

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Determining and Planning Listening Activities in Literary English as a Foreign Language Classes

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Abstract

Listening skill teaching is the everlasting challenge to teachers in EFL classroom. The present study aimed to investigate the determining and planning for listening activities in literary upper seventh grades classes in the municipality of Parakou (Benin Republic). Both EFL teachers and learners in upper seventh grades A1, A2 and B from in the secondary school of Zongo have been selected purposively as the participants. A total of 09 teachers and 59 learners were selected. Questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations have been used to collect data. Teachers focus on texts reading and storytelling as tools of measurement. From analysis, EFL teachers always plan listening activities and set clear goal with the learners. Moreover, teachers do not follow the guide's content in designing and implementing listening activities. So, concrete actions are needed in Benin education system.

Keywords: Listening, Activities, EFL, Literary Upper Seventh Grades.

1. Introduction

English is the main language that has the greatest reach and influence all over the world. For a good mastery of the language, four main skills are required such as writing, reading, speaking and listening. Listening is a primary receptive language skill that needs to be developed among ESL/EFL learners for successful verbal communication. Nevertheless, listening happens to be a difficult skill to teach foreign language learners as it is mostly non-participative (students listen to others' speech or presentation) and they have no control over the speed of speech (Blyth 2010). The consequence of this difficulty results in a very high level of anxiety and stress. This anxiety and stress raises the affective filter (Krashen 1988) in students thus clogging the path of flow of information and skill development. For this reason, teachers are reluctant in teaching listening or find it more challenging. Moreover, second language (L2) learners often face many difficulties in grasping the sounds and meaning of the listening task (Tasnim et al. 2022).

However, developing the listening comprehension skill is important for students, especially in a communicative language environment where activities often revolve around interactions between English language learners. According to Brown (2001), students with well-developed listening comprehension skills are able to participate more effectively in classroom activities. In that perspective, effective materials and teaching techniques are essential.

Due to the improvement of ICTs, various approaches and strategies are promoted and applied in teaching learning language skills worldwide. These include most importantly audio materials, such as recorded speech or conversation, songs, radio broadcasts, and audio versions of books, which are often used as teaching tools for EFL/ESL instruction. At an upper-intermediate level, music or songs can also help develop listening skills among learners (Tasnim et al. 2022).

In Benin, a French speaking country, many students do not seem to like English lessons, because it requires

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the mastering of receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). However, acquisition starts with one of them and a great part of this acquisition process lies on it. It is said that, of the total times spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%, speaking 25-30%, reading 11-16% and writing about 9% (Mendelson 1994). As for listening skill, the students often complain about their incapacity to decode and understand when teachers speak. As consequence, learners feel demotivated and uninterested to EFL classes.

Regarding, to its major part in language communication, a careful look must be put on listening activities implementation in classroom since schools are the places where learners get into contact with English language for its acquisition. This has been the real motive of the present research work which seeks to investigate the listening skill teaching learning in secondary school literary upper seventh grades.

2. Problem Statement

Four skills are taught in any language class. They are listening, reading, speaking and writing (Sadiku, 2015). The Listening skill plays a vital role in English language classes mainly in countries where it is learned as foreign or second language. It is determinant to good classroom atmosphere, learners' interaction and motivation, lessons understanding and thereby impacts their success. So it is up to teachers to design and implement good listening activities in EFL classroom to make learners interested and achieve the teaching learning goal. Indeed, teachers play many roles in the teaching learning process, including leading and managing the students' learning process. In line with this, Brown (2001) points out that the roles of teachers are as controller, director, manager, facilitator and the resources within the learning process.

Besides, many teachers do not implement an appropriate and effective method on the teaching of listening skill. This might be linked to many causes among which the lack of training, the lack of appropriate materials as mentioned above. Utami et al. (2021) stated that English language teachers need special training and must be language specialist graduates with minimum Bachelor degree in English teaching.

In Listening skill teaching especially, EFL/ESL teachers still meet difficulties in designing and conducting classes. However, it is important to teach the language skills by applying different strategies

to make the students interested and proficient in purposeful communication in English. These strategies imply students' listening problem identifying, theoretical discussion and practical task applying (Tasnim, 2022). If the activities are well determined and planned in the teaching process, then the result will be positive in the development of listening skill, and therefore will affect in a positives way the English acquisition.

2.1 Objectives of the Study

Communicating in a language requires the gathering of four main skills like speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Many people agree on the fact that the best and quickest way to master a language is to try to speak it. But speaking goes along with listening. Before speaking a language, it is necessary to listen to it because listening plays a capital role in daily communication. The purpose of this research is to analyze how listening activities are determined and conducted in EFL classes.

Specifically, the study aims to:

- Find out teachers' difficulties in designing and implementing listening activities;
- Evaluate the learners perceptions about listening activities in classroom;
- Analyze the impact of listening activities on learners language improvement;
- Highlight relevant strategies to promote students' listening skills in EFL classes

2.2. Research Questions

To reach the objectives set above, some research questions have been asked as followed:

Research question 1: What are the activities implemented by EFL teachers to raise students' listening?

Research question 2: How do teachers conduct listening activities in EFL classroom?

Research question 3: Are EFL learners motivated in listening activities in EFL class?

Research question 4: What are the difficulties faced by teachers in listening class?

3. Material and Methods

Zongo secondary school in the municipality of Parakou in northern Benin has served as setting to this research work. Bordered in the South, East and

West by Tchaourou municipality and in the North by N'dali municipality, Parakou belongs to the district of Borgou.

3.1 Target Population and Sample

This research work was focused on the EFL teachers and learners of “upper seventh grades (A2, A1, B)” classes of CEG Zongo as target population. A total of 59 students and 09 teachers have been selected purposively to constitute the sample to this research. This students’ sample is splitted into 25 from “upper seventh grade A2”, 20 from “upper seventh grade A1” and 14 from “upper seventh grade B”.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

3.2.1 Interviews

This method helped to collect relevant information about teaching learning process of listening, especially EFL classrooms are concerned and the real feelings of both teachers and learners when dealing with that skill.

The interview has taken into account only the teachers of literary upper seventh grades (A1, A2 and B). The discussion during the interview was led through questions turning around the method used in making the choice of the listening activities to be presented in class; this refers to the determining of listening activity; and around the way the activities are planned by the teachers. It was also about the presentation of listening activities in the guide, the factors of an affective and successful listening class, the use of listening materials and the teachers’ thoughts towards the place of listening skill in English language acquisition.

3.2.2 Class Observation

Classroom observation technique has been used to collect the nonverbal and behavioral responses of the respondents. It has aimed to see how teachers carry out their listening class and how students perform throughout the lesson and what are the problems learners and teachers really encounter in listening activities. First of all, an authorization was gotten from the School Principal and the concerned English teachers. The upper seventh grades A1, A2 and B classes have been observed at their normal time according to their teachers’ time table over a period of one week.

3.3 Instruments

Questionnaires addressed to both teachers and learners have constituted the major instrument used to collect data.

3.3.1 Teachers’ Questionnaire

The questionnaire addressed to English teachers aims at exploring the way listening activities are carried out in classrooms and the impact on the language acquisition by learners. It is made up of eleven questions and the respondents just do a tick in each box, which corresponds to their opinion or response. The questionnaires sheets were given to teachers and returned back one week later after filling.

3.3.2 Students’ Questionnaire

The questionnaire designed for learners are made up of ten questions. This questionnaire aims at collecting students’ perception and feelings about listening activities on the one hand, and the teaching method used by teachers during classes. The questionnaire was designed in soft way so as to facilitate its filling by putting tick in front of the responses. As done with teachers, the questionnaire sheets have been distributed to learners who have filled and returned back one week later.

3.4 Data Processing

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have been used to process the data collected. The qualitative processing consists in discourse and content analysis whereas quantitative processing concerns the frequencies and percentages calculation. Excel 10 software has been used for that purpose.

4. Findings

4.1 Data from Teachers’ Questionnaires

The analysis shows that all of the teachers, which is 100% always plan listening activities before executing them in class. The majority that is 6 teachers against 3 stated that listening activities are successful when they are planned in advance. Likewise, 7 teachers agreed that learners do not understand very well when the activities are not planned. This means that not planning listening activities before their implementation affects negatively the output of the learners concerning listening. Therefore it affects the learners’ listening skill development, or improvement, and by so doing, the acquisition of English as foreign language.

Also, 100% affirm that they get positive feedback from the students when listening activities are planned and prepared in advance. About the variable 5 related to the respect of the different stages of listening activity, 8 teachers; that is 88,89 % always follow the three stages of listening process (pre-listening, post-listening) and have then confirmed that they have

positive result. , only 1 teacher that is 11.11% has said that he/she always follows the guide for listening activities against 8.89 % who recognized not using it. Then 55.56 %, this is 5 teachers, asserted that listening activities are more successful when the guide is not used and 44.44 % that is 4 teachers said the opposite. Talking about the materials used for listening teaching, the study revealed that none (00%) use video tape as listening activities method; 1 teacher that is 11.11 % uses radio tape, 1 that is 11.11% uses song, 3 that is 33.33% use storytelling and 4 that is 44.44 % use other methods for listening activities. One can see that teachers do not use materials like video tape and radio tape for listening class. Only storytelling and other method which corresponds to text reading are used by almost all of the teachers. Moreover, 3 teachers that are 33.33% asserted that the learners are more interested in listening activities with those used materials whereas the majority that is 66.67 % who thought that the learners are not interested. The result also showed that the majority of the teachers set clear objectives to reach before starting listening activities.

4.2 Data from Students' Questionnaires

The data from students' questionnaires shows that 52 learners, that is 88.13% find English language learning easy for them. Also, 71.18% can understand clearly when their teacher or someone else speaks English against 28.82% who don't understand anything. This may explain why the numbers of the learners that find English learning easy than the number of those that do not; because when English language is spoken they understand. So English learning is easy for them.

Concerning the most challenging language skill in EFL learning, 40.67% found speaking skill the most difficult; 11.86% said listening; 30.53% said writing and 16.94% for reading. Similarly, 100% of the students affirm that with a well-developed listening ability, which include hearing and understanding what is said; English learning would be easier for them. Besides, 84.36% of the students acknowledge that listening activities in class do help them to understand more English while 18.64% said the contrary.

About the materials used by teachers to implement listening activities in class, 44.06% of the respondents told about sound, 54.84% about storytelling and 0% for video and radio tape. However, 43.37% said that sounds and storytelling are more interesting in listening activities while 54.63% are not interested.

The majority of the students (72.89%) asserted that before starting listening session, their teacher displays

the objectives of the activities and that makes them feel confident and concentrated. But 27.11% found the opposite. Likewise 100% of the respondents asserted that they do not have enough time for listening activities.

4.3 Data from Interviews

Individual interviews held with the participants revealed that the great majority of teachers does not follow or use the guide for the choice, which is the determining of the listening activity to be presented in class. And the reason they all gave is that the guide's activities are not always suitable for the level of the learners and that following the guide will not allow goal which is the development of the English learners listening skills. Most of the English teachers have also agreed on the fact that the way the listening activities are presented in the guide is not really suitable. Another important thing that has been drawn from these interviews is about the listening materials. None of those English teachers have never used listening materials such as radio tape, video tape. They are just limited to the text reading or songs. The reasons advanced for this, are that they don't have any of these materials and the school also doesn't have it. Besides, many of them recognized that they do not know how to use those materials. Another reason is that there is no electricity in all the classrooms. So they could not use listening materials. However, concerning the factors of an effective and a successful listening class, the English teachers agreed that the use of listening material like radio tape, video tape and audio is the first on list. They also share the same through that a well-developed listening skill could make English acquisition easier.

4.4 Data from Classroom Observation

During class observations, it was noticed that there was no use of listening materials like audios and video tapes or records. The listening activity was only carried out through text reading. This consisted in the teacher reading the text and the students listening to it to after answer to the questions on the text. The teacher reads two or three times before going to the questions. The section of the questions goes through three activities (Activity 1, Activity 2, and Activity 3). Sometimes, because of time constraint, teachers don't follow the three stages. Another problem noticed was oversized classroom. The students are numerous, which leads to distraction during activities. The text reading is boring for them so some prefer sleeping, other talking and some treating mathematics exercises.

5. Discussion

The data from teachers' questionnaires showed that they all, always plan listening activities before executing them in classroom. This is very important and proves that teachers are conscious of the importance of lesson planning at school. Actually, lesson plan guides us during and after the lesson that which things should be added or removed for the next session (Habibi, 2019). Lika, (2017) defined a lesson plan as a set of notes that helps us to think through what we are going to teach and how we are going to teach and taking into consideration many elements such as, students' styles of learning, previous knowledge, types of intelligences, interests and other related issues.

The majority of the teachers, 66.67% said that listening activities are not successful when they are not planned very well in advance. They support their point by the fact that the activity is not well conducted the teacher and thereby understood by the learners. This means that unplanned listening activities can affect negatively the output of the learners. Even more, all the respondent teachers affirmed that they get positive feedback from the students when listening activities are planned and prepared in advance. This observation how much necessary is the lesson planning in classroom practices. Jensen, (2001) supported by Jantarach and Soontornwipast (2018) obtained similar conclusion when said that lesson planning reaffirms quality in teaching and learning achievements.

About the question related to the respect of the different stages of listening activity, 88.89 % always follow the three stages of listening process which are pre-listening, post-listening; and have then confirmed that they have positive result. Similar results are made by Wang (2018) who pointed out three key principles in listening class. The first principle consists in choosing appropriate materials for students according to their different levels and their different need. The second principle is how to plan tasks, exercises or activities appropriate to students according to their needs. The third principle calls for teachers' ability to help students establish a good habit.

Nevertheless, only 1 teacher that is 11.11% always follows the guide for listening activities designing against the majority, 88.89 % who do not using it. To 55.56 %, listening activities are more successful when the guide is not used. This may be due to the inadequacy of its content which may not actually serve teachers to succeed in listening teaching.

Talking of the materials used for listening teaching, the study revealed that none (00%) use videotapes as

listening activities material; only 1 teacher uses radio tapes, 1 uses song, 3 use storytelling and 4 for other methods for listening activities. Whereas in listening activity, videotapes, film, BBC news, songs, recorded tapes and even 'live' are recommended as essential tools (Wang, 2018). Tasnim (2022) has focused on songs interest. The researcher stated that one of the most important benefits of using songs is that students find themselves in a relaxing and pleasant classroom atmosphere. Only storytelling and other method which corresponds to text reading are used by almost all of the teachers. These observations have raised the problem of suitable lack materials in EFL classrooms. Indeed, the majority of teachers that is 66.67 % thought that learners are not interested in listening classes. Even so, the result also showed that the majority of the teachers set clear objectives to reach before starting listening activities.

The data from students' questionnaires shows that 88.13% of them find English language learning easy. 71.18% can understand clearly when someone speaks English. Indeed, 40.67% of the students found speaking skill the most difficult; 11.86% said listening; 30.53% said writing and 16.94% for reading. This signifies that listening is the easiest skill to them. This observation is normal since learners are from literary classes (A1, A2 and B), where language subjects are more stressed. These findings are similar to Kanwal and Khurshid (2012) who pointed out that in India 62% of the students can understand when their teacher speaks English. Yavuza et al. (2015) found contrary remarks.

Correspondingly, all of the students affirmed that with a well-developed listening ability, which include hearing and understanding what is said, English learning would be easier for them. Actually, 84.36% of the students acknowledge that listening activities in class do help them to understand more English while 18.64% said the contrary. This shows teachers' great effort in teaching this skill to students.

About the materials used in listening classes, 44.06% of the learners answered sound, 54.84% said storytelling and none for videotapes and radio tapes. Unfortunately, 54.63% are not interested in songs and storytelling as media in listening teaching. Likewise 100% of the respondents asserted that they don't have enough time for listening activities. This raises the problem of time constraint that is general to EFL class.

The individual interviews revealed that the teachers did not follow the guide's instructions to designs and

conduct the listening activities. The reason for that is the mismatch between its contents and the actual level of the students. So this remarks call for school authorities' responsibility to update the guide. Also, teachers have notified the scarcity of suitable materials and media in teaching listening skill. However, Islam et al. (2020) found that quality of language teaching and efficient learning by the learners are much influenced by effective materials.

The findings from classroom observations prove actually that teachers focus mostly on texts to conduct listening section. They read the text two or three times to students who listened and answers to the task. Such practice makes students feel bored and distracted while class.

6. Conclusion

The present study has investigated the determining and planning for listening activities in literary “upper seventh grades” classes in the secondary school of Zongo (Benin). After analyzing data, the study has revealed that EFL teachers in majority plan listening activities before class. As methods and materials used for teaching Listening skill, teachers focus on texts reading and sometimes storytelling. Those materials make students feel bored and demotivated in English language learning. Nevertheless, the EFL teachers always plan listening activities and set clear goal with the learners. The study also has raised the daily problem of the lack of suitable material for a successful EFL teaching learning process. Moreover, teachers do not follow the guide's content in designing and implementing listening activities, because it is out of date. So, concrete actions are needed in Benin education sector to make the English language teaching learning efficient.

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