Effects of listening strategy instruction on students’ achievements in listening comprehension in English

OWOLEWA O. Olusegun

Department of Arts Education, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria. Email: olusegunowolewa@yahoo.com

Accepted 16 May, 2016; Published 26 September, 2016

Many secondary school students in Nigeria perform poorly in English Language examinations because of their deficient Listening Comprehension strategy. However, less attention has been paid to listening strategy instruction which has been found to be more effective than the conventional instruction. This study, therefore, determined the effects of listening strategy instruction on senior secondary school students’ achievement in listening comprehension. The moderating effect of gender was also determined. This research adopted a pretest, treatment and posttest quasi-experimental factorial design. A total sample of one hundred and twenty participants were randomly selected and assigned to three treatment groups of listening strategies, discourse markers instructions and the control which was not exposed to instruction. The instruments used were: Listening Comprehension tests, Teachers’ Instructional Guide on listening strategy; Teachers Instructional Guide on Modified Conventional Strategy and Evaluation sheet for Assessing participants’ performance on the use of listening strategies (ESAP). Data were analyzed using ANCOVA at 0.05 levels of significance. There was a significant difference in the listening comprehension scores of the participants exposed to the treatments \[F(2, 117) = 113.66, p < 0.05\] as those exposed to listening strategies had a higher performance in listening comprehension than those exposed to conventional content of instruction. Likewise, gender was significant in performance in listening comprehension \[F(1, 117)= 6.313, p < 0.05\] as female participants performed better than male participants in achievement scores.

Key words: Achievement in listening comprehension, Listening Strategies’ Instruction, Gender Performance in Listening

INTRODUCTION

English language is a language of convenience, which has helped to weld together the various ethno-linguistic groups in Nigeria. It is the official language, the language of education from the upper primary schools to higher institutions of learning and one of the core subjects in the school curriculum (National Policy on Education, 2004). The importance attached to English language is enormous that a minimum of a credit pass is a prerequisite for admission into Nigerian higher institutions by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB, 2014). Also, a good knowledge of the different skills of the English language will enhance effective learning of all other subjects in the curriculum.

It is expected that the classroom interactions should bridge the gap between the observed reality and the curriculum. Contrary to expectation, listening comprehension instruction is not to be expressly stated as part of the objectives of Senior Secondary School English Language Curriculum. For instance, the terminal objectives stated in the Senior Secondary School English Language Curriculum aim to:

(i). Provide students with a sound linguistic basis for further learning in tertiary and vocational institutions.
(ii) Equip school leavers with a satisfactory level of proficiency in English language usage in their places of work.
(iii) Stimulate love for reading as a pleasurable activity.
(iv) Promote the art of spoken English as a medium of national and international communication.
(v) Enhance and develop further the various skills and competences already acquired at Junior the Junior
Mendelsohn (2002) observed that the non-inclusion of listening instruction in the school curriculum was probably based on the assumption that students would develop listening skills by osmosis and without help. Listening is the basic of the four language skills. Neglecting its teaching cannot be without some consequences for the learners, as the very basic language foundation is missing. Alaneme (2005) lamented the mass failure recorded annually by students in English and concluded that the poor performance of students in English language examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and National Examinations Council (NECO) is actually a true reflection of the low standard of education in Nigeria. The poor performance of students in English language was reaffirmed by WAEC Chief Examiners’ Reports as evident in the analysis of West African Senior School Certificate Examination results from 2000-2012.

In Table 1, the percentage of credit passes in English language continues to fall below 50% for the period of thirteen years under review. Although Grades 7 and 8 are considered to be passes, these are not good enough for candidates to gain admission into tertiary institution. The implication of this is that more than half of the total number of students that sat for WAEC each year is ineligible for admission into tertiary institutions, and this is not good enough.

The poor performance of students in aspects of English that deal with writing has been identified as the major cause of the poor results they obtained in English Language in those years identified. Ignorance of the grammatical rules of the English language and inability to use same to write effectively are seen as parts of the reasons for poor performance (WAEC Chief Examiners Report, 2009). This is repeated in the Chief Examiners’ Report (2011), which identified candidates' weaknesses as including poor grammar and expressions, among others.

Likewise, the Chief Examiners’ Report (2012) reported the persistence of same problems by highlighting the weaknesses exhibited by the candidates to include ignorance of parts of speech and ungrammatical expressions. It is apt to say that given the enormity of the problems exhibited by students, as contained in those reports, students may not be able to use grammar correctly in both spoken and written English and may not express ideas in correct sentences in composition, summary and comprehension, thereby making their chances of doing well in the entire English Language Paper 1 to be very remote.

However, poor performance in English has been traced to students' weak oracy skills (Amuseghan, 2007). Listening is the first in order of acquisition among the four fundamental language skills. Others are speaking, reading and writing. It is the medium through which children, young persons and adults receive a large portion of their education, their information, their ideals, sense of values, appreciation of human affairs and their understanding of the world. The listener characteristics have been perceived wrongly by authors such as Pearson, Nelson, Titwotsh and Harter (2003). They describe a listener as a passive processor of speech sounds. This must have been based on the thinking that the listener only perceives speech sounds without much effort. This cannot be the true characteristics of a listener. The listener activates his/her background knowledge as soon as the speech sounds are perceived.

The attachment of relevant experiences with the speech sounds brings about understanding of the intended message of the speaker. In this wise, the listener cannot be said to be a passive processor of speech sounds.

There have been numerous attempts to describe listening comprehension in terms of taxonomies of sub-skills (Vandergrifft, 2003). These attempts are based on the notion that these skills underlie the process and the act of listening, which consists of the application of various separate skills. One of the first taxonomies is the division of listening into a two-stage process: the extraction of the basic linguistic information as the first step and the utilization of that information for the communicative purpose. This two-stage division occurs again and again in the literature with various modifications and under various terms: ‘the recognition level’ and ‘the level of selection’, ‘construction process’ and ‘utilization process’, ‘micro-comprehension’ and ‘macro-comprehension’ (Alderson, 2000, Buck, 2001, Vandergrifft, 2003 & Chen, 2005). Buck (2001, p.52) gives high credit to the two stage view of listening since scholars have worked out similar concepts and the different terminology suggests that they have arrived at these concepts more or less independently.

Buck (2001) warns, however, that the results should be treated with caution as the analysis is based on item characteristics, not abilities and there was no inter coder reliability study. Besides the assumption that there are identifiable listening skills, there seems to be agreement in the language testing literature that these skills can be arranged in a hierarchy from lower order (e.g. understanding utterances at the literal level) to higher order (e.g. inferencing and critical evaluation) (Buck, 2001). Some of the numerous graded taxonomies have been applied as a basis for identifying the comprehension operations to be sampled in the listening tests, such as understanding main ideas, listening for specific information, inferring meaning, etc (Alderson, 2000 and Vandergrifft, 2003).

However, scholars treat the skills-based approach of comprehension with caution. Alderson (2000) states that the existence of such skills is in some doubt, at least as far as it is possible separately to identify and test them. Buck (2001) goes even further by stressing that the empirical support for these taxonomies is usually lacking.
Alderson (2000) disapproves that too many lists of skills have been theorized or speculated upon and argues that the key thing is not how many skills we can dream up, but how many can be shown to exist on tests. This suggests appropriate handling rather than discarding the sub-skills approach. This is underpinned by referring to valuable studies that investigate how many empirically separable skills are there; whether it can be distinguished which skills the items are testing, which skills contribute most to the performance, which skills are the easiest to test, which skills are the most important to test, etc. Buck (2001) declares that, although there is no evidence that these lists of sub-skills constitute a complete unified description of the listening process, there is no doubt that many of the components are of crucial importance in listening. He adds that collectively they are useful because they tell us what scholars in the field have come to think is important in listening comprehension.

The scenario above shows that listening comprehension in the classroom is complex. The complexity occurs between the student’s perception of the speech sounds and the cognitive process of overt response by the student. As the ears perceive the speech sounds, they are quickly processed in the working memory, which attaches meaning to the speech sounds. The short and long-term memories are quickly activated. The moment the speech sounds find related information in the memory, the speech sounds become meaningful (Owolewa, 2015).

On the other hand, if the students cannot activate the schema in their memories, no sense is communicated. Such a student may begin to grope in the darkness of misunderstanding, lack of ideas and total void of understanding. When this situation arises, the common thing students do is to begin to talk to other students in the same category or to engage themselves in other activities not related to the class work, while the teacher engages the class in meaningful discussions (Stein and Trabasso, 1982).

On the contrary, students’ listening skills are not developed to the extent that they can derive content information from spoken words without missing (Mendelsohn, 2002; Strauss, 2002). A number of problems are said to be affecting students’ listening comprehension. For instance, Chen (2005) identified the various aspects of listening comprehension problems as follows:

(i) Lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak;
(ii) Not being able to get things repeated;
(iii) The listener’s limited vocabulary;
(iv) Failure to recognize the ‘signals’;
(v) Problems of interpretation;
(vi) Inability to concentrate; and
(vii) Established listening attitudes.

The students’ lack of control over the speed at which speakers/reader speak/read or inability to get the stream of speech repeated, problems of interpretation, inability to concentrate, and established attitudes to listening can be regarded as lack of strategic competence in listening. Also, the listener’s limited vocabulary, failure to recognize the ‘signals’ and problems of interpretation can be regarded as lack of language competence.

Another variable which may affect listener’s understanding is gender. Phillips, Lowe, Lurito, Dzemidzic, and Mathews (2001) demonstrate that men and women bring
some very real differences in attention styles and cognitive processing styles to the communicative interaction. As researchers explore more deeply the biological influence of the male and female genetic makeup, however, the social influence model continues to dominate our understanding of gender variables. Research reveals that men and women listen for different purposes and have different listening goals. The primary contrast appears in task versus interpersonal understanding: Males are said to pay much attention to facts while females are said to devote more attention to the mood of the communication (Booth-Butterfield, 2004). Dykstra (2006) also examines the role of gender in pragmatic listening. It is observed that gender differences occur in listening as female had a higher score than male in listening exercises.

**Statement of the problem**

There is usually a recurrent poor performance in WAEC and NECO English language examinations in Nigeria. Examiners' reports on the poor performance were usually attributed to include students' ignorance of parts of speech and ungrammatical expression as a major factor responsible for poor performance. Teachers and curriculum developers were then advised to emphasize the teaching of grammar. This emphasis has not yielded any positive results in the English language results of the WAEC and NECO conducted examinations (Table 1). Likewise, it has been observed that only about 40% of the class population possessed English language textbooks while the remaining 60% relied on sharing texts, while either the teacher or a pupil read the comprehension passage. These students are not equipped with practical knowledge of listening without missing, yet the economic reality affecting their parents made reliance on the oracy skills with scanty reading texts inevitable part of their learning process. It behooves on researchers to find out the comparative effects of listening strategies and discourse markers' instructions on students achievements in listening comprehension of English language texts.

**Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were generated to guide the study:

- **H₀₁**: There is no significant difference in the listening comprehension achievement of students exposed to Listening Strategies or Conventional Instructions.
- **H₀₂**: There is no significant difference in the Listening Comprehension achievement in of male and female students.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research design**

The population of the study included all public Senior Secondary School students in Ondo State. The target population was Senior Secondary School II students in Ofedepe High School, Okitipupa, Jubilee Grammar School, Ondo, and St. Patrick Grammar School, Oka-Akoko. The schools were chosen based on the following criteria:

1. A second-generation public secondary school (that is, schools establish after independence),
2. Having same year of establishment,
3. Offering similar curriculum,
4. Being a mixed school,
5. Being in a semi-urban environment and
6. Each being representative of the three zones of the state

**Sample and sampling techniques**

The sample was 120 (one hundred and twenty) participants selected through multi-stage sampling techniques, which comprised purposive and simple random sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was used to select three schools based on the criteria of school location, type and grade. Purposive sampling was equally used to select an intact class each per school and 120 participants who were regular throughout the six week training. The participants had similar exposure to English Language learning. They all use their native dialects of Yoruba as media of communication in homes and in schools, while they reserve English for learning in the classroom.

**Instruments for Data Collection**

The research instruments were:

- Listening comprehension test (LCT)
- Teachers’ Instructional Guide on listening strategy;
- Teachers’ Instructional Guide on discourse markers’ instructions;
- Teachers Instructional Guide on Modified Conventional Strategy and
- Evaluation sheet for Assessing students’ Performance on the use of the Strategies (ESASP).

**Listening Comprehension Test**

The instrument is made up of two sections, namely sections A and B. Section A consists of the personal data of the subjects, including their gender, name of school and class. Section B comprises 20 multiple test items on listening comprehension. Students will be required to pick
the option in line with their views on each item. All questions are in objective form with alternatives A to D. Students are to pick the correct answer out of the alternatives provided in each item. Each of the objective questions carried 2 marks, making a total of 40 marks. A score within the range of 1 - 13 was regarded as low listening comprehension; 14-26 was regarded as average listening comprehension, while scores within the range of 27 – 40 was regarded as high listening comprehension.

**Validation of the LCT Instrument**

This instrument was subjected to face and content validity by giving copies to experts in educational evaluation and language education with bias in English language education. These experts were asked to determine its suitability in terms of clarity, breadth and language. Only the 20 items that were found suitable were used.

**Reliability of LCT**

The test was administered on sampled 50 SSII students in a school outside the ones to be used for the study using KR-20 and the reliability coefficient determined was 0.86.

**Teachers’ Instructional Guide on Listening Strategies**

- Predicting the Theme.
- Identifying Main Ideas
- Processing Detail
- Guessing Vocabulary from Context
- Reported Speech and Summarizing
- Note Taking

**Teachers’ Instructional Guide on Conventional Strategy**

- Step 1: Teacher writes the topic on the chalkboard.
- Step 2: She/he takes the students through the examples given in their reading text.
- Step 3: She/ he sets them to do the exercises in their notebooks.
- Step 4: Teacher goes round to mark their work.
- Step 5: She/he does correction with them

**Evaluation Sheet for Assessing Teachers’ Performance on the use of the Strategies (ESAT)**

These are the guidelines for evaluating the performance of the trained research assistants on the effective implementation of the instructional guides. Any research assistant that scored 60 marks and above in any of the strategies would be adjudged to have mastered the contents of the instructional guides.

**Validity of ESAT**

The instruments were given to experts on the field of Language Education for their input. Corrections were made, and it was factored into the production of the final draft of ESAT.

**Reliability of ESAT**

The instruments were trial tested to ensure its reliability. It was administered on teachers outside the sampled schools. Inter-rater reliability was determined using scott pie as follows:
- Listening Strategy was 0.80
- Conventional Strategy was 0.82

**Procedure for Data Collection**

The study was divided into three phases: Phase one – Pre-test, Phase two-- treatment and Phase three- post-test stages.

**Phase I:**
Stage One: This stage started with a visit to the selected schools for permission to use the schools for the research. After obtaining the permission of the school authorities, three research assistants were immediately recruited, one per school, for 40-minute class periods for 8 days over eight weeks that the study lasted.
Stage Two: This stage started with a purposive assignment of the selected schools to different treatments. This was followed by the training of the research assistants on the topics to be treated in each school. The research assistants who were English Language teachers in their respective schools were coordinated properly with the different package per school.
Stage three: This was the stage where an intact class was chosen per school for the training. After the class had been selected listening comprehension test was administered on the class.

**Phase II:**
This was the treatment stage. The training held between 3.00pm – 4.00pm on Mondays in Iwaro, 3.00pm-4.00pm on Wednesdays in Ondo and 2.30pm-3.00pm on Thursdays in Okitipupa. It took place once per week as approved by the different school authorities. The Participants in the experimental group one was taught listening strategies for six weeks while control group was taught conventional strategy. The following arrangements were made from week one to week eight for group one:
Experimental group 1: Listening Strategies
- Predicting the Theme.
- Identifying Main Ideas
- Processing Detail
- Guessing Vocabulary from Context
- Reported Speech and Summarizing
- Note Taking

Control Group: Conventional Strategy
- Step 1: Teacher writes the topic on the chalkboard.
- Step 2: She/he takes the students through the examples given in their reading text.
- Step 3: She/he sets them to do the exercises in their notebooks.
- Step 4: Teacher goes round to mark their work.
- Step 5: She/he does correction with them

However, the control group was not exposed to listening instructions; they were given the same pretest and posttest.

Phase Three:
Stage One: This was the post treatment stage. All the participants were asked to respond to the same instruments which they had earlier responded to in phase one, which was listening comprehension tests.

Data Analysis Techniques
Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency counts, mean and standard deviation for the research questions. Also, inferential statistics of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) would be used to test all the hypotheses. In addition, estimated marginal means will be computed to show differences in the mean scores of different groups. All hypotheses would be tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS
Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the listening comprehension achievement of students exposed to Listening Strategies or Conventional Instructions.

The data in Table 2 show that there was a significant difference in the listening comprehension scores of the students exposed to the three types of instruction [F(1, 117), 113.66, p < 0.05]. Post hoc (Scheffe) analysis was further conducted to identify the specific mean difference among the types of instructions that had the significant difference.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the listening comprehensive achievement of male and female students.

Table 3 also indicated that there was a significant difference in students’ gender based on their performance in listening comprehension [F(1, 117)= 6.313, p < 0.05]. Hence hypothesis two was rejected. Female participants performed better than male participants in achievement scores.

The results in Table 4, also indicated that female students exposed to LS instruction had a better performance in listening comprehension with a mean score of 33.35 compared to their male counterparts with a mean score of 32.06. In the same vein, female students exposed to conventional instructions had a little better performance in listening comprehension with a mean score of 21.15 compared to their male counterparts with a mean score of 20.48. On the general view, female students exposed to LS instruction had the best performance in listening comprehension, while the least performed in listening comprehension are male students exposed to conventional instruction.

DISCUSSION
The entry behaviour of the participants showed that majority of them had average listening comprehension before the treatment. However, after the treatment, there was evidence of a better listening comprehension performance. This means that instructions improved the students' listening comprehension. This is a confirmation of Carrier (2003) and Peachy (2006) that opined that students would benefit from instructions in listening comprehension. The findings indicated that students’ listening comprehension cannot be developed by osmosis. It showed that listening should no longer be left unattended to and that the current assumption that students would develop listening skills by default is faulty.

Therefore, from the background literature and the findings on the effect of listening strategy on students’ listening comprehension, it can be said that listening strategy instructions has a significant effect on students’ listening comprehension. It can also be said here that instructions of grammatical contents only will not give the students a better performance in listening comprehension. They need substantial knowledge of both grammar and strategy to understand verbal communication.

Gender should be kept as a constant factor in any training programme for students on listening comprehension. There is the need to promote activities that will encourage male and female to listening without distractions whatsoever.

The finding also agrees with Jahagard, Moinzadeh and Karim (2011) who found that grammar and vocabulary
Table 2. Summary of ANOVA on Listening Comprehension achievement Post-test Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variations</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post-Test of Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>3172.22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3172.22</td>
<td>113.66</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>1632.78</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>13.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fieldwork

Table 3. Summary of ANOVA Showing the Difference in Gender Achievement in Listening Comprehension.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>83.693</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>83.693</td>
<td>6.313</td>
<td>&lt; .05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Error</td>
<td>1511.349</td>
<td>117</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4804.992</td>
<td>119</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on Achievement in Listening Comprehension by Gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Types of Instruction on LS</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Listening Comprehension</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33.35</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>21.15</td>
<td>2.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>32.06</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>20.48</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

alone would not significantly improve the listening comprehension of students. It also confirms the view of Herron and Seay (1991) that strategy training has effect on students’ listening comprehension.

Likewise, the findings indicate that female students had a higher listening comprehension than male students. This finding is, however, contrary to the finding of Dang (2010) who found no significant relationship between the students’ listening comprehension, performance and their gender. But the findings of this study agreed with Sankarakumar, Chandrakanthi and Malathy (2012) who found a significant difference in the performance of male and female students in reading comprehension tests as female performed better than male reading comprehension. It also confirms Jie and Fenglan (2003) that found that female performed better than male in listening comprehension.

Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of listening strategy on listening comprehension of Secondary School Students in Ondo State, Nigeria. Findings from this study vis-à-vis the earlier findings and views in the background literature showed that relying on acquisition of listening skills by default cannot be sustained. Also, students would benefit much from instructions in listening skills as well as they benefit from grammatical instructions.

Recommendations

The results gathered from this study could be of importance to some significant stakeholders like teachers of English, curriculum planners, teacher trainers and parents. On the basis of the findings, the following recommendations are suggested to different stakeholders:

**English Language Teachers:** The teacher of English should take into cognizance the significant role of a language teacher as a teacher of all language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). He/ she should, therefore, see the language skills as integral parts of English Language. This study should be an eye opener to English Language teachers who always assumed that listening is a skill not necessarily to be taught. The teacher should partner curriculum developers as well as parents towards bringing their attention to the importance of the chronological first language skill that is acquired by every human being.

**Curriculum Planners:** Curriculum planners are to be fully aware that listening skill can no longer be neglected on the school curriculum if it is truly to be regarded as the
first of the language skills acquired by every child. It should therefore be given equal attention like other language skills on the curriculum. The attention should go beyond the usual passing one given to such ones that would touch on the process of perceptual skill to the cognitive process of interpreting and responding to the speech perception appropriately. Listening should not be seen as a mere perception of sounds alone. It should be seen holistically in terms of what an individual does with the speech sounds that are perceived, how they are interpreted and how appropriate the response to the discourse.

**Teacher Trainers:** The Colleges of Education and Universities of Education might see the dire need through this study for an equal emphasis on the language skills. The pre-service student teachers should be made to attach equal importance to listening skills, this would go a long way in changing the general orientation to listening.

**Parents:** Parents should be encouraged through this study to enhance the general listening behavior of students. They should encourage listening skills by finding time to listen to their wards and children. The home is the foundation of what the school builds upon. When the culture of listening is not inculcated at home, there is little the teacher could do in the school.

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