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Factors affecting the listening skill

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Abstract

Listening skill constitutes the basic structure for all the courses in primary education. So in people's lives, it is indispensable for them to be able to understand what they listen effectively. Improving students' listening skills effectively is strongly related to being aware of the factors which have an effect on their listening performance. The purpose of this study is to define the factors that affect fifth grade students' listening skills. In this study in order to collect data, Listening Comprehension Test, Students Characteristics Questionnaire, In-class Listening Tasks Scale, Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale, and Students' Views on Listening Skill Scale were used. At the end of the study it was found out that "number of juvenile books at home", "number of books at home", "time spent reading books", "time spent reading newspaper" and "time spent listening to radio" have significant effects on fifth grade students' success in their listening performance.

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Key Words: Listening skill, listening comprehension, regression analysis

1. Introduction

The two basic learning outcomes that the Turkish lesson aims to develop in students are "comprehension and narration" skills. Schools are responsible for improving these two significant skills, which are of utmost importance to the students, and which develop in extended periods of time. "Comprehension skill" is categorized into three sub-skills, i.e. reading, listening and visual comprehension; while "narration skill" is divided into two sub-skills, namely written and oral narration. This study focuses only on the "listening skill".

Listening comprehension is the process of one individual perceiving another via sense, (specifically aural) organs, assigning a meaning to the message and comprehending it. It is the fundamental and indispensable

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prerequisite of individual communication in the social life. DeVito (1995) defines listening as “the efficient process of perception, comprehension, recognition, evaluation and reaction in communication”.

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According to this definition, it is not sufficient for us to hear our counterparts, but it is also necessary to understand them, to think about what they should say, and thus to be an effective listener. In compliance to this fact, the individuals are obliged to listen to a variety of things in their daily lives. A good listener allocates %70 of his time to listening, and only %30 of his time to speaking (Myers and Myers, 1988; Beaverson, 1999).

Listening skill, which plays an important role not only in communication but also in interpersonal relationships, is unfortunately one of those skills that is given the least significance in school education. Teachers generally believe that the listening skill emerges spontaneously in time, just like breathing. However, listening skill can only be improved by hard work and repetition as it is the case in reading skill (Bostrom, 1990, Brody, 2004; Kutlu and Aslanoğlu, 2008). Reaching educational achievement is not probable for a student, who cannot comprehend what he listens to or reads, and who is not capable of expressing his ideas and feelings clearly and accurately through verbal or written communication (Ocak and Beydoğan, 1999). Developing the students’ listening skills is directly related to putting forward the factors that take a part in the listening process. In other words, determining the factors that play a role in the listening process is of vital importance not only to the schools and families that educate students, but also to the institutions that train teachers.

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to define the factors that affect fifth grade students’ listening skills. The findings of the study are considered to contribute to the improvement of students’ listening skills.

2. Method

2.1 The Study

This is a descriptive study since it deals with the factors that affect the listening skill.

2.2 Participants

The study is conducted on 265 fifth grade students from 4 private schools, three of which are in Ankara, and one of which is in İzmir.

2.3 Data Collection Tools

Two different assessment tools were used in the study. The first tool was a “Listening Comprehension Test” suitable for fifth grade level. Listening Comprehension Test consisted of a text and short-answer questions which were prepared in accordance with the text and which assessed various cognitive capabilities of the students. The second, namely “Students Characteristic Questionnaire”, was a tool that was developed in order to collect data as to the factors which affect the listening skill. Additionally, the latter tool involved “In-Class Listening Tasks Scale”, “Outclass Listening Tasks Scale”, and “Students’ Views about Listening Skill Scale”. The mentioned tools are further explained below.

2.3.1 Listening Comprehension Test: First of all, in the preparation phase of the test, various text that were appropriate to the fifth grade level were found. Then, the final text to be used in the study was determined consulting the views of class and field teachers. Next, making use of this final text, questions that aimed to assess listening comprehension skill were prepared. In the preparation of the questions related to the “comprehension” aspect, the four-level taxonomy which was developed by International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and used by Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) was taken into consideration (PIRLS, 2003). The mentioned taxonomy is as follows:

- Level 1: Finding explicit ideas from the text (making direct deductions)
- Level 2: Finding implicit ideas from the text (interpretation)

Level 3: Relating the themes in the text to personal knowledge and experience

Level 4: Analyze and evaluate the elements, content and language of the text

After the teachers, a group of fifth graders and assessment experts were consulted for their opinions, the short-answer questions were rearranged for their latest form (Appendix-1).

2.3.2 Students Characteristics Questionnaire: This questionnaire contained questions related to the variables that were considered to affect the listening skill (related to house, school and family environment) (Appendix-2). Moreover, there were three different surveys for the students to respond to. These scales are briefly explained below.

2.3.3 In-class Listening Tasks Scale: This scale was made up of 15 questions that aimed to determine students' in-class listening activities.

2.3.4 Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale: This scale was made up of 15 questions that aimed to determine students' out-of-class listening activities.

2.3.5 Students' Views on Listening Skill Scale: This scale, which was prepared to elicit students' views on listening comprehension, contained 11 questions.

The five-likert scale on each scale was as follows: (1) Not applicable, (2) Little applicable (3) Fairly applicable (4) Mostly applicable (5) Always applicable. The positive statements in the scales were scored from 1 to 5, whereas the negative statements were scored from 5 to 1. The questionnaire was designed to be completed within 15-20 minutes.

2.4 Data Collection and Analysis

The data were gathered by two means of data collection. First, the students' answers to the listening-text-based questions were scored using a rubric. The answers were analyzed in three different dimensions: "correct answers", "incorrect answers", and "inappropriate/meaningless answers". Next, the students' answers to the questionnaire items were evaluated, and the factors affecting the listening skill were determined via stepwise regression analysis using the SPSS 16.0 program.

During the stepwise regression analysis, all independent variables except for "gender, father's education, and mother's education" were directly analyzed whereas qualitative variables such as gender, father's education, and mother's education were included in the analysis through the use "dummy variable" by minus one (-1) of level quantities. In this study, basic component factor analysis, reliability analysis and multiple regression analysis were also used in order to analyze the data.

3. Results and Conclusion

In this part, the findings of the study are interpreted using tables.

3.1 Findings as to the Data Collection Tools

The items used in the data collection tools were conceptualized through factor analysis. Consequently, a higher number of indicators were reduced to a lower number of variables, and thus, these simplified variables were defined accordingly. In other words, constructive validity of the scales was determined. Cronbach Alpha Coefficients were calculated in order to determine the consistency coefficients of the scales. The factor analysis (basic component analysis) and reliability analysis of "In-class Listening Tasks Scale", "Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale", and "Students' Views on Listening Skill Scale" are given below.

3.1.1 The Factor Analysis (Basic Component Analysis) and Reliability Analysis Results of In-class Listening Tasks Scale

According to the results of the factor analysis, it was initially seen that "In-class Listening Tasks Scale" was made up of three factors. However; the scale was limited to a one factor structure and defined correspondingly in view of the facts:

that the variance revealed by the second and third factors was low,

that the items gathered in these factors were few (less than 3),

having examined the scree plot, that there was a significant decrease after the first factor, that eigen values were similar and other factors were on a straight line after the second factor, and as a result of detailed examination together with the expert opinion, that it was concluded that items gathered in the second and third factors theoretically resembled the items in the first factor.

Hence, the total variance revealed by one factor was %40. The factor loading values of the items in the scale varied from 0.41 to 0.76. Factor common variance and factor loading values of each item are given in Table 1 below.

The Cronbach Alpha Consistency Coefficient of the “In-class Listening Tasks Scale” was 0.89.

Table 1
Factor Analysis Results of In-class Listening Tasks Scale

Item No	Factor Common Variance	Factor Loading Value
Item 1	0.597	0.536
Item 2	0.700	0.659
Item 3	0.810	0.756
Item 4	0.759	0.728
Item 5	0.677	0.690
Item 6	0.610	0.712
Item 7	0.574	0.577
Item 8	0.675	0.745
Item 9	0.618	0.696
Item 10	0.570	0.611
Item 11	0.512	0.576
Item 12	0.515	0.496
Item 13	0.657	0.614
Item 14	0.592	0.585
Item 15	0.545	0.407
Eigen value: 6.015		
Revealed Variance: %40.01		

3.1.2 The Factor Analysis (Basic Component Analysis) and Reliability Analysis Results of Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale

According to the results of the factor analysis, it was initially noted that “Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale” was made up of three factors. However, the scale was limited to one factor because of the same reasons mentioned in the factor analysis findings of “In-class Listening Tasks Scale”.

As a result, the total variance revealed by one factor was %50. The factor loading values of the items in the scale varied from 0.43 to 0.84. Nevertheless, according to the analysis, it was seen that factor load value of the 3rd item was 0.24. After conferring with expert view, it was concluded that the 3rd item, which would normally be evaluated as having low factor loading value and should consequently be left out of the analysis, represented a significant dimension pertaining to the structure that the scale aimed to assess. Therefore, it was decided to keep the item in the scale taken into account that the variance revealed by the scale was high. Factor common variance and factor loading values of each item are given in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Factor Analysis Results of Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale

Item No	Factor Common Variance	Factor Loading Value
Item 1	0.909	0.761

Item 2	0.850	0.836
Item 3	0.690	0.237
Item 4	0.739	0.428
Item 5	0.710	0.443
Item 6	0.665	0.702
Item 7	0.909	0.761
Item 8	0.719	0.764
Item 9	0.625	0.777
Item 10	0.640	0.773
Item 11	0.728	0.799
Item 12	0.816	0.825
Item 13	0.860	0.837
Item 14	0.695	0.773
Item 15	0.514	0.481
Eigen value: 7.418		
Revealed Variance: %49,45		

Based upon the factor analysis, the Cronbach Alpha Consistency Coefficient of the “Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale” was 0.89.

3.1.3 The Factor Analysis (Basic Component Analysis) and Reliability Analysis Results of Students’ Views on Listening Skill Scale

According to the results of the factor analysis, it was initially observed that “Students’ Views on Listening Skill Scale” was made up of three factors. However, the scale was limited to one factor due to the same reasons mentioned in the factor analysis findings of “In-class Listening Tasks Scale” and “Out-of-class Listening Tasks Scale”.

In consequence, the total variance revealed by one factor was %46. The factor loading values of the items in the scale varied between 0.30 and 0.82. Factor common variance and factor load values of each item are given in Table 3 below.

Table 3
Factor Analysis Results of Students’ Views on Listening Skill Scale

Item No	Factor Common Variance	Factor Loading Value
Item 1	0.928	0.681
Item 2	0.753	0.298
Item 3	0.654	0.507
Item 4	0.928	0.685
Item 5	0.624	0.764
Item 6	0.681	0.823
Item 7	0.716	0.786
Item 8	0.731	0.756
Item 9	0.717	0.709
Item 10	0.622	0.729
Item 11	0.514	0.558
Eigen value: 5.076		
Revealed Variance: %46.15		

The Cronbach Alpha Consistency Coefficient of the “Students’ Views on Listening Skill Scale” was 0.87.

Consequently, it is perceived that all three scales have one-factor structures and that their consistency coefficients are at a desired level. This may suggest that data collection tools can assess what they intend to assess and that items in the scale can assess at the same sufficiency.

3.2 Findings Related to the Prediction of Listening Comprehension Skill

In order to predict the student achievement in listening comprehension, achievement scores (BASARI) were taken as the dependent variable. On the other hand, the independent variables were as follows: the number of juvenile books at home (EVCOCKİT), the number of books at home (EVKİTAP), the number of books read within one month (OKUNANKİT), the time spent reading materials such as books, magazines and newspaper (OKUSÜR), the frequency of daily newspaper purchase (GAZETE), regular purchase of juvenile magazines (DERGİ), time spent listening to the radio (RADYO), the frequency of going to the movies (SİNEMA), the frequency of teacher's conducting listening comprehension tasks (DINANLA), the frequency of making use of course books in improving listening comprehension skill (DERSKİTAP), the frequency of making use of story books in improving listening comprehension skill (HIKAYE), the frequency of making use of encyclopedias in improving listening comprehension skill (ANSIKLO), the frequency of making use of newspaper or magazines in improving listening comprehension skill (GAZETE_A), the frequency of making use of radio in improving listening comprehension skill (RADYO_A), the frequency of making use of television in improving listening comprehension skill (TELE), the frequency of making use of computers in improving listening comprehension skill (BİL), the frequency of making use of tape-recorders in improving listening comprehension skill (TEYP), mother's education (EGITANNE), gender (CİNSİYET), father's education (EGİTBABA) together with the out-of-class listening comprehension tasks (SINDISTOPLAM), in-class listening comprehension tasks (SINICTOPLAM), and views on listening comprehension (GORUSTOP).

The regression analysis results of variables related to prediction of students' listening comprehension achievement are given below.

Table 4

The Results of Multiple Regression Analysis Related to the Prediction of Listening Comprehension Achievement

Variables	B	β	R ²	T	R ² Change	p
EVKİTAP	2.547	.180	.571	4.123	.571	.000
OKUNANKİT	3.184	.209	.690	4.850	.119	.000
SINDISTOPLAM	.193	.146	.736	3.769	.046	.000
OKUSÜR	2.210	.124	.760	3.712	.024	.000
GORUSTOP	.146	.078	.777	2.114	.017	.035
RADYO	1.732	.107	.793	2.902	.016	.004
SINICTOPLAM	.140	.086	.798	2.413	.005	.017
GAZETE	1.272	.094	.803	2.560	.004	.011
EVCOCKİT	1.468	.107	.807	2.858	.004	.005
RADYO_A	.920	.079	.811	2.740	.004	.007
EĞİTBABA	-4.302	-.068	.814	-2.427	.004	.016
BİL	-.999	-.066	.818	-2.405	.004	.017
TEYP	1.033	.076	.821	2.005	.003	.046
(Constant)	2.684			.723		
R= 0.906	R ² = 0.821					
F(13-242)= 85.59	P< .05					

The staged regression analysis pertaining to the prediction of students' listening comprehension achievement scores was completed in thirteen phases. In the first phase, the number of books at home (EVKİTAP) went in to the regression equality; so did the number of books read within one month (OKUNANKİT) in the second phase; and out-of-class listening comprehension tasks (SINDISTOPLAM) in the third phase. OKUSÜR, GORUSTOP,

RADYO, SINİÇTOPLAM, GAZETE, EVCOCKİT, RADYO_A, EĞİTBABA, BİL and TEYP variables followed the first three successively. These thirteen variables explains the %82,1 of the total variance in the dependent variable.

According to the standardized regression coefficient, the variable that has the most significant positive effect on the listening comprehension skill is the number of books at home (EVKİTAP). This variable explains the %57 of the variance in the dependent variable. The variable which went into the regression equality in the second phase and which has a high positive effect on the dependent variable is the number of books read within one month (OKUNANKİT). This variable can explain the %12 of the variance in the dependent variable. The variable which went into the regression equality in the third phase is out-of-class listening comprehension tasks (SINDISTOPLAM). This variable can only explain the %4,6 of the variance in the dependent variable. As to the other variables that went into the regression equality consecutively, %2,4 of the total variance in the listening comprehension achievement scores was explained by the time spent reading materials such as books, magazines and newspaper (OKUSÜR); %1,7 of the total variance by views on listening comprehension (GORUSTOP); %1,6 of the total variance by the time spent listening to radio (RADYO); %0,4 of the total variance by in-class listening comprehension tasks (SINİÇTOPLAM); %0,4 of the total variance by the frequency of daily newspaper purchase (GAZETE); %0,4 of the total variance by the number of books read within one month (OKUNANKİT); %0,4 of the total variance by the frequency of making use of radio in improving listening comprehension skill (RADYO_A); %0,4 of the total variance by father's education (EĞİTBABA); %0,4 of the total variance by the frequency of making use of computers in improving listening comprehension skill (BİL); and finally %0,3 of the total variance by the frequency of making use of tape-recorders in improving listening comprehension skill (TEYP).

When signs of regression coefficients were studied in terms of the correlation between the variables that went into the regression equality and the dependent variable, it was established that the listening comprehension achievement and two variables, namely father's education (EĞİTBABA) and the frequency of making use of computers in improving listening comprehension skill (BİL), had negative correlations. All other variables had positive correlations.

Students' listening comprehension achievement decreases as their fathers' level of education and their computer usage time increase. Specifically, a decline in achievement is a predictable consequence as the students' frequency of computer use goes up. Research shows that spending extended periods of time in front of television and computer has a negative effect on academic achievement (Köksal, 1996, Gaddy 1996). The negative correlation between the listening comprehension and father's education is considered to stem from the characteristics of the schools in which the study was conducted. When data was examined, it was seen that the majority of students' fathers were university graduates. This finding should be retested and its causes should be resolved through further research that will be held by different group of participants.

As seen in Table 4, the two variables that had the most significant positive effect on students' listening comprehension achievement were the number of books at home and the number of books read within one month. The students with high numbers of books at home were observed to possess prominent listening comprehension achievement. Taken into consideration the variance that this variable explained in the dependent variable, it can be suggested that it is necessary for the parents to keep as many books as possible available at home in order to promote their children's listening comprehension skills. What is more, parents' allocating enough time for mutual conversations, which help students develop their listening comprehension skills, will certainly contribute to the improvement of this achievement. The findings of the study reveal the necessity to boost the number of books at the schools, too. It is of great importance that school libraries be founded and students be given time to read books within the borders of these libraries. Listening comprehension tasks carried out by the teachers as a part of in-class activities will indisputably enhance students' listening comprehension achievement.

In addition, variables such as radio, newspaper, the number of juvenile books at home, and players/recorders (cd and mp3) have major effects on listening comprehension skill. This may be attributable to the performance tasks that have been incorporated into the school applications in recent years. Besides, this may result from the fact that teachers progressively demand that students make use of various means of communication such as radio and newspaper in most of the performance tasks they give, and that students record the interviews they made in some others. Furthermore, as a result of technological developments, mp3 and visual players (vcd and dvd) become more

widespread, small and compact; and therefore, these innovations may be another factor in the development of listening comprehension skills of students.

As another prominent finding of the study, it is revealed that in and out-of-class listening tasks play a significant role in students' listening comprehension achievement. This finding underscores the fact that not only the school administration at the school, but also the parents out of the school ought to pay careful attention to the improvement of listening skill.

As a consequence, the findings of the study suggest that the two variables that have the most significant effects on students' listening comprehension skills are “the number of the books at home” and “the number of books read within one month”. Further research on listening comprehension skill may be conducted on a larger scale including public elementary schools and replicating the study on various grades. Integrating interviews with teachers, students and parents into the forthcoming research may bring about not only more comprehensive results, but also more appropriate decisions on the listening skill.

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Appendix - 1

A SUCCESS STORY

A question: How much successful do you want to be?

Think... How bad? The only obstacle between you and the success is yourself... Because people can only be beaten by their own words and thoughts, only you can beat yourself... Believing in what others say is another barrier that you create... It waits for one thing to take you to success. It waits for you to notice it. "He" did notice...

One day, he came from school, threw all his books on the floor, ran upstairs to his room, locked the door and began to cry... He only had two more years to finish school and his biggest dream was to join the school's basketball team. His mom went into the room and asked: "What's the matter?"

"I couldn't make it to the team" answered the boy. "They said I was short..."

His mom put her arm around him and said: "Look, it is not important how little or short you are in the team; what is important is how big a team you have inside yourself..."

After those words, his mom made her way out of the room. The little boy's eyes suddenly sparkled. What he needed was to hear these words. At that moment, he felt stronger than ever... Next morning he started to train. He woke up early in the morning and went to training, every morning, every evening, every day, and every week... He worked under the rain and snow... While working out he repeated his mom's words. As he repeated them, the fire inside him grew bigger and bigger.

A year later, it was the selection time for the team once again. He was strong this time. The captain of the team was impressed by him. He took him to the team that year. He was in the team the next year, and took transfer offers at the end of that season. First, he played for some amateur teams, but not before long he was among the professionals. As the fire inside him continued to burn, he felt that the fire carried him to new horizons. Higher and higher as he climbed, there was no obstacle in front of him. Nothing could stop him...

His name is Michael Jordan, "the most famous basketball star" the world has ever seen.

In this story about him, he said:

"Her gün saatlerce antrenman yaptım. Ne zaman daha fazla koşacak ya da şut çekmek için kollarımı kaldıracak gücüm kalmasa gözlerimi kapatır, soyunma odasını ve duvarda adımın yazmadığı takım listesini gözlerimde canlandırırdım. İşte o zaman bütün enerjimi geri gelir ve kaldığım yerden antrenman yapmaya devam ederim."

I used to train for many hours every day. Whenever I had no more energy to run or lift my arms to shoot, I used to close my eyes, and visualize the locker room and the team name list, which did not have my name on. Then, all my energy used to come back to me, and I used to train from where I left.

Source: All the World Magazine

Questions

- 1. What was Micheal Jordan's biggest dream? (1. Level)**
- 2. Write the lesson the text wants to teach. (1. Level)**
- 3. How did the incident unfold from the start to the end? (2. Level)**
- 4. A friend of yours begins to lose his/her self confidence about his/her lessons and starts to believe that he/she will fail.
Write a letter to her as if you are Michael Jordan (3. Level)**
- 5. What can be added in order to contribute to what Jordan said about himself in the text? (4. Level)**

Appendix - 2

Variables of the Student Questionnaire and Their Abbreviations

VARIABLES	ABBREVIATIONS
Achievement score from the listening comprehension test	BASARI
Gender	CİNSİYET
Mother's education	EGITANNE
Father's education	EGİTBABA
The number of juvenile books at home	EVCOCKİT
The number of books at home	EVKİTAP
The number of books read within one month	OKUNANKİT
The time spent reading materials such as books, magazines and newspaper	OKUSÜR
The frequency of daily newspaper purchase	GAZETE
Regular purchase or reading of juvenile magazines	DERGİ
Time spent listening to the radio	RADYO
The frequency of going to the movies	SİNEMA
How often does your teacher conduct listening comprehension tasks (listening-based reading, asking questions related to the text or writing tasks based on the text)?	DINANLA
Course books	DERSKİTAP
Story and fairy tale books	HIKAYE
Encyclopedias	ANSIKLO
Newspaper or magazines	GAZETE_A
Radio	RADYO_A
Television	TELE
Computer	BİL_A
Tape-recorders / cd, mp3 players etc.	TEYP
In-class listening comprehension tasks scale	SINICTOPLAM
Out-of-class listening comprehension tasks scale	SINDISTOPLAM
Views on listening comprehension	GORUSTOPLAM