Teachers' difficulties in teaching English listening skills to the 11th-grade at Daimo High school, Hanoi and some suggested solutions / Nguyễn Thị Lê Thủy

PART I: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale of the study
In this new era of globalization, English language becomes the international language. It has become the most popular language of communication among countries and in many fields of human endeavor. In order to use English effectively, learners need to develop communicative competence. Accordingly, they should be helped to develop four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening, therefore, is essential not only as a receptive skill but also to the development of spoken language proficiency. Therefore, this thesis takes a critical look at the real situation of teaching and learning listening skills at Dai Mo high school to explore the problems as well as to suggest some feasible solutions. From the real experience in teaching, the researcher attempts to carry out a research to make the problems clear.

2. Aim and objectives of the study
Within the frame work of a minor thesis, the study is aimed at:

- Clarifying the practices of teaching and learning ELS in grades 11 in DM school.
- Finding out the difficulties teachers and students in grades 11 in DM school have had to undergo.
- Suggesting some feasible solutions to the teaching of ELS for grade 11.

3. Scope of the study
Learning a second language as a scholar once said “is a long and complex undertaking”. Therefore, teachers of a second language certainly have many problems during their teaching. In the scope of this research, however, the researcher only has ambition to investigate the difficulties that teachers in DM school have been faced when teaching listening skill for 11th graders. Hopefully, they will have more smooth
and successful listening lessons. Also, it is not expected that the study can bring solutions to the ELS teaching for students of all levels.

4. Methods of the study
The study is designed to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. Besides, many resources such as books, magazines, articles, newspapers and some sources on the Internet have been read by the researcher.
Along with the quantitative method, the qualitative data has been obtained by informal interviews with some teachers to collect further information about the real situations of teaching and learning ESL in grades 11 at DM school.

5. Significance of the study
This research provides an insight into the difficulties that are often met by teachers teaching English for grades 11 in DM school. In addition, this research also points out some feasible solutions which are beneficial for both teachers and students.
Hopefully, the findings and recommendations of this study will be of some help to the improvement of the teaching and learning ELS of Vietnamese students in general and of DM school students in particular. The study also gives some guidelines for teachers to help their students overcome their listening comprehension problems. The results of this study may also be useful for those who are interested in this field.

6. Design of the study
The study is divided into three parts: the Introduction, the Development and the Conclusion.
Part I: INTRODUCTION
Part II: DEVELOPMENT – consists of three chapters
   Chapter 1: Literature review
   Chapter 2: Methodology
   Chapter 3: Data analysis and discussions
   Chapter 4: Findings and feasible solutions
Part III: CONCLUSION

PART II: DEVELOPMENT
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Definitions of listening
1.2. Communicative approaches to listening comprehension

1.3. Stages of a listening lesson

1.3.1. Pre-listening stage

1.3.2. While-listening stage

1.3.3. Post-listening stage

1.4. The teacher's role in the listening lesson

1.5. Potential problems in learning ELS

It is true that language learners often feel overwhelmed with problems when they start to learn listening skills of a new language. English language learners also encounter various problems when learning ELS. Brown and Yule (1983) suggest that there are four clusters factors which can affect the difficulty of oral language tasks: the speaker, the listener, the content and support (pictures, diagrams, visual aids). And according to Yagang (1994), the problems in listening were accompanied with the four following factors: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. Furthermore, a numbers of researches have been carried out to pick out the problems in listening. As Flowerdew & Miller (1996:139) assumed that the problems of the students were for the speed of delivery, new terminology and concept, difficulty in focusing and the physical environment. Anderson and Lynch suggest that while a large number of factors are involved this falls into three principle categories: the type of language, the purpose in listening and the context in which the listening takes place. Teachers have to consider not only the number of factors involved but also the relationships between them.

Meanwhile, Underwood (1989:16-19) draws out potential problems of English language learners as follows:

- The lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak
- Not being able to get things repeated
- The listener's limited vocabulary
- Failure to recognize the 'signals'
- Problems of interpretation
- Inability to concentrate
- Established learning habits.
Whatever the reasons for students' problems, it is important that teachers recognize the features of the spoken language and understand how they affect students. From that, teachers can design exercises and assignments to help students practice and become familiar with the specific features of the English language such as sounds, stress, intonation, etc.

1.6. Strategies of listening comprehension

1.7. Role of motivation, interest and relevance in learning ELS

Cottrell (2001:107) confirmed that little learning can take place without motivation – without ‘wanting to learn’. If the subject is presented in ways which do not seem relevant to the students’ own lives, histories, circumstances and aspirations, they may find it very difficult to focus their attention for long. Moreover, motivated students are usually those who participate actively in class, express interests in the subject-matter, and study a great deal. Therefore, to improve students’ listening skills, motivation is an integral part of students’ learning progress. Here are the following solutions for the teachers to increase students’ motivation:

(a) *Focus on individual motivation*
- Encourage students to focus on students own motivation
- Build this into the reflective aspect of the course
- Link their learning to their personal skill profiles or portfolios

(b) *Make subject matter relevant to the students own lives*
- Explore with the students the relevance of your course to personal life context
- Include careers education within the curriculum
- Information which always seems to be about alien circumstances or people with whom students do not identify can become a strain on their attention

(c) *Increase interest in the subject*
- Using a variety of approaches, teaching styles, and ways of breaking the time
- Setting assignments and tasks which require students to work out answers and solve problems for themselves
- Building in opportunities for small ‘successes’
- Building in real-life learning

(d) *Help students to feel good about their study*
- Give praise where it is due. Students need to feel they can succeed.
- Help students to feel that they are getting somewhere with their work
- Show students exactly what is required to excel
- Give opportunities to do something creative or to deliver an end-product
- Create opportunities for students to feel they are part of a good team or group
- Help students to feel that study goals are worth the effort.

In short, if teachers can make their classrooms places where students enjoy coming, because the content is interesting and relevant to their age and level of ability, where the learning goals are challenging yet manageable and clear, and where the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, they can make a positive contribution to students’ motivation to learn.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Introduction of language teaching and learning conditions in DM high school

During the teaching and learning of English, subjective factors (human factors) objective factors (equipment, duration, and so on) both have vital role in helping learners to gain knowledge. With that fact, in this part of the chapter, attempts are done to make those decisive elements in DM high school clarified.

2.1.1. Subjective factors – Human

2.1.1.1. The learners – Grade 11th students

The samples of students here are restricted to five 11th form classes (among seven 11th form classes at DM school). These five classes, which were chosen randomly, account for 140 students. The 11th form students at DM school are seventeen years old. They do not have a good English speaking and listening environment. Only in the classroom can they learn and use the language. They do not have other places to practice the knowledge they have learnt from school. Although students in DM school have at least four years learning English in Lower Secondary school, many students entering DM school have little knowledge and motivation towards English, which creates difficulties for teachers during lessons.

2.1.1.2. The teachers

In Dai Mo high school, there are totally 7 teachers of English, including the researcher, aged from 29 to 42. One of them has finished an M.A course at Vietnam National University, Hanoi. In the school, teachers of English are not grouped separately from
teachers of other subjects. Therefore, it is not comfortable and convenient for us to discuss our problems in teaching during group meetings.

In addition, the number of female teachers formed the majority (5 female teachers and 2 male teachers). Some of them, however, are middle-aged which prevents them from learning training programs to have more updated and flexible ways of teaching a new language. The participants of this study were members of this team.

2.1.2. Objective factors _ Teaching and learning conditions

2.1.2.1. Teaching aids

2.1.2.3. Class size

2.2. The new “Tieng Anh 11” textbook.

2.2.1. Grade 11 listening objectives

2.2.2. Listening lessons

2.3. Research questions

In order to find out the difficulties that the teachers and students of grade 11 in teaching and learning ELS, it is necessary to answer the following questions:

1. What is the present situation of teaching and learning ELS at Dai Mo high school?
2. What difficulties do the teachers and the 11th form students encounter in teaching and learning ELS?
3. What are the suggested ways to effectively improve the current situation of teaching and learning ELS at this school?

2.4. Data collection instruments

In order to obtain in-depth, rich data and information for investigating the situation and the difficulties that teachers and students encountered in teaching and learning ELS, the study used two methods of data collection: questionnaires (conducted in May, 2011 when students generally fulfill their listening lessons in English 11) and informal interviews.

2.4.1. Instrument one: Questionnaires

2.4.2. Instrument two: Interviews

2.5. Summary

CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1. Questionnaires
3.1.1. Questionnaires for students

Question 1: How do you evaluate your English listening ability?
Question 2: How are English listening skills important to you?
Question 3: How often do you listen to English outside the class?
Question 4: What do you think about listening tasks in “Tieng Anh 11” textbook?
Question 5: Do you think that 45 minutes/period is suitable for learning ELS to 11th form students?
Question 6. Do you discuss your listening comprehension problems with someone?
Question 7: How does your teacher encourage you to listen?
Question 8: How do you evaluate your classmates’ participation in listening lessons?
Question 9: What makes it difficult for you to learn ELS?
Question 10. In your opinion, what should teachers do to better teaching ELS?

3.1.2. Questionnaires for teachers

Question 1: Which skill do you think the most difficult for your teaching?
Question 2: How important do you think ELS is to your students?
Question 3: What do you think about listening topics and tasks in the textbook?
Question 4: What is your students’ attitude towards listening lessons?
Question 5: Which stage of a listening lesson do you think the most difficult?
Question 6: What are your current problems with teaching ELS?
Question 7: How often do you use these techniques in your listening lessons?
Question 8: What should teachers do to overcome the difficulties?

3.2. Results of the interviews.

3.3. Summary

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. Teachers’ attitudes towards teaching ELS.

The results from the questionnaires for teachers and students as well as the interviews illustrate vividly the reality of teaching listening to students of grade 11 in Dai Mo high school. As can be seen from the results, listening is highly appreciated by the students and even the teachers at DM school (71%) are aware of the importance of listening skills. However, practically, they focus mostly on teaching vocabulary, grammar and
reading skills rather than on other skills such as speaking, listening and writing. Also, the main purpose of teaching and learning English at the school is for the final exams. This certainly affects the students’ listening competence and prevents the improvement of their listening ability. Besides, all of the teachers think that the students are not attentive and interested in their listening lessons. Therefore, looking into the frequency of listening teaching and techniques used in teaching, the researcher admits that it is advisable for teachers to invest more time and effort to better their lessons. Only in that way can teachers motivate students to learn listening skills.

4.1.2. Students’ attitudes towards learning ELS.

As can be seen from the above results, most of the students highly appreciated the importance of English listening skills. 78% of the students wanted to learn this skill because it is necessary for their future job but in the reality, only 9% liked learning listening skills. However, many students did not want to involve in listening lessons. About one third of the students thought that the tasks in the textbook were difficult for them. 44% stated that 45 minutes for one listening lesson was not enough. Therefore, they needed more time to learn this skill. Moreover, students did not seem to have good and close relationship with their teachers. When they had difficulties in learning ELS, only 16% discussed the problems with their teachers.

4.1.3. Students’ difficulties in learning ELS

From the data analysis, it was clear that the students had to face many difficulties such as: their low level of English proficiency, lack of background knowledge in listening topics, lack of motivation, limited time, speakers’ fast speed, bad quality of cassette tapes and etc. The majority of the students had trouble with listening because of their low level of English proficiency. Besides, their low background knowledge also made them feel stressed when listening. All these reasons led to the fact that many of them said they sometimes did not have enough time to complete listening tasks in class. Then students’ low motivation was also a problem. Only a small number of the students liked learning ELS. Furthermore, students did not highly appreciate their teachers’ assistance. Only 16% of the students discussed listening comprehension problems with their teachers. Besides, their English teachers considered the result of the final exam as the most important element. They cared much about teaching vocabulary, grammar,
structures and reading skills. Obviously, this attitude decreased students’ interest in learning listening.

4.1.4. Teachers’ difficulties in teaching ELS for grade 11 students

Not only the students but also the teachers coped with numerous problems when teaching listening. The difficulties the teachers at DM school were coping with were the factors from the students such as the low level of English proficiency of the students, low background knowledge in listening topics and their low motivation. The next difficulty was the problem of large class. Teachers had to face difficulties in shortening a big gap among their students’ different abilities. In the same class, some students who were good at English were active while many others were de-motivated. The good ones usually dominated the activities that pair work and group work were needed while the weaker ones were shy and contributed nothing. In addition, English classes at the school were very large. There were more than 40 students in a class. Hence, it was difficult for the teachers to give each of the student individual attention. For the next difficulty, teaching equipments and reference materials were important in the teaching process; however, the teaching condition in the school was not good. Moreover, there were not available listening materials in the library for students to improve their listening competence. The final challenge was the limited time for listening lessons. According to 71% of the teachers in DM school, the time was too short for listening practices. Thus, teachers should encourage students to learn listening by using flexible techniques, exploring internet websites which facilitate listening teaching and learning, and so on.

With all the difficulties mentioned above, it was necessary to have workable solutions to overcome the existing problems for further improvement of the listening lessons.

4.2. Suggested solutions

4.2.1. Doing a pre-listening warm-up activity effectively
4.2.2. Encouraging students to practice ELS outside the class
4.2.3. Giving support and encouragement
4.2.4. Upgrading teaching aids
4.2.5. Adapting and re-designing the tasks in the textbook more suitable to students
4.2.6. Equipping students with listening strategies.
4.3. Summary

PART III: CONCLUSIONS

1. Summary of the study
Listening is one of the receptive skills, through which students can gain more vocabularies, grammar structures and knowledge about the world. Besides, listening helps students learn other skills. Therefore, the importance of listening is undeniable. In the process of studying the reality of teaching and learning ELS at DM school, the attitudes of the teachers and students towards teaching and learning ELS, the difficulties facing the teachers and students were studied. The results from the research reveal the present teaching and learning listening at DM school is far from satisfaction. The students faced five main problems at listening class: the low level of English proficiency, low background knowledge, low motivation, teachers’ assistance and time limitation. Also teachers coped with many problems such as students’ low level of English proficiency, low motivation, time limitation, large and mixed-ability classes as well as lack of necessary facilities. In order to improve the situation, an effort should be made to present some useful listening techniques which hopefully can be employed to help the teachers at DM school improve their listening skills teaching.

2. Limitations of the study
Although the researcher has made effort conducting this thesis, there undoubtedly exist some limitations. Firstly, the study only carry out an investigation into the reality of teaching and learning ELS of grade 11 students, so to some extent, the results may not be generalized for all students of the school. Secondly, the author’s practical experience in teaching ELS with the textbook is limited; the suggestions to overcome difficulties are likely to be subjective and incomplete.

3. Recommendations for further study
On the basis of findings and limitations of the study, the following suggestions are made for further research:
- A study on the reality of teaching reading, speaking or writing to DM school students.
- A study on techniques and activities for DM school students which help them improve their listening skills.