



RESEARCH ARTICLE



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EXPLORING CHALLENGES TEACHERS FACE IN PRACTICING TEACHING LISTENING SKILL: PREPARATORY SCHOOL EFL TEACHERS IN FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate challenges teachers face in practicing teaching listening skill. In the study, qualitative research design was employed. The participants of the study were 5 teachers and 60 students at Damot secondary and preparatory school. Multiple instruments that included focus group discussion, interviews, document analysis, and observations were used to gather data. The obtained data was analyzed qualitatively through narrative way and in an interpretative manner. The findings indicated that, grade 11 English language teachers were not teaching each listening lesson given in the text. They neglected around half percent of the listening lessons given in the text. Despite the fact that English language teachers have had a strong, positive belief about the importance of teaching the listening skill for language instructional process, they were not practicing it properly. They have been teaching it traditionally and carelessly. Finally, it is recommended that, listening skill should be emphasized and taught equally with the other skills, the concerned bodies provide the availability of prepared materials, and the listening script/text should be avoided from the back of students' text book for its effective utilization in school.

Keywords: *Listening Skill, Challenges, Practice, English Language Teaching*

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACK GROUND OF THE STUDY

The fact that language plays a vital role in any aspect of life is unquestionable. Without language perhaps the world would not have been as it is now. In short, it is through language that the world communication and development is established. Therefore, learning international language helps people in the world at large. Since English is an international language, we are increasingly living in a global world where the ability to communicate in English language cannot be just an added bonus rather a true necessity (Wharton, 2000 & Brown, 2001). It is because the English language is becoming a language for international communication. But teaching and learning English language is not as simple as it is expected because when we teach and learn the language, we have to teach or learn by incorporating the four language skills that are listening, speaking, reading & writing.

From those language skills, listening is by far the most important skill of language. Scholar who wrote in line with the importance of listening said that listening to a second language (L2) has been regarded as the most widely used language skill in normal daily life (Morley, 2001), (J Roost, 2001). It involves a complex process that allows us to understand and interpret spoken messages in real time by making use of variety of sources such as phonetic, semantic, pragmatic etc. (Uso Japan, Esther & Alacia Martinez Flora, 2006). Given the complexity that underlies this process of listening comprehension, it has been considered the most difficult skill to learn out of the four language skills. In fact, research carried out over the last few decades on how this skill is learned has provided insights into why listening is traditionally regarded as an important skill in its own right (Morley, 2001). As a result of this progress, the primary of listening now a day is obvious and plays a key role in developing L2 learners. Communicative ability of language acquisition or language learning, However, Yinager, Cherie & Abdu (2006) noted that listening was forgotten skill in the past. That means, it is not specially taught since it was believed to be the first stage in a learner process of learning language items.

That is first learners should learn listening, & speaking, then reading and then writing. However, little attention is given for helping students in developing their listening skill.

Some researchers consider listening as a master key for successful language learning.

They argued that listening text should include items at least on a level a head of learners' present production ability, so that comprehension lead to learning (Krashen, 1988).

This modern interpretation leads to a better understanding of the real importance of listening in language learning. All in all, despite this unquestionable importance of listening skill, teachers of English language are still, giving less attention knowingly or unknowingly for this skill. From the researchers' experience, the listening lesson is inconsistently taught & most of the time it is jumped or untaught at school in particular by English language teachers. Therefore, the problems which can be obstacles of teaching listening should be identified.

1.2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Designing a good English language curriculum and offering available English language teaching materials is not as such enough to achieve the learners' proficiency. As it is known, in all grade level of primary and secondary schools, listening skill is incorporated in students' text book, enough time is allotted for this skill session in each unit the text, but it is not being put into practice appropriately & it is being jumped. Listening skill is the most important skill to develop the other three language skills including note taking (Nunan, 2002, Feyten, 1991). At high school level, where English is used as a medium of instruction, the academic environment requires teachers to prepare students to listen attentively & take notes during lectures in the class room or in other academic settings (Long & Macian, 1994 cited in Seyoum, 2012). Many researchers in Ethiopia are complaining students of different levels lack the expected English language skills in general, the



listening skill in particular (Tewolde, 1988; Hiwot, 2006).

These days, many researchers conducted a study on listening skill at different institutions; for instance, Berhanu (1993), Abdi (2005), Tesfay (2008), Semie (1989), & Seyoum, (2012). Muluken (2008) found that in his research that the practice of teaching listening is emphasized.

As far as the knowledge of this researcher is concerned, none of the researchers addressed teachers' related problems in practicing teaching listening; rather they focused on students' listening skill related problems. Even they wouldn't give any consideration to teachers' challenges in practicing teaching listening which may be the root cause of the students' low proficiency in listening skill. This is the gap that the researcher tries to address.

As Nunan (2002) said, listening is the first basic skill from those four skills of English language. However, from the researcher's experience, despite the fact that listening is the base and beginning of language acquisition, it seems still ignored in the teaching and learning process of English language at high schools by the English language teachers. Indeed the problem is serious. Though the problem exists at the primary and secondary schools, particularly at the Damot secondary and preparatory school, the case has not given due attention. Since listening is one of the basic language skills, failing to teach this skill will be failing to teach English language; failing to teach the English language will be failing to teach the other subjects because English is a medium of instruction for all subjects in case of Ethiopia except Amharic language at the secondary and preparatory schools. Although there are different responsible bodies for this, EFL teachers have the lion's share of responsibilities problem. That why, the issue ignites the researcher to conduct this research. This research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. Are English language teachers teaching each listening lesson given in the text?
2. How do English language teachers practice teaching the listening skill?

3. What are the challenges English language teachers facing in the teaching listening skill?
4. Which particular factors is the most dominant?

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1.3.1. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

The general objective of this study is to investigate challenges teachers' face in practicing teaching listening skill

1.3.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To find out whether the English language teachers are teaching listening lessons given in the text;
- To identify how English language teachers are practicing teaching listening skill;
- To find out challenges hindering English language teachers of teaching listening skill;
- To find out the most existing challenges in the process of teaching listening skills

1.4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The finding of the study will be helpful for language curriculum designing experts to use it as a source of input during curriculum revision. It will be important for secondary and preparatory school language teachers to give equal attention for the four English language skills, especially to focus on listening skill. It will also be helpful for other researchers to use it as a source for further studies.

1.5. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

Due to the fact that there was little time and resources, the research delimited only on Damot secondary and preparatory school, especially on grade eleven English language teachers' challenges of teaching the listening skill.

1.6. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study may not have been generalized to the other English language teachers since it was dependent on a small sample or subjects. Since it was qualitative research, there may have been the researcher's subjectively knowingly or unknowingly to some extent.



2. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The study was conducted in west Gojjam, Ethiopia. A descriptive design was used to conduct the study which enabled the researcher to describe events, and to define clearly teachers' problems in practicing teaching listening skill of grade eleven.

2.2. SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

With regards to sample selection, the subjects of the study were randomly selected 60 grade eleven students from the population of the sampled school. The researcher used simple random sampling as it involves picking a certain number of participants out of the total number of students in the sample frame. Moreover, 5 EFL teachers were included in the study by comprehensive sampling technique since a number of teachers in the sample school are manageable.

2.3. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

To gather data for the study, four different instruments were employed. These were class room observation, interviews, document analysis and focus group discussion.

To obtain the required information, class room observation was conducted. Here, all 5 grade 11 EFL teachers were observed who were teaching English language in grade 11 to investigate how they were practicing teaching listening skill through three stages of teaching the listening lessons. Each class was observed 3 times in different listening lessons. The observation session was conducted on the bases of structured observation check list which was adapted from Harmer (2001); Yagang, 1993).

For the current study, semi structured interview was employed. Interview was felt to be suitable for this study for two reasons. First, the study was descriptive in which interview was employed to secure pertinent data. Second, the participants who were interviewed manageable which made an interview appropriate (Nunan, 1992). Finally, this instrument was set to collect data from 5 teachers who were selected by comprehensive sampling technique. Similarly, the students' focus group discussions were carried out. The researcher had 3 FGD group composed of 10 grade 11 students who were selected from 16

sections using random sampling to get available data about challenges of teachers while practicing teaching listening lessons. Finally, data taken from the focus group discussion were transcribed and coded after the discussion. Moreover, the researcher used document analysis to see the events with evidences. Grade 11 textbook was analyzed to compare the listening lessons given in the text book with the number of listening lessons that have taught by English language teachers.

2.4. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

In the course of collecting data for the study, all the necessary procedures were followed.

First, the researcher asked permission from the school principal and explained the purpose of the study before conducting those instruments. Accordingly, after getting permission from the school principal, the researcher observed teachers how they were practicing teaching listening skill. Then after holding the teachers' class room observations, the interview was held for all grade eleven English language teachers regarding to the area. All the teachers were interviewed one by one. Thirdly, next to the teachers' interview, the students' focus group discussion composed of 10 grade 11 students who were selected from 16 sections was held. Here, data taken from the focus group discussion were transcribed and coded after the discussion. Finally, in addition to the information obtained from class room observation, interview, and focus group discussion, with reference to the teachers' challenges of while practicing teaching listening, document analysis related to the study was conducted. Since this instrument is important to see things related to the study with evidences.

2.5. METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS

All the data collected were organized and analyzed in appropriate way to answer the statement of the problem. The data was organized based on teachers' challenges in the process of teaching listening skill.

Qualitative data analysis method was used in the study. The analysis was made by directly quoting the respondents. This is because Patton (1990) points out that direct quotation is the source



of data in qualitative research. Thus, the analysis of the data collected using the interview, document analysis and observation, and focus group discussion items were analyzed using qualitative method of data analysis through using narrative form and in an interpretive manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, presentation and the analysis of data which were obtained through observation, interview, document analysis and focus group discussion are discussed.

3.1. WHETHER TEACHERS WERE TEACHING ALL LISTENING LESSONS GIVEN IN THE TEXT OR NOT

As it was seen from data presentation and analysis, among 5 EFL teacher respondents from the interview, 4 teachers, it is possible to say that all most all teachers gave a negative response. In relation to this, they said that they have not taught each listening lessons given in the text.

In this regard, teachers were also asked to remind the total listening lessons that they have already taught. Consequently, the total taught listening lessons which were taught by these teachers were 48.57% in average from the total of 28 listening lessons given in the text. This indicates that 51.43 or more than half percent of the listening lessons have jumped or untaught or neglected by English language teachers. In addition to this, the data taken from the teachers' daily lesson plan analysis confirmed this fact. According to the data obtained from document analysis, the total listening lessons by grade 11th English language teachers were 33.57% in average. This means, the rest 66.43% which were more than half percent of the listening lessonshave already been jumped by English language teachers.

With regard to this issue, the data obtained from the students' focus group discussion also supported the above finding. Concerning to the data obtained from the students' focus group discussion, it is possible to conclude that the total teachers' taught listening lessons were 51.67% in average. In line with this, Abdu (2006) wrote on his ELT methodology module that listening was a forgotten skill in the past. Means, it was not specially taught since it was believed the first stage in a longer

process of learning language items. That is, first learners should learn listening then speaking, then reading and then writing. However, little attention was given for helping students develop their listening skill. Similarly, according to the data obtained from the above three data sources, the researcher believed that listening has still been a forgotten language skill.

In spite of the fact that there was a difference between the three data that were 48.57% from the teachers' interview, 33.57% from document analysis and 51.67% from students' focus group discussion, all the data together has shown us that more than half percent of the listening lessons given in the text book have not been taught by the grade 11th English language teachers.

3.2. TEACHERS PRACTICE OF TEACHING LISTENING SKILLS

In this regard, English language teachers' practice of teaching listening lessons was discussed based on the data obtained from classroom observation, teachers' interview, document analysis and focus group discussion. As it was confirmed during classroom observation teachers' interview, all five English language teachers were aware of the three stages of teaching listening that is the pre listening, while listening and the post listening. However, they were not exploiting and practicing the listening activities required in each phase of listening one by one. For example, when we come to the practice of the pre listening activities, none of the teachers has observed setting their purpose or objective of the listening lessons. As Harmer (2001) explained setting the purpose or objective of the listening lessons is very important for students to make them ready and conscious about what they are going to do in each listening stages.

Nevertheless, grade 11 English language teachers missed this important pre listening activity. Moreover, most teachers that is four from five teachers never engaged their students in pairs or group discussion on pre listening tasks which is very important in extending into speaking activities to teach language skills integrative way. During the interview session, it was identified that teachers had



shortcomings on practicing the above pre listening activities. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that English language teachers of grade 11 were not practicing the pre listening activities fully. With regard to the while listening activities, almost all teachers never observed encouraging their students to guess the meaning of new words from the context which is very important for students to listen and understand the listening text further.

Based on the data obtained from classroom observation, teachers' interview and students' focus group discussion, the practice of teaching the while listening activities was dominated by teachers' loud reading of the listening text, students tried to listen and attempt to answer listening comprehension questions and then teachers tried to give feedback for students in the form of right or wrong answers. However, according to Holmes (2001), this kind of practice of teaching listening lessons tends to testing the listening skill rather than teaching the listening skill. Consequently, it is possible to conclude that these teachers were not practicing the while listening activity properly.

In relation to the teachers' practice of post listening activities, most teachers were observed missing some important post listening activities. For example, most teachers were never direct and help their students to work in groups or pairs and come up into agreement on the answers. Similarly, most teachers were never allowing their students to elect their group leaders who facilitated the group discussion. Concerning this, it is possible to say that all teachers were never asking their students to summarize the main points of the whole class discussion which is very important post listening activity which integrates listening with writing. To conclude, it is possible to say, similar to the pre listening, the while listening phase and the post listening phase was dominated by the teachers themselves. Almost all teachers use traditional way in practicing teaching listening skill.

3.3. CHALLENGES OF TEACHERS IN TEACHING THE LISTENING SKILLS

With regard to this title, the challenges which English language teachers were facing during

practicing the teaching of listening skill were further discussed in this section.

One of the major challenges of teachers which prevent them in practicing the teaching of listening lessons was that the presence of the listening text /script at the back of the students' textbook which led the students read the listening text instead of listening their teachers while they were reading the listening script/text. Similarly, the students' low interest or attention towards the listening skill due to the absence of this skill in classroom and national examinations. Most of the time, the teaching and learning process was exam oriented, both teachers and students wanted to focus on other language skills like speaking, reading, writing which appear in their own sections of the classroom and national examination. Consequently, teachers and students ignored teaching and learning of the listening skill. This challenge mentioned 5 times during the interview and focus group discussion session.

The other major problem of teachers which prevent them not to teach listening skill properly and consistently was that the poor background of students about the English language in general, the listening skill in particular. Thus, the students could not understand the listening text easily and it could be difficult for them to involve in each listening activities. Similarly, the teachers' pedagogical problem is the other problem teachers face while teaching listening skill. In this case, the teachers themselves admitted that they had their own teaching methodological problems of listening and the poor presentation of the listening lessons made them bored and demotivated. Another challenges of teachers in teaching the listening lessons were that the tiresomeness of the listening text to read if a loud two or three times. It is difficult for teachers to read the longer listening text or script aloud for students due to lack of the appropriate teaching materials like tape recorders, cassettes etc. which contains native speakers of English language has been making most teachers become tired of reading that longer listening texts. The teachers' low interest to teach the listening skill was also a considerable problem of teachers in practicing teaching the listening lessons.



Some of the challenges which were found this current research is consistent with Marysless or and Kyriacou (2014). According to Marysless or and Kyriacou (2014), noted that the challenges of teaching listening skill such as shortage of time to cover the wider English language syllabus, the grammatical nature of the examination, lack of resources to teach listening, large class size, the demand of the assessment and the like. However, the current study was quite different from previous studies in the following findings. The presence of the listening text /script at the back of the students' text book, the teachers' pedagogical problem to teach the listening skill, the tiresomeness of the longer listening texts for teachers to read aloud, difficulty level of the listening texts and lessons, teachers' low interest to teach the listening skill and lack of a conducive environment in the teaching and learning of listening skill.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to investigate challenges teachers face of teaching listening skill. The finding revealed that English language teachers were not giving equal attention to the listening skill comparing to the other language skills. As a result, they were not teaching all listening lessons given in the text. They neglected more than half percent of the listening lesson from the text. Despite the fact that English language teachers had good awareness about the three stages of teaching listening that are pre listening, while listening and post listening, they were not practicing each activities in each stage of teaching listening properly. They were practicing the traditional way of teaching listening.

The presence of listening script at the back of the students' text book, teachers and students low of interest to wards the teaching learning listening, poor back ground of students in English in general, the listening skill in particular, the tiresomeness of the listening text for the teachers and the teachers' pedagogical problem of teaching the listening skill are challenges teachers face of teaching listening. Therefore, it was recommended that the concerned bodies and EFL teachers should give equal weight for listening skill as the other language skills and EFL teachers should teach each listening lessons given in

the text effectively. And the text book producers/writers should avoid the listening text /script from the back of the students' textbook. Also, national examination experts and EFL teachers should find a way to include the listening skill in the national and class room examinations in its separate section to minimize its wash back effect. Finally, ministry of education should continuously give in-service pedagogical training for English language teachers on how to teach listening skill and the curriculum designers should design the listening activities based the students' level and the time allotted for the listening lesson.

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