

1. Introduction

English instruction in schools used to focus mainly on teaching students to read English or translate English into Mandarin Chinese. For long years, the cultivation of listening skills was always being neglected. Listening exercises beyond repeating sentences played on reel-to-reel tape were never involved in the textbooks until the 1990s. Nowadays, not only standardized English listening tests but also the joint entrance exams consist of the test on listening comprehension. While the importance of listening skills has begun to be stressed, the dominant trend in listening instruction, however, seemed to deal with nothing to teach students how to listen (Brown, 2011). It was argued that playing audio and asking comprehension questions are merely testing and instead, teaching English listening should be more than that.

Historically, the instruction of top-down processing¹ skills has been relegated as the main strand in listening courses, whereby listening textbooks have focused on schemata activation activities. However, listening was not all about background knowledge. While people mishear, they often fail to comprehend the text (Field, 2008; Brown, 2011). In the English classroom of the researcher, the junior high students confessed through the pilot questionnaire that they have been frequently facing difficulties segmenting the speech sounds correctly into words or recognizing efficiently and automatically the words that they know. For example, the students may fail to know that the speaker has done something because they cannot perceive the contraction form “*I’ve*”. Such failure deals with nothing about background knowledge but the word that undergoes phonological process. In addition, those students discovered that anxiety has often been hindering listening comprehension. Therefore, both suggest that instruction of bottom-up skills and overcome of anxiety should not be ignored but emphasized in the real

¹ Top processing of listening means using prior knowledge and experiences to predict the language meaning that learners are going to listen to, while bottom-up processing means using the information about the actual sounds or words to assemble the language meaning.

English listening classroom.

“**Dictation**” is taken when the listener transcribes the words uttered by the speaker. It has been employed to test listening ability for hundreds of years. Thus, for many teachers, the word “dictation” is synonymous with “old-fashioned” and “teacher-centered.” However, nowadays, instead of being a test, it has been ranked as a great task for learners to work on knowledge of bottom-up processing skills (Brown, 2011) and to improve comprehension scores (Kiany and Shiraminy, 2002). Still some studies suggested the efficacy of dictation on promotion of attention (Swain, 2000) and self-monitoring of errors (Lynch, 2001). Thus, there seem to be new reasons to do dictation in English listening classroom because doing so seems to offer solutions to the problems that the junior high school students in Taiwan are encountering.

“Action study” is a methodology of research for educators to seek a transformative change of a situation through the simultaneous process of taking action and doing research. Observing the phenomenon that the students in the English listening classroom of the researcher met difficulties with listening, the researcher designed the present study as an action study. It began with a preliminary questionnaire to identify the problems that 30 junior high school students of the researcher might have with English listening. Clarifying the efficacy of dictation, the researcher thus planned and conducted a series of dictation practices on those subjects and examined their performances, which aimed to investigate the effects of dictation practice on solving those problems. The research questions to unravel were as follows. First, what are the problems that junior high school students in Taiwan frequently have with English listening? Secondly, which of those problems does dictation help solve? Thirdly, does dictation help improve listening comprehension of the students? Fourthly, does dictation advance learners more than listening comprehension? It is hoped that the findings can contribute to the teaching of English listening for junior high school students in Taiwan.

2. Literature Reviews

Problems Perceived in Listening

During the meaning-making process of listening, both bottom-up and top-down processings occur and compensate for each other. Bottom-up processing is a process of so-called ‘decoding.’ In other words, listeners are found to assemble meaning from individual sounds, words, grammatical patterns, discourse markers and other bits of language (Brown, 2001, p. 19). Top-down processing emphasizes the use of previous knowledge, such as schemata and scripts to organize possible interpretations of the input and even predict what would follow in the discourse (Brown, 2001; Jung, 2003).

Some studies, however, reported some problems perceived in listening. Boyle (1984) conducted a questionnaire-based study of Hong Kong students and teachers and reported that the students emphasized the contribution of vocabulary to listening comprehension more than the teachers. Other factors identified by the students but ignored by the teachers were memory and attention or concentration. As for the teachers, they stressed speaker clarity, the simultaneous acoustic environment (noise, interference) and motivation. Boyle’s survey was confirmed by both of Flowerdew and Miller’s studies (1992, 1996), which found the problems stemming from vocabulary knowledge and concentration. Moreover, they saw the problems resulting from speed of delivery. Another study from a retrospective interview also suggested the role of vocabulary knowledge in listening (Wu, 1998). Using questionnaires and interviews, Goh (2000) conducted a more comprehensive study of Chinese students learning English in Singapore to enumerate perceived problems in listening. Most of them were also related to vocabulary. However, more specifically, those problems were directed to recognition and comprehension of words. For example, students had difficulties breaking “the stream of language into proper chunks”, “failed to recognize words they knew”, “got stuck about thinking about a word and thereby lost the

rest of the input”, and lacked the ability to put the words they knew into a form they could use (p. 59). Furthermore, the subjects found it difficult to concentrate appropriately and form the main idea accurately. In addition to vocabulary and speed of spoken language, Hasan (2000) observed the problems with grammatical structure, text length and accents (p142, 146). Confirmation of those studies was found in a French-learning situation by Graham (2006) with a large number of questionnaires (N=595). It showed that the problems in listening comprehension resulted from “speed of delivery of texts, making out individual words in a stream of spoken French, and making sense of any words that have been identified or understood” (p. 178). Moreover, as there exist individual differences in language acquisition and use, listening problems are, to some extent, individual (Brown, 2011, p. 74). In addition to motivation, Elkhafaifi (2005), Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006), and Berkleyen (2009) suggested that anxiety affected listening comprehension.

The problems with listening perceived in those studies may be summarized in terms of factors, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1 *Perceived Problems in Listening*

Factors	Listening difficulties
The input	Vocabulary/word recognition Grammatical structure Text length Main idea Acoustic environment (noise, interference)
The speaker	Speed of delivery
The listener	Attention/ concentration Motivation/ interest Memory Anxiety/confidence

To sum up, the most reported problem with listening should be vocabulary or word recognition, which mainly occurs in bottom-up processing. Nation (2001) proposed that

listeners have to identify 95 percent of words in the listening text for appropriate comprehension and then for an opportunity of guessing the unknown words. That suggested the importance of vocabulary recognition in listening comprehension. The related studies, as shown in Table 2, may account for possible factors that caused failure of word recognition in listening.

Table 2 *Studies Related to Word Recognition in Listening*

Factors	Related Studies
Unfamiliar words (lack of lexical or grammatical knowledge, e.g. if <i>you're stuck</i> in/ if <i>your studies</i> are)	Kelly (1991), Bonk (2000), Mecarty (2000), Staehr (2009), Field (2004)
Unfamiliar pronunciation of familiar words (e.g. <i>vocation/ vacation</i>)	Broersma and Cutler (2008)
Inability to segment speech into proper chunks (e.g. <i>a sister/ assist her</i>)	Broersma and Cutler (2008)
Lack of knowledge of phonotactic rules (e.g. past-tense suffix, <i>worked</i>)	Tauroza (1993), Weber and Cutler (2006), Field (2008)
Unfamiliarity with the phonological processes (e.g. the reduced form, <i>wanna/ want to</i>)	Henrichsen (1984)

Studies on Improving Listening Comprehension

Some studies were interested in strategies of improving listening comprehension. In Jensen and Vinther (2003), two videotaped dialogues were segmented for immediate repetition of fragments to let two experimental groups of Spanish learners reproduce the content, one at a normal speed and one at a slowed speed. The results indicated that for both of those groups, exact repetition brought effects on the improvement of comprehension, acquisition of decoding strategies and linguistic features of the forms.

In addition to “repetition,” the experiment in Blau (1990) proved that the group who heard the text with pauses inserted every 23 words scored significantly higher on comprehension, compared with the one who heard it without pauses. Lesser (2004) further confirmed that listeners might improve their comprehension from texts with unfamiliar topics through “pausing”

between ideas in the audio.

As for the metacognitive strategies, many of the studies compared the more proficient listeners with the less ones and observed that successful listeners did use some meta-cognitive strategies. They were found to use planning, comprehension monitoring, elaborating, problem identification, and self-evaluation during or after listening (O'Malley, Chamot & Küpper, 1989; Bacon, 1992; Vandergrift, 1997 & 2003). Through the literature reviews, Goh (2008) suggested the relevance of meta-cognitive instruction to listening development. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) further noted that the application of meta-cognitive instruction in the classroom benefited the low-proficient listeners the most. Their study, in particular, discussed anxiety, motivation and self-efficacy because those factors beyond the input could affect the listening process.

Effects of Dictation Practice on Language Teaching

Dictation is a classic one-way listening task, used mainly in language testing. During the dictation, a passage is read aloud to listeners, and they try to write down what they have heard as accurately as possible. The target passage may be a word, a sentence or a paragraph, which can vary with the level of the listener. Listeners' skill at listening, command of the language and their ability to hold what they hear in their memory may affect their performance of dictation.

Dictation practice encourages learners to transfer sounds into words, which is useful for teaching them about bottom-up processes, such as familiarity with word pronunciation or segmenting speech into proper chunks (Brown, 2011). Still some empirical studies tested dictation as a method of instruction and demonstrated its efficacy on teaching. Kiany and Shiramiry (2002) compared two groups of Iranian students: one whose listening input was from the textbook and the other whose input was the textbook as well as eleven dictations over the length of the course. Specifically, the dictation was heard twice: one without pauses and the other with pauses at meaningful chunks. The mean gain score for the dictation group was significantly better than for the non-dictation group on the test of

listening comprehension. Reinders (2009) again compared dictation tasks with two other grammar-oriented ones. The dictation, however, was heard three times: the first one without pauses and the other two with pauses every 8 to 10 words. Correct use of the grammatical structure improved more for the dictation group than the other two groups, especially the one who only “heard” it three times without taking dictation. By comparing two groups of Japanese EFL high school students, Nakayama and Iwata (2011) also indicated that the group taking the shadowing and dictation outperformed the one taking grammatical drills in listening comprehension ability.

However, dictation still has some theoretical underpinnings. Davis and Rinvolucri (1988) claimed that the students were “active” during and after the dictation practice (p. 4-5). What they really meant was possibly explained by the following studies. First, dictation was found to promote ‘noticing,’ the first step in language building (Swain and Lapkin, 1995, and Swain, 2000). For learners to learn actively, they need to “notice” features in the input for those features to become intake and available for acquisition. Second, Lynch (2001) presented that during the dictation task, students were also found to automatically spot 60% of their own errors and then change the errors for the better. Kazazoğlu (2013) also concluded that through the dictation, not only the teacher but also the students in the Turkish high school could identify decoding problems of word recognition and segmentation in English and then focus on those aspects.

To conclude, while used mainly as a tool of listening assessment in the past, dictation has been regarded as a useless, boring and outdated device. However, the literature reviews above indicated that there existed some new reasons to re-apply dictation practices into the listening classroom. First, dictation practices could provide listeners chances to cultivate familiarity with word pronunciation and to segment speech into proper chunks, which might deal with their difficulties with word recognition. Second, with the design of repetition and meaningful pauses, dictation practices could motivate and enable listeners

to process the linguistic form carefully. Learners thus recognized words correctly and improved listening comprehension. Third, dictation encouraged learners to be active in listening probably because it could promote their “noticing” listening texts and its immediate feedback could trigger their identification of errors. Namely, they were using meta-cognitive strategies of problem-identification and self-regulation, which are theoretically relevant to listening development.

3. Methodology

Subjects, Instruments and Procedures

There were thirty subjects participating in this action study, who were the eighth graders at one Kaohsiung municipal junior high school. The subjects, consisting of 16 males and 14 females, had studied English on average for at least seven years before the study. Given one version copy of Basic-Level General English Proficiency Test, only 12 of them passed the listening part and were ranked as higher-level listeners, while 18 were ranked as lower-level ones.

Five instruments were employed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data through the following steps. At first, a **questionnaire of perceived listening problems** was set to elicit the problems that the subjects frequently have with English listening, which helps analyze the effects of dictation practice on the participants. Then, six copies of **listening texts for dictation** were designed through revising texts from the database of English listening exercises edited by the publisher of Kang-Hsuan(康軒), Nan-I (南一) and Han-lin (翰林). In each text were no more than eight sentences, which focused on training key words, new vocabulary, and those involving common phonological difficulties (e.g. contraction and linking). For example, in this sentence for dictation, “*That’s nice of you,*” ‘*That’s*’ is the contraction form of ‘*That is*’ and ‘*nice of*’ is heard as /naɪsəv/, where a linking between /s/ and /ə/ occurs. Next, the researcher took

action by carrying out the dictation practice for ten minutes once a week and for six times until the next monthly exam arrived. In each dictation practice, the subjects listened to the text three times: the first one without pauses and the other two with pauses at meaningful chunks. Each time after the dictation, the subjects took a **multiple-choice test**, which evaluated their comprehension of the listening text, compared their output with the original input, and wrote **the listener journal**, which aimed to elicit students' scaling of their own concentration and anxiety, their report of learning gains or general reflections in the dictation practices. At last, the participants filled in a **questionnaire of learning reflection towards the dictation**, a revised version of Lin's (Lin, 2013), which solicited responses about learning results, learning attitudes, and learning strategies in a 5-point Likert-style format.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire of perceived listening problems was conducted in a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 to 1, "very frequently," "somewhat frequently," "so so," "somewhat infrequently," and "very infrequently." The mean scores were calculated to observe the problems that the subjects frequently had with listening. Then in the dictation practices, the errors were analyzed in terms of the problems mainly concerning the listening text that they had reflected in the above questionnaire. The occurrences of errors were also counted to examine whether the subjects began to reduce their own errors after the dictation. The scores of post-practice multiple-choice tests were used to inspect the effects of dictation on listening comprehension. In the learning journals, mean scores of concentration and anxiety were examined and the written notes were analyzed to evaluate feasibility of dictation and give reasonable explanations concerning the effects of dictation on English listening. In the reflective questionnaire, a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 to 1, from "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral," "disagree," to "strongly disagree," was measured by frequency distribution to probe the reaction of the subjects to the dictation activity.

4. Results and Analyses

Problems that the Subjects Frequently Had with English Listening

According to the Table 1, these possible problems for junior high school students in Taiwan were elicited to design the related questionnaire: as for the text, word recognition (Item 1) and grammatical structure (Item 2); as for the speaker, speed of delivery (Item 3) ; as for the listener, concentration, anxiety and memory (Item 3, 4, 5). The mean scores of the listening problems are presented in Table 3:

Table 3 *Scaling of the frequency of the listening problems*

	M	SD
1. While listening, I have problems with understanding some words or phrases.	3.65	1.14
2. While listening, I have problems with understanding some grammatical patterns.	2.80	1.21
3. While listening, I find that the speed of speaking is too fast for me to catch up with.	3.90	1.08
4. While listening, I find that I get distracted.	3.10	1.18
5. While listening, I find that I get nervous.	3.25	1.09
6. While listening, I have problems with remembering the words, phrases or sentences.	3.00	1.22

Before the dictation practices, the problem that the subjects encountered most frequently was fast speed of the delivery. Word recognition, anxiety and concentration were also found to cause their failure at comprehension very often.

Occurrences and Types of Errors in Dictation Practices

The mean of occurrences of errors for each period of dictation practice indicated that errors occurred significantly less and less frequently, as shown in Table 4 and Table 5 ($p < 0.05$). That may mean that the subjects grasped more and more of the listening text. Those twelve subjects

of higher level (HL) made fewer errors than the other subjects of lower level (LL):

Table 4 *Mean Occurrences of the Errors in Dictation Practices*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
All	4.0	3.3	2.5	2.4	2.0	2.1
(HL)	3.4	2.8	2.3	1.8	1.5	1.6
(LL)	4.8	3.6	2.6	2.8	2.5	2.8

However, when comparing the mean occurrences of errors in P1 with those in P6, it was found that lower-level learners ($p < 0.05$) made significant improvement while higher-level ($p > 0.05$) did not. This may indicate that the subjects of lower level have understood much more of the listening text after the dictation practices.

Table 5 *Mean Occurrences and Paired-Sample T-Test of the Errors in Practice 1 and 6*

	P1	P6	P1-P6-Gain	<i>p</i>
All	4.0	2.1	-1.9	0.006
(HL)	3.4	1.6	-1.8	0.166
(LL)	4.8	2.8	-2.0	0.015

The errors that the subjects made in the dictation practices displayed their difficulties mainly in word recognition, which corresponded to their reflection on the problems with listening texts. The other minor problems concerned memory load and writing format, as shown in Table 6:

Table 6 *Percentage of Occurrences of Each Type of Errors*

Word Recognition	Memory Load	Writing Format
87.0%	1.8%	11.2%

During the dictation practice, the factors that caused failure in word recognition were shown in Table 7. From the distributions, the subjects encountered the most difficulties with

unfamiliar words, whereby they could not recognize or spell the word correctly. It would become tougher when there exists poor correspondence of sound-symbol in English. One of the subjects reflected this in her listening journal:

- (1) *I found it challenging to spell a word right. Though I've learned phonetics, I spelled "centimeter" as "centimiter."* (S03)

Another serious problem was that the subjects seemed to be unfamiliar with the phonological process that the contraction (*I'll*) or the linking of words (*at all*) would undergo. Thus, they often failed to recognize those words.

Table 7 Occurrences of the Errors Caused by Each Factor

Factors	Occurrences of Error
F1: Unfamiliar words	142
F2: Unfamiliar pronunciation of familiar words	68
F3: Inability to segment speech into proper chunks	53
F4: Lack of knowledge of phonotactic rules	47
F5: Unfamiliarity with the phonological processes	123

As illustrated in Table 8, through the six dictation practices, the subjects seemed to improve their listening comprehension of familiar words and those that underwent certain phonological process. The listeners might start to focus more on the pronunciation of familiar words, the linking words and the combined words, whereby they recognized the words more easily.

Table 8 Occurrences of the Errors Caused by Each Factor in Each Practice

	Occurrences of Errors					
	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
F1	39	32	13	11	24	23
F2	19	14	10	10	8	7
F3	10	8	7	10	6	12
F4	8	6	9	7	11	6

F5	20	18	27	25	21	12
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During the dictation practices, 24 of the subjects (81%) were observed to do self-correction while the text was repeated. Here are some examples from their answer sheets:

- (2) ~~it's~~ embarrassing that I can't play ~~well~~ at all. (S05)
- (3) I'm ~~going~~ calling to make sure you'll be at about 10:4030. (S27)
- (4) ~~I'm~~ I'm calling to make ^ that you'll be at about 10:30. (S09)
sure

After the dictation practices, 16 of the subjects (53%) actually began to “notice” their errors and learned the accurate forms, as indicated in their listening journals. The dictation practices seemed to somehow assist the subjects to deal with their problems with listening, as shown below.

- (5) *I learned the pronunciation of two linking words. /I learned how to pronounce two linked words.* (S1, S6, S27)
- (6) *I was better in the perception of sounds.* (S25)
- (7) *I knew that 'they are' could be contracted into 'they're.'* (S24)
- (8) *I could listen to the final sound of the word, such as s and ed.* (S24)

All of these indicated that the subjects themselves noticed the language structure and further dealt with their mistakes through the practices of dictation.

Listening Comprehension of Listening Text in Dictation Practices

Listening comprehension of the subjects seemed to improve. In the end of each dictation practice, there were 2 or 3 questions about the listening text in the multiple-choice test. The results of the comprehension questions indicated that the mean scores gradually increased, except in Practice 3 and Practice 6 (see Table 9). This may be explained by their confusion about complex relationship and unfamiliarity with the dialogues between a customs officer and a tourist.

Table 9 Mean Scores of Listening Comprehension Test (LCT) in Practices

P1		P2		P3		P4		P5		P6	
M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
67.5	23.9	92.5	17.2	89.6	20.3	96.6	12.7	91.1	19.2	89.6	20.3

However, more than 59 % of the subjects got full marks during the last five practices, while 35% did in the first practice. In fact, the subjects were found to make significant improvement in listening comprehension ($p < 0.05$), as shown in Table 10).

Table 10. Mean Occurrences and Paired-Sample T-Test of LCT in Practice 1 and 6

	P1	P6	P1-P6-Gain	<i>p</i>
M	67.5	89.6	22.1	0.002
SD	23.9	20.3	-3.6	

This probably suggested that many of the subjects performed better in listening comprehension through the dictations. As the subjects were trained to focus more on the listening text, they began to “notice” it. Also, the dictation practices provided the subjects more opportunities of listening carefully by means of more repetitions and meaningful pauses. These might account for their improvement in listening ability.

Results of Listening Journals and Reflective Questionnaire

The results of subjects’ reflection on the dictation practices in a five-point Likert scale are shown in Table 11. Most of the subjects held a positive attitude towards the dictation practices, for the mean scores in the nine items were above the median.

Table 11. Reflections of the Subjects on Dictation Practices

	M	SD
1. I think that dictation helps improve my pronunciation.	3.90	0.9
2. I think that dictation helps me learn new words or	3.95	0.9

phrases.		9
3. I think that dictation helps me improve my listening comprehension.	4.40	0.5
4. I think that dictation helps me write grammatically correct sentences.	3.80	0.9
5. During dictation, I try to make inferences from the context to write down correct answers.	3.98	0.9
6. During dictation, I make use of grammatical knowledge to write down correct answers.	3.65	1.0
7. After dictation, I start to pay more attention to listening texts and thus improve my listening comprehension.	3.75	1.0
8. After dictation, I feel more confident while listening to English and thus improve my listening comprehension.	3.50	1.1
9. After dictation, I myself have found and correct some of my errors and thus improve my listening comprehension.	3.80	1.0

As for Item 1 to 4, they felt highly affirmative with the effects of dictation practices on the development of listening comprehension, word acquisition, word pronunciation, grammatical structures, as further confirmed in their comments in the listening journals:

(9) *I made a lot of progress after dictation practices.* (S17)

(10) *I improved my listening ability.* (S14, S21, S22, S23)

(11) *I learned some grammar and improved my English pronunciation.* (S23)

(12) *I acquired some new words and phrases.* (S4, S8, S27)

Though the dictation practices are ranked high for bottom-up skills, the subjects still did the conscious thinking by using the top-down strategies of inference (Item 5: $M=3.98$, $SD=0.99$) and background knowledge (Item 6: $M=3.65$, $SD=1.07$). In addition, the subjects appreciated that dictation practices facilitated the cultivation of some metacognitive skills. Many of them learned to notice, evaluate and then revise their errors during the dictation practices (Item 9: $M=3.80$, $SD=1.01$). Aside from the use of strategies, the subjects started to concentrate more on the listening text (Item 7: $M=3.75$, $SD=1.01$), also as shown in the scaling of concentration (P6: $M=3.72$, $SD=0.97$, in Table 12) and the comments in the listening journals:

(13) *I learned to concentrate more. / Dictation requires much attention.* (S10, S22, S26, S30)

Moreover, the subjects felt more and more confident in dictation practices (Item 8: $M=3.50$, $SD=1.12$, in Table 11), probably due to the gradual subtle release of anxiety (P6: $M=2.95$, $SD=1.28$), as illustrated in Table 12. In fact, 3 of the higher-level subjects (25%) were motivated a lot to do the following dictations after discovering that they were able to deal with such challenging practices.

Table 12. *Mean Scores of Scaling of Concentration and Anxiety in LJ*

	Concentration		Anxiety	
	M	SD	M	SD
P1	2.70	1.19	3.50	1.12
P2	3.11	1.27	3.70	1.20
P3	3.52	1.21	3.35	1.18
P4	3.71	1.05	3.05	1.07
P5	3.70	1.02	3.05	1.01
P6	3.72	0.97	2.95	1.28

General Discussion

The action study was conducted in the present paper to investigate the effects of dictation practice on EFL junior high school students. The answers to the research questions may be described and discussed as follows. First, the problems of listening that the subjects encountered most frequently were found to be the fast speed of the delivery, word recognition, anxiety and concentration. Second, through the treatment of dictation practices, it was then observed that the subjects, especially those low-level ones, made fewer and fewer errors. Specifically, the dictation practices could assist the subjects to overcome their difficulties mainly with word recognition. That might be due to the repetition and meaningful pauses, which were characteristic of the dictation practices in the study. Such a design, theoretically, could encourage and allow them to focus more on the pronunciation of familiar words and those common phonological processes, whereby they sharpened their perception of words and recognized them more easily. By grasping more of the listening text, the listeners thus improved their listening comprehension. In addition,

the subjects solved some of their problems with listening -- anxiety and concentration, which Vandergrift and Goh (2012) proposed to put influences on listening process. As the design of repetition in dictation offered the subjects more exposure to listening tasks and the one of meaningful pauses more hints to segment the speech into proper chunks, their anxiety seemed to be released gradually and their attention enhanced. And such results have rarely been observed in the previous studies. All of those may answer the third question: through the practices of dictation, the subjects gradually improved their comprehension of the listening texts when they were able to grasp more of the listening text with more attention and less anxiety. Fourthly, the observation from the listening journals and the results of the reflective questionnaire displayed that the dictation practices advantaged the subjects more else because such a treatment encouraged the subjects to employ some strategies of cognition and metacognition. They were found to use the cognitive strategies of inference and background knowledge. They were also observed to metacognitively “monitor” and “self-regulate” their errors, and “evaluate” their own performance and improvement. Most of the subjects held a positive attitude towards the dictation practices and felt motivated to do more dictation. Some of the high-level subjects were even motivated to acquire challenging new words.

5. Conclusion and Suggestion

The present study concludes that dictation should not be comparatively undervalued as an old-fashioned listening test, but be employed as a teaching technique and learning tool. It is effective and feasible in improving the English listening ability of junior high school students because of these following new reasons. In addition to the improvement of core listening-comprehension skills, dictation practices, through designs of repetition and meaning pauses, assist listeners to overcome the difficulties in word recognition. During and after the dictation, listeners may release some of the anxiety and enhance their motivation toward “listening,” which

may affect the listening process beyond the input. Above all, dictation seems to make listening an active process, where the listeners concentrate, predict, monitor, evaluate, and solve some of the problems. All of those have been observed to benefit the less proficient listeners more.

As for the suggestions, English teachers would be recommended to apply dictation practice in English listening curriculum, which may involve interesting topics, key words to be reviewed, new words to be taught or these common difficulties perceived in the study—contraction forms and linking of certain two words. Do involve repetition and pauses at meaningful chunks and carry it out at least once a week. It may facilitate improvement of less proficient listeners and thus enhance their motivation. Further studies can be conducted to investigate the effects of dictation practice on English speaking ability as learners use the written text from the dictation to do oral communication activities.

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