

# الصعوبات التي تواجه المعلمين في استخدام الأنشطة في فصول الاستماع والكلام في جامعة الزاوية

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## ملخص البحث :

تلعب مهارات التحدث و الاستماع دورا مهما في حياتنا. ففي الوقت الحاضر لوحظ أنه يعطى اهتماما قليلا لمهارات التحدث والاستماع في بعض فصول الجامعات الليبية. هذه الدراسة تعطي تفاصيل على كيفية تدريس التحدث والاستماع في الكليات الليبية.

الأغراض الرئيسية لهذه الدراسة هي أن تظهر الصعوبات التي يواجهها أساتذة الجامعات في أداء الأنشطة داخل فصول التحدث والاستماع في جامعة الزاوية.

هذه الدراسة تقترح أن هناك أسبابا وراء هذه الصعوبات حاول الباحث اكتشافها ؛ إذ تصف هذه الورقة طبيعة عملية الاستماع والأنشطة ، وما الذي يجعل الاستماع صعبا ، ودور المعلم في تدريس مهارات التحدث والكلام ؛ كما إنها ايضا تصف منهجية ضبط أساليب جمع البيانات وتحليلها ، وأخيرا النتائج التي توصلت اليها الدراسة .

## Difficulties Encountered by Teachers in Performing Activities in listening and speaking classes in Al- Zawia University

### \* Abstract

Listening and speaking skills play a significant role in our life. Nowadays, it is noticed that little attention is given to listening and speaking skills in some Libyan university classes. This study gives details on how listening and speaking are taught and by teachers in two faculties. The fundamental purposes of this study is to show the difficulties encountered by university teachers in performing activities in listening and speaking

classes at Al-zawia University. This study supposes that there are reasons behind these difficulties and the researcher attempts to find them out. This paper describes the nature of listening process and activities, what makes listening difficult and the teacher's role. It also describes the methodology and the methods of data collection and analysis, and finally, the findings of the study.

## \* OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Listening and speaking are essential parts of the language comprehension process. They are the most important skills in learning a foreign language. Despite of many English language researchers agree that listening and speaking skill are the most difficult skills because this skill requires competent teachers and variety of language activities.

Most teachers might agree that listening and speaking are neglected skills in the teaching process. The developing listening comprehension and speaking ability of students needs techniques for testing and assessing their progress. These techniques should be appropriate to the purpose of the test. There are many difficulties whether in teaching or testing listening and speaking skills. This means that teaching and testing are closely interrelated to help students develop their listening and speaking skills. It is important for the teacher to provide numerous opportunities for students to practice listening skills and become actively engaged in the listening process. Teachers can help students to become effective listeners through three stages: pre-listening, during-listening and post-listening by making them aware of different kinds of listening, the different purposes of listening, and the qualities of good listeners. Unfortunately, the traditional way of teaching such as: introducing some new different words, listening to the tape again and again giving correct answers, still prevails.

There is a strong relationship between listening and speaking. Rivers (1981:162) points out that “listeners take the time to process each message in detail. They will not be able to keep up with the speakers”. When speaking a language, a student can control a relatively narrow range of vocabulary at his or her pace to express an idea, but when listening to the response, he or she no longer handles the choice of vocabulary. Some students' speaking skills improve dramatically in a very short time, only by listening to English every day to help them make very steady progress. However; students need to do intensive listening in order to really learn well.

Based on the researcher's experience, many students complained that they became tired of listening to the tape from beginning to the end with some mechanical exercises. Without interest, motivation and variation in teaching and learning, students felt bored in listening classes. As a result, the passive attitude kept students from making much progress in listening comprehension. In this study, what we want to discuss is how to make listening classes more interesting and how to use the techniques in teaching listening and speaking by teachers.

### \* **Purpose of the Study**

This paper focuses on:

1. The problems that face university teachers in using listening and speaking activities in English classes at Al-zawia University.
2. The importance of teaching and testing listening and speaking skills.
3. Methods and techniques which can be used in English classes for teaching listening and speaking skills.

4. How materials taught to the students in listening and speaking at two Faculties of Al-zawia University: Faculty of Education and Faculty of Arts.

### \* **Research Questions**

The present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- 1- What makes listening and speaking difficult for teachers?
- 2- To what extent can listening and speaking be taught? What is the role of the teacher in listening and speaking classes?
- 3- How can teachers help their students overcome their listening and speaking problems?

The main hypothesis of this study is that most of the teachers find many difficulties in teaching listening and speaking so they may face the same problems which are common in teaching and testing these skills, and this study supposes that the main reasons behind these difficulties are: the lack of learning facilities such as language labs, video, audiotapes, etc., the lack of using the authentic materials in teaching listening, the time which is devoted to teaching this skill is insufficient and the last reason concerns with the teacher's role in teaching listening and speaking process.

### \* **Significance of the Study**

This study is an attempt to investigate the causes of the listening and speaking problems and try to find out suitable solutions for these problems in order to facilitate language learning. In this case, teachers should be aware of the advantages of listening and speaking activities. In other words;

this study focuses on the problems or challenges which are still facing many university teachers in preparing tests of listening and speaking skills. The researcher believes that an investigation on how to design appropriate listening materials at Al-zawia University will be very helpful in teaching and testing listening and speaking. For English teachers, the findings of this study will give valuable and useful information on the implementation of teaching listening and speaking skills.

### \* **The Importance of Listening and Speaking Skills**

Listening is the most common communicative activity in daily life. Morley (1991:82) "we can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we writ.". Listening is also important for obtaining comprehensible input that is necessary for language learning. Rivers (1981:151) points out that "speaking does not itself constitute communication unless what is being said is comprehended by another person". Moreover, speaking a language is difficult for foreign learners because effective oral communication requires the ability to use the language appropriately in social interactions. Byrne (1994:9) states that "the ability to express oneself intelligibly, reasonably, accurately and without too much hesitation; otherwise, communication may breakdown because the listener loses interest or get impatient."

Nunan(1991:17-8) points out that in order to develop appropriate approaches in teaching listening skills, it is necessary to understand the nature of listening. For many years and until recently the nature of listening was ignored by applied linguists. It was often assumed that listening skills could be acquired through exposure to the target language.

Underwood (1993:1) defines listening as “an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear”. Listening is a skill in a sense that it is a related but distinct process than hearing which involves merely perceiving sound in a passive way while listening occupies an active and immediate analysis of the streams of sounds.

Although there is a traditional labeling for reading and listening as passive skills, Littlewood (1981: 66) states “listening is not a passive activity”.

Brown and Yule (1983: 55) indicate that “most foreign learners will not acquire a comfortable ability to listen and understand the foreign language as spoken by native speakers if they only listen to their teacher and classmates and feedback from their own spoken production”.

### **\* What Makes Listening and Speaking Difficult?**

Anderson and Lynch (1988) cited in Nunan (1991:24- 5) found that the

difficulty of listening tasks was particularly influenced by the following:

- 1- The organization of information.
- 2- The familiarity of the topic.
- 3- The explicitness and sufficiency of the information.
- 4- The type of referring expressions used.
- 5- Whether the text described ‘static’ relationships or dynamic relationship.

In English language, there are four basic skills; they are reading, writing, speaking and listening, but the most difficult skills to acquire are listening and speaking skills.

## \* **The Use of Authentic and Non-Authentic Listening Materials**

Authentic materials consist of speech recorded in real situations and thus provide learners with real-life listening tasks. Unlike Non-authentic material does not have the characteristics of real-life language. Nunan (1999:27) realizes that it is not realistic for teachers to use only authentic materials in the classroom. He also adds that it is important that learners listen to and read authentic material of as many different kinds as possible.

Ur (1984:22- 5) cautions that presenting the students with difficult materials can damage morale and motivation and she maintains that it is not enough to comprehend formal language especially the teachers who are non- native speakers. Moreover, she states that many listening comprehension used today in the classrooms are still based on formal spoken language. In contrast, Harmer(1991:188) believes that despite many textbooks' use of non-authentic materials to practice specific language points, only authentic materials will genuinely improve listening and reading skills.

Underwood (1993: 98) discusses the use of the authentic materials in teaching listening comprehension. She also suggests a number of features which differentiate non-authentic from authentic speech.

From the previously mentioned sources, the use of authentic listening materials is an important factor to take into consideration when designing listening comprehension materials. By using such listening materials, the learner is given the chance to develop the skills needed to comprehend and to use language that is commonly found in real situations. Non-authentic materials are important to provide foreign

learners of language with training specifically directed at listening skills.

### \* **The Role of the Teacher in Teaching Listening and Speaking Skills**

In listening and speaking activities teachers should do and can do something to help their students improve listening ability. Paulston and Bruder(1976:155) state that “The teacher’s task is to provide an opportunity for the students to listen to the speech of native speakers and to sequence and coordinate such activities with the rest of the curriculum”.

In listening and speaking classes, the teacher can play many roles in the same class at the same time. So the role of teacher changes according to the situation of the lesson. According to Field (2002: 246), first of all, the role of teachers in listening classes is a **guide**, who gives their students some help, including skills, in the process. Then, the teacher should be a **diagnoser**, who can identify listening problems and put them right. Thirdly, he should be a **designer** who is able to select or design suitable texts and tasks for his students. Lastly, a teacher should try his best to be a **motivator** who can get his students more involved in their listening classes and learn more listening skills.

Underwood (1993: 21) indicates the following teacher roles:

- Exposing students to a range of listening experiences by using different listening texts.
- Making listening purposeful for the students by providing them with realistic tasks.
- Helping the students understand what listening entails and how to approach it.

- Building up students' confidence in their own listening ability and

Providing students with activities which make them successful in acquiring

the language.

- Preparing listening aids and activities for the students.
- Giving the students enough time for listening.
- Preparing the students for different kinds of tests.
  - Making listening enjoyable by choosing suitable topics and planned

activities.

## \* **METHODOLOGY**

The methodology employed for the present study was triangulation and two sources of collecting data were used by the researcher. They were teachers' questionnaire and a focused classroom observation.

## \* **Subjects and Procedure of the Study**

The subjects of this study were 15 English language teachers. They were selected from two faculties (Arts & Education) in Al-zawia. These teachers have been teaching listening and speaking to different levels at university, and their experience from 1 year to 20.

A questionnaire was designed and delivered to 15 teachers in Education and Arts faculties in order to gather some information about the difficulties that encountered by university teachers in using listening and speaking activities in teaching process and to check their attitude towards the problems of teaching listening and speaking. However; the classroom observation was conducted in order to know how listening and speaking skills are taught. And to find out to what extent the classroom activities have been used, then comparing the results of questionnaire and the classroom observation. The data collected have been analyzed by using percentage rate to obtain the results and findings.

### \* **Data obtained from teachers' questionnaire**

The collected data from the questionnaire were classified. The questionnaire consists of 19 questions which are focused on teaching listening and speaking skills, the teacher's role and classroom activities.

**Considering questions 1, 2 and 3**, the teachers were asked about the years which they have spent in teaching listening and speaking, does it need special experience and is it complicated?). The answers to these questions were:

- 20 % of the teachers have taught listening comprehension for short time, while 53 % have taught listening for six years. Between 13 to 18 years, no one of them has taught this skill, and nearly 27 % have taught listening and speaking for long time, i.e. more than 18 years.
- Approximately 87 % of the teachers agreed that teaching listening and speaking skills needs special experience, and only 13 % agreed that there is no need to special experience in teaching this skill.

- 20 % of the teachers said that teaching listening and speaking is complicated. Nearly 47 % said that this skill is complicated and difficult to some extent, while 33 % denied that teaching listening and speaking is too hard and complicated.

The researcher believes that it is not necessary to spend many years to be qualified to teach listening skills, i.e. there is no need to special experience in teaching this skill. In addition, teaching listening comprehension is not complicated as other skills, it only needs well-trained teacher who can use the activities and the techniques effectively to teach listening.

**The answer to the fourth question** shows that 40 % of the teachers said that the time which is given to teach listening and speaking skills is sufficient, but 60 % of them asserted that the time which is devoted to this skill is not enough. In fact, listening comprehension needs much time to be taught properly. On one hand, teachers need time to teach and check the students' comprehension then testing what the students have taught. On the other hand, students need much time to understand and comprehend what they have listened to, sometimes they need more than one chance to listen to the tape.

**Regarding questions 5, 6 and 7**, the teachers were asked about what makes listening and speaking difficult for the students.

- About 67 % of the teachers indicated that the lack of students' pronunciation impairs their speaking ability, and 33 % of them pointed out that sometimes the lack of students' pronunciation impairs and affects their speaking ability. No one said that the lack of students' pronunciation never impairs ability of speaking.

- 33 % of the teachers stated that the students may find difficulty in perception, 60% of them asserted that to some extent many students are familiar with words but unable to remember their meaning, and only 7 % stated that the students have problem in perception. Ur (1984: 36) shows that “the listener’s main problem is simply to identify the right phoneme (s) and hence the right word”.
- Nearly 67 % of the teachers said that the complexity of lexis, syntax and excessive use of new terminology affects students' comprehension and their ability to speak, 20 % pointed out that to some extent the complexity of lexis, syntax and excessive use of new terminology can affect the students’ comprehension and their ability to speak, while 13 % of them denied that.

For the students of English, the main reason behind listening and speaking difficulties is that there are many new and unfamiliar words. However, this is not the only problem that faces Libyan students of English. Even students who have studied English for years and who know hundreds or thousands of English words still find listening and speaking quite difficult.

**In reply to the 8<sup>th</sup> question,** approximately 74% of the teachers encourage their students to listen to the authentic English programs such as news, songs, voice chats, listening online and so on. However, in the other cases the percentage of the teachers is the same, 13% stated that they encourage their students to do their best to some extent and 13% said that never encourage them. Therefore, teachers can encourage their students by giving many good ways to practice such as listening to the radio, to tapes, to native English speakers, and even to non-native speakers of English. The use of authentic listening materials is an important factor to take into

consideration when designing listening and speaking materials.

**The answer to the 9<sup>th</sup> question** shows that 20% of the teachers pointed out that their students react enthusiastically to listening and activities and speaking tasks while 60% of them said that their students were interested in listening activities and speaking tasks. 20% of the teachers did not pay much attention to classroom activities so their students reacted carelessly to that, and no one of them said their students were bored of listening and speaking activities.

**With regard to the 10<sup>th</sup> question,** the teachers were asked about the affect of the mother tongue on their performance, 53% of the teachers said that their mother tongue affects their performance because they are non-native speakers, 40% of them said that the mother tongue can be affected to some extent, about 7% indicated that the teacher's performance is never affected by the mother tongue.

**Question 11** shows that 80% of the teachers use classroom activities during the lesson, and 20% do not use them, depending on the text book only because they indicated that listening and speaking material, labs and other listening equipment are not available in some classes.

**As regards to the 12<sup>th</sup> question,** according to the researcher's thinking, there are four reasons for not using the classroom activities very frequently in the university. These reasons were given to the teachers and the researcher asked them to choose the main reason according to their opinion. 40% of the teachers stated that unavailability of these activities is the main reason, nearly 27% asserted the reason is the crowded classes, 13% of them confirmed that insufficient time could be the main reason, and 20% supposed the reason is the shortage of well-trained teachers.

**The answer to the 13<sup>th</sup> question** indicates that approximately 67% of the teachers use the tape recorder, only 13% of them use video tapes, while 20% use other activities, such as computers and games.

**Concerning the 14<sup>th</sup> question,** 33% of the teachers considered that the activities mentioned above are good and enough to help teaching listening and speaking, 53% of them thought that activities are good and help in teaching to some extent, but 13% regarded these activities as not enough to help teaching listening and speaking.

**Question 15** is concerned with how often do the students participate in the class. 67 % of the teachers pointed out that their students always participate effectively in the class, and 33 % of them stated that they sometimes participate in the class. No one does that rarely, also no one never does that.

**With regard to the 16<sup>th</sup> question** about 67% of the teachers always give chance to their students to listen to the tape, while 27% of them sometimes give the chance to listen, but none chooses rarely. Only 6% of the teachers never give students the chance to listen to a tape.

**The answer to the 17<sup>th</sup> question** shows that 53% of the teachers use the same activities throughout the year, and 47% of them do not use the same throughout the year but they use different activities to make their students more active.

**In reply to the 18<sup>th</sup> question** , 33% of the teachers presented that their students are highly motivated to use the activities during the lesson, while 67% of them say that their students are quite motivated to use the activities during the lesson. However, none indicates that their students are not motivated to do that.

**The last question** shows that 60% of the teachers stated that their students participate individually in the activities. While 40% of the teachers indicated that their students participate in

pairs, and no one of them said that their students participate in group.

### \* Data obtained of classroom observation

Classroom observation is considered as one of the tools which is reliable in collecting data. It was carried out during this study in teaching listening and speaking skills. Seven classes were visited in two different faculties with 7 teachers. All the classes were conducted in a language lab, and one of these classes had a test. A classroom checklist was conducted to gather more information on how listening and speaking skills were taught, and to check the real teaching situation of the teachers against the data obtained and the findings of the questionnaire. The data was collected throughout three stages of listening, and then each stage was analyzed in a separate table.

**Table (1) Pre- listening stage**

Items	YES		NO	
	No	%	No	%
1- The teacher introduces the topic to his/her students before listening.	6	85.71 %	1	14.29 %
2- The teacher explains the new expressions before listening.	4	57.14 %	3	42.85 %
3- The teacher explains the objectives of the lesson.	1	14.28 %	6	85.71 %
4- The teacher gives a chance to his/her students for guessing and predicting.	3	42.85 %	4	57.14 %
5- The teacher encourages his/her students to interact with each other.	4	57.14 %	3	42.85 %

**Table (2) during- listening stage**

Items	YES	NO
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	No	%	No	%
<b>12- The teacher helps his/her students to recall some information.</b>	4	57.14 %	3	42.85 %
<b>13- The teacher encourages his/her students to comment.</b>	6	85.71 %	1	14.28 %
<b>14- The teacher asks his/her students to summarize what they have listened to.</b>	3	42.85 %	4	57.14 %
<b>15- The teacher checks his/her students' comprehension by asking them some questions about the topic.</b>	7	100 %	0	0 %

**Table (3) Post- listening stage**

The above tables show how listening and speaking process was taught through its three stages. It shows how students and teachers interacted with each other and how they performed in

Items	YES		NO	
	No	%	No	%
<b>6- The teacher uses the tape recorder in teaching and testing listening comprehension.</b>	5	71.42 %	2	28.57 %
<b>7- The teacher encourages his/her students to concentrate on listening.</b>	5	71.42 %	2	28.57 %
<b>8- The teacher stops the tape from time to time for explanation.</b>	4	57.14 %	3	42.85 %
<b>9- The teacher allows the student to listen more than once.</b>	5	71.42 %	2	28.57 %
<b>10- The teacher reads and speaks fluently.</b>	7	100 %	0	0 %
<b>11- The teacher corrects his/her students' errors.</b>	6	85.71 %	1	14.28 %

the classroom.

- Concerning **item 1**, nearly 86% of the teachers introduced the topic to their students before listening, and 14% they did not.
- **Item 2** presents that 57% of the teachers explained the new expressions to their students before listening to the tape, while 43 % did not.
- **Regarding item 3**, 14% of the teachers explained the objectives of the lesson and 86% did not.
- **Item 4** indicates that approximately 43% of the teachers gave a chance to their students for guessing and predicting while 57% of them did not. Introducing the topic and explaining the new expressions to students before listening to the tape recorder makes the lesson easy to be understood and to predict. Therefore, the students will be encouraged to concentrate on listening. Ur (1984: 16) remarks that “prediction is difficult for the foreign-language learner for various reasons.”
- **With regard to item 5**, 57% of the teachers encouraged their students to interact with each other and nearly 43% did not. Working in pairs or groups save the time of listening lecture, i.e. There will be enough time to ask students as much as possible. In addition, the teacher’s involvement is actually an interaction between students and the teacher, where students are the center, the teacher works as a guide.
- **Item 6** shows that 71% of the teachers used the tape recorder in teaching and testing listening comprehension while about 29% did not. They used other activities such as computers and video tapes. Variety and well using of classroom activities make students like attending listening classes.
- **According to item 7**, 71% of the teachers encouraged their students to concentrate on listening and 29% did not.

- **Item 8** indicates that 57% of the teachers stopped the tape from time to time for explanations while 43 % did not.
- **Concerning item 9**, only 71% of the teachers allowed the student to listen more than once and 29% did not.
- Regarding to the teachers' reading and speaking as in **item 10**, 71% of the teachers read and spoke fluently while nearly 29% did not. They did not have clear pronunciation which means their spoken was weak.
- **Item 11** shows that nearly 86% of teachers corrected their students' errors while they were listening and 14% did not. Correcting the students' errors makes them aware of their mistakes and can avoid them next time.
- Only 57% of the teachers helped their students to recall some information about what they have listened to, while 43% they did not as shown in **item 12**.
- **Item 13** shows that 86% of the teachers encouraged their students to comment about the activity and 14% did not.
- **With regard to item 14**, about 43% of the teachers asked their students to summarize what they have listened and 57% did not.
- **Item 15** shows that 100% checked their students' comprehension by asking them some questions about the topic. Giving students' chance to comment, to summarize and asking them questions about what they have listened help them to recall information about the topic.

### \* **The findings of the study**

This study employed the teachers' questionnaire and the classroom observation as methods of collecting data, the findings of the present study are the following:

- ❖ Based on the outcomes of the class observation, there are many common listening difficulties which include:

- Speakers speak too fast. Learners often complain about fast speaking rate of native speakers.
- Listeners listen word for word.
- Listeners lack cultural or background knowledge.
- Speakers use too many unfamiliar words.
- Listening takes too much effort and concentration.
- Recordings are not always clear and are difficult to follow.
- Speaker's accents are unfamiliar.

❖ Most of the teachers find difficulties in performing activities, because the time allotted for English lessons is not enough to engage students in classroom activities. There are some reasons why teachers do not use classroom activities very frequently in the university, because:

1. Unavailability of these activities: The authentic materials were not available to be taught to the university students. Fortunately, some English language classrooms were equipped with computers but most of the teachers still depend on tape recorder. Moreover; the tapes are not clear enough to listen in some classes.

2. Crowded classes: The teachers were not able to give chance to every student to participate. Harmer (2002: 128) says that "In big classes, it is difficult for the teacher to make contact with the students at the back and it is difficult for the students to ask for and receive individual attention".

3. Insufficient time: To teach listening comprehension, more time should be given. One hour was not enough to teach and test this skill

4. Shortage of well-trained teachers: Regarding to the teachers' speaking, some teachers did not have clear accent and they did not speak fluently.

❖ The teacher has an important job to monitor what and how his/ her students do. The teacher should create different activities and different situations, in order to encourage students to participate. The teacher also joins the discussion to provide students with an opportunity to communicate with higher-level speakers. S/ he help them to understand their strength and weakness to promote their language ability and communicative skills. Allen and Valette (1977: 3) stress the important role of teacher. They say that "The teacher plays a prime role in effecting student progress".

- ❖ In the traditional method teacher-centered class, the teacher is the leader and the instructor. The results of the study indicate that the teachers' role needs to be multi- dimensional, sometimes he is coordinator, designer, source of background information, assessor, guide or motivator.
  
- ❖ Based on the observation of classroom, the researcher observed that all the teachers use textbooks with CDs in teaching listening skills and they ask the students to keep their books open while they are listening. It is supposed to use other authentic materials beside using textbooks. Richards (2001: 6) indicates that "textbooks should be regarded as one of the many resources teachers can draw upon in creating effective lessons."

#### \* **Conclusion:**

The present study has focused on the challenges that face university teachers in performing activities in listening and speaking classes. It has been conducted on the English teachers in two faculties of Al-zawia University. Teaching listening and speaking skills are difficult tasks for any EFL teacher. Consequently, we can see clearly that the present situation of the teaching of listening in two faculties in Al-zawia is not encouraged by teachers. The traditional method of teaching, by introducing some new difficult words, listening to the tape again and giving the correct answers, is still used.

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