Analysis of Listening Tasks in Korean Middle School English 1 Activity Books

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate whether the listening tasks in the Korean middle school English 1 activity books are appropriate for enhancing students' communicative competence. For the study, twenty activity books were selected, and all the listening tasks in the listening sections and the assessment parts were examined. For data analysis, three criteria were used: achievement standards for listening skills from the revised 7th national curriculum, six types of classroom listening performance by Brown (2007), and the classification of communicative activities by Littlewood (1981). The findings were as follows. First, achievement standards 2, 3, 4 and 7 were mainly realized in the listening tasks rather than all the standards being applied evenly. Second, extensive listening, selective listening and reactive listening performances were mostly implemented in listening tasks. Third, the listening tasks were mainly focused on functional communicative activities. All in all, the results of the study suggest that a greater number of various and balanced listening activities related to the standards should be developed in order to enhance students' communicative ability.

Keywords
Communicative Competence/ Communicative Syllabus/ Listening Achievement Standards/ Listening Performances/ Communicative Activities

Introduction
Developing communicative competence is essential for L2 students, and the English Education of Korea has become focused on developing communicative competence and communicative language teaching. In this situation, the contents of English textbooks are closely related to the goals of teaching English, and well-developed textbooks can help students to better build and develop their communicative competence (Chang, 2003; Rubdy, 2003).

According to research, the previous English textbooks lacked in communicative activities in the listening and speaking sections, the topics of oral skills were narrow, and tasks for oral skills required fixed responses. Additionally, there were a lot of awkward discourses in the textbooks (Chang, 1996, 1998; Kim & Seong, 2006). Within this framework, twenty-five kinds of English activity books along with the main English textbooks were newly produced to eliminate those problems and to secure the diversity of English education, and they have been used in schools since 2009 for effective English language learning.

Among communicative language skills, the most basic and important communication skill is the ability to listen impartially (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Rivers 1981). Listening is an integral part of communicative competence and an active process of constructing meaning utilizing linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge (Buck, 2001; Rost, 2002). In other words, it is an essential skill that will make L2 learners better communicators. Thus, listening tasks in newly- made activity books should be carefully analyzed to investigate whether or not they are appropriate to enhance listening comprehension skills and cultivate practical communicative competence.

Therefore, the present study examined twenty Middle School English 1 activity books which were not covered in previous research, and analyzed by the following criteria: achievement standards for listening tasks presented in the revised 7th national curriculum, six types of classroom listening performances by Brown (2007), and the classification of communicative activities by Littlewood (1981). Through this examination and analysis, this study will reveal objective data on the new materials and this will help English teachers to select more appropriate textbooks. In addition, the results of the present study can be used as a basis to develop different listening activities in order to enhance listening skills and cultivate communicative competence in the future.

1　　　Literature Review

1.1 Communicative Competence

Communicative Competence refers to forming correct utterances and using these utterances properly in a wide range of contexts, as well as a learners' ability to apply and use grammatical rules. In order to better build learners' overall communicative competence in a target language, all foreign language programs should focus on developing all aspects of communicative competence.

Two major principles of the 7th Korean national curriculum were to cultivate communicative competence and to utilize various activities and tasks. These two major principles have led to the establishment of the communicative-grammatical approach, and they are related to the present syllabus design and have also been applied to the revised textbooks.

1.2 Achievement Standards, Classroom Performances, and Communicative Activities

Achievement standards state educational objectives to be learned at each grade level to accomplish the goal of English education through the 7th national curriculum. Table 1 shows achievement standards of listening for first year middle school students in Korea.

Table 1: Listening Achievement Standards of Middle School English 1

Standard 1	Students will be able to grasp the feelings or the emotions of speakers through a particular tone or intonation.
Standard 2	Students will be able to grasp the gist of words or conversations in everyday life.
Standard 3	Students will be able to understand words or conversations relating to everyday life about the past, present, and future.
Standard 4	Students will be able to get details of words or conversations about everyday life.
Standard 5	Students will be able to understand the sequence of events in simple words or conversations.
Standard 6	Students will be able to understand context and the relationship between speakers in words or conversation relating to everyday life.
Standard 7	Students will be able to perform tasks after listening to words or conversations about everyday life.

Students can enhance their listening skills through various types of listening materials and procedures (Harmer, 2007). Brown (2007) suggested six types of listening performance that could be applied to teaching listening in L2 classrooms: reactive listening, intensive listening, responsive listening, selective listening, extensive listening, and interactive listening.

1.3 Communicative Activities

Littlewood (1981) proposed two types of activities applicable for communicative language teaching. One is functional communicative activities, whose purpose is that learners should use the language they know in order to get meanings across as effectively as possible. The other is social interaction activities, which means that students have to pay better attention to the social as well as functional meanings that language conveys.

2 Method

For this study, twenty of twenty-five activity books were selected; the listening tasks were examined according to the achievement standards that the 7th revised national curriculum proposed and six listening performances by Brown (2007). Additionally, the listening tasks were investigated depending on the classification of communicative activities by Littlewood (1981). For the analysis, all listening tasks in the listening activity sections of all the units in activity books were analysed and the listening tasks in assessment parts were also included.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results of Analysis on Achievement Standards

According to the results, listening tasks did not evenly cover all the achievement standards. Four achievement standards (Standard 2, 3, 4 and 7) were mainly covered by the listening tasks in activity books. Standard 4 was the one most often covered by the listening tasks, at 34%. The second most used was Standard 3, at 20.43%. The third most covered was Standard 7, at 17.68% followed by Standard 2, at 16.39%. Standard 6 at 5.60%, Standard 5 at 3.81%, and Standard 1 at 2.10% were fifth, sixth, and seventh respectively, with the fewest amount of listening tasks.

In other words, activities to discover the specific information in the words or conversations about everyday life were the most common in the activity books. Then, activities to understand words or conversations relating to everyday life about the past, present, and the future were the second most

used in the activity books. The third most used were performing tasks after listening to words or conversations about everyday life. The fourth most used were activities to grasp the gist in words or conversations. Activities to understand context and the relationship between speakers in words or conversations, tasks to understand the sequence of events, and activities to grasp the feelings and the emotions of speakers were the least often used in activity books. This finding shows that the examined activity books are written by mainly focusing on the listening tasks for interpreting words or sentences, and for understanding the text. However, Rost (2002) noticed that listening comprehension is an inferential process. Listening is a process of receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with speakers and respondents, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination, and empathy. To sum up, successful listening comprehension skills for enhancing communicative competence require not only interpreting what listeners hear but also matching perceived meaning with intended meaning in a variety of ways. Therefore, to foster communicative competence more completely, listening tasks should evenly cover all the achievement standards.

3.2   Results of Analysis on Listening Performances and on Communicative Activities

The results of analysis on listening performances revealed that listening tasks did not achieve all the six listening performances. Extensive listening was the most often used in the listening tasks, at 36.05%. The second most used was selective listening performance, at 25.76%. The third most employed was reactive listening performance, at 19.75%. Responsive listening at 8.60%, interactive listening at 6.63%, and intensive listening at 3.21% were the least used. As for the lack of interactive listening performances, listening tasks related to interactive listening performances such as debating, conversations, and role-plays in the examined activity books were often classified into speaking skills. As a result, the frequency of interactive listening performances was less than the other tasks. However, intensive listening performance was excluded in most of the examined activity books. In

teaching listening, it is necessary to combine intensive listening with extensive listening for students to create the productive listening habits of active thinking, and to enhance the ability to understand the text (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Therefore, textbooks should provide various listening tasks involving all the listening performances to give a greater opportunity for learners to acquire listening skills successfully.

The results of analysis on communicative activities showed the obvious difference of two communicative activities. The frequency of functional communicative activities at 84.77% was much higher than the social interaction activities at 15.23%. This result presents that the listening tasks in the examined activity books mainly focuses on activities for understanding what was heard. However, this result is not desirable to properly develop communicative ability. Listening is a much more complex process than we recognize it to be. Listeners should be actively paying attention and working on understanding and interpreting what they hear. Therefore, we should recognize listening as an active skill, and more balanced communicative activities should be contained in listening tasks to better foster communicative competence.

4   Conclusion

According to Helgesen and Brown (2007), listening is a very active process of getting information and responding with one's own ideas or answering questions. Moreover, as many language specialists have stated, communicative competence refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately (Bachman, 1990; Hymes, 1972; Savignon, 1983). Therefore, it is necessary for students to engage in various meaningful and authentic listening activities in their English classes in order to enhance their communication competence (Brown, 2007; Buck, 2001; Littlewood, 1981; Rost, 2002). Considering these points of view, the overall results of the study imply that teachers have to additionally develop listening activities associated with representing speaker's feeling, sequencing events, understanding context and the relationship between speakers, and noticing an intonation, a stress, and a grammatical structure. Teachers also have to provide students

with these additional listening activities in the classroom besides the listening activities in the activity books in order to enhance students' communication competence. Furthermore, the overall results indicate that more intensive and interactive listening tasks should be included in the activity books in the future in order to cultivate students' communicative ability successfully.

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APPENDIX

<List of English Activity Books for Research>

A	Chang, K., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Joeunchacksinsago.
B	Lee, K., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Biyouwasangjing.
C	Choi, I., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Miraeanculture.
D	Shin, J., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: YBM si-sa.
E	Lee, C., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Didimdol.
F	Park, J., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Daegyo.
G	Lee, J., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Cheonjaegyoyouk.
H	Lee, B., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Goryechoolpan.
I	Gueon, O., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Geumsungchoolpan.
J	Kim, Y., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Didimdol.
K	Lee, B., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Doosandonga.
L	Kang, Y., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Miraeanculture.
M	Lee, C., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: HappyHouse.
N	Kim, C., et al. (2010). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Bakmoongak.
O	Yim, B., et al. (2011). *Middle School English 1 Activities.* Seoul: Sungandang.