

Since the introduction of the new-style speaking and writing examinations for GCSE MFL in 2008, teachers across schools within the Alliance have reported a decline in pupil attainment on the GCSE listening papers. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that due to the heavy emphasis on rote learning for the speaking and writing exams, less time is available to devote to practise the skill of listening. This year the Redhill Academy MFL Faculty bought the AQA online programme 'Exampro' which enables teachers to access all AQA listening past paper questions and sound files. This, coupled with the facility of setting homework electronically through 'showmyhomework' (including the facility to upload sound files) offered the opportunity to investigate whether the regular setting of listening homework would improve pupil attainment in this skill.

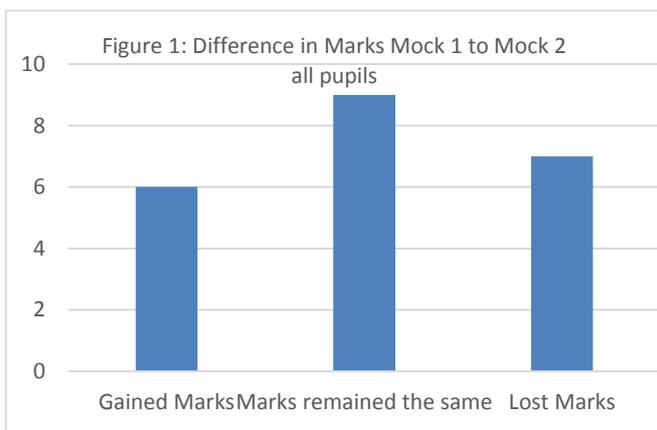
At the Redhill Academy, Year 11 pupils sit two sets of mock examinations; the first in November, the second in March. I decided to use the period in between these two mocks to conduct my research, thus allowing a 12-week period between the two listening examinations. The two mock examinations would also allow two sets of data to be generated under the same conditions, which could then be analysed. Whilst these two sets of data would not enable me to fully answer my research question, they would allow some preliminary findings.

During this twelve-week period, I managed to set eight listening homeworks. In the other four weeks listening homeworks were not set either because it would have been inappropriate to do so, for example because GCSE speaking and writing examinations were imminent or else due to circumstances beyond my control, such as school closure for pupil reviews.

Furthermore, whilst most pupils engaged with the purpose of these homeworks a small group of pupils were either inconsistent in handing in the homeworks. In addition some pupils, for various reasons, were absent when these homeworks were set/collected. Thus I decided in addition to analysing the whole group of pupils, I also decided to set a minimum benchmark of four completed homeworks, in order for a pupil to be included in a second data set.

Findings

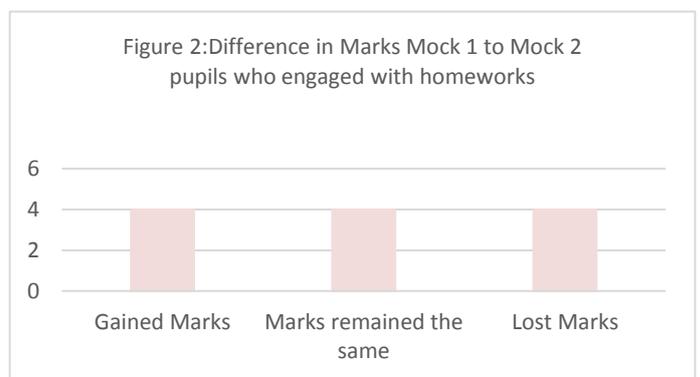
Once I had marked the second set of mock exams using the AQA Mark Schemes, I compared the data with those taken from the first round of mock examinations. As you can see in Figure 1 below, from a class of 23 pupils, six pupils increased their attainment, nine pupils' marks remained the same and seven pupils actually lost marks.



Further analysis of which papers the pupils had sat showed that on the Foundation paper, only two pupils lost marks, whereas on the Higher paper four pupils lost marks. This could be due to the

Mock 2 question paper being more challenging. It could also be a consequence of Mock 2 taking place in March when there is more pressure on pupils to finalise GCSE coursework across several subjects so pupils may not have taken the Mock 2 examinations as seriously.

When I removed the set of pupils who had not fully engaged with the homework process, the results were even more interesting, as



As can be seen above, once the eleven pupils who had been inconsistent with submitting homework had been removed, this left a group of twelve pupils in the data set. As Figure 2 shows, the same number of pupils gained, lost or received the same marks. Where marks stayed the same this could be due to papers of a similar level of difficulty. It also suggests that the listening homeworks had not yet had time to have an impact upon pupils. Further analysis showed that the number of homeworks completed did not necessarily equal an increase attainment. This suggests that the setting of listening homeworks in isolation would not raise attainment in this skill.

Limitations

This research was conducted with a very small sample size and thus generalisability is not possible. Also we must take into account the relatively short length of time in which the research was conducted as three months may not have been enough time to notice any significant improvement,

Considerations for Future Research

In the future it would be worthwhile to conduct this research over a longer period of time to see if extended focus on this skill might have more of an impact. It would also be worthwhile to investigate the need for greater support to be given to pupils when attempting listening questions at home, for example providing guidance on how to be successful in the different types of exam question. It is also worth investigating whether providing vocabulary activities before attempting the question may support pupils with listening at home.