

## DOCUMENT RESUME

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper was to discuss the importance of listening and to examine whether or not transcribing utterances in English using the Korean alphabet improved the accuracy in English sentences produced by a group of Korean college students. A total population of 120 students was divided into two groups, control and experiment. The experiment group transcribed the English utterances on a practice TOEIC tape into phonological writing in Korean and then later transposed the Korean writing into English words. The control group transcribed the English sounds only in English without using the Korean alphabet. Statistically significant differences were noted in the accuracy of dictation when the students used the Korean alphabet, especially for the beginning and intermediate students. Statistically significant results were not produced for the advanced students. The findings of the study supported the view of many researchers and methodologists that listening comprehension is important to the acquisition of language skills, and second language instruction should continue to emphasize the importance of listening. (Contains 4 tables and 48 references.)

## I. INTRODUCTION

Research suggests that listening skill is prerequisite to other language skills, i.e., speaking, reading, and writing. Listening comprehension is the first and foremost skill to be acquired in learning a new language – comprehension should precede production. There is a great deal of evidence that listening comprehension and language acquisition are closely related and that listening skill transfers to other language skills. Research has shown that promoting aural skills before oral skills results in increased acquisition.

The fifty years of English education in Korea have not produced success in raising the proficiency of English for Korean students. Even after years of study, from elementary school to college, most Koreans are still unable to communicate in English effectively and have great difficulty in carrying out even rudimentary conversations, even though they possess sufficient knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. The reason may lie in the ineffective approach the educators take in teaching English.

## II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### Listening defined

Scholars have defined listening differently. Chastain (1971) defined the goal of listening comprehension as being able to understand native speech at normal speed in an unstructured situation. Morley (1972) defined it as including not only basic discrimination of the sound, but also extracting information, remembering it, and processing or mediating between sound and construction of meaning. Goss (1982) defined it as a process of taking what is heard and organizing it into words, phrases, sentences, or other linguistic units to which the listener can attach meaning. James (1984) explained listening as being tightly interwoven with other language skills. Purdy (1997) defined listening as "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings" (p. 8).

### Importance of listening

Listening is the most frequently used language skill of the four language skills, (Morley, 1999; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Listening is the primary means by which incoming ideas and information are taken in (Devine, 1982). Adults spend in communication activities 45 percent listening, 30 percent speaking, 16 percent reading, and only 9 percent writing (Rivers & Temperly, 1978). Gilbert (1988) noted that students from kindergarten through high school spend 65-90 percent of their communication time for listening. Wolvin and Coakley (1988) stated that, in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication.

### Listening-first approach

Listening is prerequisite to developing other language skills; it comes before speaking, reading, and writing (Devine, 1982; Lundsteen, 1979; Wolvin & Coakley, 1988). An examination of the realities of first and second language acquisition reveals that immediate

oral practice is not recommended for developing both aural and oral competence in a second language. In fact, delaying oral production may be preferable until the learners feel they are "ready" (Devine, 1982; Gary, 1975; Gilman & Moody, 1984; Im, 2000; Krashen, 1981; Park, 2002; Ringbom, 1992; Rivers & Temperly, 1978; Wolvin & Coakley, 1988).

Learning a foreign language is commonly considered as speaking that language, and learners are enamored with speaking the language immediately. As for teachers, they tend to plunge students right into speaking. Children have months of listening to their native language before they even utter their first word but when a person is being taught a foreign language, he/she is expected to speak the language from day one.

The teaching of listening has been treated superficially. Almost all training in high school and college language classes is in effective speaking. There seem to be much fewer teaching materials for listening than for speaking and reading. This is because comprehension processes are still not well understood and because teachers often assume that students will somehow develop listening skills naturally once they are taught speaking.

Some of the reasons for applying the listening-first approach are as follows. Listening comprehension lays a foundation for the future acquisition of speaking skill. Emphasis on aural comprehension training and relaxation of the requirement for oral production in the initial phase of instruction fosters development of linguistic competence and produces better results than those obtained through intensive oral practice.

The listening-first approach was pioneered by Postovsky (1974, 1975), who demonstrated advantages in delaying oral practice at the beginning of foreign language learning. Postovsky contended that intensive oral practice is not productive in the initial phase of instruction and should be delayed until the student is better prepared for the task, until he/she has learned to understand the spoken language. Other scholars have also advocated the listening-first approach to language instruction (Asher, 1972; Asher, Kusudo,

& de la Torre, 1983; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Winitz, 1981; Winitz & Reeds, 1973). Krashen has argued that early emphasis on speaking is not only wasteful, in that it takes up time that could be more productively spent on providing input but also can be harmful. Forcing the learner to say things before he/she has acquired/internalized the necessary language rules creates anxiety and encourages errors, which might be difficult to eliminate later (Krashen, 1985).

#### Listening as an active process

Of the four language skills, listening and reading are considered by linguists as receptive while speaking and writing are said to be productive. This does not mean that the learner's task is to listen passively. On the contrary, the learner needs to keep mentally active in order to gain comprehension. Many scholars have argued that listening is not a passive but an active process of constructing meaning from a stream of sounds (McDonough, 1999; Murphy, 1991; O'Malley et al., 1989; Purdy, 1997; Rivers & Temperly, 1978). Listeners do not passively absorb the words, but actively attempt to grasp the facts and feelings in what they hear by attending to what the speaker says, to how the speaker says it, and to the context in which the message is delivered (Purdy 1997).

#### Transfer of listening to other skills

In a language classroom, listening ability plays a significant role in the development of other language skills. Research has shown that promoting listening skills will result in positive transfer to other skills (Asher, 1969, 1981, 1986; Postovsky, 1974, 1981; Benson & Hjelt, 1978; Gary & Gary, 1981). Postovsky's (1975) studies supported his argument for the listening-first approach which showed a high degree of transfer from listening to other language skills. His experiment showed that students scored lower in the four language skills when they were required to develop speaking and listening skills simultaneously than when they focused only on listening.

Listening can also help learners build vocabulary, develop language proficiency, and improve language usage (Barker, 1971). Cayer, Green, and Baker (1971) found that students' proficiency in reading as well as speaking and written communication were directly related to students' proficiency in listening. Dunkel (1986) also asserted that developing proficiency in listening comprehension is the key to achieving proficiency in speaking. Listening skill is not only the basis for the development of the other skills but also the means by which learners make initial contact with the target language and its culture (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

Bridgemen and Harvey (1999) cited several studies which correlated test scores of speaking and listening and reported a correlation of 0.5-0.6 while Messick (1996) reported a high correlation of 0.91. Consequently, a person who does well in listening comprehension is likely to do well in speaking. With respect to the transfer of listening to reading, there is strong evidence of a high transfer. Reeds, Winitz and Garcia (1977) demonstrated significant development of reading skill for learners to translate from written German to English after eight hours of listening and yet no practice in reading German. Asher et al. found a high degree of transfer from listening to writing. After 90 hours of Spanish language training in listening, with almost no direct instruction in writing, students performed beyond the 50th percentile rank for listening, speaking, and writing on the Pimsleur Spanish Proficiency Test (Glisan, 1986).

#### Neglect of listening comprehension

Despite the importance of listening practice in language instruction, the teaching of listening comprehension has been overlooked in English education in Korea and has been neglected without understanding its importance. It is the most neglected of all language skills as English language classes still emphasize mostly the skills of speaking and reading. Listening is mistakenly regarded as a skill that can be acquired automatically once the learner goes through the general process of studying the target language.

In terms of the teaching strategy, too often, teachers, using the audio-lingual approach, plunge students directly into speaking even when students have little or no comprehension of the drills they are forced to undertake. This causes unnecessary anxiety on the part of the students and can further delay the acquisition of language skills. Such an approach is due to the general assumption that language learning is learning to talk. It overlooks the fact that communication is a two-way process; a person must first understand what the other person is saying before he/she can respond.

The case for emphasizing listening comprehension in foreign language classes is compelling. Yet, language teachers have not fully adopted the listening-first approach. This is perhaps attributable to the following reasons.

- a. Listening is considered a skill that will be acquired naturally by teaching the learner to speak and read.
- b. Listening is incidental to learning to speak.
- c. Teaching listening comprehension is generally not a neatly laid-out method to use.

There is further evidence of the neglect. English language is taught as a subject at school and used only inside, but not outside the classroom. The audio-lingual approach has been a major culprit for the general neglect. While the audio-lingual method places listening first in the sequence of language skills, the listening that has taken place has been largely listening for speaking rather than listening for understanding. The audio-lingual emphasis on language learning as a habit formation, coupled with the active (production) versus passive (reception) dichotomy, allowed little room for the teaching of listening comprehension. Traditionally, in the field of foreign language teaching, both teachers and learner have tended to underestimate the complexity of the learning task. This tendency can be traced directly to such common sense notion as "learning by doing" and "practice makes perfect" and to the position assumed by behavioristic psychology that language learning can be described by the imitation-repetition and analogy paradigm (Postovsky, 1981, p. 171).

## Dictation

Dictation allows the teacher to learn what the students have heard or have missed in the listening, evaluate their knowledge of linguistic forms, and teach the students accordingly. Dictation could be a means by which the students demonstrate that they have gained understanding in what they have heard, and they should perform a task to demonstrate it (Dunkel, 1986; Ur, 1984). Accordingly, dictation exercises for listening comprehension could be more effective if they are constructed for a specific task, i.e. comprehension of the text, pronunciation, spelling, etc.

Some of the reasons for using dictation given by Davis and Rinvoluceri (1988) were: (1) The students are active during the exercise. (2) The students are active after the exercise. (3) Dictation leads to oral communicative activities. (4) Dictation fosters unconscious thinking. The effectiveness of dictation is supported by Krashen's Monitor Theory, which hypothesizes that adults have two independent systems for developing ability in second languages, subconscious language *acquisition* and conscious language *learning*, and that subconscious acquisition appears far more important than conscious learning (Krashen, 1981).

There is further support for dictation. Kowal and Swain were interested in learners' internalization of linguistic knowledge and used a method called "dictogloss," a variation of dictation, in their research in a French immersion content-based instruction. They found that dictogloss was an effective method for making students aware of language form and function (Kowal & Swain, 1994). They contended that dictogloss should be the rational approach to learning grammar, language forms, structures, and patterns and promotes negotiation of the meaning as well as negotiation of the form (Wajnryb, 1990).

Once the students have performed dictation, the reading of the text should provide visual reinforcement for the listening process. The main concern about reading the text before listening is that the written forms may lead to faulty assumptions about the sounds of the



utterances. By making sure that students listen to the material before they read it, such faulty hypotheses can be prevented. Sufficient listening will imprint the sound image and enable the learner to avoid a faulty guess of the pronunciation of the text (Gary & Gary, 1981).

### The Korean Alphabet

The Korean writing system, called "Hangul" is a set of symbols using a combination of vowels and consonants. Hangul was created by King Sejong of Yi Dynasty in the 15th century for the purpose of educating the illiterate populace. Prior to its creation, books had been written only in Chinese characters. Consequently, the commoners, women, and those who were not members of the elite class who could not read or write Chinese characters were in fact denied access to education.

Although the Korean alphabet can effectively transfer sounds into written phonetic symbols in English dictation as the present study demonstrates, many teachers discourage its use in fear that it may somehow hamper the students' ability to learn English. Their argument is that English should be taught only with the English alphabet and the only reason for using the Korean language is for the purpose of translation.

## III. METHOD

### *Research Questions*

This study was designed specifically to answer these questions:

1. What was the accuracy rate in listening comprehension for Korean students taught by the traditional method?
2. What was the accuracy rate in listening comprehension for Korean students taught by the use of the Korean alphabet method?
3. Did using the Korean alphabet reduce the number of errors in dictation, thereby increasing the accuracy in listening comprehension of the

university students as reported in the study?

### *Subject*

The test population consisted of 120 university students ranging from freshmen to seniors at a Korean university. The participants were drawn from the entire population of about 140 students from six English classes of the program.

### *Design*

When the learner hears the English utterances in a dictation and attempts to transcribe the sounds into English, he/she invariably thinks of the words which they already know and are familiar with. Since they do not possess sufficiently large vocabulary, what they tend to produce (write) is a series of wrong words. Once they have written down the wrong words, they believe they are hearing the sounds of the words that they have incorrectly written. By using the Korean alphabet, they are likely to transcribe the sounds more accurately. The Korean alphabet acts as a phonological representation of the utterances, and they can transcribe the English sounds into Korean words without a bias or a preconceived notion. Then the instructor can transpose the Korean written words into appropriate English words and sentences more accurately. By doing so, the learner can match the sound with its meaning, thus internalizing the rules. In that process, the Korean alphabet merely functions as a bridge from the sound to a written description in Korean.

### *Procedures*

Part I of the Listening Comprehension of a practice TOEIC test was used for dictation. The results of the dictation were compared between those students who received the treatment and those who did not.

1. The population of 120 students was divided into two groups of 60, each with the following breakdown: three classes were the control group and the other three the experiment group.

- 10 students with low (L) test scores
  - 40 students with medium (M) test scores
  - 10 students with high (H) test scores.
- a. Listening is considered a skill that will be acquired naturally by teaching the students to speak and read.
  - b. Listening is incidental to learning to speak.
  - c. Teaching listening comprehension is generally not a neatly laid-out-out method to use.

Low scores ranged from 0 to 200, medium scores from 201 to 300, and high scores from 301 to 495 (495 being the perfect score).

2. The next step was to administer dictation from the audiotape of the listening comprehension part of a practice TOEIC test to both control and experiment groups. For Test I, Group A served as the control and Group B as the experiment group.

The following test instructions were given to the participants in the present study:

1. The students first listened to the audiotape.
2. The Experiment Group (Group B) transcribed the sounds into Korean writing, using the Korean alphabet.
3. The Control Group (Group A) did not use the Korean alphabet. The participants were instructed to transcribe the sounds directly into English words and sentences.
4. The Experiment Group transposed the written words in Korean into English words.
5. The instructor wrote the correct sentences on the board.

After the first test was completed, another TOEIC listening test (Test II) was used to measure the accuracy of the first test results. For Test II, Group B served as the control and Group A served as the experiment. The procedures for Test II were the same as for Test I. Table 4 on the following page provides a breakdown of the number of study respondents in each of the two groups: control and experiment. As indicated, there was a total of 60 participants in each group.

### *Statistical Procedures*

The first two research questions, as stated in the previous section, are descriptive by design and hence descriptive statistics were used. The third research question, however, is an inferential question and was therefore analyzed by using analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures. The sample was divided into two groups: control and experiment. The dependent variable was the number of errors on the TOEIC test. The repeated measures were Tests I and II. The independent variables included the levels (beginning, intermediate, and advanced) and the groups (experiment and control). The assignment of the 120 students was made into two groups, 60 students in each, was made in order for the two groups to be equal to each other. By having a large middle group (intermediate students), the data are symmetrical and have a normal distribution.

### *Data Collection and Analysis*

Listening test scores of the participants were obtained from the university administrative office. The students were segregated into three categories, beginning, intermediate, and advanced. The categories were based on the listening comprehension scores of the TOEIC test scores. The designation of the students to the control and experiment groups was made by dividing the six classes in half: three classes were control and the other three experiment.

## IV. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

### *Statistical Analysis of Study Questions*

Three research questions were posed by the study, which was designed specifically to answer these questions. Each is restated below in a separate subsection, followed by statistical analysis, testing, and discussion. Results, as presented in table and graph form, are discussed within the text.

### Question 1

The first question of the study asked, "What was the accuracy rate in listening comprehension for Korean students taught by the traditional method?" Table 1 on the following page displays the descriptive statistics for the first and second testing. The statistics were displayed for the three comprehension levels, High, Medium, and Low. Included were minimum and maximum accuracy scores, means, and standard deviations.

As indicated, the Low comprehension group produced an average accuracy score of 61 for both tests in which students were taught by the traditional method. The Medium comprehension group averaged 75, while the High comprehension group recorded an average score of 93. The total group produced a mean accuracy score of 75.7 for the first testing using the traditional method and 76.5 for the second. It was clear from the descriptive analysis that there were differences between and among the three levels within the two groups of the study.

### Question 2

The second question of the study asked, "What was the accuracy rate in listening comprehension for Korean students taught by the Korean alphabet method?" Again, the statistics are displayed for the three comprehension levels for both groups in both test treatments. Table 2 on the following page presents the descriptive statistics for the first and second testing.

Table 1

TOEIC Descriptives for Traditional Method Group by Comprehension Level

Variable	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
First Testing	46	99	75.7	11.0	60
High	85	99	92.3	5.0	10
Medium	64	85	75.4	5.4	40
Low	46	75	60.7	9.3	10
Second Testing	48	98	76.5	11.0	60
High	87	98	93.5	3.3	10
Medium	62	87	76.1	5.6	40
Low	48	73	61.1	8.1	10

Table 2

TOEIC Descriptives for Korean Alphabet Method Group by Comprehension Level

Variable	<u>Min</u>	<u>Max</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
First Testing	58	98	82.5	8.5	60
High	90	98	94.3	2.6	10
Medium	67	93	82.1	5.5	40
Low	58	82	72.1	8.1	10
Second Testing	58	99	83.4	8.8	60
High	89	99	95.6	2.8	10
Medium	70	92	83.3	5.4	40
Low	58	82	71.8	7.5	10

The statistics are displayed in Table 2 for the three comprehension levels, High, Medium, and Low. Included are minimum and maximum accuracy scores, means, and standard deviations using the Korean alphabet method. As indicated, the Low comprehension group produced an average accuracy score of 72, as compared to the Medium comprehension group which averaged an accuracy score of 82 for the two tests. Again, the High comprehension group recorded the highest accuracy score. Specifically, this group averaged 95 for the two tests.

Question 3

The third question of the study asked, "Did using the Korean alphabet reduce the number of errors in dictation, thereby increasing the accuracy in listening comprehension of the university students as reported by the research?"

Table 3 on the following page displayed the results of the 2-way ANOVA for the first test. The results indicated that there were significant differences in English comprehension scores among the three levels of comprehension and also between the control (traditional method) and the experiment (Korean alphabet method) groups for the appropriate degrees of freedom (df). Differences were significant at the probability level of .01 for group and for comprehension level. For the group, comprehension level interaction, the difference was significant at the .05 level of probability.

As indicated in the table listing, the High comprehension group scored the highest in both the control and experiment groups, while the Medium comprehension level scored in the middle for both the control and experiment groups. As expected, the Low comprehension group scored the lowest in both the control and experiment groups, but still showed an improved difference with respect to the use of the Korean alphabet method versus the traditional.

Another interesting finding was that the experiment group scored an average of 6.8 points higher than the control group. For the High comprehension group, the difference between the control and experiment groups was two points, for the medium group about seven points, and for the low group about 11 points, as indicated in the lower half of the table listing.



Table 3

## ANOVA Results the First Testing

Source	df	MS	F
Group	1	909.00	26.07 **
Comprehension Level	2	3633.82	104.24 **
Group x Level	2	110.50	3.17 *
Error	114	34.86	

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Traditional	75.7	11.0	60
High	92.3	5.0	10
Medium	75.4	5.4	40
Low	60.7	9.3	10
Korean Alphabet	82.5	8.5	60
High	94.3	2.6	10
Medium	82.2	5.5	40
Low	72.1	8.1	10

Note. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

Table 4 on the following page displayed the results of the 2-way ANOVA for the second testing. As with the first testing, there were significant differences among the levels of comprehension and between the control and experiment groups for the appropriate degrees of freedom (df). Also, again similar to the first testing, the low group showed the greatest difference between the control and experiment groups. For group and comprehension level, as shown in the table, the differences were statistically significant at the .01 level of probability.

To illustrate the listening differences for the total sample population group, graphs were computer-constructed. As shown in Figure 1 on the following page, there was a larger difference between the control and experiment groups at the low comprehension level than the other two levels, medium and high.

Table 4

## ANOVA Results the Second Testing

Source	df	MS	F
Group	1	888.89	27.95 **
Comprehension Level	2	3956.58	124.14 **
Group x Level	2	94.58	2.97
Error	114	31.80	

Variable	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Traditional	76.5	11.0	60
High	93.5	3.3	10
Medium	76.1	5.6	40
Low	61.1	8.1	10
Korean Alphabet	83.4	8.8	60
High	95.6	2.8	10
Medium	83.3	5.4	40
Low	71.8	7.5	10

Note. \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

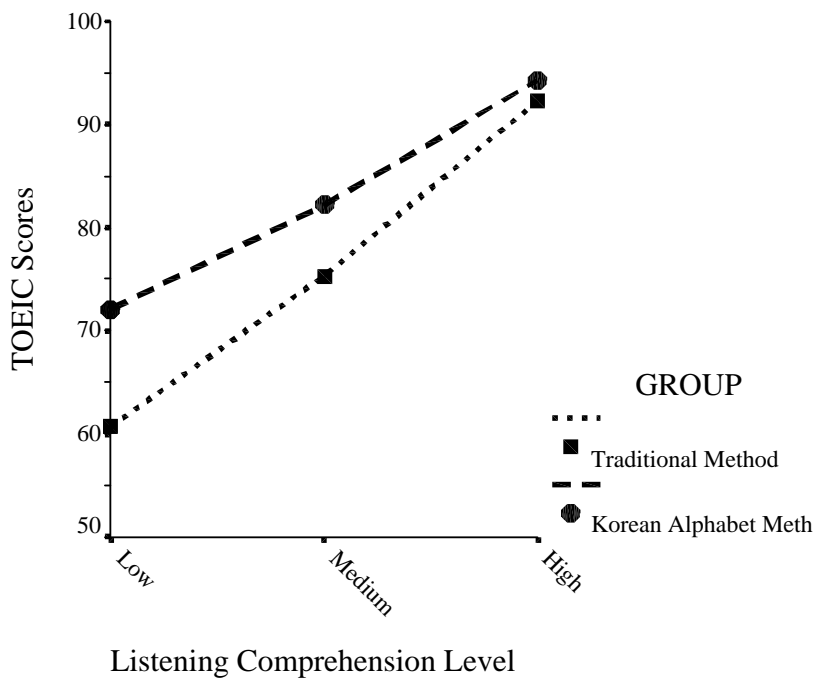


Figure 1. Comparison of the *first* testing TOEIC scores for the group using traditional methods with the group using the Korean alphabet method

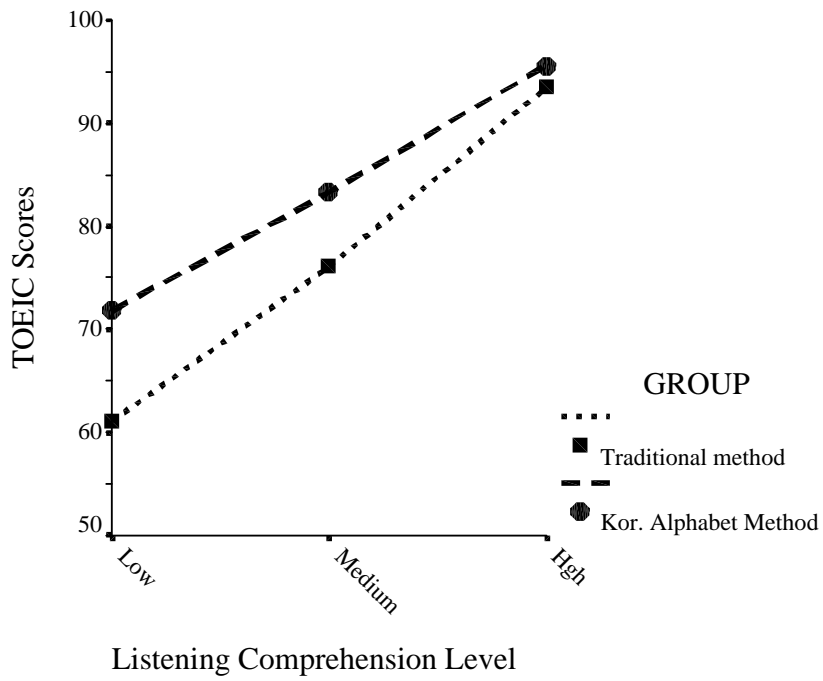


Figure 2. Comparison of the *second* testing TOEIC scores for the group using traditional methods with the group using the Korean alphabet method

Figure 2 presented similar information but pertained to the second testing of TOEIC scores. Specifically, it compared scores of the second testing for the group using the traditional method with the use of the Korean alphabet method. Again, results indicated that the Low group achieved much better scores by using the Korean alphabet method as compared to the Medium and High groups. From the analysis it could be concluded that using the Korean alphabet did increase the accuracy in listening comprehension.

## V. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated two approaches in teaching listening comprehension and compared the traditional method to the method of using the Korean alphabet as an intermediary step. The results of the present study support the argument for a new direction in teaching English. While extensive research exists on EFL teaching methods for Korean students, no research has been done on the teaching of listening comprehension using the Korean alphabet. The implications of the results of this study for Korean college students and teachers are as follows. The traditional method of emphasizing speaking may no longer be the best method of instruction. The fact that Korean students continue to have great difficulty with the usage of English implies that a change in the teaching method is needed. By employing the new method of enhancing listening comprehension, specifically the Korean alphabet method, Korean college students will be able to develop their listening skills more effectively. However, more research is needed to provide additional validation.

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