A Qualitative Study on Listening Skills in Turkish EFL Classes

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Abstract: This study focuses on pedagogical implications and evaluation of listening skills in an English as a Foreign Language context. In this sense, this study aims to investigate i) whether listening skills are considered as important as the other receptive and productive skills, ii) EFL teachers' perspectives on motivation levels of learners towards listening in the target language, iii) whether teachers feel competent enough to teach listening skills, and iv) whether listening skills are evaluated in EFL classes. The participants of the study consisted of 45 teachers, and the data were gathered through a semi-structured interview form which was prepared by the researchers. The findings reveal that teaching listening skills is mostly ignored in Turkey, teachers believe that learners have low motivation while learning listening skills in English, and most of the teachers who participated in the study feel competent in teaching listening skills; however, in teaching and testing listening, they have some concerns. Lastly, the findings reveal that testing listening skills are mostly ignored in Türkiye.

İngilizcenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğretildiği Türkiye Bağlamında Dinleme Becerileri Üzerine bir Nitel Çalışma
Özet: Bu araştırma, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce bağlamında dinleme becerilerinin pedagojik çıkarımlarına ve değerlendirilmesine odaklanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda çalışmanın amacı, i) dinleme becerisinin diğer alıcı ve üretici beceriler kadar önemli görülüp görülmediğini, ii) İngilizce öğretmenlerinin öğrencilerin hedef dilde dinlemeye yönelik motivasyon düzeylerine ilişkin bakış açılarını, iii) öğretmenlerin dinleme becerisini öğretmek için kendilerini yeterli hissedip hissetmediklerini ve iv) İngilizce sınıflarında dinleme becerisinin değerlendirilip değerlendirilmediğini araştırmaktır. Çalışmanın katılımcıları 45 öğretmenden oluşmaktadır ve veriler araştırmacılar tarafından hazırlanan yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formu aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Bulgular, Türkiye'de dinleme becerilerinin öğretiminin çoğunlukla göz ardı edildiğini, öğretmenlerin öğrencilerin İngilizce dinleme becerilerini öğrenirken düşük motivasyona sahip olduklarına inandıklarını ve çalışmaya katılan öğretmenlerin çoğunun dinleme becerilerini öğretme konusunda kendilerini yeterli hissettiklerini; ancak dinlemeyi öğretme ve test etme konusunda bazı endişeleri olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışmanın son ve ilginç bulgusu ise Türkiye'de dinleme becerisinin çoğunlukla test edilmediğidir.

1. Introduction

Listening is one of the most important skills for language learning, and the importance of listening comprehension skills in the English language learning and teaching process has always been underlined by many researchers in the English as a foreign language (EFL) settings (Cheung, 2010; Solak & Altay, 2014; Ulum, 2015). According to the Natural Approach, the primary purpose of learners acquiring a new language is to use the language to understand what other speakers say so that language acquisition occurs when learners can comprehend the messages in the target language (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). As this description suggests, it is vital for learners to develop their listening abilities to communicate effectively to improve their English proficiency (Gowhary et al., 2015). This statement also emphasizes that listening is challenging without understanding meaningful input (Krashen, 1994). Therefore, teaching listening is essential in English classes; in this manner, teachers' main objective should be to enhance their students' comprehension. However, although listening skills, as in the first language, play an essential role in acquiring the second language and communicating with others in the target language, listening skills appear to be given less importance in English classes when compared to other language skills (Baumert et al., 2020; De Wilde et al., 2020; Farrokhi & Modarres, 2012; Rao, 2019; Wallace, 2022).

Teachers appear to be the most critical actors in teaching listening skills in this regard, and their perspectives are highly valued. Their perceptions of teaching listening skills are vital. In this vein, teachers' perspectives on teaching listening skills paved the way for the current research. Although there have been various studies on teachers' perceptions of teaching listening skills (Gilakjani, 2016; Krivosheyeva et al., 2020; Nushi & Orouji, 2020; Pratama et al., 2020; Rahmat, 2018; Songbatumis, 2017; Tran & Duong, 2020), this study is specifically focused on some crucial dimensions of listening skills in EFL classes and aims to explore teachers' opinions on including paying attention to listening skills in EFL classes, learners' motivation level, teacher competencies and assessing listening in EFL classes.

1.1. Research Questions

English is a mandatory subject in the Turkish education system and starts at the second grade; however, it is hypothesized by the researchers that there are still some issues with teaching listening comprehension. As one of the most important stakeholders, teachers' opinions are crucial. Thus, it is essential to investigate teachers' reflections on their teaching practices, challenges, and evaluation procedures with regard to listening skills. To this end, due to the gap in the literature and the need for extensive research on standardized English proficiency tests, this study addresses this problem in the Turkish context and aims to explore pedagogical consequences and the evaluation of listening skills by answering the following research questions:

1. Do Turkish EFL teachers think listening skills are given enough attention in EFL classes? If not, why?
2. What are EFL teachers' opinions on the motivation level of their learners in terms of listening skills?
3. To what extent do EFL teachers consider themselves competent in teaching listening skills?
4. To what extent do EFL teachers include listening skills in their exams?

1.2. Literature Review

1.2.1. Definition of the Listening Process

A number of studies shed light on the definition of listening and EFL teachers' challenges when teaching listening skills. Tyagi (2013) defines listening as "the receiver's active participation in constructing meaning from the sender's messages" (p. 1). Similarly, Sarıcoban (1999) defines listening as "the capacity to recognize and comprehend what others are saying" (p. 1). Rost (2011) emphasizes the distinction between hearing and listening, with the latter requiring a higher level of intent, such as recognizing words, expressions, and key points in spoken or nonverbal messages. L2 listening is frequently regarded as the most challenging of the four language skills because it is a crucial skill for developing when learning a foreign language. (Graham, 2003). In a similar vein, Segalowitz (2003) identifies listening as an essential skill for communication, as it accounts for nearly half of our daily interactions. According to Underwood (1989), there are three significant phases in teaching listening: pre-, during-, and post-listening. The pre-listening phase focuses on activating students' schemata, while the during-listening phase emphasizes comprehension of the spoken language material. The post-listening stage provides an excellent opportunity for various post-listening activities designed to improve the students' speaking, reading, and writing skills.

1.2.2. Importance of Listening in Language Learning

Listening is a crucial aspect of language acquisition because it gives students access to authentic language input, which can help them improve their proficiency. According to Goh (2002), listening is a fundamental and important skill for language learning as it enables students to comprehend spoken language and have good conversations with others. By listening to authentic language input, students can acquire the necessary vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation abilities for efficient communication. In addition to enhancing language proficiency, listening can aid in developing cognitive and social skills in learners. According to Hinkel (2003), "listening requires learners to pay attention, to focus, to remember, to process information, and to make inferences, which can all contribute to the development of cognitive and social skills" (p. 16). By actively listening, students can also develop their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial for academic and professional success. Listening is also a vital part of communicative language teaching, which emphasizes using authentic language input and providing opportunities for learners to interact in meaningful ways. According to Ur (2012), "listening is a critical component of communicative language teaching, as it provides learners with access to authentic language input and helps them develop their ability to understand and use language in real-world contexts" (p. 173).

1.2.3. Importance of Listening in Foreign Language Learning

EFL listening ability is regarded as a problematic language skill, particularly in a foreign language context where real-world practice opportunities are limited (Nowrouzi et al., 2015); on the other hand, listening is an essential component of language instruction playing a vital role in language acquisition and development. According to Rost (2011), developing effective communication skills in a second language is contingent on comprehending spoken language. In addition, Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) assert that listening skills are essential for language learners to acquire new vocabulary, improve their pronunciation, and increase their overall language proficiency. The research of Van Zeeland and Schmitt (2013) and Vidal

(2003, 2011) demonstrates that listening has the potential to contribute to the development of L2 vocabulary. Additionally, research indicates that extensive listening practice can significantly improve language skills. Field (2008) found that explicit instruction in listening can assist students in differentiating between sounds in the target language. Moreover, according to Turan Ozturk and Tekin (2020), extensive listening practice can improve learners' fluency and pronunciation skills, especially when combined with speaking practice. Additionally, listening comprehension can foster intercultural competence in language learners. Yashima (2009) notes that listening instruction that emphasizes different cultural perspectives can enhance students' intercultural competence. Similarly, Vandergrift and Baker (2015) discovered that listening can help students comprehend cultural differences and cultivate empathy.

1.2.4. Listening Activities and Tasks in Foreign Language Classrooms

In language instruction, listening activities can be used to develop a variety of language skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. According to Harmer (2007), "listening activities can be used to teach a variety of language skills, such as listening for specific information, listening for the gist, listening for inference, and listening for meaning in context." (p. 119). Listening activities can also be used to develop learners' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, as they require learners to process information and draw inferences from what they hear. In addition to listening activities in EFL classrooms, authentic materials and activities are also of paramount importance (Keihaniyan, 2013; Maneekul, 2002). Maneekul (2002) conducted a study on the use of authentic material and tasks to enhance undergraduate English majors' listening skills. The findings revealed that when students used authentic materials and tasks after viewing video programs by native speakers, their listening skills increased. In addition, Secules, Herron, and Tomasello (1992, cited in Keihaniyan, 2013) claimed that video-based instruction is preferable to audio-only instruction for teaching language learning because it offers multiple input modalities that can motivate learners and draw their attention to the aural input. Moreover, Buck (2001) discovered that listening to authentic materials, such as news broadcasts or interviews, can improve learners' listening comprehension and expose them to natural language use. Listening for specific information is another essential listening task. Hinkel (2003) argues that listening for specific information, such as names or dates, can assist learners in concentrating on the main points of a listening passage and improving their listening accuracy. In addition, according to Field (2008), listening for specific information can increase the motivation and engagement of learners in listening tasks. In addition, due to the rapid development of technology in EFL classrooms, research indicates that interactive listening tasks such as pair work or group discussions can help students improve their listening abilities. Ur (2012) discovered that pair work activities can help students concentrate on the listening task and give them opportunities to practice their listening skills in a supportive environment. Similarly, according to Sabet and Mahsefat (2012), group discussions can help learners develop their listening skills by exposing them to various perspectives and points of view.

All these studies aimed to reveal EFL teachers' difficulties when teaching listening skills. Tapia (2017) states that when teaching and researching should be combined, this helps minimize the theory and practice gap between countries and the latest academic issues, such as testing and listening. Therefore, teachers are seen as ingenious supporters of problem-based learning (Assen et al., 2016). However, for a comprehensive understanding of the situation, researchers believed that teaching listening in EFL classes should incorporate

additional dimensions. Although there are a number of research studies on teaching listening, there is still a need for studies investigating the perspectives of Turkish EFL teachers on the challenges of teaching listening due to the limited number of studies in the relevant literature.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design as this research design enables researchers to identify and comprehend a phenomenon, a process, a perspective, or a global aspect of a given situation (Merriam, 2015). Additionally, such studies also aim to gain knowledge of a specific topic, inform those who do not, and explain how people interact in real and social life (Patton, 2002), investigating situational and/or specific factors and focusing on how they affect or are affected by the situation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In this vein, since this study aimed to examine a phenomenon in its real-life context with a limited number of participants for deeper analysis, this study employed a qualitative approach via semi-structured interviews with in-service EFL teachers regarding their teaching and testing practices regarding listening skills.

2.2. Data Collection Procedure

Considering the comprehensiveness of the participants' views, perceptions, and opinions on teaching listening skills, data for the study were gathered through an online semi-structured written interview form, including six open-ended question items on teaching listening comprehension skills in EFL classrooms. Such online data collection, as Braun et al. (2021) underline, provides openness and flexibility to answer various research questions of interest to researchers. The data collection tool included standardized open-ended items comprising a series of pre-written and sequenced questions that are asked in the same way and order to all participants (Patton, 2002), and they do not require a one- or two-word response from the user. Instead, they have several alternative responses and frequently allow for more probing by the moderator, which is ideal for the study's design (Dube, 2020). The following steps were handled to prepare the interview tool in the following way. As the first step, the researchers developed the questions after reviewing the relevant literature in light of the study's purpose and questions. The semi-structured interview form was then sent to an expert who has experience and expertise in testing, evaluation, and assessment in an ELT department at a state university in Turkey, along with the research purpose and sub-objectives. After the expert provided relevant feedback and expert opinion, a pilot interview with three participants was conducted using the form developed in response to the feedback received. The teachers were asked to respond to a series of questions about their experience and expertise in teaching listening skills before developing the protocol. Following the interviews, new items were added to the data collection tool, and some items were excluded as they were ambiguous and not clear enough for the participants, and the form was then given the final shape for collecting data. In the final step, three teachers were interviewed to determine whether there was any ambiguity or unclear item to edit, and then, the final version of the instrument was developed. In order to collect more robust data, the most practical and secure way to collect data from participants nationwide was to administer the interview online. The interview form was delivered to the participants electronically using "Google Forms," and their responses were received in written form. The participants provided written responses and the consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the study.

2.3. Participants

The convenience sampling method was employed in the current study to choose the participants. Convenience sampling is a widespread technique in educational research to choose participants who are easily accessible to the researcher and available when needed. Convenience sampling is frequently used in exploratory, pilot, and small sample-size studies in educational research. Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling technique, is frequently used in educational research, particularly in studies with limited time and resources, according to Creswell (2014). Similarly, convenience sampling is described by Cohen et al. (2018) as a technique for choosing participants who are easily accessible to the researcher and available, such as students in a particular class or school. Convenience sampling is useful in educational research because it makes it possible to efficiently gather data from a particular population or group of participants. (Cohen et al., 2018). Forty-five in-service English teachers working in various school types in Turkey took part in the study. They had different experience levels, school types, and educational backgrounds. Table 1 provides demographic information about the research participants.

Table 1.

Demographic information about the participants

Variables	Gender	N	%	Total
Gender	F	32	71.1	45
	M	13	28.9	
School Type	Primary	7	15.5	45
	Secondary	33	73.3	
	High School	5	11.1	
Experience	1-10 years	18	40	45
	11-20 years	17	37.7	
	20 years and +	10	22.2	
Educational Background	Bachelor	41	91.1	45
	Master's degree	4	8.8	

2.4. Data Analysis Process

It is critical to examine the credibility of each stage of the analytical process, including preparation, organization, and reporting of results (Elo et al., 2014). In the current study, a qualitative content analysis approach was used. "Any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively detecting specific qualities of messages" is defined as "content analysis" (Krippendorff, 2018). Thus, the responses were analyzed in order to ascertain common thematic elements throughout the study, and similar remarks were categorized and coded by the researchers. Coding is the process of analyzing qualitative text data by breaking it down to see what it provides before reconstructing it in a meaningful manner (Creswell, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of a research paper increases its value, and establishing reliability entails credibility, which is the belief in the 'truth' of the finding, and transferability, which demonstrates that the findings are applicable in other situations, reliability, which demonstrates that the results are consistent and repeatable., and confirmability - a degree of neutrality or the extent to which a study's results are molded by respondents rather than researcher bias, motivation, or interest. While analyzing the data, the most common responses were classified, and the researchers identified essential themes. This process was conducted individually, and the common codes were compared. Examples of each theme, subtheme, and code were reviewed and moved until the coders reached an agreement on what constituted adequate proof of a true representation of

a theme. This entailed repeatedly reading and rereading the subset of themes until topic saturation was reached. Stability, repeatability, and accuracy were also considered to improve reliability (Palmquist, 2012). Since one of the goals was to identify the themes, the coders first separated the data into distinct categories as well as themes, checked their categories frequently for intra-rater reliability, and then compared the findings in person to check for inter-rater reliability. The bottom-up methodology of qualitative analysis required the coders to move through a number of phases before providing a broad framework. To get at the themes and categories, they underwent initial, focused, and thematic coding stages (Kolb, 2012). As the last step, the frequencies of the concepts were reached and calculated. Tables illustrate the most common responses. There were two coders; one was the researcher, whereas the other was an academician at an ELT Department at a state university in Turkey. According to the inter-rater reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994), their agreement level was found to be .82 in the initial meeting when 25% of the qualitative data were analyzed. The coders discussed the disagreed themes and went on to analyze the rest of the data. After that, when the coders separately analyzed and categorized the data, the inter-rater reliability was found to be .92 in the second meeting. Finally, the coders discussed the disagreed items until they reached a consensus.

3. Findings

3.1. Results for the Opinions of EFL Teachers on Whether Listening Skills are Paid Enough Attention in EFL Classes (Research Question 1)

The first aim of this research was to investigate the opinions of Turkish EFL teachers related to the place of listening skills in the Turkish EFL context and to unearth whether teachers pay attention to listening skills. Six open-ended interview questions were prepared and sent to the participants to determine their perspectives. Forty-five English teachers who worked in different schools (e.g., primary, secondary, and high schools) answered the questions. Eight respondents (17.7%) believe that listening skills are taught equally as other skills; however, most teachers (82.3%) think not enough attention is paid to listening skills in EFL classes, and they stated some opinions about why they could not pay attention to the listening skills in their classes. The following table provides the emerging themes of the relevant participant responses.

Table 2.

Opinions of the participants on the reasons why listening skills are ignored

Question	Theme	Expressions from opinions	F	%
Do you think that listening skills are paid attention to in EFL classes?	Yes		8	17.7
	No		37	82.3
If not, why?	Classroom situations	-crowded classes -lack of technological equipment		
	Less importance attached	-backwash effect of National exams		
	Time	-Limited time		
	Sources	-Limited sources		

The reasons why listening skills are ignored in EFL classes can be listed as follows; classrooms are crowded, listening skills are ignored in national exams and not tested, time is not enough to teach listening skills, and there are limited sources.

One of the most stated themes in this research question was classroom situations. Under this theme, two main opinions emerged. The first one was crowded classrooms. The teachers faced some problems and could not teach listening skills effectively. In this vein, P7 reports:

> P7: *It's impossible to teach listening in a secondary school classroom with 32 students.*

The second problem related to classroom situations was the lack of technical equipment. Although the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) has run the FATİH (Increasing Opportunities and Improving Technology Movement) project to supply smart boards to each class all around Turkey, some of the participants stated that they did not even have smartboards in their classes; they still had to use traditional blackboards, which is regarded as a factor affecting teaching listening in a negative way. The second theme was related to the importance attached to listening compared to other skills. Even though all participants believe that listening skills are certainly important, they seem less important in practice than the other skills. The most striking reason was the negative backwash effect of national exams. National exams to enter high school or university do not include listening skills in English (Akpinar& Cakildere, 2013; Bekleyen, 2009; Hatipoğlu, 2016; Yıldırım, 2010), and teachers must prepare their students for these exams. Thus, teachers have to focus on developing reading comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary knowledge rather than listening, speaking, and writing, as these skills are not tested in national exams. This problem is reflected in the following statement:

> P13: *I teach 8th graders, they have a very important exam at the end of the academic year, and this exam does not test our students' listening skills.*

Lack of enough time to cover the curriculum was another emerging theme. The teachers think that English class hours are not enough to teach listening while trying to cover the curriculum. To illustrate, P32 states:

> P32: *We need extra class hours to teach listening in an effective way. Class hours are not enough to teach it.*

Finally, the last theme was about the listening materials supplied to the teachers. The textbook has several listening texts in each unit, but some respondents state that those audios are tedious or too difficult for their students. On the other hand, when they would like to use another listening material, similarly, they face the same problem, the level of listening ability of their students is not enough to comprehend or do the activities. Therefore, teachers prefer to skip these listening parts. For instance, the following quote exemplifies the preference for skipping some listening activities:

> P21: *The materials include listening activities/tasks which are mostly above the proficiency levels of my learners, which is discouraging for them, so I sometimes skip listening parts in the textbook.*

3.2. Results for the Opinions of EFL Teachers towards Learners' Motivation Level (Research Question 2)

The second question of the interview was about learners' motivation in terms of listening skills in English classes. Twenty-six participants (57.7%) stated that their students were not

motivated during listening activities in the classroom. They stated that learners had a low level of motivation while learning listening skills in the target language because they did not have self-confidence in listening activities. Ten participants (22.2%) stated that the motivation of the students depended on the material type or topic in that if they were listening to an interesting story or song, they were highly motivated, but if it was a lecture or there were some texts related to science, for example, they lost their interest and motivation easily. However, nine teachers (20%) stated that their learners liked listening to all kinds of English-related materials. Table 3 displays the emerging themes of the second research question.

Table 3.

Motivation level of the learners in listening

Question	Theme	Expressions from opinions	F	%
How do you evaluate the motivation of your learners in listening in English?	High	Highly motivated	9	20
	Low	No self-confidence	26	57.7
	Depends	Topic or type (music, story, etc.)	10	22.2

The following statements can be given as examples of the opinions of the participants on this theme. Specifically, P4 focuses on his/her students' lack of confidence and risk-taking in listening activities, as in the following.

> P4: *Learners do not have courage in listening activities, and they do not take risks due to their lack of self-confidence, and this makes them unmotivated and, accordingly, they have low motivation levels.*

In contrast to the above statement, P34 reports that his/her students can become more motivated if the activities attract their attention and they participate in kinesthetic activities in a multisensory learning environment.

> P34: *If they enjoy the activities and can participate (physically or by accompanying the songs, even with rhymes), they enjoy it, which may motivate them.*

3.3. Results for the Opinions of EFL Teachers for Teaching Listening Comprehension Skills (Research Question 3)

Self-evaluation of teacher competencies in teaching listening skills was the next question in the interview, and 32 (71%) EFL teachers stated that they were competent in teaching listening skills, while 13 (29%) of them did not consider themselves competent. In addition, six (13.3%) of them stated they were not competent and needed some in-service training, including seminars, webinars, or workshops. Table 4 illustrates the emerging themes for the third research question.

Table 4.

Opinions of the participants about teaching listening skills

Question	Theme	Expressions from opinions	F	%
	Yes		32	71
Do you consider yourself competent enough in teaching listening skills?	No	-Not so sufficient		
		-Need some professional development: seminars, webinars, or workshops	13	29

Contrasting perspectives of teachers are well documented in the following quotes. To start with, some teachers, such as P41, believe in their teaching competences and do not seem to hold any concerns about the challenges of teaching listening.

> P41: *I believe I have enough experience and expertise in teaching listening skills, I do not think I have any concerns or lack of teaching it.*

In contrast to the above statement, some teachers, such as P17, appear to need in-service teacher training due to the differences between today's era and the time of their graduation, which may be linked to the need for continuous professional development in different areas, such as technological literacy skills. Thus, they feel the need to participate in in-service teacher training to keep up with the latest trends in their profession.

> P17: *I cannot say I am fully equipped with the latest developments in teaching as I graduated from my department 20 years ago, and we may need in-service training.*

Similar to P17, P20 also touches upon the importance of in-service teacher education opportunities due to changing nature of technology, and this change seems to require receiving professional help to keep updated about the latest developments. However, P20 draws attention to the practical sides of this training rather than theoretical underpinnings, as teachers are the practitioners of ideas or approaches in a physical classroom setting.

> P20: *Technology has changed a lot, we need in-service training, but it should be on practical issues on teaching listening, not a theoretical one.*

3.4. Results for the Opinions of EFL Teachers Towards Testing Listening Skills in Exams (Research Question 4)

The last research question was related to testing listening and classroom applications. The participants were asked whether they included listening skills in their exams. Thirty-five of the respondents (77.7%) stated that they did not include any listening part in their exams, while 10 participants (22.3%) stated that they included it with varying percentages. As in-depth data, they were asked what percentage they included listening tests in their exams, and it was found that the percentage of listening part in exams varied from 10% to 25 %. The responses of the participants are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5.

Involving listening skills in exams

Question	Theme	Expressions from opinions	F	%
Do you include listening skills in your exams? If so, what percentage?	Yes	10% 20% 25%	10	22.3
	No		35	77.7

Different reasons were indicated for testing or not testing listening skills. For example, P2 stresses the time-consuming aspect of testing as in the following:

> P2: *I cannot test students' listening skills because it is time-consuming while administrating exams.*

Other than time and feasibility issues, some teachers, such as P44, do not favor testing listening skills as they believe their students cannot get high scores on these tests. Since it is

thought that testing listening skills may not help students to feel a sense of achievement, the other language skills and aspects are preferred more for testing purposes.

> P44: *I do not believe learners can achieve in listening tests, so I prefer to test them just in reading, language use, and vocabulary, but not in listening and speaking.*

As for the causes, 27 (60%) participants stated they did not have the opportunity to do listening activities in their classes, whereas 18 (40%) stated that they did listening activities in each class. When it comes to why listening is not included in their exams, it is seen that the time limit is a major obstacle in teaching and testing listening skills. This obstacle is reflected by P10 in the following way:

> P10: *I cannot include listening in exams as I do not have time to teach listening during classes, and I do not test them in listening skills.*

4. Discussion

The present study investigated the opinions of EFL teachers toward teaching listening skills in their classrooms. In accordance with previous studies (Matthews & Cheng, 2015; Ulum, 2015; Hashim et al., 2018), the findings have revealed that listening skills are generally ignored in EFL classes for various reasons. It is worth discussing these interesting facts revealed by the results. The participants agree that listening skills are quite significant in English; however, when it comes to practice, it appears that they generally do not have enough listening activities in their classes. In this vein, these EFL teachers put forward some excuses for not applying listening in their classes, such as classroom situations, lack of time and sources, and paying more attention to other skills. Classroom situations were the first problem stated by the respondents. According to their statements, they have a very crowded population, and this is an obstacle while teaching listening. The second and most common one is that they lack equipment and technological devices such as smart boards. In addition, teachers appear to feel the need to pay more attention to other skills, such as reading, to prepare students for the national exam. Thus, they may have no time for listening activities. Some respondents stated that they did not have enough sources, although all textbooks used in MoNE had some listening parts in each unit, and several websites provided lots of listening materials and even books. When the participants were asked whether they spent enough time listening in their classes, some different opinions emerged, and the majority of them reported that they spent little or no time on the listening activities due to the time limitation. Instead, they spend time listening as much as the syllabus allows, which is a similar finding to Aygun and İlhan (2020) and Yıldırım (2013)'s studies. Moreover, many participants think that the time allocated for listening is not enough, and they have to cover the curriculum. Thus, they only spend time on what the curriculum suggests. In addition, some EFL teachers think English class hours are not enough to teach listening while trying to follow the curriculum and finish the coursebook. The study reveals that the teachers felt the need to cover the textbooks assigned by policymakers rather than preparing appropriate pre, while and post-listening activities for their students. Hence, teachers may not actualize their listening perceptions in their classes. This finding corroborates the ideas of previous research focusing on the mismatch between the language and what is taking place in the language classroom (Arisman, 2019).

Moreover, in the testing process, listening skills are not included in the exams prepared by the teachers even though they are aware of the importance of teaching and testing listening skills. Only a limited number of respondents stated that they included listening with different

percentages. In this sense, the results of the present study are in line with the previous studies of Solak and Altay (2014) and Nazari (2020), in which EFL teachers stated that there was a gap between their practice and beliefs in testing listening. Also, echoing Farrokhi and Modarres (2012), listening skills are seen as crucial in testing English but ironically ignored in teaching practices. The major reason for ignoring listening appears to be the influence of exams in that national exams to enter high school or university do not include listening skills in English, and teachers are expected to prepare their students for the scope of these exams. The next issue concerns the students' motivation level, as perceived by the participating in-service teachers. It has been revealed that the majority of the students show almost no motivation or low motivation in English classes, which negatively affects their listening performance. Thus, more listening practice was demanded, and teachers should spend more time listening in each lesson by using listening as a warm-up or follow-up activity for practicing other skills. In this way, student self-confidence in listening is likely to increase gradually. In addition, the cause of low motivation in listening was attributed to the type of listening material (Prastiyowati, 2019). It was indicated that when students were listening to an interesting story or song, they were highly motivated. However, if there was a lecture or some texts related to science, for example, they seemed to lose their interest and motivation. To boost the motivation level of students, it can be suggested that digital stories can be used in the classroom. All in all, it can be concluded that although teachers' reported underlying reasons for lack of motivation could differ from each other, they all believe that the listening motivation problem of the students can be dealt with through more listening practice, encouragement, and interesting listening materials.

Another critical point is that most participants evaluate themselves as competent in teaching listening skills effectively; however, the findings reveal that there is a mismatch between their beliefs and practices when it comes to practice. Undoubtedly, effective teaching listening practices are required to maximize the learning of listening. According to Hashim et al. (2018), teaching students effective learning strategies will benefit them to become better language learners. In this vein, Linang (2005) claims that teacher beliefs, lack of teaching strategies, and lack of emphasis on teaching listening skills in teacher education programs were the major factors. In line with these arguments and the findings of this study, pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should provide practical opportunities to bolster listening activities in foreign language classes. Another issue is about the place of listening skills in exams in that listening skill is mostly ignored in exams and not mostly tested, or only a limited number of teachers include a listening section in their exams. For professional development, the needs of EFL teachers should be investigated, and some pre- and in-service training in terms of teaching and testing listening skills ought to be provided by MoNE.

5. Conclusion

As an implication for action, when the findings are deeply analyzed, teachers believe that listening is an important skill for their learners; however, they also state that enough importance is not attached to listening skills. This may have two reasons; the first reason may be that they have theoretical competency and skills in teaching listening in the target language, but they have some challenges in putting this competency into practice. Rather than learning by doing perspective, pre-service teacher education programs can support prospective English teachers to create a more effective English class, which could solve the problem of "learners' lack of motivation," stated the participants. The second issue may be related to testing, evaluation, and assessment issues. Teachers need to test what they teach to create a

positive washback effect and increase student motivation. Similarly, teachers have stated their concerns about listening tests. As teaching and testing are hand-in-hand, not only how to teach listening skills but also how to test them is a must for EFL teachers. Thus, teacher education programs in higher education should lead the role before prospective teachers take the scene and provide them with some in-class applications of teaching and testing listening skills.

This present study may yield another important implication for the testing system in Turkey. The participants have stated that they do not test listening skills and see it as a waste of time because listening is not tested and is not a part of the national tests in Turkey, which could create a negative washback effect. As a solution, listening should be tested in a top-down process, and high school and university entrance examinations in Turkey should include listening skills as well to promote a positive washback effect and increase stakeholder motivation in educational settings, as it is a very effective approach to create needs for the learners to focus on four language skills and to get them ready for their academic life (Jianna, 2020; Paker, 2013; Riazi, 2011).

As for limitations and suggestions, this study has some limitations. First, there were a small number of participants, and the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. Thus, future studies can be conducted with a larger population. Also, this study is qualitative, and the researchers developed an interview form as the data collection tool; however, future researchers can rely on questionnaires, observations, and material evaluation to triangulate the data. Given that the participants stated that listening skills were not tested broadly, as a follow-up study, teachers' assessment literacy in listening can be investigated to investigate the roots of this issue. Another suggestion for further research may be on the causes of low motivation of EFL learners because the participants claimed that their learners had low motivation levels. A further study may yield important findings on learners' motivation in listening classes.

Note on Ethical Issues

The authors confirm that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: 18/04/2023).

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