

The Opinions of the Instructors about the Listening Skills of Syrian Students Learning Turkish

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Abstract

In this study, the opinions of the instructors giving Turkish courses based on listening skills for the Syrian students, who have migrated from their countries and taken refuge because of the domestic turmoil in their country in recent years; and who are learning Turkish in different regions of Turkey, were collected and evaluated. Research data were obtained through the semi-structured interview forms prepared by the researcher and redesigned according to the opinions of experts. In this study, Syrian students' perceptions about listening skill, the difficulties that the instructors encountered while teaching this skill, the solution methods they found to overcome these difficulties, the instructors' studies on the measurement of Syrian students' listening skill and their opinions about their own capabilities of developing listening skills were determined and evaluated through content analysis method. At the end of the research, it was revealed that students develop a negative attitude towards listening, instructors do not find themselves sufficient in terms of giving education on listening skills; that they have a lot of problems in terms of usage of techniques and methods and instructors have difficulties in assessment and evaluation studies. Solution proposals for both Syrian students and the instructors have been developed in order to solve the determined problems.

Keywords: Listening skills, Syrian student, instructor, opinion.

1. Introduction

Due to the political problems and conflicts in Middle East region in recent years, nearly 700.000 Syrian refugees have come to our country, which increased the importance of teaching Turkish as a second language. After all, it is important for an individual to know the language of people living together in a community in order that he could adapt himself to the society and he could learn information about the cultures of the speakers of that language. Because language includes historical and social backgrounds and all other properties of culture in itself (Bölükbaş and Keskin: 2010). Today, the negative events happening especially in the geographical area where Turkey's neighbors exist compelled Syrian people to immigrate from their country and hundreds of thousand Syrian refugees have had to take refuge in Turkey which is one of the welcoming countries for the people fleeing from the war in their country. These people are lack of their basic needs such as shelter and food in addition to continuing their education and building a healthy communication with the people of the country to which they refuge. Fulfilling the needs of Syrian people is vitally important for them to adapt to the life conditions in Turkey. Thus, different classes have been opened in the camps where Syrian refugees live and studies about students' acquisition of basic language skills are carried out by giving them Turkish courses in particular, so that they can communicate with the society. For this purpose, students are given Turkish courses under the supervision of TÖMERs in camps where some of the Syrian refugees stay. In this sense, "listening" is one of the language skills which is taught to Syrian refugees in different regions of Turkey.

Listening is an inborn and thus first emerging skill among all other language skills. According to Baş (200: 32) listening training is both visual and an auditory practice. It is an activity which is practiced in order to comprehend what is told and spoken, to convert them into knowledge, to communicate and to criticize something. Therefore, it could be said that listening is a prerequisite of building a healthy

communication with the environment.

The basis of language education is provided with listening education. Other language skills are developed and shaped based on listening activities. Thus, it can be said that while giving priority to listening education in Turkish teaching to foreigners, it would be useful to do activities towards listening education just as children learn their mother tongue (Çelenk, 2005: 135).

Acquisition is that when children learn a language without being aware of learning. Language acquisition begins at birth and continues until the age of 3 (till 5 according to some scientists). This period is called “critical period” (Huber, 2007: 15). Therefore, it could be argued that it is important to make efforts for foreigners learning Turkish by creating natural atmosphere as much as possible so that they can learn Turkish through language acquisition.

Listening skill has been defined in different ways by field experts. Focusing on the words uttered, understanding the meanings of words in addition to perceiving speech sounds. (Hampleman, 1958: 49). A language ability that we use in everyday life to comprehend what is going on in our environment without thinking (Rost, 1994: 1). Stopping speaking, moving or mind-wandering on various issues and only to focus on what speaker says (Moore, 2000: 120). Language ability can be defined as hearing a speaker’s speech sounds on any issue, understanding what he says and focusing the attention on the sounds in order to get the necessary things for now or probably for the future and hide them in the memory (Keskinlikç, 2002: 84). Listening is an act of understanding messages and giving reactions to stimuli. In other words, listening is the comprehension of a message sent by speaking or listening (Gürgen, 2008: 49).

From the definitions, it can be understood that listening is principally a comprehension process; hence it is primarily an explanation process which requires consciousness and attention. Researches have shown that listening skill keeps a wide area in human life. A human spends 9 percent of a day by writing, 16 percent of it by reading, 30 percent of it by speaking and 45 percent of it by listening (Özbay, 2009: 66). It can be argued that these results give the indication that listening skill in teaching Turkish to foreigners should be given much more importance than any other language skills.

In today’s school environments, it has become important to be the producer of knowledge rather than the people in need to be directed constantly or taught. Using different methods and techniques in education is the way of making students active and productive rather than a passive receiver (Yalçın, 2002: 16). There is an important connection between improving listening skills and methods or techniques used in classrooms. Therefore, it is important for instructors teaching Turkish to foreigners to keep up with the new developments in language acquisition and make effective listening activities with their students.

According to constructivist language theory, listening is a developmental and transactional process. It is developmental because listening skills are acquired in a long period of time and listening is divided into different periods and stages. It is interactive because there is an interaction between speaker, the knowledge transferred from the speaker and the atmosphere where listening takes place (Güneş, 2007: 71). Therefore, it is important for instructors to use a progressive education plan which includes different processes while teaching Turkish to foreigners. Another point the instructors should pay attention is to increase the motivation of children as much as possible by building a healthy communication with them.

When the body of literature is searched, different studies could be seen about “The Situation Of Teaching Turkish To Arabs In History” (Akkuş, 1999; Baskın, 2012), “The Coursebooks Used In Teaching Turkish To Arabs” (Şeref and Yılmaz, 2013; Yılmaz and Şeref, 2013), “Basic Language Skills Developed” (Bölükbaş, 2011; Subaşı, 2010) “Educational Problems Of Syrian Refugees” (Seydi, 2013; Seydi, 2014) and “Syrian Students’ Perception Of Turkish” (Akkaya, 2013). However, it was noticed that no study which directly deals with the instructors’ opinions about the listening skills of Syrian students who are refugee in our country. This study is expected to help to determine the needs of Syrian students in the

field of listening training and to make a contribution to the solution of these problems.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the opinions of the instructors working at TÖMERs about the Syrian students' acquisition of Turkish listening skills and improvement of these skills. In this respect, the questions are determined under five main topics indicated below.

- i. What are the opinions of the instructors about Syrian students' listening skills?
- ii. What are the difficulties the instructors encountered while improving the listening skills of Syrian students?
- iii. What are the opinions of the instructors about the influences of developing active listening skills over Syrian students' language development?
- iv. What are the methods and measurement - evaluation techniques used by the instructors while improving the listening skills of Syrian students?
- v. What are the problems the instructors encountered in terms of the methods or measurement evaluation techniques that they use while improving the listening skills of Syrian students?

2. Method

This study in which the opinions of the instructors working at TÖMERs and giving Turkish education to foreigners about the listening skills of Syrian students have been assessed is a qualitative research. Qualitative research is a type of research in which qualitative data collection methods such as observation, interview or document analysis are used and a process in which events and perceptions are investigated with a realistic and holistic approach in a natural atmosphere by following a qualitative method (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 1999: 14).

In this research, an interview form developed by researchers and prepared according to the opinions of people who are expert in their field was used. The analysis of data obtained from the research was done by content analysis method.

Content analysis is a systematic and renewable method in which some certain words of a text are summarized with smaller categories according to the specific coding rules (Büyüköztürk, 2009: 269).

Study Group

The work-group of the research consists of 11 instructors working and giving Turkish lessons to Syrian students in Çukurova University, Adana Science and Technology University and Turkish Education Centers.

Data Collection and Analysis

To collect data, the instructors working in these universities and centers were required to answer six semi-structured questions. Codes and themes were determined by examining the collected data. During the reporting process, direct quotations are taken from the instructors' opinions. Each instructor is named as "K" and they are ordered as "K1, K2, K3, K4..."

3. Findings

The quotations from the instructors' answers to the question "How are your students' opinions about speaking Turkish and listening to the texts? Please explain" are shown at Table1. with their categories and frequencies.

Table 1. The findings of instructors' opinions about their students' speaking Turkish and listening texts

Category	f	Sample Sentences
Difficulty in acquisition of listening skills	8	<i>Listening is the most difficult skill for the students, especially if the sound recording is bad. They can also distinguish it after a while. (K-8)</i>
The importance of the suitability of the listening texts for the level of students.	1	<i>It is quite important that listening text should be suitable for the level of students. (K-1)</i>
Listening is a skill which is acquired in a long process.	1	<i>Listening skill requires a long process which is acquired second after writing.(K-2)</i>
Students' lack of self-confidence in listening training	1	<i>Students are generally abstain from this skill. In fact, It is a problem related to not being familiar with speech sounds and their lack of self-confidence (K-2)</i>
Interesting texts make a difference in listening training	1	<i>We have observed that students have a different approach towards interesting texts. (K-1)</i>
An optimistic looking to listening in Turkish	1	<i>Generally, our students' opinions about speaking Turkish and listening to something in Turkish are positive. (K-4)</i>
Willing to listening to something in Turkish	1	<i>Our students are generally willing to listen or speak something in Turkish. (K-4)</i>
Having prejudice against listening skills	1	<i>Students are having difficulty in understanding the expressions in texts, because they have a negative attitude towards listening skills. (K-11)</i>

According to Table 1, most of the instructors have difficulties while they are providing listening training for their students. The instructors, who say that listening is the first acquired skill, have stated that students' negative attitude towards listening skills cause them to have difficulty in understanding the expressions in the texts. The instructors who think that students should be given interesting texts in listening activities have stated that students can improve their listening skills better in topics in which they are interested. They have said that students have a lack of confidence because they are not familiar with speech sounds. They think that selected listening texts should be suitable for the levels of students and students' lack of confidence can be overcome only when texts are suitable for the levels of students.

The quotations from the instructors' answers to the question "Do You Have Difficulties in Improving Your Students' Listening Skills? Why?" are shown at Table 2 with their categories and frequencies.

Table 2. The findings about the difficulties the instructors encountered in improving listening skills of the students

Categories	f	Causes	f	Example Sentences
Problems Encountered by the Instructors	11	Listening Skills Are Not Suitable For the Levels of Students	4	<i>Yes. I have difficulty in listening activities. I think students' levels are not taken into consideration in textbooks and other materials prepared on this skill. (K-10)</i>
		Listening Materials are not satisfying.	3	<i>Yes. I have difficulties because materials available are inadequate and listening recordings are not suitable.(K-3)</i>
		Having difficulties in some levels	1	<i>I have difficulties in listening skills especially in elementary level and in intermediate level. (K-2)</i>
		Fast-flowing texts create problem	2	<i>In listening activities, our students are sometimes complaining that texts are flowing so fast. (K-1)</i>
		Difficulty in interpretation of listening texts.	1	<i>Yes, I have difficulties. Because understanding the listening texts is difficult for students. (K-7)</i>

According to Table 2, the instructors have difficulties in improving the listening skills of Syrian students. They are of the opinion that one of the most important reasons of these difficulties is that materials are either inadequate or unsuitable for students. The instructors who say that materials are not only insufficient but also not suitable for the levels of the students and due to these drawbacks the students cannot interpret the listening texts. The instructors who prepared their own materials as a result of these inadequacies have realized that students have difficulties in remembering the structures which they already knew. Additionally, it was also observed that students have difficulties in following and understanding the text because of the fast flow of the voice recordings. The instructors say that the students focus on words rather than the meaning of the whole text in such cases, therefore; they cannot comprehend the whole meaning and these case results in various problems in the exams.

The quotations from the instructors' answers to the question "How does it contribute to students' acquisition of Turkish when they are conscious and active listener? Please explain" are shown at Table 1 with their categories and frequencies.

Table 3. Findings related to the instructors' opinions about how their students' being a conscious and active listener contribute to their acquisition of Turkish?

Category	(f)	Sample Sentences
Contributes to the language acquisition of students	6	<i>Informing students on this case will increase their acquisition of Turkish by about 50 percent. All other language skills are directly related with listening in improving a language acquisition. (K-3)</i>
Effects other language skills positively	4	<i>Listening skill is also important for the improvement of speaking and writing skills. If a student becomes an active and conscious listener, this will effect his/her other language skills positively.(K-4)</i>
Improves listening skills	1	<i>Students' being active and conscious listeners will enable them to improve their listening skills faster (with the proper guidance of instructors) (K-5)</i>
Enabling students to comprehend faster.	1	<i>It makes a big contribution to students. My students who are listening actively could comprehend the texts faster answer the questions easily(K-2)</i>
Enabling students to comprehend the texts	1	<i>Listening consciously enables students to comprehend the text accurately. (K-1)</i>

According to Table 3, students' active participation and conscious listening makes the biggest contribution to instructors in listening training. The instructors who emphasize that informing students about the listening skills and activities beforehand will affect their process of learning Turkish positively have stated that all other language skills are directly related to listening in improvement of a language. The instructors who underline that listening skill is one of the necessities of speaking and writing skills have said that effective listening training will reflect positively on other language skills.

The quotations from the instructors' answers to question "What are the methods and techniques that you use during improving your students' listening ability and what are the difficulties that you encounter while using these methods and techniques? Please explain." are shown at Table 4 with the categories and frequencies.

Table4. Findings related to opinions of interviewed instructors on methods and techniques they used and the problems they faced while using these methods and techniques

Category	f	Sample Sentences
Acquisition skill by such activities of watching-listening-completing a movie or a video.	4	<i>We generally use techniques like listening record, oral reading and request students to answer questions about the reading material, word / sentence completion as well as watching video or listening song activities. (K-9)</i>
Acquisition skill by listening-completing and understanding songs	3	<i>I make my students listen a song, leave blanks, and request them to fill these blanks. (K-5)</i>
Teaching of techniques like what should be done and how to take notes during listening	2	<i>To improve student's listening ability, I explain what the most important things are before, during and after listening. Moreover I teach techniques of listening by taking note in order to become better listeners and resolve the listening imperfections.(K-11)</i>
Acquisition skill by using visual-auditory- sensual techniques	2	<i>We use course CDs. Additionally by watching and listening video, we make visual and auditory listening. (K-8)</i>
Insufficient or unsuitable materials for the comprehension level of students	1	<i>Insufficient material or unsuitable materials for the comprehension level of students are important problems. (K-7)</i>
Acquisition of Listening skills-building by listening materials which prepare to daily life	1	<i>In order to improve listening skills, students should make listening examples as many as they can. Moreover, instructors should create awareness of being a good listener at dormitory, supermarket, in short, in daily life (K-4)</i>
Acquisition listening skill by usage of course CDs	1	<i>We use course CDs. Beside by watching and listening video, we make visual and auditory listening. (K-8)</i>
Auditory teaching by dictation method	1	<i>Additionally, listening skill can be improved by dictation. (K-4)</i>
Improving auditory skill by the way of listening News programs and stories	1	<i>After listening a story, news or program, I make activities and studies about these. (K-5)</i>
Teaching of what should be done before, during and after listening	1	<i>In order to improve auditory skills, I explain what the most important things are before, during and after listening. (K-11)</i>
After listening training, giving cloze test	1	<i>I use cloze tests for listening ability. .Classic questions are more difficult for students. (K-10)</i>
The maintenance of listening educational process by making critical listening	1	<i>We use active, selective, critical, note taking listening methods which are determined according to the type and context of the text. (K-3)</i>

According to Table 4, the instructors use mostly visual and auditory elements during the acquisition of listening skill activities. The instructors, who choose texts oriented to daily life for their students, make these texts in-class activities to allow them to speak and listen in different settings like dormitory, supermarket, street etc. The instructors, who use mostly visual and auditory elements like movies, videos and songs, support student's motivation and creativity by performing listening-completing-infilling activities. Furthermore doing listening activities with course CDs, vocalization of reading texts, dictation studies oriented to listening, listening of the news in agenda and giving these activities as homework to the students are the other studies related to listening skill. Giving information about the process before, during and after the works about the listening activity and motivating students to this process facilitate the activities that Syrian students perform during auditory training according to the instructors.

The quotations from the instructors' answers to the question "What are the measurement and evaluation studies to determine the students' level of acquiring and improving their listening skills?" are shown at Table5 with their categories and frequencies.

Table 5. The findings related to instructors' measurement and evaluation studies to determine Syrian students' level of acquiring and improving their listening skills

Category	f	Sample Sentences
Preparing different questions with reference to listening texts	4	<i>With reference to listening texts available, we ask multiple-choice, infilling, true/false and open ended questions that can be used at C level. (K-9)</i>
The assessment of the practice tests and end-of action questions after each activity prepared by the instructors	4	<i>I make practice tests and assess them. I give listening and text related questions as weekend assignments and assess them. (K-3)</i>
Making measurement and evaluation after listening activities by using question-answer method	1	<i>Question-answer method on an issue listened before might be helpful. While some students make representations they've prepared for speaking, others are in the listener position. Asking questions about the representations they listen might also be helpful. (K-4)</i>
Not doing measurement and evaluation studies	1	<i>I do not do any measurement and evaluation study. (K-5)</i>
Using activities in the language book sets during the measurement and evaluation process	1	<i>I carry out exams and activities in the language book sets. (K-6)</i>
Measurement and evaluation by preparing appropriate questions for students' level	1	<i>We assess Syrian student's level of acquiring and improving their listening skills with appropriate questions for students' level (K-2)</i>
Measurement and evaluation after vocalization of listening texts	1	<i>I do assessment after vocalizing different texts. (K-10)</i>
Measurement and evaluation with questions based upon synonyms of the words in listening texts	1	<i>Rather than asking direct questions in the listening text, we prefer using synonyms and encourage the students to think about them. (K-1)</i>

According to Table 5, there is no a standard assessment scale which can be used by the instructors after doing listening activities. Experts generally try to maintain the measurement and evaluation process by using multiple-choice, infilling, true/false and open ended questions prepared by themselves, which can be used at C level. Another measurement and evaluation method that instructors use is practice tests. According to the academicians, practice test is one of the main tools that can be used in the process of

measurement after listening trainings. Doing the activities in language book sets is also another measurement and evaluation method. The instructors emphasize that students' language level should be taken into consideration in the measurement and evaluation stage. They also state that they try to give synonyms as examples when they encounter questions about the words students couldn't comprehend. On the other hand, there is also an instructor who says s/he doesn't do any measurement and evaluation after listening education.

The quotations from the instructors' answers to the question "Do you think the instructors who teach Turkish to foreigners are qualified enough to improve students' language skills? How do you assess yourself in this point of view?" are shown at Table 6 with their categories and frequencies.

Table 6. The findings about whether the instructors assess themselves or their colleagues qualified enough in terms of improving students' language skills?

Category	f	Sample Sentences
Thinking instructors as unqualified	7	<i>Currently, I think they have some inadequacies in terms of education. (K-5)</i>
Finding themselves as qualified in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners	3	<i>I think not only others but also myself to be successful and qualified. (K-8)</i>
The Idea that instructors should improve themselves in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners	3	<i>I think experience, especially the one in this field, will improve instructors. This is my second year in this field but I think I will be better and more qualified by my 5th year. (K-7)</i>
Training expert instructors in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners with self-improvement and certificate programs	3	<i>We are working in an atmosphere where most of the instructors didn't take any academic education in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners. That's why there are several inadequacies. We are trying to correct these deficiencies with self-improvement and certificate programs. (K-3)</i>
The idea that instructors can or will improve themselves easily in a class environment	2	<i>Partially. I think instructors should be chosen according to some specific criteria. They are qualified enough because they are in the center of the education. However, instructors should also be open to improvements and learning new things since this is a new improving field and there are still so many things to do and learn. (K-4)</i>
In order to train experts, resources and materials should be enriched.	2	<i>In order to train experts in this field, resources and materials should be enriched. (K-9)</i>
Few studies are being conducted in the field of auditory skill.	1	<i>Auditory skill is a basic skill ignored and less studied on. More studies should be carried out about it. (K-2)</i>
Instructors should share their experiences and information by material or data repository and common projects.	1	<i>The importance of creating a common sharing platform in Turkey that can be considered as a data repository in terms of specialization has been emphasized by some linguists. We think that every instructor is responsible for sharing materials, experiences and common project representations. (K-1)</i>

According to Table 6, the instructors teaching Turkish to foreigners generally do not find themselves and their colleagues qualified in this field. The instructors thinking that in these field only experts should give education; believe that gaining experience in class environment will improve themselves. While some experts find themselves unqualified in this field, others see themselves qualified, but they still think that they should be educated about new developments in the field such activities as seminars and workshops.

According to data, the main requirements of Syrian students in Turkish classes about listening skill are lack of materials, resources and methods. The instructors think that sharing available materials, resources and methods among each other through data repositories can facilitate the process of education.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, Turkish teaching instructors' opinions on listening skill of Syrian students is studied. In this respect, students' perception of Turkish listening skill, the problems the instructors encountered, the instructors' solutions to overcome these problems, the studies they made to measure the listening skill and instructors' opinions on their own qualification in improving students' listening skills are evaluated by content analysis method.

The results obtained are listed below:

According to the instructors, one of the most difficult acquired skills by Syrian students is the listening skill. The instructors think that one of the most important reasons of this difficulty is that Syrian students' biased perceptions about the skill. In order to overcome these problems, usage of listening texts or activities which are related to students' cultural perception can be helpful. As a matter of fact, the study results in the literature also confirm this suggestion. According to Şahin and Koçer, students' awareness of their own abilities should be raised. With this purpose, it must be emphasized on what students will be able to accomplish in foreign language rather than what they cannot. (Şahin and Koçer, 2014: 43).

Majority of the instructors state that they have difficulties during improvement of Turkish listening skills of Syrian students. Insufficient and unqualified listening texts and materials used in classes are among the most important reasons of these difficulties. So as to overcome these difficulties, effective auditory materials, convenient to the improvement of Syrian students' listening skills could be used. In her study, Yangın (1994) states that the instructors did not practice critical teaching characteristics like motivating students about the content of listening text and preventing students from following the written text during the listening activity. Moreover, Wolvin and Coakley (2000) indicate that the instructors did not have the prior academic knowledge about the improvement of auditory skill. Thus, organizing education seminars for instructors can be beneficial to provide more productive Turkish listening skill courses of Syrian students.

Another point that can be beneficial for the improvement of Syrian students' Turkish listening skills is paying attention to culture and language relationship. According to Baş, in the process of preparing any kind of study, research or project to be conducted about language education, the relationship of language with society and naturally with culture should be paid attention (Baş, 2011: 115). While doing auditory skill activities with Syrian students who were the part of Ottoman geography throughout the centuries and shared several aspects of their culture with Turkish people, it is possible to benefit from this cultural proximity.

Another notable issue is the absence of a particular measurement scale to be used by instructors after listening activities. According to data obtained from the interview forms, there is not any particular measurement scale used by the instructors in order to assess Syrian students' listening ability. Each instructor tries to assess this ability with their own efforts. Yıldız and Tunçel states that the feedbacks to be received from the measurement and evaluation studies which are parallel to speaking, reading, writing and listening activities in the education process enable to solve educational deficiencies (Yıldız and Tunçel, 2014: 201). Therefore, making well-designed measurement and evaluation studies related to Syrian students' auditory skill has an important place in having more productive courses by determining listening skill problems in the system.

Another issue that the instructors, teaching listening skill training to Syrian students, encountered that they don't feel qualified themselves in this field. The instructors, who think experts of Teaching Turkish to foreigners should be trained, underline that instructors in this field should improve and update themselves via seminars and workshops.

With reference to study data, suggestions related to the improvement of Syrian students' auditory skill are listed below:

- Negative attitudes of Syrian students about Turkish listening skill should be converted into positive thanks to cultural proximity between Syrian and Turkish society.
- Considering the proficiency of instructors who will give Turkish listening courses to Syrian students, studies related to training more qualified instructors should be made and education seminars should be organized about.
- Similar studies about Syrian students' listening skill should be made and more efficient solutions should be produced about the issues like training instructors, education environment, methods and techniques used usage of materials, motivation of students with reference to the results of these studies.
- Instructors should organize extracurricular activities in natural environments in which students can learn and practice Turkish naturally in order to improve Syrian students' auditory skill in a more effective way.
- Studies about meeting the needs of the instructors in the field of measurement and evaluation of students' Turkish listening skill should be made and education seminars about the practice should be organized.
- Theoretical and practical education should be given about how to give more efficient listening education to Syrian students.

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