

Listening Skill at the Tertiary Level: Exploring the Gap Between Normativity and Practice

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Abstract

Listening tasks are mostly challenging for learners of English as a second/foreign language in different stages of learning English. This article aims to improve teaching the listening skills in academic settings in foreign language contexts, particularly to discover the present scenario of the English listening classroom at the tertiary level. A questionnaire for teachers was used to collect the data. The findings of the study showed some basic explorations of the listening classroom scenario at the academic level. The listening coursebook (CB) used is still taught as a separate course in most of the faculties. It was good relating some issues such as authenticity of the content and familiarity with the topics. Though, it was limited in the pronunciation activities and cultural background issues, so it needs to be supported by different sources. Further, the findings showed that students' activity in listening and speaking tasks was poor, and there is a need for strategy training programmes to develop students' performance in listening. Finally, the classroom environment lacked many aids and technological facilities for teaching listening.

Keywords: Foreign language, second language, language learning, language skills.

1. Introduction

Listening is an important skill in the development of second/foreign language (S/FL) teaching and learning. Language learning is dependent on listening skills. It is also related intimately to other skills and an indispensable skill for S/FL learning; it internalizes the rules of language

and facilitates learning other language skills (Vandergrift, 2007; Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2002).

The interactional view of learning focuses on how strategies could be used to enhance the learning process. O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 129) define listening comprehension strategies (LCSs) as strategies employed by learners to comprehend language texts, process new information, and learn and retain concepts on academic language and content. Although most universities in Bangladesh introduce compulsory courses in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, learners' listening skill is not properly assessed at the tertiary level (Akteer, 2019).

Consequently, it is necessary to design a listening comprehension (LC) course which involves training on using strategies (Mendelsohn, 1994). Moreover, Hwaider (2021) showed that listening strategy training has affected the students' level of achievement in LC significantly, helped students to reduce the level of problems they face in LC tasks, develop positive attitudes towards listening, and increased their motivation for listening.

This study examines one of such contexts for teaching listening (i.e. University of Aden, Yemen). It aims, specifically,

1. To explore the teaching and practice of listening at the University of Aden.
2. To examine the effectiveness of teaching listening to the learners.

2. Methodology

A questionnaire has been used to collect the data. It has been distributed to teachers online using the platform of Google Forms. It was based on the mixed method approach including both qualitative and quantitative data.

The study's sample included 51 teachers of English language at the Faculties of Education and Language and Translation at the University of Aden, Yemen. These faculties are distributed in different areas from two governorates: Aden and Lahej. These are the Faculty of Education and Faculty of Languages and Translation in Khoor-Maksar, Aden, Faculties of Education Radfan, Saber, and Toor Albha in Lahej governorate. Their teaching experience is between 5 to 20 years. The distribution of the sample is shown in the following tables.

Table 1: *The Geographical Distribution of the Study's Sample*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Aden	14	27.5	27.5	27.5
	Radfan	21	41.2	41.2	68.6
	Tooralbaha	12	23.5	23.5	92.2
	Saber	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

3. Validity and Reliability of the Data Collection Instrument

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were judged by three experts in ELT. Cronbach's alpha (or coefficient alpha) has also been used to measure the internal validity and reliability and the results are shown in the following tables.

Table 2 shows that Cronbach's alpha for all questionnaires' items is high. Its values ranged from 0.775 to 0.834. Therefore, they reflect a very high rating of the questionnaires' items reliability and internal validity.

Table 2: *The Reliability of Item – Total Statistics of the Questionnaire*

	<i>Scale Mean if Item Deleted</i>	<i>Scale Variance if Item Deleted</i>	<i>Corrected Item – Total Correlation</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted</i>
q1	42.12	47.306	-.447	.835
Q2a	40.92	37.074	.659	.789
Q2b	40.69	40.900	.417	.805
Q2c	40.45	38.493	.635	.793
Q2d	40.75	34.794	.822	.776
Q2e	40.51	34.055	.783	.777
Q2F	40.71	38.212	.508	.799
Q2G	40.22	33.253	.749	.779
Q2H	40.33	33.667	.809	.775
Q3	42.02	40.580	.615	.799
Q7	41.75	42.034	.393	.808

Q8	41.02	39.140	.489	.801
Q9	42.27	42.123	.542	.806
Q11	42.41	44.687	.000	.817
Q12	42.41	44.687	.000	.817
Q14	41.08	42.554	.307	.811
Q15	41.76	47.024	-.388	.834
Q18	41.43	42.370	.141	.822
Q19	41.53	45.294	-.130	.825
Q20	41.45	46.133	-.254	.830
Q21	42.41	44.687	.000	.817

Similarly, Table 3 below shows that the value of the Cronbach's alpha of the questionnaire was 0.815 ($\alpha = 0.815$), indicating a very high value of the internal reliability.

Table 3: *The Overall Reliability of the Statistics of the Questionnaire*

<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>No. of Items</i>
.815	21

4. Data Analysis

This section will show the results of analysing the data using the SPSS (26.0) program. The analysis of the data will be tackled under some issues reflecting the scenario of teaching the listening skill at the University of Aden. These are issues related to the CB, the aids, the students, and the classroom environment. These issues will be analysed and discussed individually in what follows.

4.1. The Coursebook

This section views the CB used in teaching the listening skill at the University of Aden. These are the nature of the course used, the effectiveness of the course used in terms of some related issues.

Q1. Is the listening course in your faculty a course by itself or an integrated course with speaking?

Table 4 shows 70.6 per cent state that the listening CB used at Aden University is taught as a separated course, while only 29.4 per cent said that they use an integrated course with speaking.

Table 4: *The Nature of the Listening Course*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	A separated course	36	70.6	70.6	70.6
	An Integrated course	15	29.4	29.4	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Q2. Based on your experience, indicate the extent to which the listening CB is effective in terms of: students' needs, the authenticity of content, students' familiarity with the topics, pronunciation activities, activities variety, listening strategies, cultural background, and students' interest?

49.0 per cent state that listening CB in terms of students' needs is good, for 27.5 per cent it is very good and for 7.8 per cent it is fair. However, 15.7 per cent confirm that it is excellent in terms of students' needs. These percentages reflect that the CB used is suitable to students' needs only to some extent (Table 5).

Table 5: *Effectiveness of the CB in Terms of Students' Needs*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Excellent	8	15.7	15.7	15.7
	Very good	14	27.5	27.5	43.1
	Good	25	49.0	49.0	92.2
	Fair	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

In terms of content authenticity, 52.9 per cent view that the CB is good, for 37.3 per cent it is very good and 9.8 per cent state that it is fair (Table 6).

Table 6: *Effectiveness of the CB in Terms of Content Authenticity*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Very good	19	37.3	37.3	37.3
	Good	27	52.9	52.9	90.2
	Fair	5	9.8	9.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Table 7 below illustrates that 49 per cent of the teachers confirm that the

listening course used consists of familiar topics to the students in a good way, for 27.5 per cent rate is very good and for 23.5 per cent it is fair.

Table 7: Effectiveness of the CB in Terms of Students' Familiarity with Topics

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Very good	14	27.5	27.5	27.5
	Good	25	49.0	49.0	76.5
	Fair	12	23.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

In terms of pronunciation activities (Table 8), for majority of the teachers (56.9 per cent) CB used is very good, for 27.5 per cent it is good, and for 7.8 per cent it is both fair and poor.

Table 8: Effectiveness of the Listening Course in Terms of Pronunciation Activities

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Very good	29	56.9	56.9	56.9
	Good	14	27.5	27.5	84.3
	Fair	4	7.8	7.8	92.2
	Poor	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the variety of the activities included in the listening course, 54.9 per cent see it as good, 35.3 per cent say it is very good, for 7.8 per cent it is very poor, and for 2 per cent it as fair. These percentages indicate that the activities variety included in the course is good.

Table 9: Effectiveness of the Listening Course in Terms of Activities Variety

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Very good	18	35.3	35.3	35.3
	Good	28	54.9	54.9	90.2
	Fair	1	2.0	2.0	92.2
	Very poor	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

47.1 per cent value the LCSs represented in the listening course as good, for 23.5 per cent it is very good, for 17.6 per cent it is fair and only 11.8

per cent rated it excellent (Table 10). These percentages indicate that teachers differ in their evaluation of utilizing LCSs in the listening CB.

Table 10: *Effectiveness of the Listening Course in Terms of LCSs*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Excellent	6	11.8	11.8	11.8
	Very good	12	23.5	23.5	35.3
	Good	24	47.1	47.1	82.4
	Fair	9	17.6	17.6	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Table 11 indicates that the representation of such a type of content in the CB is good, however some percentages refer that it is poor. This issue needs to be considered in the LC course, as it causes many difficulties to EFL learners in LC (Hwaider, 2010).

Table 11: *Effectiveness of the Listening Course in Terms of Cultural Background*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Very good	15	29.4	29.4	29.4
	Good	22	43.1	43.1	72.5
	Fair	7	13.7	13.7	86.3
	Poor	3	5.9	5.9	92.2
	Very poor	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Table 12 indicates that the course needs to be developed to focus on students’ interest appropriately.

Table 12: *Effectiveness of the Listening Course in Terms of Students’ Interest*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Excellent	5	9.8	9.8	9.8
	Very good	7	13.7	13.7	23.5
	Good	22	43.1	43.1	66.7
	Fair	13	25.5	25.5	92.2
	Poor	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Q3. Do you use other sources besides the prescribed listening CB?

The results indicate that the utilized listening course is not sufficient and needs to be supported by other materials from different sources.

Table 13: Using Other Sources Besides the Prescribed CB

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Yes	31	60.8	60.8	60.8
	No	20	39.2	39.2	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Q4. If you use other sources besides the prescribed CB, can you give some examples of these sources?

The data reveal some sources used besides the prescribed CB like internet sources (e.g. mp3, videos, and some websites such as BBC Learning). Conversely, another category uses some other CBs such as Headway, World View, Person to Person, and Listening Tactics. These results reveal that there is a variety of sources used by teachers as supplementary materials to the prescribed listening course.

4.2. Activities and Aids Used in the Classroom

The types of activities, aids used, and the adequacy of the listening CB used will be revealed in the responses to questions 5, 6, and 7, respectively.

Q5. What are the types of activities that you use in the classroom?

The data were classified according to the most frequently activities used which include **integrative activities** followed by **communicative activities** in the first two categories of responses. The third category was not focused, as it refers to the activities concerning the aids used such as listening to videos and audios without clarifying the types of the listening activities included. The last category refers to listening strategy activities (i.e. listening for the general idea, specific information, and repetition activities).

Q6. What are the aids that you use to teach listening in the classroom?

The results show that half of the responses did not have access to new technologies for teaching listening, especially in the rural areas. However, the other half includes some new technologies for teaching listening besides the old ones.

These results show that there is a limitation in the aids used in teaching listening in both rural and urban areas.

Q7. Do you think that these aids used are sufficient?

These results indicate that there is inadequacy in the aids which can be related to the unavailability of the facilities.

Table 14: *Teachers’ Satisfaction with the Aids Used*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Yes	17	33.3	33.3	33.3
	No	34	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

4.3. Students

This section analyses the data about some issues related to students, viz. students’ activity in listening and speaking tasks, training students on LCSs, students’ needs for LC strategy training, students’ needs to practise more listening tasks, and students’ attitudes towards listening.

Q8. To what extent are your students active in listening and speaking activities in the listening classroom?

45.1 per cent state that their students are to some extent active in speaking activities, for 11.8 per cent they are active to a great extent. For 35.3 per cent these activities are practised to a limited extent and for 7.8 per cent these are not practised at all. Such results reveal that the level of students’ activity in listening and speaking tasks is poor.

Table 15: *Students’ Level of Activity in the Listening and Speaking Tasks*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	To a great extent	6	11.8	11.8	11.8
	To some extent	23	45.1	45.1	56.9
	To a limited extent	18	35.3	35.3	92.2
	Not at all	4	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Q9. Do you train your students on using listening comprehension strategies?

Table 16 shows that most of the teachers (86.3 per cent) state that they provide their students with training on LCSs, while only 13.7 per cent state that they do not do that.

Table 16: Training Students on LCSs

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Yes	44	86.3	86.3	86.3
	No	7	13.7	13.7	100.0
	Total	51	100.0	100.0	

Q10. What are the listening comprehension strategies that you used to train your students on?

The data shows that many teachers focus on LCSs. They provide some examples of LCSs such as warm-up strategies, e.g. thinking of the topic, selecting clues for text), metacognitive strategies, comprehension monitoring and auditory monitoring. They also refer to some cognitive strategies, e.g. listening for details, summarization, repetition, note-taking strategy and inferencing strategy. One socio-affective strategy was also referred to which included cooperation. Conversely, the other group of respondents (40 per cent) did not respond appropriately to this question.

Accordingly, despite the limitation in the strategies used, some teachers perceive and train students on LCSs. However, some teachers need to know more about LCSs and the way of training students on using them.

Q11. Do you think that students need to be trained on using listening comprehension strategies?

Table 17 indicates teachers' awareness of students' needs for training on LCSs, where all of them think that students need such training.

Table 17: Students' Need to LC Strategy Training

		Frequency	Per cent	Valid Per cent	Cumulative Per cent
Valid	Yes	51	100.0	100.0	100.0

Q12. Do you think that students' need to practise more listening tasks to develop their listening skills?

All teachers confirm that students need to practise more LC tasks (Table

18). This may refer that the tasks provided in the classroom are not sufficient and students’ proficiency level in listening activities is not sufficient.

Table 18: *Students’ Needs to Practise More LC Tasks*

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Per cent</i>	<i>Valid Per cent</i>	<i>Cumulative Per cent</i>
Valid	Yes	51	100.0	100.0	100.0

5. Conclusions

The results of investigating the scenario of teaching the listening skill at the University of Aden showed some critical issues.

First, the CB used is still taught in a separate course in most of the faculties, whereas, the most effective ways of teaching listening are directed to integrate it with the other language skills. Regarding the effectiveness of the course in terms of students’ needs, the authenticity of content, and students’ familiarity with the selected topics, the results showed that it was good. Besides, pronunciation activities included in the CB were good but inadequate. Furthermore, the cultural background was insufficiently reflected in the course. Similarly, it was found that the prescribed listening course was not sufficient, and there was a need to support it by other materials from different sources. Moreover, the aids and technological facilities were inadequate.

The findings revealed that teachers need to focus on relating the activities to LCSs for improving students’ performance. Students’ activity in listening and speaking tasks was poor. Moreover, there is a need for LC strategy training programmes and practising more LC tasks.

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