

Investigating english listening comprehension deficiency among students at secondary schools from psychological and educational view

Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the deficiency of English listening skill among students of secondary schools in Port Sudan town. The researcher provided a number of factors that cause the deficiency, and then set out a group of suggestions to deal with it. This study is of a descriptive analytical nature, focused on the listening skill so, the researcher used the descriptive methodology which described the problem before dealing with it and also used the analytical methodology as an additional method to analyze some data and diagrams which the researcher used in the research. Tools used in the study were a questionnaire to students both males and females and a written interview for teachers who were teaching them. The researcher discussed and analyzed the results revealed by the students' and teachers' responses. After that, the researcher moved to conclude the study by presenting the findings of the study such as most of students tried to listen to English but they failed because of many reasons such as difficulty in identification different English words pronunciation, besides clear and correct pronunciation help students to comprehend English words in a right way. The methods of teaching listening comprehension are not convincing and enough to achieve the purpose of teaching. Finally, the materials provided by the curriculum and learning activities were not sufficient to enable students to learn listening in English language. Hence according to these findings, the researcher suggested a plan to solve these problems to achieve the goal of the study.

Keywords: english language, listening deficiency, secondary students, sudan

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Introduction

In the globalization era, English as an international language is very important to be learned by everybody both in spoken and written communication. Everybody knows that language is one of the ways to communication with. Communication here means understanding and expressing information, thoughts, feelings, and developing culture, science, and technology using language. As stated in Competency-based Curriculum, the function of teaching English mastery is needed to communicate in order to access the information in daily contexts. English is a means to develop the interpersonal, relationship, share information and enjoy esthetic of language in English culture. Besides that, the objective of teaching English is to develop the linguistic competences both spoken and written.

Research problem

Like any other language learning English needs to be skillful in four fundamental skills reading, listening, writing, and speaking. It is necessary to make balance and approximation between these skills if student want to know English well. Some of these skills do not take the sufficient attention and this is because of the absence of suitable environment and enough educational aids to fulfill that, such as listening skill. In listening classes, students are usually given practice in listening, but they are not actually taught listening.

Research questions

The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the aims of teaching listening skill?

2. To what extent is listening skill understood by students at secondary schools in Port Sudan town?
3. How is listening taught at secondary schools in Port Sudan town?
4. What problems are faced by the teachers and students in teaching and learning listening comprehension?

Research hypotheses

1. The aim of teaching English in Sudan is to help students acquire the foreign language then easily contact with others in the outside world.
2. The main reason of students difficulty in understanding spoken language was the ignoring of listening skill as a separate skill and the weaken of listening practice and drills.
3. Not enough concernment of listening comprehension as an important skill whether in the curriculum or in practice.

The problems are the lack of materials in curriculum focusing especially on listening skill. Some of students hate English, and most of students didn't take English lessons in a serious way in their previous stages.

Teaching Listening skill in the literature

Rivers¹ suggested four stages in the teaching of listening. The first stage is identification: At this stage students need practice in discrimination of sounds and in the elements of meaning conveyed by stress, pitch, and in to nation. An exercise of consisting dialogues is

appropriate. The second stage is identification and selection without retention at this stage, the student listens to a connected sequence with a development of thought which he tries to follow. The student and the teacher are satisfied if he has followed the passage as delivered without worrying about the ability to recount or discuss what he has heard. The most suitable materials for this stage are simple plays or sketches depicting normal situations in which the characters use the common, repetitious speech of conversation. The parts should be read with normal everyday diction, not the artificial diction employed on the stage. Also suitable dramatic readings, by several participants, of stories with a considerable amount of conversation. At a more advanced stage, students may listen to group conversations where two or three native speakers with easily identifiable differences of voice discuss a subject of interest to the student. The third stage, identification and guided selection with short-term retention. Material similar to that for Stage two maybe used, with clearly distinctive voices and lively themes. At this stage, the student is given some questions before hand, not a great number, and he listens for the answers which he marks on a question sheet as he hears them, or, at a more advanced stage, after he has listened to the whole passage. The passage should be repeated so that the student may have further practice in listening and selecting, and may have an opportunity to verify his answers.

Stage for identification, selection and long-term retention: This is the final stage. Here the student is encouraged to listen freely to all kinds of material. He may listen to literary extracts, plays, poems, and lectures on literary or cultural subjects related to his work, or he may listen to all kinds of aural material (news bulletin, discussions on subjects of typical interest, plays, songs, and films scenarios) for his own pleasure. At this stage he should have a practice in listening to regional accents and to all types of voices. After a period of listening, the student is expected to be able to talk or write about what he has heard.

Zaytoun² suggested a few techniques for teaching listening for foreign learners.

- a. Teacher if possible should expose the students to real life situations in which native speakers of English use the language in a spontaneous conversational and communicative way.
- b. Another technique to teaching listening using short taped-segments of Radio or TV news and we at her reports.
- c. To encourage the use of language laboratory.

A method of teaching listening should take into account the skill elements and their subsequent development. In a listening situation, as Rivers states (1968:23) a student should recognize without effort, sound patterns (Sound discriminations affecting meaning, intonation patterns, significant levels of pitch, word groupings), grammatical sequences and tenses, modifiers and function words, clichés, expletives or hesitation expressions which can be ignored as irrelevant to the message, levels of discourse (colloquial or formal), emotional over tones(excited, disappointed, peremptory, cautious, angry utterances),as well as regional, social, or dialectal variations. Candlin³ asserted that effective teaching of listening involves motivation and stimulation. The teacher before teaching or introducing any activity should ask questions to motivate the learners so as willingly to involve them in the activities.

Listening is a complex operation integrating the distinct components of perception and linguistic knowledge in ways, which

are poorly understood. Some linguists maintain that knowledge of the same system of grammatical rules of a language is basic to both listening and speaking. Some psychologists, on the other hand, believe the rules students apply are different and that they employ perceptual strategies for surface scanning of what they are hearing, stopping to penetrate to underlying relations only to resolve ambiguities or untangle complexities.

Rixon⁴ observed that at times a person might find himself listening to something in a relaxed way, not concentrating on every word, but for the sheer pleasure of following the content of what is said. An example might be the experience of listening to an interesting or amusing radio program, which poses no particular problems of language difficulty of concepts. At other times the same person might find himself in a situation where he has to listen with great attention, because he is trying to pick up and remember a series of important instructions, as in the case of the employee listening to his boss's orders. Alternatively, the speaker might be using complex or unfamiliar language, as with an undergraduate listening to a lecture on a subject new to him. The parallels between a native speaker and a learner are not exact here, but there is certainly a case for giving students the two different types of listening experience— those in which the language-level is well within their present capacity, and which therefore allow them to listen for pleasure or interest without having to make a great effort to overcome linguistic difficulties, and those in which they need to pay more attention to content and language. The first sort of experience can last quite a long time, several minutes, as in the case of easy stories read aloud by the teacher or heard on tape. They can also be quite short, when, for example, they hear a short poem or joke, just for pleasure or fun. In both cases they are not asked to do 'language work' on what they hear but have the satisfaction of an almost complete, direct, understanding of something worth hearing. This type of listening can be called extensive listening (by analogy with extensive reading, a term widely used in the teaching world. It is an experience which is important to give all students a high motivation and interest, as well as giving them valuable extra contact with English in its spoken form.

The second type of listening might be called intensive listening (again by analogy with reading). This is perhaps the more widely used form of listening practice in modern classrooms. Here, the students are asked to listen to a passage with the aim of collecting and organizing the information that it contains. The type of passage used, is usually a little different from that used for extensive listening. It contains more concrete information, which may be quite densely packed, and often is not as easy for the students to understand on first hearing. This is because the aim is to give the students challenge, to allow them to develop listening skills or knowledge of language through the efforts they make, guided by exercises or activities related to the passage. For this reason, passages for intensive listening should be short, not more than a few minutes long, because they should be played several times, straight through or in sections (usually in both ways during a lesson). This is so that students have the chance to get to grips with the contents and to have several tries at parts that at first hearing they may find difficult. Practically, the passages need to be short in order to be fit within the time limits of a lesson, and also because of the effort that the students will be expending in their attempts to make out as much as possible. Such heavy concentration on along passage would be extremely tiring, and would probably result in making students dislike the experience rather than finding it challenging and rewarding.

In listening teaching, both intensive and extensive listening should be combined with cultivating students' basic skills, the development of the productive listening habits of active thinking and the ability to understand the text. Therefore, teachers must encourage students to engage in intensive listening in class, requiring students to understand the general meaning and also to become familiarized with English pronunciation, into nation and the changes in language flow. In activities outside the class, students need to engage in extensive listening; listening to many different varieties of language phenomena and gaining more knowledge through TV programs, radio, and the internet and as many of their kinds of exposure to listening training they can find. Exposure to demands of listening should include aspects of everyday life, science and technology, and academic lectures. Teachers must create language-learning environments that stimulate students' interests and raise students' passion and enthusiasm for learning English.

Effective listening takes place when a number of skills are employed almost simultaneously. Anderson & Lynch⁵ identify four steps:

1. The spoken skills are identified from the surrounding sounds.
2. Speech is segmented into units (known words).
3. Syntax is grasped and meaning understood.
4. We apply our linguistic knowledge to respond appropriately (where applicable).

However, learning to listen successfully, as the researcher knows, involves more than being able to understand the words and linguistic structure of what is being said. Teachers must provide learners with the skills to identify the schematic as well as the linguistic information.

Study procedure

The researcher used a descriptive and analytical methodology to deal with the data gathered for the research. The researcher described and categorized the population and sample used in the research. Instruments used in the research were a questionnaire to students both males and females and a written interview for teachers who teaching them. A group to which the researcher would like the results of the study to be generalizable, students of five secondary schools in Port Sudan Town in the academic year of 2015/2016.

Teachers who were carrying out the process of teaching were also included in the sample. Thus, the study was represented by seventy two students and eleven teachers. The total number of the subjects under investigation was about seventy two students: thirty six were male students and thirty six were female students. The actual number of respondents was seventy one students and eleven teachers.

Thirty six male students were taken from three secondary schools as follow:

- *Red Sea Secondary School (academic), thirteen students.
- *Al Barbari Secondary School (academic), twelve students.
- *Port Sudan Technical Secondary School, eleven students.

Thirty six female students were taken from two secondary schools as follow:

- *Al Gezira Private School (academic), sixteen students.
- *Coptic Trading Secondary School, twenty students.

The teachers included were both males and females from the five secondary schools in Port Sudan Town (Table 1).

Table 1 Schools under investigation

| School | Male | Female |
|--|----------|------------|
| Red Sea Secondary School | 13 males | |
| Al Barbari Secondary School | 12 males | |
| Port Sudan Technical Secondary School | 11 males | |
| Al Gezira Private School | | 16 females |
| Coptic Trading Secondary School | | 20 females |
| Total | 36 males | 36 females |
| Total 72 students both males and females | | |

Process of the study

This study was intended to know the students' mastery of listening comprehension, and know the factors that cause the deficiency in listening skill. In this case, the samples were the students of five secondary schools in Port Sudan Town in the academic year of 2015/2016. The researcher used the questionnaire with the students and the written interview to their teachers to have real and clear evaluation of the situation.

Analysis of the questionnaire:

The researcher displayed the outcomes of the students' answers. The results were categorized and put in tables to investigate the main role played by teachers and students so as to achieve the goal of the study. The analysis of questionnaire is as follows:

From the first question, the researcher realized that the responses of the students showed that most students tried to listen to foreign language. Concerning the second question, the researcher noticed that most of the students were unable to understand full information from others even from their teachers when they teach English.

The results of question three support the opinion that many students faced many difficulties when they tried to listen and comprehend English.

From this question, the researcher noticed that the results of the students' answers were about 50% showed that the basic role that environment played on how to listen to English language.

Question five showed the basic role played by mother tongue in learning to listen to English language.

Summary of the results of the questionnaire

From students' responses the researcher collected the results of the questionnaire and the researcher noticed the following:

1. From question one the researcher noticed that most students tried to listen to the foreign language.
2. From question two came out the result that most of the students' answers showed that most of the students were not able to understand full information from others in English language.
3. Question three showed that most students faced many difficulties when they tried to listen to the foreign language.
4. From question four, the researcher came out with the result that the environment in which students lived played basic role in the acquisition of the foreign language.

5. Question five showed that the role played by the mother tongue was an important one since it helped students to acquire the foreign language and become good English listeners.

Analysis of the written interview

The analysis of the written interview displayed the following:

1. What is listening?
 - a. Listening is a part of the four skills which helps in the process of understanding.
 - b. One of the fourth skills of language which enables the listeners to communicate.
 - c. How to understand what others say orally?
 - d. Listening is one of the language skills and it depends on the attention of the sense.
2. In your opinion, what are the aims of teaching English in Sudan?
 - a. English language is the major world language that enables people to be acquainted to all world culture.
 - b. The aims are many, but the main ones are: enabling students to understand English well, and become skillful at all the skills of learning (listening, speaking, reading and writing).
 - c. To raise the pupils awareness to learn this international language because it is very essential in all aspects.
 - d. To help students communicate in English with accuracy and fluency in social work and study situations.
3. Are the approaches of teaching listening comprehension convincing?
 - a. They are not convincing, they need many corrections.
 - b. The approaches of teaching listening are not convincing enough to acquire language better.
 - c. The problem is how to apply these approaches accurately.
 - d. Because of the absence of some teaching material, so, to some extent it is convincing.
4. Are the given activities enough to enable students to understand information and practice language orally?

Teachers' answers were as follows:

- a. Not enough to enable students to understand information and practice language orally 100%.
5. Why do many students suffer from difficulty in understanding spoken English?

Teacher's answers were as follows:

- a. Since they may not come across enough practice and drills of listening activities.
- b. Spoken language differs from written language in many respects. They cannot go back and study it again, as you can do with written language, and also spoken language comes in different accents.
- c. Because they depend on the teacher's translation.

- d. Suffering of the students comes from their poor vocabulary.
- e. Because mother tongue deeply affected.

Findings summary of the written interview

The results given by the written interview were as follows:

1. From question one; the researcher got the result that most teachers said that listening comprehension means that how to understand what others say orally.
2. From question two, the researcher obtained the result that English language seemed to be the first language in the world, thus, to help students to communicate in English in social, work and study situations. Moreover another aim of teaching English language in Sudan is that to help students acquire the basic four skills.
3. From question three, the researcher noticed that the approaches of teaching listening comprehension were not convincing in addition to the absence of some teaching materials and the weak of obligation in applying these approaches accurately.
4. From question four, the researcher found out that the activities were not enough to enable students to understand information and practice language orally.
5. From question five, the researcher observed that the result of the teachers' responses showed that the basic cause to get many students suffer from difficulty in understanding spoken English is attributed to the curriculum and the method of teaching as well. Then students may be able to come across enough practice and drills of listening activities.

Testing hypotheses

In order to complete the picture of the study, the researcher testing the research hypotheses as follows:

- i. The researcher hypothesized that the main reason of students difficulty in understanding spoken language was the ignoring of listening skill as a separate skill and the weaken of listening practice and drills, the findings of the study became accordant to the hypothesis and prove that the researcher was correct.
- ii. The researcher hypothesized that not enough concernment of listening comprehension as an important skill whether in the curriculum or in practice, the findings of the study to some extent became accordant to the hypotheses and prove that the researcher was correct.
- iii. The researcher hypothesized that the problems are the lack of materials in curriculum focusing especially on listening skill; the findings of the study became accordant to the hypotheses and prove that the researcher was correct.

The recommendations

The researcher recommended important points that both students and teachers need to take into consideration in listening comprehension in the teaching/learning process. The recommendations are as follows:

- a. Teach students to know what is listening and how to listen.
- b. Show them how to identify facts and major points to help them get more out of their listening.
- c. Teach them how to look at context and tone to determine not

- only the literal meaning of what is being said, but also the intended meaning.
- d. Using visual aids can help to draw the attention of students who suffer from short attention spans, as well as those who have difficulty in hearing or have some other developmental problems.
 - e. Plan a variety of activities to keep students interested in learning listening skills, including games, songs and listening comprehension assignments.
 - f. Specialize certain lessons for teaching listening comprehension in the planned program.
 - g. Prepare training programs for teachers in listening skill.
 - h. Give more attention to the materials presented in the curriculum especially materials related to teaching listening skill.
 - i. Using group work provides more chance for students since it gives them additional time to practice.
 - j. Finally, encourage students to listen to the English radio channels and watch English news on television.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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