



## Is listening instruction neglected intentionally or incidentally in foreign language teaching contexts?

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### Abstract

This study aimed to explore whether foreign language learners would benefit from listening activities in the coursebooks, and to what extent foreign language instructors use the regarding activities. It is also intended in this study to determine the views of the teachers on the effectiveness of improving learners' listening skill through the listening activities. In this respect, 51 teachers based in elementary and high schools in the province of Kayseri, Turkey participated in the present study. The survey was administered to the participants and their views were received and analyzed using SPSS 20.0 statistics programme. The results indicate that the participants to a great extent agree that listening has a crucial role in developing learners' listening comprehension and pronouncing the target vocabulary correctly. The results also prove that learners benefit from the effective use of listening activities in the coursebooks, in developing self-esteem and learner autonomy.

*Keywords:* Listening; coursebook; correct pronunciation; fluency; self-esteem; schemata

## 1. Introduction

It is now widely admitted that listening in foreign language contexts is one of the important skills that deserves to be focused on as well as the other skills. Needless to say, its importance cannot be denied. To Burely-Allen (1995), of all the four skills, listening has the highest percentage for many people in a daily communication. Despite its significant importance, it has been regarded as a hard task for many foreign learners for the fact that it includes some certain special features of spoken language that demand full attention (Lynch, 2009; Ridgway, 2000; Ur, 1984; Vandergrift, 2011). In Rost's words (2005), "listening is also an extremely complex process which involves not only receptive, but also constructive and interpretative aspects of cognition" (p.503).

It is usually considered that listening is composed of hearing and decoding the utterances produced by the speakers. However, it is an active process that includes the process of constructing meaning using the listener's prior knowledge and some certain strategies. In this respect, Nunan (1998) contends that verbal and non-verbal messages are used to decipher and construct meaning in an active listening process. He also claims that "listening is thus fundamental to speaking" (p.47). Thus it needs to be developed with ample activities. According to Ridgway (2000), when students are provided with ample listening activities they develop their listening skills and automaticity in

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processing oral language. Furthermore, learners are motivated to learn the target language when they see “language-in-use” (Harmer, 2001, p.282) through listening. However, students are usually discouraged to take an active part in oral communications when they are at low listening proficiency level. Learners’ proficiency level in the target language has a great influence on comprehending listening instruction (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Renandya & Farrell, 2011; Thorn, 2009). Thus, they should be integrated into this process using appropriate activities addressing to their needs and levels so that they can develop their listening proficiency. That is, fostering listening comprehension is key to develop proficiency in speaking and it provides the input that is the raw material necessary for the process to occur (Vogely, 1999). Therefore, one of the ways of achieving this goal and being exposed to large amounts of comprehensible input, of course, is through listening (Renandya, 2011).

### *1.1. Difficulties in Listening Instruction*

In listening instruction there are a lot of factors influencing comprehension such as rate of speech, prosody, accent, phonology, hesitations, lack of background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, rhetorical signaling cues and so on (Cross, 2011; Graham, 2006; Ockey, 2007). In other words, level of aural texts, the number of unfamiliar words and nonverbal clues such as gestures, facial expressions, body movements etc., make listening activities difficult for learners to understand. Renandya and Farrell (2011) also agree that listening is fast and full of blurry word boundaries, and it takes time to process and progress for foreign language learners. Arnold (2000) claims that “listening includes serious time constraints such as difficulty in hearing, lack of clarity, acoustic inadequacies etc.” (p.77). What makes listening difficult is also reported as such by Renandya (2012; “no opportunities to interact with speakers to pick up on any non-linguistic cues like facial expressions and gestures.”(p.77). However, in speaking we can rehearse what we say or someone says. This is not the case with listening (Anderson & Lynch, 1988).

Anderson and Lynch (1988) list three main reasons why listening is difficult for students as the type of input; the support provided by the listening context; and the type of task involved. As mastering in lexical competence is central to communicative competence and important part of a language (Meara, 1996; Stæhr, 2009), foreign language learners face difficulty when they don’t have enough vocabulary knowledge. Therefore, it is safe to say that listening comprehension is highly correlated with vocabulary knowledge (Stæhr, 2009, p. 596). Teachers’ attitudes towards teaching listening, types of activities, procedures and materials are also the other factors that make listening hard to deal with (Rost, 2001) as well as learners’ attitudes and listening anxiety (Yasin Sharif & Ferdous, 2012).

### *1.2. Ways of Listening Instruction*

In order to enhance learners’ listening comprehension, their prior knowledge should be triggered and utilized in foreign language listening instructions (Brown, 2006). However, in many foreign language teaching contexts, to make use of the existing knowledge is not always possible, and learners highly feel the necessity of the background knowledge about related aural texts. It is obvious that the schemata, which can be referred to background knowledge, includes abstract and generalized mental representations of experience and it facilitates to comprehend new information (Brown, 2006; Rumelhart, 1980). That is to say, the data in memory can be used as background knowledge to assist to build a relationship between the new and existing knowledge.

In teaching listening in EFL settings, Hinkel (2006) states that bottom up approach used to be implemented in 1970s in which learners are required to identify words, sentence boundaries, contractions, individual sounds etc. She adds that the type of process changed in 1980s into top down

process in which linguistic aspects of language learning were replaced by the schema-based view. Later on, it was thought to be useful in many contexts that both approaches would be possible for learners in comprehending listening activities. Based on these views, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) suggest that there are three types of listening instructions: Text-oriented, communication-oriented, and learner-oriented. The first one is based on the use of activities that promote the bottom-up processing such as dictation, reading aloud, or cloze-type tasks (Shintani & Wallas, 2014). In the communication-oriented instruction learners are exposed to more authentic listening materials involving comprehensible input processing. The learner-oriented listening instruction employs the activities that enable learners to develop their listening skills and metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift, 2003).

The use of some other techniques in listening instruction was also considered as beneficial for language learners. It is confirmed by Ur (1984) that using minimal pairs could assist learners to practice aural perception and differentiate the sounds. Dictation technique would enable learners to stress on segmenting speech into words along with overcoming some particular perception problems (Field 2008; Lynch 2009). Furthermore, using transcripts also can be used to develop learners' perception skills in that they can differentiate the aural and written language (Vandergrift, 2011; Wilson, 2008).

### *1.3. Role of Coursebooks in Listening Instructions*

Needless to say, coursebooks play such a pivotal role for many foreign language teachers (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986; Hutchinson & Torres, 1994) that they are dependent heavily on these instructional materials, and they remain the indispensable and classroom tools for teachers and students alike (Gray 2010). This fact is not only valid for some certain teachers but also for the teachers all around the world. One of the main reasons for this dependence might be that they include ready-made syllabus designed by the experts (Garinger, 2002). To put it another way, many coursebooks do not require teachers to prepare before the lesson as they provide a comprehensive guideline, teacher's book. Therefore, through coursebooks it is possible to provide the regarding structure that a teaching-learning system requires (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994).

Listening, like speaking, isn't considered as an important skill to be concentrated on for many teachers although they are included in many instructional materials or curricula by course designers. It is widely admitted that well-designed coursebooks include various types of texts, content, and sometimes instructional activities beyond the current levels and capacities of most teachers, which will possibly result in professional development of many teachers (Richards, 2002). For this reason, it is observed that many aspects of these materials are usually avoided by many teachers in designing their lessons (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011, p. 978). On the other hand, foreign language learners feel the value of published materials considering the fact that they provide much more reliable information than that of a teacher (Sheldon 1988). Thus, a lot of students heavily rely on the course materials, particularly course books. In this vein, Hassani and Rahmani's (2011) study proves that there is a correlation between a positive attitude towards an EFL coursebook and a positive attitude towards learning English. That is to say, a well-designed coursebook usually draws attention towards learning a foreign language. On the contrary, some people believe that coursebooks do not always meet the needs of the learners with their limited content and application (Tomlinson, 1998), and overdependence on only the coursebooks may deskill a teacher whose role would be a presenter of material (Richards, 2002). Additionally, most of the coursebooks involve listening activities that aim to focus on the product rather than the process. Thus, they require learners to give the right or wrong answer. It is acknowledged that teachers shouldn't be someone who just adopts a material but evaluates, adapts or develops material when necessary. However, it is highly suggested that they need

to take part in designing the materials with their views and experiences because, in many cases, course materials lack many principles and needs of the learners (Peacock, 1997).

Despite the drawbacks cited above, it seems that coursebooks will remain to be inevitable for teachers and learners in foreign language teaching. When teachers of foreign languages skip the listening activities in the coursebooks, it is possible that learners will have some certain problems. First of all, as many of foreign language teachers in many EFL settings are nonnative speakers, students might mispronounce some words. Thus mispronunciation would lead to miscommunication. Besides, due to lack of exposure to target language in and out of the class, teaching might turn out to be less motivating and realistic. In this case, listening to some dialogues, songs, watching some movie trailers etc., would enable learners to hear something new and interesting for them. From learners' and teachers' perspective, most of the coursebooks and activities are usually inauthentic and not realistic. Furthermore, the quantity of the input that students need to get is usually limited to the reading, writing and speaking activities.

#### *1.4. Foreign Language teaching in Turkish context*

After the recent changes in the Turkish educational system, teaching programmes have been redesigned. The transition from the 8+4 educational model to the new 4+4+4 system has led to review the English curriculum because in the new system English instruction was intended to be implemented from the 2nd grade onward. In the previous system the grade to teach English as a foreign language was 4, but students at the 2nd and 3rd grades started to learn English in 2013. The learners' ages in the new system was between 6,5 and 7, which brought a lot of considerations into foreign language teaching. Regarding the age factor, the instructional design, instructional materials and assessment issues have been revised in the new curriculum prepared in 2013. Similarly, the English curriculum of the 9th and 12th grades was revised in 2014 by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE). The aim of the 9th-12th grades' curriculum is to foster communicative skills in English among learners. When examined the both curricula it is observed that learners are expected to learn the target language through the use of course materials in which language skills need to be developed properly with regard to learners' grades. When analyzed the new curricula it is seen that four skills have equal importance particularly for the elementary and secondary students. The curricula involve various tasks intending to develop learners' communicative competence. Needless to say, tasks and activities of language skills are important components of language instruction that should assist learners to develop their high order thinking skills. Of the four skills, listening seems to be one of the concentrated skills in both curricula and students are required to develop their listening abilities with the help of the materials and activities provided with the coursebook. It is safe to say that coursebooks as instructional materials provide learners with alternative and rich source of listening activities which were designed in line with the objectives specified in the related teaching programmes. In this respect, considering the importance of listening skill, the coursebook designers included a lot of activities that intend to appeal to learners' ages, interests and levels. Thus, through the activities in the coursebooks, it is possible for learners to practice listening through songs, dialogues, audio recordings most of which were narrated or sung by native speakers. There is no doubt that when the instructional materials are designed in accordance with learners' interests, they will be more attractive and sustainable in drawing attention and building a good rapport (Nunan, 1998).

As it is a must for the teachers and students to use the coursebooks as the core source (Richards, 2010) delivered by MoNE, the instructional materials should be designed appropriately. Although coursebooks are designed in accordance with the pedagogic principles of the related teaching programmes, it is usually confronted that many of the teachers avoid implementing the listening parts of the coursebooks. It is also expected that apart from the use of coursebooks, teachers should vary the

type of course materials by bringing the current technology into classroom. However, Hatipoğlu and Can (2010) claim that most of the foreign language learners at Turkish state schools are dependent on only coursebooks, and they are not in search of using English for communicational purposes out of the schools. More recently, the technology has been integrated into educational system in Turkey with the Fatih Project that aims to introduce and implement educational technology in school curriculum with the tools and materials it provides. In this regard, most of the schools are equipped with technological devices, basically Interactive White Boards (IWB) through which language instruction can be facilitated and fun for foreign language learners and teachers. Despite its affordances, unfortunately, it is possible to meet teachers who prefer to remain reluctant to use it effectively, in particular in English classes while exploiting the listening activities in the coursebooks. Bearing all this in mind this study intended to figure out the comments of the foreign language teachers on the role of listening instructions and activities in the coursebooks. This study also aimed to explore to what extent the teachers of English use the listening activities in the coursebooks during foreign language instructions in order to improve learners' listening comprehension abilities.

### *1.5. Review of Literature*

Research proves that listening instruction has been searched by few researchers in some certain aspects. Some of the studies regarding teaching listening investigated the exposing learners to listening and assisting learners with vocabulary, video, visuals, strategies etc. to comprehend it effectively (e.g. Chang, 2011; Chang & Millett, 2013; Çakır, 2012; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). These studies have all revealed that listening comprehension can be improved positively when they are accompanied by the relevant activities properly. It is also clear that listening instruction is central to foreign language learning.

In the case of listening instruction, effective listening instruction enables learners to develop comprehension and fluency in speaking as well as correct pronunciation. To realize this ability, many teachers prefer using extensive listening rather than intensive one because of the time and programme constraints. In an attempt to find the effect of extensive listening on developing learners' listening comprehension and pronouncing, Çakır (2012) sought to what extent extensive listening contributes to correct pronunciation of the prospective teachers of English. In the quasi-quantitative research that he conducted with 125 freshmen English Language Teaching major students he aimed to figure out the effectiveness of using extensive listening in correcting mispronounced words. The audio supported reading materials were assigned to the participants to read and listen in order to see the progress in correct pronunciation of some specifically chosen mispronounced words. The research proved that the effect of extensive listening had a huge contribution to the improvement of the participants' pronunciation.

In a similar context, Chang (2011) studied with seven learners in order to figure out the influence of extensive listening on augmenting learners' lexical competence. The study showed that the learners had a great improvement in expanding vocabulary knowledge and they developed listening fluency. In another study Chang and Millet (2014) looked at the effect of extensive listening through audio graded readers. The results proved that extensive listening practice contributed to L2 listening fluency. It is seen in the studies above that the quantity of input has a huge impact on developing learners' listening abilities and fluency in speaking. Simply put, providing excessive input and frequent practice are two important factors in fostering listening fluency (Chang & Millet, 2014).

Additionally, Eken and Dilidüzgün (2014) evaluated a coursebook for teaching Turkish as a foreign language in terms of listening comprehension exercises comparing its counterpart used to teach English as a foreign language. Berne (2004) intended to find out to what extent language learners

listened in the target language using some strategies and their tendencies. The study showed that less proficient listeners heavily rely on bottom-up approach whereas advanced listeners usually use top-down approach to comprehend the related listening tasks. In a similar vein, Murphy (1985) conducted a study with less and more proficient students. The results of this study are also consistent with Berne's (2004) study in utilizing the listening strategies. Liu (2009) also worked on the same topic that aimed to present the differences between more and less skilled language learners in using listening strategies. The results of this study confirmed that more skilled listeners had tendencies to use cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

### 1.6. Research Questions

Bearing the importance of listening instruction in foreign language teaching, this study focuses on the role of listening activities in foreign language teaching in Turkish context. There seems to be lack of studies stressing on the tendencies of teachers of English to exploit the listening activities in the coursebooks properly. The study focused on investigating the current perspectives of foreign language teachers in using the listening activities presented in the coursebooks. The research proves that related studies in this field do not meet the research questions of this study. Therefore, it seems that there is a gap in this field that deserves to be explored. This study aims to find answers to following questions.

1. What are the comments of foreign language teachers on listening instruction in EFL contexts?
2. What are the difficulties that foreign language teachers face in teaching listening to foreign language learners?
3. What are the views of foreign language teachers on the effectiveness of listening materials in the coursebooks?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

The population of this research was teachers of English working at state elementary and high schools in the province of Kayseri, Turkey. The reason for choosing this population was convenience sampling which is used in many studies with the available participants when it is not possible to reach all members of the entire population (Fred & Perry, 2005). Another main factor in working with this sample was that they used the coursebooks approved and delivered by MoNE, which was the main concern of this research. The researcher intended to get more participants to involve in this study but some of the teachers who were invited to share their experience (n=11) didn't want to participate in this research process.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the participants

Gender	<i>f</i>	%
Female	18	35.29
Male	33	64.71
Total	51	100

As for the ages, the respondent sample consisted of 51 teachers of English at the ages that ranged from 21 to 51. Almost one third of the participants (35.29%) is between the ages of 21 and 30. The number of the participants between the ages 31 and 40 is 19. The third group (n=9) consists the

participants between the ages 41 and 50. Those who are over 51 seem to be least in number (n=7) comparing to others.

**Table 2.** Schools that participants are based in

School Taught	<i>f</i>	%
Primary/ Elementary	34	66.6
Secondary/High School	17	33.4
Total	51	100

The participants' years of experience ranged from 4 (3.9%) to 21 (19.7%). Almost 76.4 % of the participants had working experience between 5 and 20 years. That is to say, 44 of the participants have teaching experience in state schools. 11 of the participants teach English to young learners of second, third and fourth grades at primary schools while 23 (45.1%) of them use the coursebooks to teach English at secondary schools (5-8 graders). The total number of the teachers working at primary and elementary state schools is 34 (66.6%). The rest of the participants (n= 17) have foreign language learners at high schools (9-12 graders). It is apparent that the population is composed of various groups who use the coursebooks as instructional materials to teach English to learners at different schools and ages. Last point that should be mentioned here is the educational backgrounds of the participants. The respondents were asked to indicate the departments they completed at university, and it was seen that almost half of the participants (48%) studied English Language Teaching, and the rest of them completed the departments of English Language and Literature (34%), English Linguistics (12%), and other departments related to English language (6%).

## 2.2. Instrument

The research instrument used for this study was a survey which was developed by the researcher in order to obtain the responses to the research questions. The survey was designed by the researcher based on a rigorous research on a review of literature on teaching listening through coursebooks in foreign language teaching and a review of literature on similar survey studies conducted for similar purposes (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Razei & Hashim, 2013). The respondents completed pencil and paper version of the survey. To eliminate the possible ambiguities and check the face validity four experts in the field reviewed the survey. After piloting the survey with 10 teachers using cognitive interview technique, it was revised and reworded. The final version of the survey was administered to the respondents by the end of the second semester in 2015. The reason for choosing the end of the academic year was to be able to get reliable data about the coursebooks and experiences from the teachers.

The survey was composed of three parts. In the first part, demographic characteristics of the participants with regard to age, gender and year of experience were investigated. The second part included six open ended questions exploring the views of the participants about the use of listening activities in the coursebooks at elementary and high schools. Two of the questions in this part intended to determine comments of the participants on listening instruction in teaching English, and to figure out the problems that students encounter in teaching this skill. The third part of the survey included two subcategories in which the participants were required to express their views about the role of listening in teaching a foreign language and listening activities in the related coursebooks. This part involved 20 statements that were designed in 3-point Likert scale ranging from Agree, Neutral, and Disagree.

### 2.3. Data Collection

The participants, as the prime users of the coursebooks, currently working at state schools were requested to complete the pencil and paper survey after getting their consents. Some of the teachers didn't want to participate in the research and they were excluded. The aim of the research was clearly explained to the participants and they were required to respond the questions in the survey. Data collection process took about two months because it was not possible to reach all the participants in a short period. Furthermore, some of the participants were reminded of the survey several times after submission.

### 2.4. Data Analysis

As the survey included both open ended and three-point likert-type scale questions, this study employed a mixed method. For quantitative data, items presented in the likert-type scale part were analyzed using descriptive techniques such as frequency and percentage. The data obtained from the open ended questions was analyzed using content analysis. The researcher categorized the themes emerged from the content analysis in relation to some certain topics. This type of categorization in a content analysis, as Weber (1990) suggests, helps researcher make valid inferences from text.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Listening Instructions in the Eyes of Teachers

#### 3.1.1. Teachers' comments on Listening Skill in Foreign Language Teaching

In order to reveal the general views of the participants about the role of listening instruction in teaching English as a foreign language, they were asked to mark the statements provided in the three-point Likert scale ranging from Agree, Neutral and Disagree. This part included some statements regarding the significance of listening activities in language learning.

**Table 3.** Comments on the importance of listening activities in foreign language learning

Statements	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Listening has a significant role in language teaching.	88.2	11.8	0
Students benefit a lot from listening activities.	70.6	23.5	5.9
Listening is a hard skill to apply in the class.	55	17.6	27.4
Listening is more difficult than reading.	53	25.5	21.5
Many teachers neglect listening skill.	62.8	23.5	13.7
Students are not concentrated on listening activities.	47.1	41.2	11.7
Listening activities in the class is time consuming.	6	19.6	74.4
Reading and dialogues should be provided.	74.5	25.5	0
Teachers need to know how to use listening activities.	82.4	17.6	0

The table above reveals the comments of the participants on listening instruction in foreign language teaching. Two statements aimed at finding out to what extent listening is appreciated by the participants. 45 teachers out of 51 reported that listening has a significant role in language teaching. They (70.6%) support this view with the statement that students benefit a lot from listening activities. To see how these statements are compatible with the classroom implication they were asked how they concerned about the role of listening skill in foreign language instruction. Table 3 reveals that more than half of the participants (55%) believe that listening is a hard skill to utilize in the class. As it is difficult to practice in the class properly for teachers, 62.8(%) of them agree that many teachers tend to neglect this skill. The reasons for skipping the listening parts in the coursebooks might derive from the



difficulties cited above in detail. The participants were also required to compare listening to reading skill in foreign language teaching. In this respect, 53 % of the participants reported that listening is more difficult than reading.

With regard to learners' comments, the results above prove that students generally (n=27) are not very much concentrated, as required, in utilizing listening activities. Despite this negative attitude that students have towards listening, almost three fourth (74.4%) of the teachers do not agree with the belief that listening in the class is time consuming. They (74.5%) suggest that listening activities need to be varied with the reading and dialogues that should be narrated by native speakers as much as possible depending on the context. Interestingly enough, 82.4 % of the participants admit that teachers need to know how to use listening activities properly.

In order to validate the data gathered in the table above, the respondents were asked to express their own personal beliefs about the contributions of listening instruction to language learning through an open question. The responses obtained from the open ended question were analyzed and the prominent six themes with their frequencies were listed in the following table. Responses to the difficulties of listening activities in general were categorized with respect to themes and the prominent statements were listed below.

### 3.2. *What are the contributions of listening instruction to language learning?*

**Table 4.** Comments of the participants on developing listening skill

Item	<i>f</i>
Listening comprehension	24
Exposure to the target language	28
Correct pronunciation	32
Vocabulary knowledge	26
Fluency in speaking	18
Self-confidence	17

When asked the views of the participants about the benefits that students get from utilizing the listening activities on a regular base, the most frequent responses were categorized as in Table 4. They mostly believe that when listening instruction is presented adequately by the teachers, students would inevitably develop their listening comprehension abilities. The most important benefit that students get from listening instruction with authentic listening materials is, of course, to be exposed to the target language. There is no doubt that in many EFL settings, as in Turkey, students are not able to experience the realistic language use apart from the classroom. Another contribution of listening instruction to effective language use is the correct use of language, in particular vocabulary. It is frequently observed that many newly learned words are not pronounced correctly by many learners because of the lack of adequate stress on teaching words with correct pronunciation. Thus, it is inevitable to use a lot of words in incorrect pronunciation, and it turns out to be misinterpretation or misunderstanding among the listeners and speakers. Therefore, it is highly recommended that every single listening activity needs to be exploited in the classroom with its audio recording so that learners can develop lexical awareness. That is, it is possible that some mispronounced words can be corrected with the help of listening which might also help them improve their vocabulary knowledge and fluency in speaking and listening. Consequently, all of these factors are thought to be beneficial for learners to gain their self-confidence in learning the target language. Some of the excerpts from data given below also prove that listening instruction undoubtedly has a pivotal role in developing many aspects of language learners such as correct pronunciation, communication ability, listening comprehension etc.

*“It improves learning new words, making sentences, understanding other language, learning to think like native speakers”. (Respondent 4)*

*“Listening skill is very important in foreign language teaching because it definitely helps students develop their listening comprehension. They can also easily recognize the words they learnt.” (Respondent 24)*

*“I believe that for a better communication students need to do listening activities properly as they foster their communicative skills.” (Respondent 35)*

*“Students face the real language in the aural texts along with the correct pronunciations of the familiar words.” (Respondent 41)*

The positive comments of the participants on the importance of listening instruction are consistent with the results of the previous studies (Chang, 2011; Chang & Millett, 2013; Çakır, 2012; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). There seems to be a consensus among the participants about the benefits of listening instruction in developing learners' lexical competence, listening comprehension ability, recognition of the sounds in their real contexts, communication skills etc.

### 3.3. What are the difficulties that students face in listening instruction in general?

The participants were also required to share their experiences in listening instruction. To this end, they responded the open ended question that aimed to put forth the views about the difficulties students face during the listening instruction, and their personal and professional views about the benefits of developing listening skill of the learners. Responses to the difficulties of listening activities in general were categorized with respect to themes and the prominent statements were listed below. While interpreting the responses, some of the difficulty factors cited in the review of literature (Cross, 2011; Graham, 2006; Ockey, 2007; Renandya, & Farrell, 2011; Underwood, 1989) were also taken into consideration by the researcher.

**Table 5.** Difficulties that students face in listening instruction in general

Item	<i>f</i>
Speed of the listening activities	22
Lack of background knowledge about the listening text	19
Lack of vocabulary knowledge	18
Lack of nonverbal clues	12
Anxiety	10
Recording quality	13
Inappropriate for learners' level and interest	28
Lack of correct pronunciation	26
Being stick to bottom-up strategies in comprehending the texts	39
Lack of interest and motivation to listen	21

The themes indicate that students generally have problems in listening instructions as they can't follow some recordings because of the lack of input, vocabulary, background information, encouragement etc. One of the significant themes emerged in this research is that the speeches are too fast to understand for learners since it is probable that learners do not have ability to comprehend a listening text without nonverbal clues when they are narrated particularly by native speakers. This fact normally results in misinterpreting some of the words by the learners as some of the words are not

pronounced in the way they have learned. Furthermore, in order to be able to fulfil some listening tasks in the coursebooks appropriately, students tend to use bottom up approach to understand by focusing on understanding every single word. The results clearly reveal that rate of speech, background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, interest, lack of motivation are the key factors that inhibit learners from carrying out listening activities effectively. The following excerpts also reveal that learners usually have difficulties in listening instruction in the class.

*“My students can’t follow the dialogues because they say that the speeches are too fast.” (Respondent 39)*

*“Some of the aural texts are not appropriate for my students’ level. They think that it is too hard to understand some speeches in the texts.” (Respondent 21)*

*“Some of the students are indifferent to the listening instruction because they can’t keep up with the speed and length of the speeches. Their lack of vocabulary knowledge causes to lose motivation.” (Respondent 13)*

*“I think our students’ main problem is to try to understand every single word in the speeches. They can’t keep away from it, and then they get lost in the activity.” (Respondent 45)*

The excerpts presented above reveal that teaching listening through coursebooks is not an easy task for teachers to deal with in the class due to some factors. The findings above prove the assumptions made by Renandya (2010), Graham (2006) and Ockey (2007) who claim that rate of speech, lack of nonverbal clues, unfamiliar words can be considered as the main problems for foreign language teachers that they need to overcome.

### *3.4. Listening Activities in the Coursebooks in the Eyes of Teachers*

#### *3.4.1. Views on the use of listening activities in the coursebooks*

The other part of this study is devoted to determine the views of the participants on the effectiveness of the listening activities in the coursebooks. In this sense, they were required to express their opinions through ten statements and two open ended questions to picture the practicality and effectiveness of the listening activities in the coursebooks. In the first question, the participants were required to state whether they have a strong belief about the contribution of the listening skill to learning the target language through the activities presented in course materials. Almost all of the participants (97.1%) agree that coursebooks as instructional materials should include listening activities as well as others. They believe that listening instruction should be supported by various activities to create a different atmosphere in the class. As a follow-up question the respondents were asked how often they used listening activities in the coursebooks delivered by MoNE. More than half of the participants (approximately 58.8 %) reported that they “always” practiced them while 41.2 % of them “sometimes” preferred to use them. Contrary to Gray (2010) and Hutchinson and Torres’ (1994) claims, a great amount of the participants (41.2 %) are not so willing to use them as instructional materials. The findings discussed in Table 5 clearly prove that learners have a negative attitude towards this issue. This fact also has a great impact on teachers, eventually they seem to be reluctant to make use of these activities. Thus a lot of teachers prefer to skip this part or they narrate some parts themselves so that students can comprehend the related tasks.

### 3.4.2. The Effectiveness and Efficiency of Listening Activities in the Coursebooks

Instructional materials, most of which are composed of approved coursebooks, at Turkish state schools are delivered by MoNE in Turkey. These materials are designed by various publishing companies and subjected to rigorous evaluation by the experts. In this process the coursebooks which fulfil the requirements determined by MoNE have to be used at schools by teachers of English. In other words, teachers adhere to these coursebooks. When analyzed the coursebooks, it is seen that they include the objectives that enable students to gain four language skills properly depending on the ages and levels. In this vein, from the eyes of the main users, teachers, the coursebooks as listening instructional materials were analyzed with regard to the statements in three-point Likert scale below.

**Table 6.** Comments on the listening activities in the coursebooks

Statements	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Listening activities are interesting.	25.4	23.5	51.1
Students don't understand listening activities.	41.2	35,3	23,5
Listening materials are not well recorded.	21.5	35,2	41,3
The speed and level are not appropriate.	49	33.3	17.7
Students participate in the listening activities.	21.5	33.3	45.2
Activities are presented in meaningful contexts.	35.3	49.0	15.7
They are authentic and narrated by native speakers.	50.1	25.4	23.5
They are bottom-up based activities.	43.2	25.5	31.3
They have pre and post-listening activities.	45.1	39.2	15.7

As for the types of activities the respondents were intended to reveal their views how much students find interesting. Nearly half of the participants (51.1%) disagree with the view that listening activities draw learners' interest. On the other hand, one fourth (25.4%) of them think that they are interesting enough while 23.5% prefers to be neutral. As a whole, the number of Neutral (n=12) and Disagree (n=26) shows that the activities are not well designed for the interests of learners. This finding is compatible with the statement (n=28) in Table 2 in that teachers report that activities are inappropriate for learners' level and interest.

One of the other significant findings of this study is the difficulty level of the activities in the coursebooks. In parallel with the findings in Table 2 depicting the difficulties that students face in listening instruction, the results of this part also prove that students in general cannot understand the tasks. 41.2% of the participants agree with this view, and 53.3% remain neutral which can also be interpreted that they also, to some extent, share this view. To verify this result, almost half of the participants (49%) believe that the speed and level are not appropriate. This view was also expressed in Table 2 (n=22), which can be stated that the speed is a common issue that foreign language learners face while learning the target language. Only 17.7% of the teachers don't share this view while 33.3% do not have a certain opinion about this issue. The other finding of this study, which can be an evidence of difficulty, is the voice quality of the materials. The view for this statement was shared by 21.5 % of the participants. Considering all these factors, listeners possibly are not so much willing to participate in these activities. 45.2% of the participants disagree with the view that learners seem to be active in practicing these activities. Only 21.5 % of the teachers report that students take part in performing listening in the class.

This study also intended to determine the views of the participants with the statements investigating the types and presentation of the activities. 35.3 % agree that they are presented in meaningful contexts. On the other hand a great amount of them, 26 out of 51, state that speeches were authentic and narrated mostly by native speakers. Furthermore, the results indicate that most of the activities (50.1 % Agree) are designed to teach listening through bottom-up approach. In this regard, learners are

expected to comprehend the related tasks step by step. Based on the finding, it can be asserted that the listening instruction through the coursebooks is provided with pre and post listening activities (45.1% Agree). Simply put, the findings show that listening instruction in the EFL classes are not very much appreciated by learners and teachers. When students resist remaining reluctant to participate, teachers also lose their motivation and enthusiasm.

#### **4. Discussion**

Based on the results reported above, it can be stated that developing learners' listening skill doesn't seem to be primary concern of the teachers due to the factors cited earlier. On the other hand, the findings of this study prove that all of the participants admit its effect on foreign language instruction, and they are aware of the fact that listening skill can be developed only through listening (Molina, 1997), and without necessary input it is possible for learners to have difficulty in producing a satisfactory output (Krashen, 1985). The results in this study also paint a picture of the importance of classroom implications of listening activities in the coursebooks regardless of the problems the teachers may encounter. That is to say, the themes emerged in the study depict that students generally have problems in listening instructions as they can't follow some recordings because of the lack of input, vocabulary, background information, encouragement etc. In this vein, as Underwood (1989) contends, one of the main problems that students mostly confront is the rate of speech. In such cases when the aural texts are presented without nonverbal clues, listeners automatically lose their concentration and motivation. However, it should be kept in mind that, as a significant finding of this study, it is not easy for learners to develop listening comprehension ability because of the verbal and non-verbal messages that require the ability of deciphering and constructing meaning simultaneously (Nunan, 1998).

To support this view, a worthy finding of this study indicates that students favour bottom up approach to understand by focusing on understanding every single word in order to do some listening tasks in the coursebooks. In bottom-up process linguistic features such as phonemes, syllables, words, phrases, sentences need to be recognized for semantic meaning (Siegel, 2012). According to Vandergrift (2007), in order to construct meaning listeners utilize bottom-up process whereas they prefer top-down processes to build meaning. In top-down process, listeners' background knowledge, schema (Rost, 2005), and expectations in relation to oral topic have a great impact in getting the meaning (Clement, 2007). As regards the results of this study, it can be said that the findings are consistent with Berne's (2004) study which proved that learners' strategies to comprehend listening tasks are mostly based on bottom-up approach. Murphy (1985) also found out the similar results in his study. Additionally, the findings of this study revealed that students are not exposed to target language appropriately in terms of listening skill considering the fact that listening comprehension is complex. It is also an active process in which learners struggle to discriminate sounds and are lost in getting the meanings of some lexis and grammatical patterns (Vandergrift, 2007). Although the research suggests to combine both approaches to develop listening comprehension (Graham & Macaro, 2008; Vandergrift, 2004), the participants in this study tend to rely heavily on bottom-up processing.

One other significant finding of this study is that it is quite hard for learners to keep up with the speed and unfamiliar words in the aural texts. The participants agree that this difficulty derives from lack of lexical competence and difficulty in recognizing some known words. Particularly in Turkish context, many foreign language learners are not able to recognize some of the words that they are familiar because of the differences in written and spoken forms of the words in English. This irregular spelling system of English (Wilson 2008) leads to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of some

speeches. This failure, most probably, stems from the attitudes of foreign language teachers towards vocabulary teaching. It is true that in many vocabulary teaching contexts, some teachers provide learners with mother tongue equivalents of the lexis without stressing on pronunciation teaching. Furthermore, as Goh (2000) claims, some lexis is taught in isolation without focusing on its use in connected speech.

It can be asserted that this study confirms the findings of the similar studies focusing on the significance of listening instruction in EFL contexts. In other words, listening comprehension is a vital ability that needs to be developed for the learners in Turkey as they can't be exposed to target language. Therefore, it can be stated that some of the teachers of English, who are mostly nonnative English speakers, are not competent enough to produce English properly, and some of them might have problems in producing some sounds and correct pronunciation. In brief, the aspect of teaching listening and its components in foreign language teaching plays a crucial role for foreign language teachers.

## **5. Conclusion**

This study examined the role of listening activities in the coursebooks for foreign language learners and teachers' attitudes towards the exploitation of them in classroom implications. Based on the research findings, it can be asserted that listening competency receives significantly less attention in some of the state schools and it is mostly avoided by many teachers. It was found that teachers tend to be unwilling to utilize listening tasks in the class because of the difficulties that can be summarized mainly in three categories: teachers' competency, quality and quantity features of listening materials, and learners' attitudes. When analyzed the factors that derive from the instructors it can be stated listening activities are avoided due to some prejudices for the course books delivered by the MoNE in Turkey. Some teachers believe that the coursebooks need to be designed professionally in line with the needs of the teachers and students. However, it is safe to say that there has been a great improvement in the process of coursebook evaluation and in course design through which teachers, academicians, course designers, students have taken some certain roles. Before a coursebook is accepted, it has to go through several vigorous stages in which teaching skill has a crucial part that needs to be included properly. That is to say, this study may offer foreign language teachers a better perception of how students can improve their listening ability and correct pronunciation, etc.

The suggestions from this study might also enable teachers to apply some certain listening activities. It is highly recommended that listening activities in the coursebooks should not be overlooked but they need to be handled effectively. What teachers should concern here is to focus on listening instructions in classes integrating the other skills. They need to motivate learners to practice related activities in the coursebooks. It is highly suggested that teachers should find the ways of varying the types of listening materials such as authentic materials, songs, podcasts, movies etc. The participants (80.4%) in this study support the view of including at least one activity for each unit which concerns the learners' interests and presents the material in a well recorded manner. Additionally, the role of extensive listening task in developing listening comprehension shouldn't be underestimated and it should be intensified in listening classes using authentic aural texts. The aim of listening instruction shouldn't be just to improve accuracy but also fluency. In this sense, teachers' books need to include necessary information regarding how to teach and exploit listening strategies such as pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening, predicting, asking for clarification etc.

As repeatedly cited above, rate of speech, background knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, lack of motivation and interest are the key factors that inhibit learners to listen effectively. When students do

not meet these factors they seem to be reluctant to take in part the process. Therefore, this small scale study also proves that developing learning listening comprehension has a crucial impact for learners on gaining self-esteem particularly in the functional use of the language. It is a fact that a lot of students hesitate to speak in target language for the fear that they will mispronounce some words and they will be misunderstood by the listeners. In this regard, in-depth information about how foreign language instructors can benefit from listening activities in the coursebooks properly was provided. The study proves that foreign language learners need to be exposed to ample listening activities in class in order to improve their listening comprehension ability. In an effective application of listening in the class teachers need to introduce learners to different accents uttered by native speakers.

One of the crucial suggestions for foreign language teachers in listening instruction is the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT). When exploited properly, ICT tools provide a huge benefit for learners and teachers (Vandergrift 2011). It is probable that with the advance of the technology, teachers are not able to avoid this skill, and they focus on finding the best way to implement properly in the classes (Thorn, 2009; Vandergrift, 2011). Needless to say, the audio recordings of the coursebooks are easily obtainable from the Internet. So learners and teachers both in and out of the classrooms (Wilson, 2008) can reach them using their mobile devices. Students can also be assigned or suggested listen and watch audios, videos or language teaching mobile phone applications from different websites in line with their needs and interests (Lynch 2009).

It can be concluded that insufficient pedagogical development and lack of teacher training are two other important factors that many teachers avoid teaching listening skill (Mendelsohn, 1998). That is to say, listening instruction with the help of coursebooks is one of the pivotal issues that need to be elaborated in detail. For this reason, further studies are suggested to get a broader view about the research topic because this study is limited to 51 teachers of English working at state schools in Turkey. So the scope used for this study might not meet this need with the instrument of survey which included only teachers' views. Finally, some other data collection techniques like interviews with teachers, students, classroom observations can be used in order to gain a large insight about the issue.

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## Yabancı dil öğrenme ortamlarında dinleme öğretimi bilinçli mi yoksa bilinçsiz mi terk ediliyor?

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### Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı yabancı dil öğrenenlerin ders kitaplarındaki dinleme etkinliklerinden yararlanıp yararlanmadıklarını ve dil öğretmenlerinin ilgili etkinlikleri hangi oranda kullandıklarını ortaya koymaktır. Bunun için dinleme etkinliklerinin yabancı dil öğrenenlere ne tür katkılar sağladığı konusunda öğretmenlerin görüşlerine başvurulmuştur. Kayseri'deki ilk ve ortaöğretimde görev yapan 51 öğretmen bu çalışmaya katkıda bulunmuştur. Araştırma için hazırlanan anket katılımcılara uygulanmış ve elde edilen veriler SPSS 20.0 istatistik programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçları dinleme etkinliklerinin etkili bir şekilde

kullanılmasının öğrencilerde hedef dilin sesletimini doğru yapmalarında önemli etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca ders kitaplarındaki dinleme etkinliklerinin etkin kullanılmasının öğrencilerin öz güven duygularının gelişmesine ve öğrenim özerkliklerini kazanmalarına katkı sağlamaktadır.

*Anahtar sözcükler:* Ders kitabı; sesletim; akıcılık; kendine güven; şemalar

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