



Pre-service EFL Teachers' Perceptions on Listening Comprehension Problems

Hizmet öncesi İngilizce Öğretmenlerinin İngilizce Dinleme-Anlama Problemleri Algıları

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Öz

Bu çalışma, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin İngilizcedeki dinleme-anlama becerileri ile ilgili yaşadıkları problemleri ve ardında yatan sebepleri araştırmaktadır. Bu çalışma ile, hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin yaşadıkları problemlerin daha iyi anlaşılabilir şekilde meslek hayatlarına başladıklarında onların ihtiyaçları doğrultusunda öğrenci odaklı bir eğitim ve ölçme değerlendirme yapılmasına yönelik önerilerde bulunulması amaçlanmaktadır. Karma yöntemli bir araştırma desenine sahip bu çalışmada, veriler açık uçlu sorulardan ve 5'li Likert ölçeğinden oluşan anket ile toplanmıştır. İçerik analizi ve betimleyici istatistik analizi sonuçlarına göre, öğrenciler sıklıkla, farklı ve tanıdık olmayan aksanlar, hızlı konuşmalar, konsantrasyon/dikkat eksikliği ve dikkatin dağılması, konuşurların sözcükleri yutması ve belirsiz sesletilen sözcükler, bilinmeyen sözcükler, akademik ve bilimsel konuşmalarda çok fazla terminoloji kullanılması, konuşmanın konusuna olan ilgisizlik ve konu ile ilgili yeterli bilgiye sahip olmama gibi problemlerin üzerinde durmaktadırlar. Ayrıca, katılımcıların çoğu dinleme-anlamadaki problemlerini çok az pratik yapmaya ve İngilizce sözcük bilgilerinin sınırlı olmasına da bağlamaktadırlar.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dinleme-anlama problemleri, İngilizce Öğretimi, Hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenleri, dinleme becerisi ile ilgili farkındalık yaratma

Abstract

This study reports on pre-service EFL teachers' perceptions on their listening comprehension problems in English and how they view the reasons behind their lack of success in this skill. It aims to contribute to teachers' better understanding of the reasons and factors that lie in the difficulties that freshmen in ELT department experience in listening, and this in turn may also enable teachers to set more learner-centered and reasonable goals in testing and language teaching-learning program. Using a mixed method research design, the data was gathered through a questionnaire consisting of open-ended and Likert-scale questions. The results of the content analysis and descriptive statistics reveal that the main source of problems highlighted by the students are varied/unfamiliar accents, fast-paced speech, lack of concentration/attention and distraction, speakers' slurring the words/unclear pronunciation, unknown words, overloaded terminology used in the academic/scientific speeches, lack of interest in the topic of the speech, and lack of background knowledge about the topic of the speech. Moreover, the majority of the learners attribute their problems in listening comprehension to their lack of practice in listening and their inadequate vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Listening comprehension problems, English Language Teaching, Pre-service EFL teachers, developing awareness on listening skills

1. Introduction

Considering the fact that we spend more than 40 percent of our daily communication on listening, 35 percent on speaking, 16 percent on reading, and 9 percent on writing (Mendelsohn, 1994; Burley-Allen, 1995), it is quite surprising that there has been relatively small amount of research in L2 listening. The reason might be that the very complex, dynamic nature of and the intricate processes involved in listening make it difficult to investigate the listening ability as the phases listeners go through during listening is external to the researcher. Nonetheless, we can have access to these mental processes by asking language learners to talk about them. Given that language learners hold beliefs about the ways of language learning and they are also capable of developing awareness of their mental processes (Goh, 1997), which is called as 'metacognitive knowledge' (Flavell, 1979 cited in Goh, 1997, p. 361), uncovering students' perceptions on listening comprehension problems is of great value not only for language teachers but also for students themselves.

In order to comprehend and interpret speeches, listeners need information from a myriad of sources such as phonetic, phonological, prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic units (Lynch, 1998). Contrary to common belief that listening is a receptive skill that requires no active involvement, it is actually an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from verbal and non-verbal messages in the course of interactions (Nunan, 1998). Therefore, of all the other language skills and areas, listening skills might be regarded as the most multifaceted ones to be developed or even more complex and hard to be improved (Martinez, 2010), because it requires not only listening to and comprehending what the speakers try to convey, but also responding to interlocutors sometimes simultaneously (during the natural interaction) or some other times immediately after listening to spoken texts (during a classroom activity). Therefore, listening and speaking skills can not exactly be dissociated, which lends itself to a wide range of difficulties and frustrations on the part of language learners.

Research on listening skills has been carried out to reveal how good language learners cope with listening comprehension problems and what kind of strategies they adopt to overcome and get to a point where they can successfully comprehend what they listen to and respond to them (Field, 1998; McDonough, 2000; Ridgway, 2000; Farrell and Mallard 2006; Littlejohn, 2008). Another important agenda in the area of listening skills in foreign language learning and teaching is related to the common problems that the language learners encounter. With the purpose of having a better understanding of learners' difficulties and finding appropriate solutions and strategies to surmount their problems, research effort has been also devoted to uncovering what difficulties language learners face and why while listening to spoken texts in the target language (Boyle, 1984; Flowerdew and Miller, 1992; Goh, 2000; Hasan, 2000; Lotfi, 2012).

Although researches (Field, 1998; McDonough, 2000; Ridgway, 2000; Farrell and Mallard, 2006; Littlejohn, 2008) have been carried out in EFL or ESL settings, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, there have been few studies (Lotfi, 2012) which focus on the perceptions of the students studying at English Language Teaching departments, who are pre-service EFL teachers, with respect to their listening comprehension problems in English. When we consider the fact that these students are prospective teachers of English, it is thought to be of great value to reveal their own listening comprehension problems. Moreover, as prospective teachers of English, when and if they are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in listening skills and are trained to find appropriate strategies to fall back on so as to become better listener in English by eliminating the factors limiting and/or preventing their listening comprehension, then they can be expected to reflect them in their own teaching atmosphere and recognize their students' listening comprehension problems as well. To this end, this study reports on pre-service EFL teachers' listening comprehension problems by revealing the factors inducing problems in the process of listening in the light of their own perceptions. It is hoped that both the qualitative and the quantitative findings of the study will contribute to teachers' better understanding of the reasons and factors that lie in the difficulties that freshmen in ELT department experience in listening, and this in turn may also enable us to set reasonable and accommodating goals in teaching and testing processes.

1.1. Literature Review

All language learners may experience difficulties while listening to the target language; however, the types of the factors affecting their listening comprehension and the extent to which they find these factors difficult and formidable to overcome may differ. Investigating and identifying language learners' listening comprehension problems will enable language teachers to be conscious of where and when their students can face hardships related to listening comprehension so that they can be informed about what types of knowledge and skills are

important and necessary to improve listening skills. Moreover, they can take precautions beforehand to avoid these problems by means of appropriate pedagogical approaches and techniques. With this attempt, several influential studies on listening comprehension problems have been conducted (Boyle, 1984; Underwood, 1989; Yagang, 1994; Flowerdew & Miller 1996; Goh 2000, Hasan 2000; Lotfi 2012). These studies generally classify difficulties in L2 listening under problems pertinent to spoken text, speaker, listener, physical setting and listening tasks and activities.

Boyle (1984) examines the factors affecting listening comprehension of EFL learners in Hong Kong. Thirty university teachers and six college students are asked to list six factors fostering and hampering effectiveness of listening comprehension. The results reveal that both teachers and students consider lack of practice as the most crucial factor behind their ineffective listening comprehension. What the students perceive as top reasons behind their listening comprehension problems are educational level and background related to the content of the speech, general ability in English, the unknown vocabulary and idioms used, the lack of concentration, speaker's voice and clarity, and speed of delivery. On the other hand, teachers' responses to the factors influencing students' listening comprehension are speaker's clarity, pronunciation and accent, acoustic environment and noise in the class, lack of motivation to understand, and knowledge of the target language. One of the significant findings of Boyle's study is that teachers' and students' perceptions may differ, which is an important contribution to teaching of listening because what teachers consider as problems, difficulties in listening comprehension may not be perceived as problems or the extent to which they affect students' level of understanding can be different. From this perspective, it can be said that learning and teaching need to be learner-centered and a great amount of importance should be placed on the students' perceptions and beliefs so that appropriate listening activities are designed for the students to serve for their needs and wants.

Underwood (1989) also states seven factors that hinder efficient listening comprehension. The first one is related to the speaker. Different from the findings of Boyle (1984), many language learners believe that the greatest difficulty with listening comprehension arises from the fast-paced speech of the speakers. However, this finding is in parallel with the results of Zeng (2007), who examines the listening comprehension problems of EFL college students in China. She also finds out that speech rate comes at the top of the sources of listening comprehension problems. Similarly, the findings of Hasan's (2000) research on EFL learners' perceptions of listening problems also indicated that 84% of the students find it difficult to understand well when the speakers speak too fast. Second factor influencing listening comprehension is mentioned by Underwood (1989) as the lack of opportunity to ask for repetition or clarification for the words or parts that they have not understood in the listening activities done in the classroom. However, the second rank of the listening comprehension problems in Zeng's study (2007) belongs to distraction as the mostly experienced difficulty. The participants explained that they often get distracted due to the missed words or unknown phrases in the listening text. Third, due to the unknown words used in the spoken texts, students may not understand the message or they may stop and try hard to think about the meanings of those unknown words, which in return brings about missing the rest of the speech. Other listed factors preventing students from successful listening comprehension are failing to recognize the transition statements or signals for topic switches; lack of contextual knowledge; misinterpretation of facial expressions, gestures due to cultural differences; difficulty in concentrating on the spoken text in the target language; lack of interest in the topic of the spoken texts; the obsession of understanding every word in the speech, which causes them to worry or become anxious when they do not understand even a single word so they will be discouraged from listening due to the failure.

Goh (2000) investigates real-time listening difficulties encountered by a group of tertiary level ESL learners within the three phase-model of language comprehension propounded by Anderson (1995). He collects the data through data-triangulation method: learners' diaries, small group interviews and immediate retrospective reports. She identifies 10 problems which appeared during these cognitive processing phases of perception, parsing and utilization such as word recognition, attention failure during perceptual processing; quickly forgetting what is heard, missing the beginning of the texts, neglecting the next parts when focusing on the meaning, and inability to form a mental representation from words heard. Moreover, in her study, many students state that attention is a cornerstone in listening; therefore, they identify their lapses in concentration as another listening problem.

Other factors like sentence complexity and new words are related to the features of the spoken text while unfamiliar pronunciation can be regarded as a factor resulting from the speaker, all of which contribute to the factors of nervousness, anxiety and frustration that will in turn hinder listening comprehension to a great extent.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sampling

The actual data were collected from 188 Turkish learners of English (139 female and 49 male), who were studying in their first academic term in ELT department at two different state universities in Ankara. The participants were taking a listening course at the time of the research. Their ages ranged from 17 to 23. The proficiency level of the students' in English was considered as upper-intermediate, because these two state universities administer an English proficiency exam similar to TOEFL to their students. The ones who receive required scores in the exam are allowed to start their education in their department, whereas the rest who fail to succeed in the exam need to study at preparatory school for a year. According to the demographic information elicited, 39% of the participants studied at the preparatory school for a year while the rest directly started their undergraduate education in their department.

2.2. Data Collection Tools

“Along with the number of dimensions that had to be part of an investigation into listening, there [is] the problem of how to actually go about undertaking research when the information is ‘inside-the-head’ (Flower & Miller, 2010,p.160). Thus, students’ perceptions with respect to listening comprehension have been mostly investigated by means of Likert-scale (Hasan, 2000) or open-ended questionnaires along with interviews and student diaries (Goh, 2000; Lotfi, 2012). In this study, students were asked to fill out a questionnaire (Appendix 1), which mainly consisted of 2 different sections, apart from the questions about students’ demographic information. The first section of the questionnaire included three open-ended questions to elicit the students’ listening comprehension problems that might result from (1) spoken texts, (2) speakers, and (3) listeners. With the purpose of eliciting in-depth data, they were asked to enumerate the problems they encounter while listening in English and the possible reasons behind the listed problems before they were administered the second part of the questionnaire where they were asked to state how frequently they experienced the given problems in listening. In other words, the second part of the questionnaire was in the format of a 5-point Likert scale, where the students were supposed to rate 25 listening comprehension problems (spoken text, speakers, and listeners) from 1 (never) to 5 (always). Researchers utilize Likert-scale questionnaires since they allow researchers to draw out opinions and/or identify the degrees of agreement of informants with the statements they aim to test (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). Therefore, the quantitative data were aimed to support and complement the qualitative data gathered through open-ended questions. In other words, the validity of the research was tried to be ensured with a methodological triangulation (Dörnyei, 2007).

2.2.1. Instrument Construction Process

First, in order to construct the items in the questionnaire, the relevant literature on L2 listening comprehension was searched and the sources of listening problems were listed. In this regard, three major categories were identified to base the constructed items (i.e., spoken text, speakers, and listeners). The items in the Likert-scale were mainly adapted from the listening comprehension problems designated in Goh (2000), Hasan (2000), and Lotfi (2012) and a few other possible items were also added by the researcher.

After constructing 3 open-ended questions and 39 items for listening comprehension problems in English, to avoid misunderstandings that might arise from limited linguistic competency of the students, the questionnaire was translated into students' mother tongue, Turkish by the researcher herself. It was also thought that more insights could be gained about the students' perceptions of their listening comprehension problems when they expressed themselves in their mother tongue. To ensure that the Turkish version of the questionnaire had equivalent meanings with the items originally written in English and to avoid translation loss, the Turkish version of the questionnaire was back translated into English by two Turkish-English bilingual experts working as a research assistant at the Department of Foreign Language Education and as an instructor at School of Foreign Languages with 4 years of experience each at a Turkish state university. The discrepancies between the original English version of the questionnaire and the back-translated versions were analyzed and the necessary changes related to wording choices were made.

As a third step, two experts' opinions were consulted for redundancy, content validity and clarity (Brown, 2001). One of the expert judges was a university instructor with more than 20 years of experience at the department of

Turkish Language Teaching and who was also an expert in designing questionnaires and scales to investigate language skills. The other expert was also an instructor at the same department with 5 years of experience. They were consulted regarding the understandability of the questions and the items. Based on the comments and feedback elicited from these experts after a critically examining process, the parts that might cause confusion or misunderstanding for the students were changed.

Finally, to ensure the validity of the data collection tool, the last version of the questionnaire was piloted with 10 first-year ELT students at a private university in Ankara. On the basis of the participants' responses, comments on the comprehensibility of the items and the observation of the researcher, wording of some items were changed.

2.3. Data Analysis Procedure

The qualitative data gathered from the students' responses to the open-ended questions were content analyzed. The descriptions of listening comprehension problems stated by each participant were categorized under previously identified three headings: comprehension problems arising from (1) spoken texts, (2) speakers, and (3) listeners. Although the participants were asked to list the listening comprehension problems under these categories, they most of the time mistakenly wrote their listening problems under the heading of spoken texts, which were actually listening comprehension problems related to speakers. Considering this, all of the responses were scrutinized and put under correct category. If the participant repeated the same problem in listening comprehension more than once under different headings they were not counted (sometimes various/unfamiliar accent of the speaker were mentioned both in the part where they were supposed to list problems related to spoken texts and in the part where they needed to list the difficulties they faced due to speakers). In the end, a list of factors affecting the students' listening comprehension negatively as reported by themselves was provided in order of frequency of appearance in responses.

The quantitative data collected through Likert-scale questionnaire were entered to SPSS 19. The descriptive analyses were run to identify the frequency of each item/listening comprehension problems faced by the students. Other statistical analyses were not carried out due to the fact that the data collection tool was not a scale but a questionnaire. Then, most frequently experienced listening comprehension problems of ELT students were ascertained.

3. Findings

The sources of the listening comprehension problems may vary depending on several factors such as proficiency level of the students, individual learner differences and the extent to which the students set a barrier to the target language due to the affective filter (Krashen, 1985). The findings of the quantitative and qualitative data analyses are presented in accordance with the sources of the students' listening comprehension problems; namely, problems related to spoken texts, speakers, and listeners. The quoted responses of the student were translated into English and given in the result section.

3.1. Listening Comprehension Problems Related to Features of Spoken Texts

The features of the spoken texts themselves can be the source of listening comprehension problems. Table 1 displays the students' perceptions of listening problems caused by the spoken texts. The spoken texts may induce comprehension problems mainly due to unknown words, complex grammatical structures and the length of the spoken texts. The statistical analysis of the quantitative data in the Likert-scale shows that 70% of the students have difficulty in understanding the speech due to the unknown words used by the speakers while 41, 2 % do not comprehend the spoken text because of the complex syntactic structures. This finding can also be supported by the students' responses to the open-ended questions because most of the students state that unknown words or phrases in the spoken texts hinder their understanding the content to a great extent, which sometimes results in frustration and giving up listening to the whole speech. The qualitative data further reveal that these unknown words generally include daily expressions and idioms since as reported by the students themselves, they are not exposed to sufficient amount of input with daily language use of English.

The use of complex grammatical structures is also mentioned quite frequently by the students as the source of failure to understand the spoken texts. They further elaborate this factor by exemplifying these complex grammatical structures and express that when there are many inverted and elliptical sentences and rarely-encountered structures and long sentences that are connected to one another, they have great difficulty in understanding the speech.

However, the third item in the Likert-scale; namely, the fact that the speech is too long seems to be less influential in contributing to inefficient listening comprehension when compared the mentioned problems. Accordingly, students state that the long spoken texts sometimes make it hard to comprehend the message, but it can be still considered as a source of listening comprehension problem for the students.

The content analysis of the qualitative data provides us with various factors related to the nature of the spoken text, which affect students' listening comprehension negatively. The majority of the students indicate that they cannot understand the juridical, medical and political speeches owing to the overloaded terminology used in these kinds of academic/scientific speeches (Participant 1). They show awareness of the different discourse style of these speeches and comment that since they are not familiar with the language used in these academic/scientific speeches, it is hard for the students to comprehend them.

Table 1

Distribution of the Listening Comprehension Problems Related to Features of Spoken Texts

1	I find it difficult to understand long spoken texts.	2,7	12,6	47,5	27,3	9,8
2	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts because of unknown words.	1,6	8,7	28,8	48,9	12
3	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts because of complex grammatical structures.	2,7	18,1	37,9	31,3	9,9

Participant1: "I have great difficulty in scientific spoken texts because the content, namely the words and the sentence structures are quite terminological and complex."

Another frequently mentioned source of listening comprehension problems related to the spoken text is the interruptions and overlaps during the speeches. The students clarified this factor by stating that when there are more than three interlocutors involved in the interaction and they simultaneously speak, they cannot follow who says what, nor can they understand the messages conveyed. Interestingly, many students also express that their problems in listening comprehension are due to overloaded use of statistical information, and private names in the speech (Participant147).

Participant147: "When there are many numeric data in the spoken text, it becomes difficult to catch them and follow the speech."

Although mentioned only a few times by the students, the use of abbreviations and reduced forms in the spoken texts, and the higher proficiency level of the language used in the speech are perceived as sources of their failure in listening comprehension.

3.2. Listening Comprehension Problems Related to Speakers

As can be observed from Table 2, listening problems can also be resulted from the speakers. These problems may be related to speech rate, the use of hesitations and pauses, unclear pronunciation, varied accents, and unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of speakers. The results of the data gathered through Likert-scale reveal that the most frequently encountered listening comprehension problems regarding speakers are the varied/unfamiliar accents (94% sometimes, often or always) and the fast-paced speech and of speakers (and 90% sometimes, often or always). These two sources of listening comprehension problems are also mentioned as the most influential factors in failures of understanding spoken texts in the responses to open-ended questions. One of the students' answers related to the listening comprehension problem arising from speed of delivery is as follows:

Participant118: "They speak too fast. Sometimes when they are angry and they shout, they utter the words differently so it gets difficult to understand."

Elaborating on the issue of varied/unfamiliar accents, the students distinguish between the problems they face resulting from varied/unfamiliar accents of native speakers of English (Participant 1 and Participant9) and those of

non-native speakers of English (Participant 125). They state that they are more familiar with the American accent, but they very often have difficulties in understanding British, Australian and Irish accents.

Participant1: "The style of the speakers are quite an influential factor. Specifically, if we are taught American accent but the speaker speaks British accent or in another unfamiliar accent, understanding gets considerably difficult".

Participant9: " Some speakers use such different accents that I can't understand a single word".

Participant 125: " I may find it a little difficult to understand the non-native speakers of English because the speaker speaks English in accordance with the rules, intonation and stress patterns of his/her own language".

Table 2

Distribution of the Listening Comprehension Problems Related to Speakers

Item No.	Statements	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
4	I find it difficult to understand natural speech which is full of hesitation (e.g., er, umm, uh, well) and pauses.	20,2	44,3	26,2	8,7	0,5
5	I find it difficult to understand the meanings of the words which are not pronounced clearly.	-	9,6	34,5	43,5	12,4
6	I find it difficult to understand well when the speakers speak too fast	-	10	17,8	48,3	23,9
7	I find it difficult to understand well when the speakers speak with varied/unfamiliar accents.	0,5	5,5	22	51,6	20,3
8	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts because of unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of the speakers.	4,3	26,6	37,5	26,1	4,9

Moreover, the descriptive statistical analysis shows that unclear pronunciation of the speakers interferes with the students listening comprehension (90% sometimes, often or always). This problem is described by the students in the qualitative data as the speakers' slurring the words while speaking, which causes unclear and blurry pronunciation. This finding is very much related to the issue of using authentic spoken texts in the classroom as native speakers often slur the words or shorten the words; thus, it prevents students from fully comprehending the spoken texts and cause frustration. The result, however, contradicts with the findings related to the item 4, where 65% of the students indicate that they never or seldom find it difficult to comprehend natural speech which is full of hesitations and pauses. A possible explanation for this can be found in students' comments regarding the way the interlocutors speak. They often consider unclear pronunciations or their slurring of the words as bad or false pronunciation rather than the characteristics of natural speech. As for the item 8 in Table 2, the students express that they experience listening comprehension problems resulting from unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of the speakers (69% sometime, often or always). Contrary to this finding in the quantitative data, students' responses to open-ended questions reveal that the rate of occurrence of this source of listening comprehension problem is quite low.

The qualitative data have enabled the researcher to gain more insights into the listening comprehension problems related to the speakers. Differently from the statements in the Likert-scale, many students mention the speakers' tone of voice as another important factor. They further explain that unclear, disturbing or high-pitched voice of the speakers interfere with their understanding.

An unexpected source of listening comprehension problems is related to the age of the speakers. Although not frequently mentioned, if a baby or child speaker is involved in the conversation, the students find it really difficult to understand the speech.

3.3. Listening Comprehension Problems Related to Listeners

Another source of listening comprehension problems are related to the listeners themselves. These can be also categorized as cognitive and affective factors regarding students and their attitudes. These problems arising from the listeners themselves seem to outnumber the other factors. As can be observed in Table 3, the most frequent source of listening comprehension problem is a cognitive factor. Namely, 86% (sometimes, often or always) of the students state that they cannot concentrate back on the speech when they miss some parts of it. Moreover, motivation looks as if it is a very important factor in listening comprehension skill because the students find it hard to understand the spoken texts well when they are not interested in the topic of the text (69% sometimes, often or always). In the same vein, the majority of the students' responses to open-ended questions reveal that when the topic of the spoken text does not appeal to their interests, they get distracted and cannot concentrate on the speech (*Participant 9 and Participant 11*).

Participant9: "Sometimes, if the topic is not appealing to me and if I do not understand most of the words, as soon as I start listening, I get distracted. Especially when I miss the beginning of the speech, I cannot listen to the rest."

Participant11: "I suffer from lack of attention as listener. I can picture the words I hear but when it is fast, I cannot make sense of the speech, just like not being able to pay attention to the lyrics by focusing on the music while listening to the song"

Moreover, the students find it difficult to comprehend the spoken texts about which they don't have enough experience or background knowledge (75% sometimes, often or always). Similarly, a great many of the students report in the qualitative data that when they do not have sufficient amount of background knowledge about the topic of the speech, they cannot understand the content (*Participant15*).

Participant15: " If I do not have previous knowledge about the topic of the spoken text or if I am listening to a topic I am not familiar with, I generally find it difficult to understand."

In addition, the students can easily get frustrated and demotivated when they do not understand the listening texts in the target language; this is also reflected in the findings of this study because 71 % (sometimes, often or always) of the students indicate that they feel nervous when they don't understand the spoken texts and 66% (sometimes, often or always) state that they get frustrated and worry when there are unknown words in the spoken texts.

Other listening comprehension problems experienced in a relatively lower degree are mentioned as inability to use context to guess those parts of the spoken texts that are not heard clearly (58% sometimes, often or always), losing the flow of the speech due to concentrating too much on understanding every word or phrase (57% sometimes, often or always), inability to connect new material to the previous knowledge to understand the missed parts and getting worried about not understanding the spoken texts before starting to listen (54,3% sometimes, often or always), and not knowing which listening strategies to employ (53,2% sometimes, often or always).

The least frequently encountered listening comprehension problems stated by the students are difficulty in identifying the mood and emotional state of the speakers in the spoken texts (65,2 never or seldom), giving up listening when they do not understand the speech (62,4 % never or seldom), difficulty in understanding the spoken texts well when there are no visual clues such as pictures, and videos (59% never or seldom), inability to summarize the speech in mind (58% never or seldom), not seeing the speakers' gestures, mimics and body language (54% never or seldom), and finally difficulty in concentrating on the spoken texts when they are not given any activities to do based on the listening (51% never or seldom).

Table 3

Distribution of the Listening Comprehension Problems Related to Students

Item No.	Statements	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
9	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts without seeing the speakers' gestures/mimics and body language.	18,5	35,5	27,3	15,8	2,7

10	I find it difficult to concentrate on the spoken texts when I am not given any activities to do to based on the listening.	15,9	35,7	30,2	15,9	2,2
11	I find it difficult to recognize some of the words even though I know them while listening to the spoken texts.	14,2	34,8	35,9	12,5	2,7
12	I find it difficult to concentrate on the rest when I miss some parts of the spoken texts.	1,6	12,6	35	35,5	15,3
13	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts well when I don't have enough experience or background knowledge about the topic.	0,5	24	33,9	31,1	10,4
14	I find it difficult to understand well the spoken texts in which I am not interested in.	5,5	25,1	33,3	27,9	8,2
15	I feel nervous and frustrated when I don't understand the spoken texts.	9,4	19,9	28,7	28,2	13,8
16	I feel nervous and worried when there are unknown words in the spoken texts.	11,5	22,4	30,1	25,1	10,9
17	I stop listening when I have problems in understanding the spoken texts.	29,8	32,6	19,9	12,2	5,5
18	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts well when there are no visual clues (e.g., pictures, videos)	17,9	40,8	29,9	8,7	2,7
19	When I start doing the listening activities, I worry that I cannot understand the spoken texts.	25	21,7	24,5	20,7	8,2
20	I find it difficult to use the context to guess those parts of the spoken texts that I cannot hear clearly	6,5	35,9	42,4	12	3,3
21	I find it difficult to understand the spoken texts because I don't know which listening strategy to use while listening	18,5	28,3	31,5	17,9	3,8
22	I find it difficult to connect new material to my previous knowledge to understand the parts that I miss while listening.	10,9	34,8	40,2	12,5	1,6
23	I find it difficult to make a mental summary of the spoken text	17,9	39,7	29,9	10,9	1,6
24	I lose the flow of the speech because I concentrate too much on understanding every word or phrase I hear.	15,8	27,7	23,9	25	7,6
25	I find it difficult to identify the mood and emotional state of the speakers in the spoken texts.	25	40,2	21,7	11,4	1,6

Unlike frequently experienced listening comprehension problems stated in the Likert-scale data, the students report that the trouble/lack of concentration and distraction (Participant 5) together with the lack of practice are the most important factors in their failure of comprehending what they listen to in English. Almost all of the students, who identify the lack of practice as the most influential factor limiting their listening comprehension, say they either did not have the opportunity to practice listening skills at high school since the teachers most of the time focused on grammar and vocabulary teaching or they do not try hard to develop their listening skills and find in-class activities adequate when they are actually very limited as reported by the students again.

Participant5: " Since I already have concentration problem, any tiny noise may cause me to miss the points. Besides, generally the sound system in the classrooms makes it difficult to understand".

The next mostly mentioned source of listening comprehension problems in the qualitative data is the students' inadequate vocabulary knowledge and lack of full competence in English or listening skill. The majority of the students attribute their lack of competence in listening skill to their limited size of vocabulary in English. Some of the students, however, describe their common listening comprehension problem as not being able to concentrate back on the speech when they lose flow of the speech due to the unknown words and missed parts. They further explain that when they do not understand a word, they try too hard to recall the meaning of it that they miss the rest of the speech so cannot understand the whole content. Besides, they report on the affective factors that make it difficult for them to concentrate on the speech and understand the message because from time to time they feel too anxious even before starting to listen that they will not be able to comprehend the spoken text (Participant90)

Participant90: "After a while, I sometimes lose my attention while listening, this happens especially when I do not understand the spoken text. Sometimes, before listening, I also prejudge that I will not be able to understand. This affects the degree of my understanding"

4. Discussions

This research is an attempt to reveal learners' perceptions of their listening comprehension problems. It reports various factors related to spoken text, speaker, and the listener which hinder pre-service EFL teachers' English listening comprehension skills. The findings of the study correspond to the results of some of the researches which investigate the problems of EFL learners in listening comprehension. Boyle (1984), Underwood (1989) and Goh (2000) pinpoint the common factors causing ineffective listening comprehension such as the lack of educational level and background related to the content of the speech, unknown vocabulary and idioms used, the lack of concentration, speed of delivery and lack of interest in the topic of the spoken texts. These are among the most frequently reported sources for the learners' listening comprehension problems in this study as well. Differently from the findings of this study, Underwood (1989) finds out that the lack of opportunity to ask for repetition or clarification for the words or parts interferes with learners' listening comprehension as reported by the learners themselves. However, such a statement has not been encountered in the data elicited from the students in the study. Other problems which are revealed to be some of the most influential factors in listening comprehension in Goh's study (2000) are that students quickly forget what they hear, and miss the beginning of the texts, then neglect the next parts. However, while in none of the responses in this study included information regarding the students' inability to keep what they hear in their short-term memory, some of them point out that when they miss some parts of the speech, they become anxious or cannot pay attention to the rest of the speech.

The learners' perceptions have highlighted the following sources of their listening comprehension problems in English.

Table 4

The list of frequently mentioned sources of the learners' listening comprehensions

Related to spoken text	Related to speakers	Related to listeners
1. unknown words	1. varied/unfamiliar accents	1. lack of concentration/attention and distraction
2. overloaded terminology used in the academic/scientific speeches	2. fast-paced speech	2. lack of practice in listening
3. complex grammatical structures	3. slurring the words/unclear pronunciation	3. lack of background knowledge about the topic of the speech/unfamiliar topic
4. interruptions and overlaps during the speeches		4. lack of interest in the topic of the speech 5. inadequate vocabulary knowledge

The findings related to the frequently mentioned listening problems caused by the features of spoken texts (such as unknown words, overloaded terminology, complex syntactic structures, and interruption and overlaps) comply with Vogel's (1998 as cited in Hasan, 2010) argument that hardships in listening comprehension are partly caused by structural elements of the texts. This might also result from the fact that some students believe that without knowing each and every word in the spoken texts, one cannot comprehend the intended message in the text, which is neither true nor applicable. If we even consider the natural interactions among native speakers of any language, we realize that the listener does not try to interpret every detail but comprehends the intended message, so they are quite selective while listening. Therefore, students who have this fallacious view point of the necessity of catching and understanding every single word in a spoken text should be taught certain strategies to overcome this problem. Firth's (1996) *let it pass principle* might be applicable to this situation. Learners can be trained to develop a habit of accepting that not comprehending every detail of a speech does not pose a problem as long as a certain threshold of understanding is achieved.

The revealed listening problems in fact show that students are in certain aspects poorly equipped with effective listening strategies and skills. Therefore, they need to be trained as to how to tackle with their problems and to improve their listening comprehension.

"Language learners have definite beliefs about ways of learning a language and they are also capable of becoming aware of their mental process" (Goh, 1997, p. 361). With the purpose of benefitting from this fact, over the past 20 years or so, substantial effort has been devoted to revealing the nature of listening strategies and how these strategies exploited by good listeners can be taught to ineffective listeners and train them (Renandya & Farrell, 2010). Consequently, many recommendations for listening strategies have been made. The most common and general one is to use presentation-practice and evaluation cycle for learner strategy training (Littlejohn, 2008). Goh also (1997, p. 365) provides a detailed list of strategies reported by the students in his study who demonstrated an extensive awareness of learning strategies.

As Martinez (2010, p. 21) rightly states *'listening is anything but a passive activity; it is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered ..'*. Seeing that learners have a wide range of listening comprehension problems, they need to be trained to become better listener in the target language because "it is important for them to adopt listening strategies that can assist and enhance their comprehension" (Goh, 2000, p. 71). For example, listening strategies such as predicting general content before listening by using contexts and prior knowledge, taking short notes of important content words/key words, visualizing scenes, objects, events etc. being described, listening selectively according to the purpose can help learners to overcome their listening comprehension problems.

As a last point, given that the lack of concentration-attention, the lack of interest in the topic of the spoken texts and the lack of background knowledge about the content of the speeches are reported among the most influential factors in students' listening comprehension problems, the use of 'partly-negotiated syllabus' (Breen and Littlejohn) can be suggested for the running of a listening course. Through negotiated syllabus, students have a say in certain aspects of the course such as deciding on the topic/themes of the listening passages together with the teacher in the classroom. Since negotiation reflects the importance placed on the learner needs and ideas within the course, the learners as active participants rather than solely passive recipients of the knowledge provided by the teacher, can also have an active role in negotiating the topics of the listening texts. When students are given the right to voice their opinions, wants, expectations out of the course, they start to be aware of the fact that their ideas are respected and appreciated by the teachers and integrated into the running of the course so that their motivation increases. Since motivation/concentration is one of the most significant elements affecting students' success in listening, and negotiation is likely to increase student motivation and involvement in the learning process (Breen and Littlejohn, 2000), the use of negotiated syllabus might be really of great value in this respect in order to decrease the anxiety level and unwillingness of learners to listen to spoken texts, the topic of which they are unfamiliar to and uninterested in.

5. Conclusion

Listening comprehension skill is a complex skill to be improved because it calls for both listening to and comprehending what the speakers try to express and responding to the interlocutors. While trying to develop their listening skills in the target language, students encounter a great many difficulties and problems that might result from spoken texts, speakers and listeners themselves. Revealing these listening problems through learners'

perceptions is of utmost importance because when learners are aware of the sources of their own comprehension problems in listening, it would be by far easier to find the appropriate strategies or solutions to overcome these problems. Besides, being aware of their own listening problems and being trained to avoid them through listening strategies, learners become more autonomous because "many students want to have greater control over their own language development" (Goh, 1997, p. 368). Finally, these problems can guide teachers to determine the sources of learners' listening comprehension problems and communication breakdowns in the target language so they can design remedial activities, dwell on the more problematic areas with a more focused and learner-centered approach and train students with appropriate listening strategies for them to tackle with their problems in listening comprehension.

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APPENDIX A: Data Collection Tool (Questionnaire)

Bu çalışma, İngilizcede yaşadığımız dinleme-anlama problemlerinizi (listening comprehension problems) araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

A. Aşağıda verilen sorularda size en uygun cevabı işaretleyiniz.

1. Cinsiyet: Kadın Erkek
2. Yaş:
3. Bölüme geçmeden önce İngilizce Hazırlık okudunuz mu? Evet Hayır

B. Aşağıda verilen sorularda, sizden İngilizcede yaşadığınız dinleme-anlama problemlerinizi 3 başlık altında sıralamanız istenmektedir.

1. İngilizcede dinleme metninden kaynaklanan (türünden ya da özelliklerinden) dinleme-anlama problemleriniz nelerdir? Sebeplerini açıklayınız.

2. İngilizce, konusmacıların konuşma şeklinden kaynaklanan dinleme-anlama problemleriniz nelerdir? Sebeplerini açıklayınız.

3. İngilizcede, kendinizden kaynaklanan dinleme-anlama problemleriniz nelerdir? Sebeplerini açıklayınız.

Madde No.	Aşağıda verilen, <u>dinleme-anlama problemlerini İngilizcede ne sıklıkta yaşarsınız?</u> Size en uygun seçeneği işaretleyiniz.	1 (ASLA)	2 (NADİREN)	3 (BAZEN)	4 (SIKLIKLA)	5 (HER ZAMAN)
1	Uzun konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum	1	2	3	4	5
2	Bilmediğim kelimeler içeren konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Karmaşık dilbilgisi yapıları içeren konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Tereddüt etmelerin (er, umm, uh, well gibi) ve duraksamaların yoğun olarak kullanıldığı doğal konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Net bir şekilde telaffuz edilmeyen kelimeleri anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Konuşmacılar çok hızlı konuştuğunda anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Konuşmacılar değişik/alışık olmadığım aksanda konuştuklarında anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Konuşmacılar alışık olmadığım vurgu ve tonlama ile konuştuklarında anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Konuşmacıların yüz ifadelerini ve beden dilini görmeden dinlediğim konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Dinlemeye başlamadan önce, dinlemeye bağlı bir aktivite verilmediğinde konuşmaya odaklanmakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Konuşmayı dinlerken, bildiğim halde bazı kelimeleri tanımakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Konuşmanın bir kısmını kaçırdığımda geri kalanına odaklanmakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Konuşmanın konusu ile ilgili yeterli tecrübe ve bilgim olmadığında konuşmayı anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Konusu ilgimi çekmeyen konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Konuşmaları anlamadığımda kaygılanıyor ve hayal kırıklığına uğruyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
16	Konuşma içinde bilmediğim kelimeler geçtiğinde, kaygılanıyor ve geriliyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Konuşmayı anlamakta sıkıntı yaşadığımda, dinlemeyi bırakıyorum	1	2	3	4	5
18	Resim veya video gibi görsel ipuçları olmadığında konuşmayı anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
19	Dinleme aktivitelerini yapmaya başlarken, konuşmaları anlamayacağım diye endişeleniyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
20	Konuşmanın net olarak duyamadığım kısımlarını tahmin etmek amacıyla konuşmadaki bağlamı kullanmakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
21	Dinlerken hangi dinleme stratejisini kullanmam gerektiğini bilmediğim için konuşmaları anlamakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
22	Dinlerken kaçırdığım kısımları anlayabilmek amacıyla, konuşmadaki yeni bilgilerle sahip olduğum eski bilgiler arasında bağlantı kurmakta güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
23	Konuşmayı zihnimde özetlemekte güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
24	Dinlerken duyduğum her sözcüğü anlamaya çok fazla odaklandığım için konuşmanın akışını kaçıyorum.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Konuşmacıların ruhsal ve duygusal durumlarını tespit etmekte güçlük çekiyorum.	1	2	3	4	5

Ankete katıldığımız için teşekkürler.