Investigating the situation of teaching/learning Listening Comprehension

(A case study: secondary level schools- Port Sudan)

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Abstract:
This study aims at investigating the teaching of listening skill at secondary stage schools in Port Sudan town, what actually done by the teachers when they taught this very significant skill and how students interacted with it. At the end of the research, the study tried to get rid of the problems that encountered students in learning to listen to English. The researcher used the descriptive analytical method since it fits the aim and nature of the study. To carry out this methodology, the researcher used tools such as questionnaires and observation checklists. The research resulted in a number of problems that confronted both teachers and students in teaching/learning listening skill. These problems were classified by the researcher into three main categories, i.e., the material, to be listened to, the presentation which includes both speaker and listener and the physical setting which includes both noise and visual element. A certain strategy for dealing with these classes of difficulties was recommended by the researcher at the end of the research.

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Introduction

Listening is defined as a collection of micro-skills, including phonics, vocabulary, grammar, etc. In this respect, some language teaching theorists and researchers have constructed a number of taxonomies delineating the micro-skills needed for effective listening (e.g. De Haven, 1988; Field, 1997; Lund, 1995; Lundsteen, 1989; Peterson, 1991; Richards, 1983; Rivers, 1981; Rubin, 1990, Wipf, 1984). Richards’ (1983) taxonomy, for example, lists thirty three micro-skills that students need to master for effective conversational listening and eighteen micro skills for academic listening. Listening is also defined as an active process in which the student constructs meaning from an aural text. The definition of listening, which is in the researcher’s opinion provides a sound theoretical base. To develop listening in EFL, students must involve both skills and meaning. The following extracts are in support of the investigator’s view:

In developing classroom activities and materials for teaching listening comprehension, a clear understanding is needed for the nature of top-down and bottom-up approaches to listening and how these processes relate to different kinds of listening purposes (Richards: 1990: 65).

FL listening is not just “a bottom up” skill in which the meaning can be derived from perception or comprehension of the sum of all discrete sounds, syllables, words, or phrases (Ur: 1984:4). FL listening does indeed involve some “bottom-up” processing, but at the same time it requires substantial amounts of “top-down” processing in which meaning is inferred from broad contextual clues and background knowledge (Richards:1983:pp219–240).

Research Questions

(1) What are the aims of teaching listening skill?
(2) To what extent is listening skill understood by students at secondary schools in Port Sudan town?
(3) How is listening taught at secondary schools in Port Sudan town?
(4) What problems are faced by the teachers and students in teaching and learning listening comprehension?

Research hypotheses

- The aim of teaching English in Sudan is to help students acquire the foreign language they easily contact with others in the outside world.
- The main reason for suffering from difficulties in understanding spoken language is the ignorance of listening skill in itself as a separate skill and the little practice of listening.
- Teachers do not prepare students to understand the natural spontaneous speech of native speakers.
- The problems come out from the lack of materials in curriculum focusing especially on listening skill, some of the students hate
English, and most of them did not take English lessons seriously in their previous stages.

**Aims of study**
The study aims at investigating the deficiency of listening comprehension among students of secondary schools in Port Sudan town. The research will try to find out and categorize the problems that hold back precise listening comprehension. After that, it tries to assess and evaluate the complete process of teaching and learning listening comprehension.

**Significance of the study**
The importance of this study (investigation) is that it tries to set a comprehensive strategy for one of the basic skills of English which, though now recognized, is still lagging behind the other skills in methodology and practical application in the English classroom. This will help textbook writers to provide adequate material for developing the listening skill. It will also help teachers to use the appropriate techniques in classrooms.

**Research Problem**
At the present time, there is agreement among foreign language methodologists that teaching a foreign language should aim at developing the four basic skills of the target language namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the past foreign language teaching stressed the written aspect of the language i.e., reading and writing. It was only in the mid 1950 that the oral aspect received its due emphasis when the slogan “language for communication” was raised. Unfortunately, the term “communication” was misunderstood and misinterpreted to mean stressing the speaking skill. In this case, practicing listening was considered only as a means for teaching speaking. This may explain why Wilga Rivers (1972) describes listening comprehension as a “long neglected area” (p.136). Chenfeld (1978) also devotes a whole chapter in Teaching Language Arts Creatively entitled: “listening”: A forgotten Language Art? “(pp. 89-137). In this chapter, he explains that “it was believed that listening was an automatic reflex, closely related to intelligence, and could not be taught as a skill in itself” (p.90). So, it was only recently that listening began to attract the attention as an independent skill that should be developed as an end in it self. Yet, the present situation may be summed up as listening is probably the least stressed skill in the language classroom. Reasons for this may lie in the lack of emphasis on teaching listening comprehension in the language textbooks in general, as well as in the lack of available material specifically developed for and focused on the teaching of listening comprehension skill and
until recently, however, little is offered in terms of methodology or practical application for helping the EFL student develop these important aural skills.

If, however, the researcher examines carefully the listening abilities of the students in the secondary schools in Port Sudan town, he will realize that they are not as competent as he needs. The situation usually becomes obvious when they make their first contact with native speakers. Often they feel lost and complaining about the speed of delivery of the native speakers or their accents. This alone should convince him of the need to teach this skill.

The problem of this research lies in the attempt to set a strategy for developing the listening skill in English as a foreign language (EFL) in the secondary schools in Port Sudan town.

**The procedure**

To tackle the problem of this investigation, two steps will be taken:

1. Conducting a field study in the present situation of listening skill teaching using tools such as two different types of questionnaire and two different kinds of observation checklist in the secondary level schools in Port Sudan town.

2. On the basis of the results of the field study, the principles of the recommended strategy will be suggested.

**Methodology and tools**

The researcher adopted the descriptive methodology because it fits the nature of the study. To look into the genuine situation that existed in the secondary level schools in Port Sudan town when teaching listening, the researcher used two different types of investigation. These involve two different kinds of questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed to teachers of English at secondary schools. The first questionnaire was distributed to forty teachers of English at the secondary level schools in Port Sudan town whereas the second questionnaire was distributed to twenty teachers of English at the same level.

As regards the observation checklists, they were used in classes. The first was intended to check students’ reaction when they were exposed to different sorts of listening in twenty classes. The other checklist to see what teachers of English at secondary level schools actually did when they wanted to teach a listening lesson in twenty classes too. The total number of the students was one thousand students.

**Detailed analysis of questionnaire**

(1) To approach the proper position which prevailed in listening lessons in secondary level schools in Port Sudan town, the researcher tried in the following to consider and analyse the replies that teachers gave to the various questions in the
first questionnaire which comprises ten different questions aiming at extracting information from the teachers of English about the teaching of this significant skill. The researcher categorized the answers to all of the questions into categories. The similar answers in each question form a category. This category was given a suitable name according to what is included in it. Each question has a different number of categories. The number of the teachers who selected a particular category is indicated clearly in front of it.

1. What are the aims of teaching listening?
The categories of this question are:
   a. Pronunciation 70%
   b. Integration 10%
   c. Comprehension 8%
   d. Communication 7%
   e. Consolidation 5%

2. What types of spoken English will your students need to understand?
   a. Live English 45%
   b. Contrived English 35%
   c. Communicative activities 20%

3. How do you link listening work with your main course?
   a. Textbook materials 55%
   b. Creation of new materials 20%
   c. Language aspects 15%
   d. Integration of the skills 10%

4. What would you say the sub-skills of listening are?
   a. Aspects of language 55%
   b. Attitude toward listening 42%
   c. Transcription 03%

5. What are the general principles of teaching listening?
   a. Aim 40%
   b. Interest of materials 30%
   c. Presentation and practice 25%
   d. Sufficient time for answer 05%

6. What types of listening exercises do the coursebooks provide to help students practice the listening skills they need?
The categories of this question are two in number. They are as follows:
   a. Textbook exercises 80%
   b. No exercises 20%

7. What are the potential problems that encounter secondary school pupils in listening?
The replies to this question were categorized into three main categories. They are as follows:
   a. Presentation (speaker + listener) 70%
   b. The message to be listened to 20%
   c. The physical setting 10%

8. Can you state some ways of solving these problems?
The same categories were given to the answers to question eight.
   a. The message 25%
   b. The presentation (speaker + listener) 55%
   c. The physical setting 20%

9. What percentage of the teaching time do you suggest should be given to listening?
The categories of the answers to this question are nine in number. They are as follows:
   a. 25% of the teaching time would suffice 40%
b. 27% of the teaching time should be devoted to listening 20%
c. 50% of the teaching time should be given to listening 17%
d. 30% of the teaching time should be appropriated to listening 12%
e. 20% of the teaching time is sufficient for listening 5%
f. 33 ⅓% of the teaching time should be allowed for listening 2%
g. 5% of the teaching time should be certified for listening 2%
h. 80% of the teaching time should be specified for listening 1%
i. 10% of the teaching time should be taken up by listening 1%

(10) Is it important to teach listening? Give reasons.
The categories of the answers to the last question are five in number. They are:
a. Base 40%
b. Pronunciation 30%
c. Comprehension 15%
d. Structure development 10%
e. Communication 05%

Summary of the results of questionnaire (1)
1. Most of the teachers put the aims of teaching listening in the category of pronunciation.
2. The majority of the teachers chose live English as a type of spoken English students need to understand.
3. Most teachers preferred that linking listening work with the main course through textbook materials.
4. More than half of the teachers put the sub skills of listening in the class of aspects of language.
5. The general principles of teaching listening were put in the category of aim by most of the teachers.
6. Textbook exercises were chosen as a type of listening exercises coursebooks provide to help students practice listening.
7. Most of the teachers selected the problems that related to presentation as the potential problems which confronted the pupils in learning to listen.
8. Solutions to the problems related to presentation were given by more than half of the teachers.
9. 40% of the teachers suggested that 25% of the teaching time should be devoted to listening.
10. Most of the teachers picked out the reasons that connected to the base category to justify the significance of teaching listening.

From the previous questionnaire, the researcher noticed that teachers of secondary level schools, to whom the questionnaire was distributed, gave different and varied perspectives about listening skill but their points of view were of paramount importance to the course of the study.

Detailed analysis of the questionnaire (2)
The researcher set another questionnaire for the purposes of obtaining extra information from the teachers of English at the secondary level schools in Port Sudan town about teaching the listening skill. It is regarded as a supportive questionnaire.
to the first questionnaire which aimed at getting subjective opinions from the teachers of English at the secondary level schools on the process of teaching the listening skill. It is also intended to cover the aspects of the process of teaching listening that the previous questionnaire did not look at.

In this questionnaire which was composed of two selection order questions, the researcher requested teachers of English to arrange in order of importance from the greatest importance to the least importance. In the first question, there are some aims of teaching the listening skill at the secondary level schools.

**Question (1). The aims are**
1. To train students to pronounce words correctly.
2. To develop the speaking skill.
3. To make students understand what they hear.
4. To interact effectively with each other and with the teacher in the classroom and with other people outside the classroom.
5. To learn how to guess the meaning of the unknown words.
6. To enable students to differentiate between similar sounds.
7. To increase students’ vocabulary.
8. To help students develop the other language skills.

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<th>Aim No</th>
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**Fig (1)**

From this figure, the researcher observed that the least favoured aims are 6,7 and 8 while the most favoured ones are 2,3,1 and 5.
Question (2)

From the list below choose the suitable type(s) of spoken English that secondary level school students in Port Sudan town need to understand by putting a tick (√) in front of them and a cross (x) in front of the others. Then put those you have ticked in order of importance from the greatest to the least.

a) Type of discourse)
1. Discussions.
2. Descriptions.
3. Talks.
4. Dialogues.
5. Stories.
6. Advertisements.
7. Interviews.
8. Pop songs.
9. Lectures.
10. Directions.
11. Folk songs.
13. Instructions.
14. Telephone conversations.

In relation to the first part of this question which deals with the suitable types of spoken English that secondary school learners need to understand, teachers gave these opinions:
- Dialogues, discussions and stories were chosen by all teachers.
- Interviews 55%
- Talks, descriptions and telephone conversations 30%
- Instructions, directions, lectures, advertisements, pop songs, folk songs and news broadcasts 15%

Concerning the arrangement of the suitable types of spoken English that secondary school learners need to understand, teachers, to whom the researcher distributed the questionnaire, differed considerably in their opinions. From figure (2), the researcher noticed the following:
- Discussions and dialogues were placed number one.
- Talks, lectures, directions and instructions were put number two.
- Stories, advertisements and directions were considered number three.
- Stories, interviews, instructions and telephone conversations were put number four.
- Discussions, dialogues, interviews, pop songs, folk songs and news broadcasts were placed number five.
- Discussions, descriptions, dialogues and advertisements were considered number six.
- Descriptions and talks were put number seven.
- Discussions, dialogues and lectures were considered number eight.
- Stories, news broadcasts and telephone conversations were chosen number nine.
- Folk songs were selected as number ten.
- Talks and interviews were picked out as number eleven.
- Stories were deemed number twelve. Telephone conversations were placed number thirteen.

(b) From the list below choose the
suitable type(s) of language that secondary school students, who were under investigation, need to understand by putting a tick ( √ ) in front of them and a cross ( x ) in front of the others. Then put those you have ticked in order of importance from the greatest to the least.

Types of language
1. Formal.
2. Informal.
3. Colloquial.
5. American English.
6. Indian English.
7. Irish English.
8. Nigerian English. (see figure 2 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of language</th>
<th>Position %</th>
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<td>8</td>
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Fig (2)

From the above figure, the investigator noticed that the most favoured types of language are formal and British English, whereas the least favoured type of language is American English.
Analysis of observation checklist (1)
To draw a complete and clear picture of what was happening in the classes when teaching listening, the researcher designed two formats of observation checklists: the first was to identify students’ reactions when they were exposed to different types of listening through short taped listening materials. These various kinds of listening involved informational listening, critical listening, appreciative listening and so on.
The other observation checklist looked into the role of the teachers when teaching their pupils a listening lesson. This can be achieved through different kinds of materials. These materials involved taped materials namely, dialogues, passages, conversations and materials taken from textbooks. Teachers’ role or function was investigated through three stages, that is to say, before they came to the classrooms, when they were inside their classrooms, and after a listening lesson.
Now the researcher is going to analyse...
the first observation checklist that dealt with students’ responses when they were confronted by different types of listening materials. The end-product of the students’ responses to the several sorts of listening was as follows:

1. Pupils who were able to react to and recall details of an oral message (informational listening).
   - Never 60%
   - Sometimes 30%
   - Most of the time 07%
   - Always 03%

2. Pupils who were able to react to and recall and respond to the sequence of a message (informational listening).
   - Never 52%
   - Sometimes 37%
   - Most of the time 10%
   - Always 01%

3. Pupils who were able to follow a set of oral directions (informational listening).
   - Never 55%
   - Sometimes 35%
   - Most of the time 07%
   - Always 03%

4. Pupils who were able to distinguish main from subordinate ideas (informational listening).
   - Never 45%
   - Sometimes 40%
   - Most of the time 10%
   - Always 05%

5. Pupils who were able to take notes from an oral communication (informational listening).
   - Never 45%
   - Sometimes 37%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Always</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. React to and recall details of an oral</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>07%</td>
<td>03%</td>
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<td>message (informational listening)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. React to and recall and respond to the</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>01%</td>
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<td>sequence of a message (informational listening)</td>
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<td>3. Follow a set of oral directions (</td>
<td>55%</td>
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<td>informational listening)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Distinguish main from subordinate ideas</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<td>(informational listening)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Take notes from an oral communication</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
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6. Pupils who were able to take action based on information heard (informational listening).
   - Never 55%
   - Sometimes 35%
   - Most of the time 09%
   - Always 01%

It is obvious that the majority of the students were never able to react actively to this sort of listening. Some of them sometimes reacted to it while a few most of the time succeeded in interacting with it. Those who always reacted actively to this type of listening constituted the minority.

7. Pupils who were able to perceive relations among ideas (critical listening).
   - Never 72%
   - Sometimes 23%
   - Most of the time 03%
   - Always 02%

8. Pupils who were able to distinguish fact from opinion (critical listening).
   - Never 72%
   - Sometimes 25%
   - Most of the time 02%
   - Always 01%

9. Pupils who were able to identify a speaker’s point of view and feelings (critical listening).
   - Never 49%
   - Sometimes 38%
   - Most of the time 07%
   - Always 06%

10. Pupils who were able to identify
the non-verbal and vocal expressions that communicate feelings and ideas (critical listening).

Never 50%
Sometimes 30%
Most of the time 15%
Always 05%

From the analysis above, the researcher observed that most of the students never responded actively to this kind of listening. Very few of them always were able to interact effectively with this sort of listening.

11. Students who were able to formulate opinions and judgments, support judgment with reasons (critical judgmental listening).

Never 70%
Sometimes 15%
Most of the time 12%
Always 03%

12. Students who were able to evaluate stories heard (critical judgmental listening).

Never 40%
Sometimes 25%
Most of the time 20%
Always 15%

13. Students who were able to weigh the quality of an oral message (judgmental listening).

Never 47%
Sometimes 42%
Most of the time 10%
Always 01%

14. Pupils who were able to identify some messages as propaganda and evaluate these as harmless or harmful (judgmental listening).

Never 55%
Sometimes 33%
Most of the time 10%
Always 02%

15. Students who were able to take pleasure in the content of stories, poems and dramatizations when heard (appreciative listening).

Never 40%
Sometimes 35%
Most of the time 20%
Always 05%

16. Pupils who were able to enjoy the sounds of language (appreciative listening).

Never 57%
Sometimes 25%
Most of the time 15%
Always 03%

17. Students who were able to enjoy the moods expressed and the pictures conjured up through striking language usage (appreciative listening).

Never 60%
Sometimes 25%
Most of the time 12%
Always 03%

The researcher noticed that the majority of the students never able to enjoy the moods expressed and the pictures conjured up through striking language usage whereas the minority always able to enjoy this form of listening language usage.

From the analysis of this sort of listening and other kinds, the researcher noticed that students were unable to cope with these kinds of
listening well. They showed great weakness in this respect which entails specific and effective treatment to put them on the right track for listening comprehension.

**Detailed analysis of observation checklist (2)**

Concerning the second observation checklist that dealt with the teachers’ role when teaching a listening lesson to their students, the researcher would like to make a clear and full picture of *What Actually Done by the teachers*. This can be achieved through different materials. These materials included taped materials, i.e. dialogues, passages, conversations and materials taken from textbooks. By analyzing the observation checklist, the investigator came to these conclusions:

1. Type of language used by the teachers to practice listening.
   - Authentic 5%
   - Inauthentic 75%
   - Both types 20%

2. Control exercised over the linguistic aspects & the topic of the message: Linguistic aspects of the language 35% (such as sounds, vocabulary and structure)
   Topic of the message 65%

3. Division or portions of the material used by the teachers. Division of the material into:
   - Complete sections 15%
   - Incomplete sections 40%
   - No division into sections at all 45%

4. Topics selection according to the variables that affect our teaching of the listening skill (such as the age, sophistication of the pupils, etc.)
   - Teachers who employed topics that fit in with the students’ age and sophistication 30%
   - Teachers who did not use topics that are appropriate to the pupils’ age and sophistication 70%

5. Grading of the listening material that is used by the teachers according to the level of the pupils:
   - In terms of difficulty 35%
   - Is not in accordance with the level of the students in terms of difficulty 65%

6. Length of the passages to be presented by the teachers:
   - Passages of more than hundred words 55%
   - Passages of less than hundred words 45%

7. The break down of long extracts by the teachers:
   - Into meaningful and manageable length 45%
   - Into meaningful but not manageable length 55%

8. Speed of delivery of the teachers:
   - Normal speed of delivery 40%
   - Speed that is slower than normal 60%

9. Number of pauses in a listening material that is used by the teachers.
   - Served listening materials that include sufficient pauses 35%
   - Listening materials with insufficient pauses 65%
10. The number of times of listening to the material.
   Teachers who allowed their students to listen to the material only once 75%
   Teachers who allowed their students to listen to the material twice 20%
   Teachers who allowed their students to listen to the material several times 05%

11. Type of the listening material to be listened to.
   Listening materials that allow students to be exposed to various voice qualities 30%
   Listening materials which don’t allow students to be exposed to various voice qualities 70%

12. Adoption of the visual dimension.
   Most of the time used the visual dimension 15%
   Sometimes used the visual element 25%
   No visual element at all 60%

13. Teachers intervention while listening.
   Teachers who always intervene while listening 50%
   Teachers who occasionally intervene while listening 35%
   Teachers who don’t intervene at all 15%

15. Teacher’s job is to provide students with useful exercises to help them understand the material presented.
   Always gave certain tasks after listening to check students’ comprehension 35%
   Sometimes gave tasks after listening to check their students’ understanding 40%
   Never accompany their listening with tasks that test whether their students have fathomed out the listening material or not 25%

16. Raising students’ motivation to listen to the foreign language.
   Whenever possible, even without paying attention all the time (passive listening) 40%
   Rarely encourage their students to listen to the foreign language 45%
   No encouragement at all 15%

17. Form of words used by the teachers to make their intentions clear.
   Use of pretentious language 60%
   Use of technical jargon 35%
   Employment of language that students can understand 05%

18. The preparatory stage of a listening lesson.
   Gave this stage its due attention and prepared themselves and the students for it 35%
   Did nothing in this stage 65%

19. While-listening stage
   Gave students some exercises, tasks,
and activities during listening 45%
Did not give students any support while they are listening 55%

20. Post-listening stage.
Exploited the passage after students have listened to it. 40%
Did not employ the passage after students have listened to it in any way 60%

The results of the analysis
The analysis of observation checklist (2) resulted in the following:
- Inauthentic language was used by most of the teachers.
- Control was not exercised over the linguistic aspects of the language by the majority.
- No division of the listening material into sections was practiced by most of the teachers.
- Most of the teachers did not use topics that are appropriate to the pupils’ age and sophistication.
- The minority of the teachers graded the listening material according to the pupils’ level in terms of difficulty.
- Passages of more than hundred words were frequently used by the teachers.
- Most of the teachers did not give tasks after listening to check the pupils’ understanding.
- Insisting on a unique correct answer was adopted by most of the teachers.
- The majority of the teachers did not encourage students to listen to the foreign language.
- Teachers used very rarely language that students can understand.
- Most of the teachers did not give the pre-listening stage its deserved attention and did not prepare themselves and their students for it.
- Most of the teachers did not give their pupils any help while they are listening.
- Most of the teachers did not employ the listening material after students have listened to it in any way.
- Breaking down of long extracts into meaningful and manageable length was not adopted by most of the teachers.
- The majority of the teachers used speed that is slower than normal.
- Listening materials with insufficient pauses were used by most of the teachers.
- The majority of the teachers allowed their students to listen only once to the listening material.
- Most of the teachers did not allow the pupils to be exposed to the various voice qualities.
- Most of the teachers did not accompany the listening material with a visual element.
- Most of the teachers always intervene while listening.
Summary of the actual problems that encounter secondary school students in learning to listen to English

The evidence that shows why listening is difficult to Sudanese learners of English, who were under investigation, comes mainly from three sources: the message to be listened to (the material), the presentation and the physical setting.

The message (the material)
This include redundancy, colloquialisms, idealized language, its vocabulary, and its unpredictable phrases.

The presentation (the speaker and the listener) The speaker
This involves the different accent used, intonation and stress which characterize natural speech and spoken prose as in reading aloud written texts, and redundant utterances.

The listener
This comprises his lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak, his inability to get things repeated, his limited vocabulary, his failure to recognize cohesive devices, his problems of interpretation, his inability to concentrate, his mishearing the sounds, his inability to cope with redundancy and noise, his inability to predict, his fatigue, his misunderstanding of different accents, his insufficient practice opportunities and his attitude towards listening.

The physical setting
Noise
Noise, including both background noises on the recording and environmental noises, take minds off the content of the listening passage. Unclear sound resulting from poor quality equipment interfered with listeners’ comprehension.

Visual dimension
Listening material on tape lacks visual and aural environmental clues. Not seeing the speaker’s body language and facial expressions makes it more difficult for secondary school listeners, who were studied, to understand the speaker’s meaning.

Recommendations
(A strategy for Teaching the Listening Skill)

The researcher can decide that the difficulties that resulted from the application (processing) of the tools used in the study can be classified into three main categories, namely, the message to be listened to or the material, the presentation which involves both speaker and listener, and finally, the physical setting which comprises noise and visual dimension. Not all the problems resulted can be overcome.
Certain features of the message and the speaker, for instance, are inevitable. But this does not mean that teachers can do nothing about them. Teachers can at least provide the students with suitable listening materials, background and linguistic knowledge, enabling skills, pleasant classroom conditions, and useful exercises to help them discover effective listening strategies.

The researcher’s recommendations take the form of a strategy for developing the listening skill in secondary level schools in Port Sudan town. This strategy will deal with four principal aspects, i.e., message (material), presentation (speaker and listener), physical setting (noise and visual element). It had better set this question before proceeding the strategy. **What Can Teachers do to help pupils master the difficulties?**

1- The message (the material): contrived language versus live language.

Two types of listening material should be used in teaching listening comprehension, contrived language and live language. Contrived language is the language items especially designed, adapted or produced for teaching purpose while authentic language is any thing written or spoken by native speakers for or to native speakers. Some examples are: films – TV programs – interviews – unscripted conversation – radio excerpts – advertisement – songs – etc. Understanding live language is in the ultimate aim of teaching listening. Yet, contrived language is important as a means to that end.

Through contrived language material, which is in language teaching terms, is one that has been written especially for language students. Examples of this are dialogues, conversations and passages included in the course book when students read aloud. These are devoid of features that characterize authentic language such as repetitions, false starts, pauses and rephrasing. Control is exercised over the linguistic aspects, sounds, vocabulary, and structure as well as the content. This control is essential in the early stages.

The contrived language material should be authentic, i.e., consisting of utterances with a high probability of occurrence, since, using artificial language combinations is a waste of time and energy and can only confuse the student when he/she is later confronted with natural speech. For contrived language to be authentic, it should have redundancy which is a characteristic of natural speech. Artificially constructed material often causes difficulty because of reducing the amount of redundancy. This redundancy is important since it helps the person to follow the message at the normal speed although some parts of it may pass unheard. In authentic speech, there are two types of redundancy,
redundancy of content and linguistic redundancy. It is the lack of content redundancy that makes following a close knit discourse requires a concentrated effort on the part of the listener. So, the researcher suggests that listening comprehension passages should have a certain amount of repetitious material which may take the form, for example, of explanation or description in slightly different version.

Another characteristic of authentic speech (natural language) is that it is different from the written language. So, a printed text should not be used un-adapted in listening comprehension.

The solution is that either to take material from sources other than the class textbook or to adapt the text. Also studying the syntactic differences between spontaneous informal speech and the carefully prepared language before setting material for listening comprehension. Thus, the contrived language should be as authentic and as natural as the live language. The difference should lie only in the degree of control exercised over the material.

After students have received much practice in listening to contrived language material, they should move forward to practicing listening to live language which is the ultimate goal of teaching listening. As soon as students can take it, pupils must try live-situation recordings.

Live language situations are important, since they not only expose the students to very natural language with its infinite variety of structures, new vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, sand hi-variation, and changes in register (as opposed to typical classroom register), but it also adds a lot in terms of meaningful cultural exchanges.

Finally, since contrived language, essential as it is the beginning, is unable to prepare the students to cope with real life language situations, recorded live language material is precisely what is needed to bridge the gap between the language heard in EFL classrooms and the real language that is spoken by native speakers in informal situations.
Live & Contrived Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of language</th>
<th>Live</th>
<th>Contrived</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>Are said to be those which are designed for native speakers: real texts designed not for language students, but for speakers of the language in question</td>
<td>Are those have been written especially for language students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>English language newspapers–radio programs for English speakers, a British advertisement, etc</td>
<td>Conversations, dialogues and passages included in course-books and read aloud</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.1 Topics

Used in listening comprehension should vary with the age and sophistication of the students and therefore match their knowledge of vocabulary and experience or interest. These topics may include personal experiences, family, friends, pets, and funny incidents. Interviews may deal with food and eating habits, drinks, recreation in spare time, and holidays. Dialogues may be based on how to take or leave messages, make appointments, get information via the telephone. Radio or TV programs may include news bulletins (with wide areas of vocabulary), weather reports, plays, songs, and film scenarios. The material may also be in the form of speeches, discussions or lectures or literary or cultural subjects, current events, and controversial issues.

1.2 Difficulty

At the beginning, the material should be familiar to the students. Here, neither new vocabulary nor new structures should be introduced, but the main effort is to present quite new situations within the language features already known by the students. At this stage, unfamiliar material will present the inexperienced student with a high information content in each sound sequence, thus affecting his/her memory and making him/her unable to retain the relevant elements from the preceding sequences.

Yes, keeping the listening material at this elementary stage will not allow the teachers or students to know how far they can stretch their minds or ears. So, at a higher stage, the students should not be left without a challenge. This challenge is to see just how easily quite new lexis and phrases can be guessed, provided the context gives a strong enough lead. By this advanced stage, the student should have mastered the basic phonological and structural patterns of the language. So, recognition of these patterns is almost automatic,
thus allowing the student assimilate easily the new elements when embedded in easily recognizable material. The new elements introduced in the listening comprehension passage, should be not more than three or four words or one structure, and their introduction, should always be intentional and never accidental. At this stage, choosing the listening material should be based on two main criteria:

- How much can the context help in following the gist?
- How far can quite new vocabulary be intelligently guessed from what has gone before?

### 1.3 Length of passage

The main principle in that the listening material should move from short to longer passages. This sounds logical since the learner at the beginning will pay so much attention to recognizing the sound sequences that less capacity is left for retaining what he has heard and understood. As the student’s familiarity with the language increases through having more and more practice, he becomes able to follow and retain longer and longer sequences. So, at the beginning, listening comprehension passages should be kept short. Only three or four sentences be given at a time or only two short sentences should be presented. Sometimes one sentence may be enough for beginner, to be increased gradually. At an advanced level, the student is able to follow and retain longer and longer sentences. Thus longer passages are presented with the aim of developing the student’s memory span.

It should be mentioned here that the passage should form a meaningful unit. So, very long extracts should be broken down into acceptable and manageable lengths.

### 1.4 Length of sentence

In listening comprehension, the length of the segments emitted in each breath group is significant. This significance lies in the fact that the amount of information is directly proportional to the number of the words. So, the longer the segment the greater is the strain on the auditory memory. Therefore, the length of sentences should vary according to the level of the students. Their abilities to concentrate will be impaired if too great strain is placed on the memory. With segments of from eight to ten words, less in the early stages, the mind of foreign learners can recirculate the material during the pause, relating it to what preceded and anticipating to some extent what will follow. So, at the beginning, students should be presented with very short sentences (basic pattern). Gradually longer sentences are required.

### 2. Presentation (the speaker and the listener)

#### 2.1 Speed

It is always emphasized by foreign langagemethodologists that students
should be exposed to the normal speed of the foreign language from the beginning of learning listening comprehension. The normal speed is a speed of delivery which would not appear to a native speaker to be unduly labored—as speech which retains normal word groupings, elisions, liaisons, consonant assimilation, natural rhythm and intonation. Artificially slow speed must be avoided in teaching listening since the utterances are inevitably distorted and the auditory images stored by the student will not be immediately useful when he hears a natural formal of speech. This means that we reject any material that is originally produced specifically for foreign use. Even if teachers complain that students will not understand the normal speech, the researcher assures that, they will if the language material is presented in graded stages. Sometimes it may be desirable that the listening material be presented in a little slower speed than ordinary fluent speech. This may be the case with the first recording or reading of a passage that would be read twice or with the opening sentences which usually set the scene in a story. In such cases, the researcher suggests that the normal intonation should be preserved, and, by analogy, it should be similar to a native speaker telling a story to a group of small children, and not giving a dictation. Finally, it is preferable that the listening material should be recorded. This will ensure that the identical passage be played again and again without being influenced by the teacher’s impression or the students’ attitudes.

2.2 Pauses

Pauses serve an important function in following and understanding speech. They allow the student to rehearse what he/she has heard, thus strengthening the memory trace. These pauses, are characteristic of natural speech in the form of recitations, hemming and hawing, restating, and cliché phrases. These help extend the pauses in normal speech. The lack of sufficient pauses will cause material to be lost through making the immediate memory unable to recirculate what is retaining. Therefore, listening material should be made to include sufficient pauses. This may take the form of lengthening the pauses between segments. Finally, it is reasonable to expect that pauses may be longer for the beginners to enable them to recirculate the information emitted. Of course, lengthening the pauses should not affect the normal speed of delivery within the segments.

2.3 Repetition of material

There is no set limit for the number of times the students should be exposed to the listening signal (material). The criterion is the students, understanding of the material. For the beginners when the emphasis
is placed on recognition, the same material may be repeated several times. This allows students to have further practice in listening and selecting and to have an opportunity to verify their answers. Gradually, as students progress, they should be encouraged to listen to the material less and less times. Later, with more advanced students, efforts should be exerted by the teacher to train them to listen to the material only once. This is the ultimate aim that should be achieved to help the students get involved in real-life situations.

2.4 Different Voices
Teaching listening comprehension aims at helping students to be able eventually to understand different people in different situations. Every individual has his own idiolect which is different from that of other people. The quality of the female voice is different from that of males. Both are still different from the child’s voice. To achieve this aim, material should be graded to allow students to be exposed gradually to various voice qualities.

At first, beginners may be exposed to two different voice qualities, preferably male and female. Sticking to the same two voice qualities for sometime is important since it helps inculcate the basic phonological patterns of the language with additional burdens being placed on the student as a result of introducing new voices.

Gradually, other voices may be introduced in different situations. The purpose here is to train students to recognize not only the basic intonation patterns of the language, but also those carrying extrinsic information which may be vital to his/her functioning of the language. At an advanced stage, students should have the opportunity to hear a variety of voices of differing quality, and educational backgrounds. Children’s voices should also be recorded and presented to students. To achieve this variation, radio recordings which illustrate typical everyday situations are valuable for accustoming students to different voices.

2.5 Regional Dialects
After students have covered the four points discussed so far, it is time to expose them to the main dialects of the language. In the case of English, if the students have all the time been practicing one of the two main dialects (British or American), the other dialects should be dealt with to train students to recognize the dialectal variations. At this more advanced level, such training may be started by using recordings of simple utterances in the new dialect. It should be stressed that it is recognition, not production, of various dialects that is being aimed at here.

3. Physical Setting
3.1 Noise
In real-life situations we rarely listen
to ideal messages, i.e., messages without the accompaniment of irrelevant sounds (noise). This noise is related either to inadequacies on the part of the speaker or to physical difficulties in the situation. This leads to missing some of the message by the listener. A basic aim of teaching listening comprehension is to enable students eventually to cope with these “noise” features. When teaching beginners, students should listen to noise-free language material. By using taped or recorded material, the speaker’s idiosyncrasies can be avoided. The language-laboratory is very important at this stage to keep out the physical noise for it excludes distractions and assist concentration. As students progress the “noise” element should be introduced and increased gradually in the listening material. So, instead of using the laboratory head-phones and tape recorders may be needed through the air. Later, a form of light background noise may be introduced such as music or knocking. Also, students may listen to material with a tiny bit wiped off the tape, or the volume may be rapidly turned down and then up again. At a more advanced stage, student should be exposed to more realistic situation. The student should be trained to behave with the same confidence (as the native speaker) to make reasonable interpretation even though he has not clearly heard all the information. The native speaker does this because of his ability, supported by the redundancy features existing in the linguistic code itself, to reconstruct the message as he thinks it should be.

3.2 The Visual element

The visual element serves a number of functions in language teaching in general and listening in particular. Through visual aids (pictures or films), students can acquire the cultural background of the target language (TL). This background is important for mastering the language. Other functions of the accompanying visual material, are that it effectively reduce the amount of concentration or understanding and remembering what is said, assists in learning what is said, and certainly helps to prevent the danger of listening without comprehension. Also, an accompanying film helps students to watch the expression and gestures of the speakers as further delimitations of the message this is significant since no full comprehension of aural communication is complete without taking these kinesics and paralinguistic aspects into consideration. With beginners, where vocabulary is limited to concrete objects and actions, the listening material should be accompanied by visual material. In case of pictures, each must have only one possible interpretation. Gradually, students should be trained...
to listen with less and less visual help. At a more advanced stage where material is characterized by a higher degree of complexity and abstraction, students should be encouraged to depend more and more on their ears in understanding the message with the least visual help.

**Conclusion**

Some teachers think that listening is the easiest skill to teach, whereas most students think it is the most difficult to improve. This contradiction reveals that there are some things about teaching listening need to be explored. Perhaps those who say it is “the easiest to teach” mean that it does not require much painstaking lesson preparation and all they need to do is play the tapes and test the students’ comprehension. But is there nothing more to teaching listening than testing?

Teachers must find out all they can do about how listening can be improved and what activities are useful to this end and then use this knowledge and these activities in their own classrooms.

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المستخلص:
تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في تدريس مهارة الاستماع في مدارس المرحلة الثانوية في مدينة بورتسودان. ما الذي يفعله حقيقة المعلمين عندما يدرسون هذه المهارة المهمة جدا وكيف يتفاعل الطلاب مع تدريسها. في نهاية البحث ، حاولت الدراسة التخلص من المشكلات التي واجهت الطلاب في تعلمهم لمهارة الاستماع في اللغة الإنجليزية. تبنى الباحث منهج البحث الوصفي التحليلي لأنه يلائم ويتناسب مع هدف وطبيعة الدراسة. لوضع هذه المنهجية ووضع التنفيذ استخدم الباحث أدوات مثل الاستبانات واستمارات الملاحظة. نتج من الدراسة عدد من المشاكل وواجهت المدرسين والطلاب على حد سواء عند تدريس مهارة الاستماع وتعلمها. هذه المشاكل صنفت بوساطة الباحث إلى ثلاثة أصناف رئيسة أي الرسالة (المادة) التي يستمع إليها والعرض الذي يشمل كل من التalker والمستمع والحيط (الوضع الطبيعي الذي يشمل الأصوات المنتجة في مكان الاستماع والعنصر المرئي). أوصى الباحث في نهاية البحث بإتباع استراتيجية محددة للتعامل مع هذه المجموعات من الصعوبات.