for using the iPad.

4.5 iTunes U Effectiveness

The impact had been positive all around and the responses showed this. The following table depicted the positive outcome and it was basically a satisfying improvement in students listening skill that had also positively impacted their conversation skill in daily life. The percentages shown were students' confirmation on their opinion of the courses and contents offered.

No	Items	S. Agree	Agree	Disagree	S. Disagree
Table 3 iTunes U Effectiveness					
1	I feel my listening skill improve after using the iTunes U courses	16(80%)	3(15%)	1(5%)	0(0%)
2	I feel that the listening skill has helped my conversation skill	15(75%)	3(15%)	2(10%)	0(0%)
3	I feel that iTunes U is effective in developing my listening skill	15(75%)	5((25%)	0(0%)	0(0%)

Majority of respondents either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' on effectives of iTunes U on learning English and Arabic language in specially listening skill. Item 6 as the table shown that (80%) from the respondents are strongly agree that iTunes U affect their listening skill but still some of respondents (5%) disagreed. Their conversation skill

took a positive change with improved listening skill. In general, majority of them agreed that iTunes U courses were effective in developing their listening skill.

5.0 Conclusion

The perceptions of 20 gifted students of Permata Insan College in this research revealed that iTunes U language courses provided for them did improve their listening skill. Their responses showed that most respondents agreed that they learned new vocabulary pronunciation, and the reading style reduced their misunderstanding before. In addition, the ideas or opinions by peers help them getting better at listening and guide them to perform better reading and understanding. The main challenge for them was the small storage of the iPad. It is also discovered that the internet speed was not good enough for video downloading.

Though it is confirmed that though students like to learn independently, a facilitator or lecturer is still important to guide the learning process, especially mobile learning space or online learning where students are left with their own devices. It is recommended that further research focus more on the challenges of integrating iTunes U in the classroom.

6.0 Acknowledgements

References

[1]   iTunes U Content Tops One Billion Downloads, https://www.apple.com/pr/library/2013/02/28iTunes-U-Content-Tops-One-Billion-Downloads.html

[2]   Zaidieh, Ashraf (2012). The Use of Social Networking in Education: Challenges and Opportunities: World of Computer Science and Information Technology Journal. ISSN: 2221-0741- Vol. 2. 1, 18-21- 2012.

[3]   Tiryakioglu ,Filiz & Erzurum, Funda (2011). Use of Social Networks as an Education Tool.: Contemporary Educational Technology, 2(2), 135-150

[4]   Srivastava, Preeti (2012). Social Networking & Its Impact on Education-System in Contemporary Era: International Journal of Information Technology Infrastructure, Volume 1, No. 2- 2320 2629- 2012.

[5]   Bicen , Huseyin (2013). The Use of Social Networking Sites in Education: A Case Study of Facebook: Journal of Universal Computer Science, vol- 19-5 13.

[6]   Walker, Natasha (2014) . Listening: the most difficult skill to teach.: 23, 2014- 1989-0796, pp. 167-175.

[7]   http://www.city.ac.uk/itunesu/getting-started

[8]   https://www.apple.com/pr/library/2013/02/28iTunes-U-Content-Tops-One-Billion-Downloads.html.

[9]   http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/iTunes-U

[10]   http://learn.org/articles/What_is_iTunesU.html

[11]   Tavel, P. 2007 Modeling and Simulation Design. AK Peters Ltd.

[12]   http://tech.firstpost.com/news-analysis/apples-educational-app-itunes-u-records-more-than-1-bn-downloads-77186.html

[13]   http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,2817,2416060,00.asp

[14]   https://e27.co/apples-itunes-u-total-downloads-cross-one-billion-mark-thats-a-lot-of-zeroes/

[15]   https://www.imore.com/apple-announces-itunes-u-update-adds-course-creation-more Building gifts into talents: Brief overview of the DMGT 2.0,

[16]   file:///C:/Users/mizan/Downloads/Building%20gifts%20into%20talents%20%20brief%20overview%20of%20the%20DMGT.pdf (Gagné 2008).

[17]   Renzulli, Joseph S. & Reis, Sally M.: The Schoolwide Enrichment Model - Second Edition; Creative Learning Press, Mansfield 1997 (p. 5-14) (Renzulli, 1997).

[18]   Gagné, F. (2003). Transforming gifts into talents: The DMGT as a developmental theory. In N. Colangelo & G. A. Davis (Eds.), Handbook of Gifted Education (3rd ed.), pp. 60-74. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

[19]   Gagné, F. (2009). Building gifts into talents: Detailed overview of the DMGT 2.0. In B. MacFarlane, & T. Stambaugh, (Eds.), leading change in gifted education: The Festschrift of Dr. Joyce VanTassel-Baska. Waco, TX: Prufrock Press.