

## Listening Skills Teaching Practice at Secondary Level: Gondar Secondary Schools in Focus

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### Abstract

The objective of this study was to assess the exercise of teaching listening skill at general secondary schools found in Gondar city. Thus, adopting descriptive survey design, a total of 115 (male=90 & female=25) English language teacher who taught grade 9 students participated in the study. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaire whereas the semi-structured interview was used to collect the qualitative data. Data analysis was undertaken using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitatively, frequency and percentage were used whereas thematic analysis was used for analyzing the qualitative data. Findings show that the majority of English language teachers use the bottom-up approach during the teaching of the listening skill. Findings also show that English language teachers failed to properly and fully implement the pre, while and post listening activities. Findings also show that teachers' emphasis on grammar, teachers' preference to explanation and demonstration than to create students listening opportunities, teachers' preference to teacher-centered approach, teachers' reluctance to provide students opportunities to

exercise listening were some of the challenges facing the class room exercise of teaching the listening skill. Finally, it is recommended that English language teachers should clearly understand and properly exercise the pre, while and post-listening activities in the process of teaching the listening skills. Moreover, practical in-service trainings on how to teach listening skill should be given to teachers

Keywords: Listening skills, Exercise

## 1. Introduction

In Ethiopia, EFL teaching-learning process, listening has been consistently cited as an important skill because it is taught as one of EL skills and used as a medium of instruction in various grade levels where students attend lessons of various academic subjects (Taye, 2008). However, though data may be old; various local studies consistently reported that the listening skill of students in various grade levels was found to be below the expected (Tewolde, 1988; Semie, 1989; Birhanu, 1993).

When having a closer examination of the findings of each study, Tewolde (1988) studied the listening ability of grade 7 students and revealed that students had below the expected listening level required of them in understanding their subject areas. Similarly, Seime (1989) studied the listening skill of college students and concluded that college students had below the level expected of them in understanding lectures on physics, chemistry and mathematics subjects. Though the above reviewed works revealed poor listening skill of sampled subjects, they did not specifically identify factors behind the problem. A study conducted by Haregewoin (2003) could be more informative in this respect. The author found out that teachers did not show any significant efforts to give pre-listening tasks or to provide students

with visual support. Furthermore, she reported that the materials used to teach listening skills were inadequate in the sense that they did not express the real life of the learners. Taye (2008) also reported that teachers failed to fully implement the teaching of listening skill according to the procedures and techniques favored by the teachers' book and scholars of ELT. Moreover, Muluken(2008) revealed that teachers failed to manage the listening lessons using the appropriate pedagogical procedures i.e. they did not employ the pre, while and post listening stages or activities.

Hence, it can be safely inferred from the above empirical studies that listening skill was not properly taught in English language classrooms where the above respective studies were conducted. This was a point where the present researcher focused on because the researcher believes that systematically assessing actual classroom exercise of teaching listening may help to rule out factors behind students' poor listening skills. In line with this, Sheerin(1987) explained that effective teaching of listening involves procedures such as provision of adequate preparation, adequate support and appropriate tasks, together with positive feed-back, error analysis and remedial action. The author further discusses that language teachers can present listening lessons effectively when they make adequate pre-teaching preparation, i.e. studying the text, identifying and adjusting the level of difficulty of the listening tasks. Similarly, Rost (1990) made it clear that in order to establish whether learners have understood the discourse, teachers should set some kinds of listening comprehension tasks. While setting the tasks, factors such as listener's general background, interest and purpose in listening should be taken into account. Thus, in light of the above ideas, this study assessed the exercise of teaching listening skill. The study focused on all secondary schools found in Gondar city with a particular focus on grade 9 students.

## 2. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological procedures of the study. Specifically, the chapter includes study area, the research design, sampling procedure, data collection instruments and data analysis. The description of each component has been presented here under.

### 2.1. Study area

The study was conducted at Gondar city situated at highlands surrounded by mountains. Gondar city it is the major social, political and economical center of Central Gondar Zone. According to statistics of 2007 from the zone statistical office, the total population of the city was about 298,000. The city is also the home of various ethnic, social and cultural groupings. The city is predominantly inhabited by Amharas. Gondar is famous for its historical legacies such as Atse Fasil castle, Empress Mintewab castle which are located at the center of the town. In the town there are about 34 government sector offices including 6 sub-cities, 12 general secondary schools and 44 primary schools.

### 2.2. Research Design

The focus of this study was to assess the exercise of teaching listening skill. consequently, the study employed a descriptive survey design because this design provides the researcher an opportunity to present and describe the existing situation in relation to the objectives of the study. In this respect, McMilan (2007) also explained that descriptive survey design provides a summary of an existing phenomenon by

using numbers to characterize individuals or group. It assesses the nature of existing conditions.

### 2.3. Sampling Techniques

This section presents sampling techniques that was used to select the school and grade level.

#### 2.3.1. School Selection

As explained earlier, this study examined the exercise of teaching listening skill at general secondary schools found in Gondar city. To achieve this objective, class room observations were planned initially, grade 9 students were also presumed to involve in the study and Edeget Felg general secondary school was chosen as case study area. But, due to current situations, the teaching-learning process has been interrupted and students have been dispersed. This forced the researcher to focus on English language teachers as source data.

For this reason, using comprehensive sampling technique, all general secondary schools were taken. According to data available from Gondar City Department of Education (2020), there are 12 general secondary schools which give education in two grade levels (9-10 grades). The data also shows that there are 710(male=414 & female= 296) teachers who teach different subjects of whom 115(male=90 female=25) were English language teachers. The rationale for involving all general secondary schools was the fact that English language teachers were taken as the sole sources of data used for addressing the objective of the study. As explained above, their number was easily manageable for the research work such as data collection and analysis. The following table presents the list of all general

secondary schools with the number of English language teachers who teach at grade 9 level.

### 2.3.2. Participants of the Study

In this study, there were two types of participants based on their role in the study. The first participants were English language teachers who involved in filling the structured questionnaire to render the quantitative data. Their number was 110(male=85 female=25). Moreover, a total of 5 English language teachers who teach at grade 9 were involved in the study to provide the qualitative data. To this end, those English language teachers who taught English for relatively many years at grade 9 were taken purposefully because they were believed to provide relevant data used in the study. Thus, added together, they study involved a total of 115(male=90 & female=25) English language teachers as participants.

## 2.4. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, two data collection instruments namely structured questionnaire and semi-structured interview guide were used to collect the required data. The following section describes each data collection instrument

### 2.4.1 Structured Questionnaire

The structured questionnaire was adopted from previous studies (Muluken, 2008; Haregewoin, 2003). The main objective of using structured questionnaire was to collect quantitative data aiming to address the objectives of the study. Thus, through the questionnaire, data regarding approaches used by English language teachers were collected. Moreover, the structured questionnaire was also used to collect data regarding pre, while and post listening activities. Challenges facing the

class room exercise of teaching the listening skill was also collected using the structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire was prepared by the researcher through revising relevant literature that focus on the teaching of listening skill. The questionnaire was prepared in Likert scales. Particularly, items that assess approaches followed by English language teachers and challenges were prepared in five point Likert scale which represents 1=strongly disagree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree. On the other hand, items that assessed the exercise of pre, while and post listening activities were prepared in four-point Likert scale ranging from 1=usually, 2=often, 3=sometimes and 4=never

#### 2.4.2. Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from English language teachers regarding approaches they used in the teaching of listening skill, listening activities and challenges were affecting the exercise of teaching listening skill. A total of 8 interview items; of which 3 assessed the listening approach English language teachers used, 3 assessed the listening activities and 2 focused on challenges affecting the exercise of teaching listening skills.

#### 2.5. Data Analysis

In this study, data analysis was conducted using quantitative and qualitative techniques. Quantitatively, the study used frequency and percentage to analyze the data collected through the structured questionnaire. Moreover, tables were used to present the quantitative findings. On the other hand, thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data collected through the semi-structured interview guide.

### 3. Discussion

With the objective of assessing the exercise of teaching the listening skill, this study was conducted among English language teachers who teach at general secondary schools found in Gondar city. Using comprehensive sampling technique, a total of 110(male= 85 & female=25) grade 9 English language teachers involved in the study to fill the survey questionnaire. Moreover, using purposive sampling technique, 5 English language teachers involved as key informants to render the qualitative data. The study used both quantitative and qualitative data. To this end, the quantitative data were collected through survey questionnaire whereas the qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview. Data analyses were undertaken using both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Specifically, the quantitative data were analyzed using frequency and percentage whereas thematic analysis was used to analyze the qualitative data. Findings show that most of the English language teachers use the bottom-up approach when teaching the listening skills; specifically,

- 34% and 41% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that English language teachers encouraged students to pay attention to every detail of the listening text.
- 30% and 45% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they encouraged their students to focus on language aspects such as sounds, vocabulary and grammar which were included in the listening text.

- 33% and 40% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they helped their students to understand the listening text beginning from smallest language units to complete texts.
- 25% and 47% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they helped students to understand the meaning of new words based on the context
- 30% and 35% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that they assisted their students to relate the information they get from the listening text with their own personal experiences.
- 29% and 33% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they helped their students to reflect ideas presented on the listening text using their own words.
- 33% and 40% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively that they assisted students to ask questions, revise and conclude the main ideas of the listening text

Findings also show that in the course of teaching the listening skill, pre, while and post-listening skills were not properly and fully exercised in the classroom. Specifically, findings show that pre-listening activities such as introducing the listening text (44%), making instruction clear (58%), drawing students' attention to the listening text (38%), telling students to copy the questions, tables and summary outlines (46%) and engaging students in pair and group discussions are most of the pre-listening activities exercised among English language teachers. On the other hand, setting purpose for each listening activity, drawing students' attention to some key lexical items, making students read though the comprehension questions before the listen the text and reminding students to take special note were not exercised by the majority of English language teachers in the study area.

Findings show that most the while-listening activities were not exercised. More particularly, the majority of English language teachers never exercised while listening activities such as advising students how to use various listening and note-taking techniques (65%), making students listen for the general idea of the text (67%), letting students listen for main points of the text (50%), making students listen for detail information given in the text (35%), encouraging students to guess the meaning of new words from the context (78%), engaging students in some listen and follow-up activities(85%) and making students take meaningful notes to write summaries and reports later(58%).

Findings also show that post-listening activities such as making students compare and complete their notes(78%), assigning students elect their group leaders during group discussion(72%), ensuring students' discussion was in English (84%), helping students to work in their groups to come to consensus on answers of comprehension questions(86%), asking students to report the results of their group discussion (74%), asking students to summarize on the main point of their discussion(76%), engaging students in extensive writing exercises (91%) and giving 'appropriate' feedback on the students' listening comprehension activities (75%) were never exercised by English language teachers in the course teaching the listening skills.

Findings also show that teachers' over emphasis on grammar than listening, teachers' preference to explanation and demonstration than to create students listening opportunities, teachers' preference to teacher-centered approach, teachers' reluctance to encourage students to use English in and outside class, teachers' reluctance to provide students opportunities to exercise listening, Teachers' incompetence,

teachers' reluctance to use teaching aids and authentic materials and absence of teachers' feedback as challenges affecting the exercise of teaching listening skill.

#### 4. Conclusion

As one of the English language skill, listening plays significant role in both academic and non-academic purposes. Particularly, without appropriate listening skill, students face various academic challenges. Thus, in the process of teaching English as second language, the exercise of teaching listening should be properly implemented; however, findings of this study show that most of the English language teachers follow bottom-up approach which requires students to start from smallest language units and proceed to complete text in course of understanding the listening text. But, an entire dependence on single approach could not result in required listening competence on the part of students. Instead the available literature promotes that in the course of teaching listening skill teachers should follow an interactive approach. In other words, teachers are encouraged to combine the bottom-up and top-down approaches which provide an opportunity for teachers to complement ones' inherent limitation with the other and vice versa. Findings also show that the pre, while and post listening activities were not properly exercised during the teaching of listening skill. This in turn affects students to develop their listening skills. Therefore English language teachers need to give room for each activity designated under each stages of listening. The study also pointed out that the exercise of teaching listening skill faces challenges such as teachers' over emphasis on grammar than listening, teachers' preference to explanation and demonstration than to create students listening opportunities, teachers' preference to teacher-centered approach, teachers' reluctance

to encourage students to use English in and outside class, teachers' reluctance to provide students opportunities to exercise listening, Teachers' incompetence, teachers' reluctance to use teaching aids and authentic materials and absence of teachers' feedback.

#### 5. Recommendations

- English language teachers should follow an interactive approach which incorporates both bottom-up and top-down approach in the course of teaching the listening skills
- English language teachers should clearly understand and properly exercise the pre, while and post-listening activities in the process of teaching the listening skills. Moreover, practical in-service trainings on how to teach listening skill should be given to the teachers.
- English language teachers are recommended to lessen giving over emphasis to grammatical activities; instead, they should create students opportunities to develop their listening skills through practical activities
- English language are recommended to use teaching aids and authentic materials during the teaching of listening skills.

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