ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

(Graduate Programme)

FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE PROBLEMS EFL LEARNERS FACE IN THE LISTENING SKILLS CLASSROOM

BY

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JUNE 2008

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TESFAYE TILAHUN

A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE
(GRADUATE PROGRAMME)

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

JUNE 2008

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other university.

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Date of submission July 14, 2008

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. K. Amaliraj, who helped me in organizing, reshaping and editing the paper. I am deeply grateful to her for her invaluable suggestions and comments. My sincere thanks also go to Ermias Legesse and Mulgeta Teka for their critical comments and constructive suggestions.

My deep appreciation goes to Yinager Tekilesillasie of the English department at Bahir Dar University for his provision of the textbook, module and audio-cassettes which were analyzed in the study. Also I deeply appreciate him for his advice and comments.

I am grateful to Samuel Seid, the technician of the language laboratory at Bahir Dar University for his help in the data gathering. My sincere gratitude as well goes to all the students who participated in the study.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to Shegaw Wodaj, Haweni Alemayehu, Bethelhem Tesfaye, Birhanu Simegn and Tilahun Bejitual of the English department at Bahir Dar University for the cooperation they rendered to me in making the data gathering successful.

Financial support from the Addis Ababa University which was used to cover part of the expense incurred in the research work undertaken and in the preparation of the thesis is gratefully acknowledged.

Tesfaye Tilahun

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAU – Addis Ababa University

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

BDU – Bahir Dar University

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ELIP – English Language Improvement Program

ESL – English as a Second Language

HDP – Higher Diploma Programme

ILA – International Listening Association

Lab – Laboratory

L_1 listening – Listening in a Native Language

L_2 listening – Listening in English

MoE – Ministry of Education

TOEFL – Test of English as a Foreign Language

VOA – Voice of America

USA – United States of America

ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that contribute to the problems learners encounter in EFL listening comprehension, assesses whether the factors are associated with the text, the speaker, the listener, or the environment, and identifies which particular factor poses the most difficulty for the learners. The subjects of the study were first year English major students of Bahir Dar University and 149 students who took the listening course in 2007/8 were selected for the study. Data was collected using questionnaire, interview, observation, material analysis and document analysis. The study confirmed that EFL learners in college encounter listening problems whenever they are engaged in EFL listening activities on the listening course. The study identified thirty six factors that influenced the learners listening comprehension, and it further identified that the learners' listening difficulties emerged from the defects of the listening materials used in the course, from the students lack of exposure to native speaker English, and from the inconvenience of the listening environment where the EFL listening took place. The study also revealed that the students perceive native speaker pronunciation and fast speed of delivery posed the most difficulties for them while they are engaged in EFL listening activities.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background

Bahir Dar University is located at Bahir Dar Town, the capital of the Amhara National Regional State in Ethiopia. It is one of the biggest universities in Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which has more than 20 thousand students and over 400 lecturers (BDU, 2007). The University was inaugurated in May 2001 when Bahir Dar Teachers College and Bahir Dar Polytechnic Institute joined together to become the Education and Engineering Faculties, respectively, of the new University. The University has recently added three faculties: the Faculty of Business and Economics, the Faculty of Law, and the Faculty of Agriculture.

The Faculty of Education is the largest faculty in the university and currently, it offers degree programme in Biology, Chemistry, English, Geography, History, Mathematics, Pedagogical, Amharic, Physics, Physical Education and Sport and Industrial Chemistry. The faculty also offers Master of Education program in Biology, English, Mathematics, Amharic, Psychology, Curriculum, and Educational Administration.

The Department of English is one of the oldest departments in the university. It has been offering various courses since the establishment of the institution. It offers degree courses in the regular programme and degree and diploma level courses in the evening programme. It also offers on-job degree courses in the summer for high school teachers. The department has launched M.Ed programme in the 2006/7 academic year.

With regard to the teaching staff of the English Department, there are 48 members: 1 Associate Professor, 41 Lecturers, 2 Assistant Lecturers and 4 Graduate Assistants. Among the lecturers, 3 are Ph.D holders, 30 are at MA level and the other 8 are currently studying Ph.D in the country and abroad. In addition, there is one laboratory technician assigned for the language laboratory.

The English Department has various facilities including internet access, ELIP center, and a modern laboratory with the latest equipment. The students in the English Department have also access to the libraries as well as to the computer

laboratories of the university. The language laboratory was built in 1995 and has been giving service, since then, for the teaching of Listening Skills, Spoken English-I and Spoken English-II for various groups of students in the regular, the extension, and the summer programme (see pp 69). Similarly, the ELIP center is equipped with modern electronic devices and reading materials. There are collections of valuable recent books and journals on three strands of English Language Studies: TEFL, Literature and Linguistics. Any member of the language club is privileged to the facilities in the center which is established to provide the learners with opportunities to practice and improve their English outside class.

There are well over 500 students in the regular programme. Results of the action research conducted in the HDP proramme of the university indicated that there are lots of students who do not perform very well in the English courses. This problem was also found to be serious with freshman students (Tesfaye et al, 2006). Among the courses, it was in the listening course; in particular, students achieve relatively lower scores. This was one of the major problems the researcher of this study observed at work, too, and this is the main reason that necessitates the need for systematic investigation into the factors that contribute to the problems. Thus, this study investigates the factors that contribute to the problems English major students of Bahir Dar University (BDU) encounter in listening comprehension.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

These days listening is incorporated in the English syllabuses of primary, secondary, and preparatory levels of Ethiopian education system. Therefore, students learn listening skills beginning from grade one. Especially, recently, there are English educational media programs in which native speakers of the target language present English lessons at all levels of primary, secondary and the preparatory schools of Ethiopia. While the students of primary schools (Grade 1-8) get exposed to this through radio, those of the secondary (Grade 9-10) and the preparatory schools (Grade 11-12) are also exposed through plasma television. Based on these facts the researcher had the following assumptions in mind before engaging in this study:

1. In Ethiopia, English is a medium of instruction starting from grade nine through to graduate studies. It is also taught as a subject starting from grade one through first year college for almost all students. Thus, freshman college students pass through lots of L_2 listening experiences in primary, secondary and the preparatory schools. As a result, the students are familiar with the EFL listening before they enroll in the tertiary level listening classes.
2. Now a days, there are English educational media programs in which native speakers of the target language present English lessons at all levels of primary, secondary and the preparatory schools of Ethiopia. Therefore, the students are familiar with the spoken features of native speaker English.
3. As far as the students over all skills of English is concerned, by the end of grade-12, the students gain sufficient mastery of the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in English to enable them to study effectively at tertiary levels, and to use the language whenever necessary in everyday situations and in the world of work (MOE, 1994). Such a wide range of linguistic abilities facilitates the learners' comprehension.
4. The listening skills the students learn at the tertiary level is an extension of the listening skills the students learned in the listening lessons of primary, secondary, and preparatory schools.
5. There are potential problems of listening which the L_2 listeners face in EFL listening that L_1 listeners do not experience (e.g., not easily understanding what is said in L_2, unlike in the L_1). However, there is an expectation among teachers that such problems can be avoided or at least minimized through continuous EFL listening practices.

From the researcher's experience of teaching the EFL listening skills in between 2004 and 2005, however, he has come to realize that there were certain instances that seem to contradict with most of the above assumptions. Most of the students who enroll in the English Department of Bahir Dar University (BDU) have serious deficiencies in listening comprehension. This is especially observable when the students take the listening course entitled "Listening Skills" (FLEE 105) at first year level. The researcher observed that many students performed poorly in this course. This problem was noticed even by other instructors who were offering the

same course to different groups. Furthermore, there are other courses entitled "Communicative Skills-I" and "Communicative Skills-II" (FLEE 101 & FLEE 102 respectively) in which listening is included as an integral part of the courses. These courses are common courses, which are taken by all the students of the Departments of Amharic, English, Biology, Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Geography, History, and Civics in the Education Faculty of BDU. As a result, a large number of students are registered for the courses and many instructors are assigned every semester to offer the courses for different groups. Most instructors had similar complains about the low achievement of the students in listening comprehension. Little has been done, however, to investigate this problem.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to find out the specific listening problems EFL learners of BDU encounter in listening comprehension. To this end, the researcher has formulated the following leading questions to be answered in the course of the study:

1. What are the factors that contribute to the problems EFL learners of BDU encounter in listening comprehension? Do these factors associated with a text, a speaker, a listener, or an environment?
2. Which particular factor poses the most difficulty for the learners?

The study, therefore, tries to seek answers to the above questions.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is

- to provide useful information that can help to solve the listening comprehension problems of students, and to suggest possible measures that could contribute to planning a lesson taking the learners' problems into consideration.

The specific objectives of the study are

- to identify the factors that contribute to the problems EFL learners of BDU encounter when listening to a spoken text.
- to find out which particular factor poses more difficulty for the learners.

1.4 Significance of the Study

Awareness of the factors that contribute to the problems EFL learners encounter in listening comprehension would benefit both the learners and the instructors. After this study is completed, the finding may help instructors to become aware of the problematic areas of listening comprehension so that they can take necessary treatment measures, which are suggested as an implication of the study. More specifically, the study derives its importance from the context it explores, i.e., it tries to give an account of the difficulties EFL learners of BDU encounter in listening classes. These particular learners, as the researcher observed them in the past, had listening comprehension problems when they were engaged in EFL listening activities. Understanding their listening difficulties will permit the instructors to modify their teaching practices.

The study would also help learners to identify their difficulties of listening comprehension to ascertain what further learning strategies are necessary. Learners need to be aware of the factors which contribute to their difficulties in listening; when listeners know something about their own problems, they will be able to improve their listening practices and become better listeners.

The finding would also encourage material designers (instructors) to conduct needs analysis, and to revise modules or course contents in order to adjust the materials in such a way that they address the learners' listening deficiencies, which are indicated as an implication of the study.

1.5 The Scope of the Study

As it is described in the review of literature, many factors are mentioned that are claimed to be sources of foreign language listening difficulties, based on the studies conducted on native language listening comprehension and on reading comprehension and based on the theoretical models that have been derived from insights gained as a result of classroom experience. Some of the scholars (like Rubin) use general terms such as *text characteristics, interlocutor characteristics, task characteristics, listener characteristics,* and *process characteristics* to describe the factors that affect listening comprehension. Where as others (like Underwood) prefer to use specific terms as: *lack of control over the speed at which*

speakers speak, not being able to get things repeated, the listener's limited vocabulary, failure to recognize the "signals," problems of interpretation, inability to concentrate, and *established learning habits*, etc. If we look at these specific terms, they can be included in the broader terms mentioned earlier. For example, most of the terms described by Underwood can be included in *"listener characteristics"* of Rubin and Yagang. The points which are described under *listener characteristics* and *process characteristics* of Rubin can be included in "*the listener*" characteristics of Yagang. Thus the researcher has intended to focus on the factors proposed by Yagang (1994), they are: message, speaker, listener and physical setting. The study is, therefore, particularly limited to the listening problems pertinent to the listening text, speaker, listener, and the listening environment (see key terms, pp 7). Thus, the study does not include process characteristics that are described by Rubin.

1.6 The Limitation of the Study

As it is mentioned earlier, listening is incorporated in the English syllabuses of primary, secondary, and preparatory levels of the Ethiopian education system. The study would be more comprehensive if it was studied at all levels. However, this study is restricted to first year English major students of Bahir Dar University due to scarcity of time and resources. Further research needs to be conducted with more comprehensive samples including the primary, secondary, and preparatory levels in order to get a complete picture of the problem.

This study attempts to explore a broad view and in-depth knowledge about the understanding of how Ethiopian college students in EFL context face listening difficulties. However the higher institutions are not uniformly equipped; for example, there are variations in the type of modules, textbooks, manpower, laboratory equipments, etc. As a result, the researcher is not sure that if the listening problems of the students of BDU can represent the EFL listening problems at other higher institutions of Ethiopia. Nevertheless, this study yields some results that can help identify listening problems college students encountered in EFL listening comprehension.

Even though the study implicitly hinted the existence of individual differences between Rural Vs Urban, Higher achievers Vs Lower achievers and

Male Vs Female participants, the present study did not compare the EFL listening problems of such different participants. The researcher does not explore further to treat such differences because they were not the major issues in this study. Future research can be conducted to determine the effect of such differences.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

The Text refers to the content of the listening passage, the quality of the topic to generate interest to the learners, frequent change of topics in a single listening activity, conceptual difficulty, syntactic complexity, length and density of a text, etc.

The Speaker refers to speaker's voice, speech style, repetitions, false starts, re-phrasings, self-corrections, elaborations, hesitations, pauses, pace, volume, pitch, intonation, standard variety of British or American English accents, etc.

The Listener refers to listener's lack of socio-cultural and contextual knowledge of the target language; the listener's limited vocabulary, failure to recognize the "signals," problems of interpretation, inability to concentrate, lack of interest on the topic, ineffective use of strategies, etc.

The Environment refers to environmental noise or distraction that can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage.

The Natural Feature of Spoken English refers to natural pronunciation (i.e. not especially carefully enunciated)**;** some overlap between speakers (including interruptions)**;** normal rate of delivery (sometimes fast, sometimes low)**;** relatively unstructured language, which is used spontaneously in speech**;** incomplete sentences, false starts, hesitations and 'mistakes'**;** natural starts and stops**,** less densely packed information than in written language; characterized by colloquial and informal conversation; and sometimes background voices.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section describes the role of listening skills in language learning. The second section reviews the studies conducted on listening in general and in the Ethiopian context. Finally, the potential factors that are claimed to affect the learners listening comprehension will be reviewed.

2.1 The Role of Listening in Language Learning

Language acquisition depends on listening since it provides the aural input that serves as the basis for acquisition, and listening is the first language mode that children acquire. At birth we know nothing about language, and yet we will complete much of the first language acquisition process within our first five years, depending almost exclusively on listening. As it is indicated in second language acquisition theory, language input is the most essential condition of language acquisition. As an input skill (says Krashen) listening plays a crucial role in learners' language development (1985).

Beginning in the early 70's, work by Asher, Duker, Carroll and others, and later by Krashen, brought attention to the role of listening as a tool for understanding and emphasized it as a key factor in facilitating language learning. As the studies on listening increased, it became a center of attention not only in the process of first language acquisition but also in second language acquisition. As a result, it is recognized as an important language skill for EFL learners especially for those students who learn English for academic purposes. Thus, listening has emerged as an important component in the process of second language acquisition (Feyten, 1991).

Feyten (1991) further points out that listening plays a very important role in a student's academic success and it is a key component to successful learning. This is true according to Dunkel (1986) and Seime (1989) in the sense that students spend most of their time listening to their teachers' lecture. Duker (1971) is also among the writers who early noticed the importance of listening. Duker reported data on how people spend their communicative time: of the total time devoted to communication, 45% is spent on listening, 30% on speaking, 16% on reading, and

9% on writing. This is also cited in the work of Feyten, 1991; Oxford, 1993, and Iscold, 2006. From the data given above, one can understand that listening is the most frequently used language skill which plays a great role in the process of communication.

Similarly, an article which appeared on the web page of International Listening Association (Beard, 2005) indicated that listening is the fundamental language skill, and it is the medium through which people gain a large portion of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and of human affairs, their ideals, sense of values, and their appreciation. In this day of mass communication, much of it oral, listening is of vital importance and students should be taught to listen effectively and critically.

Although listening has such significant roles in communication and second language acquisition, it has long been the neglected skill in research, teaching, and classroom assessment (Rubin, 1994; Richards and Renandaya, 2002). In recent years, however, there has been an increased focus on developing foreign language listening ability because of its perceived importance in language learning and acquisition. Especially these days, there has been increasing emphasis on listening comprehension in second language pedagogy, and this is also reflected in several methodologies and in the development of numerous listening materials such as textbooks, audiotapes, videotapes, and CD-ROMs (Teng, 1998; Richards and Renandaya, 2002).

Assuming its great importance in foreign language classrooms and in language acquisition, scholars have started giving greater attention to second/foreign language listening comprehension (e.g., Ur, 1984; Krashen, 1985; Underwood, 1989; Rost, 1994). Some of the ideas that have been of focus in the insights are the factors that affect listening comprehension. In this context, therefore, this study aims to explore the barriers that hinder EFL learner's listening comprehension at the tertiary level listening classes of BDU.

2.2 Studies on Listening Problems

2.2.1 In General

Globally, since 1970's, we have gained some important and potentially useful insights about factors that affect listening comprehension, however, the

descriptions concerning the influence of these factors have been mostly derived from classroom experience, from the works of reading comprehension and native language listening comprehension (Long, 1989; Dunkel,1991; Rubin, 1994). Regarding to this point, Long (1989) and Dunkel (1991) say that the detailed explanations of listening comprehension, as well as theoretical models and pedagogical activities, have largely been derived from insights gained as a result of classroom experience and reading of the native language listening literature. Similarly, Rubin (1994:199) states the following:

> *In the past decade, scholars have reviewed the factors that may influence second language (L2) listening comprehension, referring to factors isolated for first language (Ll) learning. ....in the main, many factors are cited as relevant either because they are suspected on logical grounds to affect listening or because they are thought to be relevant based on parallels found in reading research.*

Indeed, much of the information we have about foreign language listening comprehension is gained from classroom experience (Ur, 1984; Underwood,1989; Yagang, 1994; Rubin, 1994) and is rooted in the work of first language researchers (see Carroll, 1977; Watson & Smeltzer, 1984; Samuels, 1994). As it is mentioned above, much of our current knowledge about foreign language listening comprehension has been borrowed from the research conducted on reading comprehension and on native language listening comprehension. It is obvious that there is a difference between “reading” and “listening” or “L1 listening” and “L2 listening”.

The researcher believed that the findings obtained from “the reading” and from “the native language listening” can not provide adequate information about foreign language listening comprehension. Thus, this study attempts to explore the factors directly in the context of EFL listening. This point makes this study different from the other related studies mentioned above.

2.2.2 In the Ethiopian Context

In Ethiopia, some studies have been conducted on EFL listening although the existing studies are not many as much as needed. Some of these studies in

English for Academic Purposes have begun to show that Ethiopian students have much difficulty of understanding foreign language listening texts. Different scholars have various suggestions about the factors that affect EFL listening. Despite the speculations are different, most scholars agree that our students have much difficulty in understanding English listening texts.

Among the studies conducted locally, Tewlde (1988) studied the actual listening ability of the junior secondary school students in comparison with the listening level required of them in understanding their subject areas. He found that the actual listening ability of the students was below the level expected of them by their teachers. According to the findings of this study, the students were weak in *understanding the general information, understanding instructions, transferring information, and understanding the specific functions of language*. Similarly, Seime (1989) investigated the listening abilities of natural science diploma students of Bahir Dar Teachers' College based on instructor's lecture. He found that the students were below the level expected of them in understanding their lectures. The main point that make this study different from the study conducted by Seime and Tewelde is that while their studies indicate the listening ability of the subjects are below the level expected of them, this study also tries to point out the underlying problems that made the students perform below the level expected of them, i.e., the factors that hindered the students listening comprehension.

These were not the only related studies conducted locally so far; there is also another study on strategy use. In the 1990's, the research of Birhanu (1993) investigated the interactional listening strategies fourth year AAU students use. The study explored the types of listening strategies EFL learners use in listening comprehension and the contrast of strategy usage of the learners at different proficiency levels (i.e. the top ranking versus the bottom ranking EFL learners). The study indicated that the most successful students were those who used a greater variety and higher frequencies of strategies.

2.3 Potential Factors in EFL Listening

This section began with a summary of those factors which were given most emphasis in books and articles about listening comprehension, which base their ground on insights derived from foreign language teaching experience of many

years (Penny Ur, Mary Underwood, Fan Yagang, and Joan Rubin), from the works on reading comprehension (Long, 1989; Dunkel, 1991; Rubin, 1994) and from studies conducted on native language listening comprehension (Carroll, 1977; Watson & Smeltzer, 1984; Samuels, 1994).

Listening comprehension is a process in which the listener constructs meaning out of the information provided by the speaker (Samuels, 1984). This involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning (Howatt & Dakin, 1974). Morely (1972) as cited in Teng (1998) provides a broader definition of listening comprehension which includes the process of reauditorizing, extracting vital information, remembering it, and relating it to construct meaning, besides the basic auditory discrimination and aural grammar. Considering various aspects of listening comprehension, Underwood (1989) organizes the major listening problems as follows: (1) lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak, (2) not being able to get things repeated, (3) the listener's limited vocabulary, (4) failure to recognize the "signals," (5) problems of interpretation, (6) inability to concentrate, and (7) established learning habits. Underwood sees these problems as being related to learners' different backgrounds, such as their culture and education.

Further research by Samuels (1984) points out that the differences between the spoken features of the learners' mother-tongue and the target language can be another factor that hinders the students listening performance. He further points out that sometimes the target language differs enough from the listener's language in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, and the existence of such differences places additional demands on the listener's processing which can severely interfere with comprehension.

In addition, there are other scholars who forwarded factors that are thought to affect foreign language listening comprehension. Rubin (1994) identified five factors which affect listening comprehension: text characteristics, interlocutor characteristics, task characteristics, listener characteristics, and process characteristics. Yagang (1994) attributes the difficulty of listening comprehension to four sources: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. The following section discusses each characteristic.

2.3.1 Text Characteristic

One of the major factors that is believed to affect listening comprehension is text characteristics. According to Carroll (1977) and Sheils (1988), the density and explicitness of information contained in the speech; length and conceptual difficulty of the text; and the degree of attractiveness of the message influence the success or failure of listening comprehension. That is, as soon as the text becomes less explicit or less attractive or conceptually more difficult, comprehension suffers. The details are presented as follows.

2.3.1.1. Length and density of the text

In learning a foreign language, listening and interpreting unfamiliar sounds, lexis and syntax for long stretches of time are tiring. This happens to the fact that many learners seem to work much harder than necessary aiming for accurate perception and interpretation of every word/point they hear. In a long EFL listening comprehension exercise a learner's grasp of the message is much better at the beginning and gets progressively worse as he/she goes on. This may be partly due to fatigue. The listener may run out of the energy necessary to absorb and interpret the strange sounds. It seems for this reason that many writers prescribe a short listening text. For example, Atkins et al (1995) assert that a short listening text reduces the complexity of comprehension by reducing tiredness and lapse of concentration. Indeed, EFL learners find short simple passages with the minimum of necessary information easier to follow; this gives them more opportunity to grasp the information.

With regard to the density of the message, many writers (Ur, 1984; Underwood, 1989; McDonough & Shaw, 1993) claim that information is packed less densely in the spoken language than in the written language. If a written discourse is transformed to a spoken discourse and if used for the teaching of listening comprehension, it sounds unnatural and becomes difficult to understand. According to Carroll (1977), when a message contains more information that can not be stored easily in memory, special listening skills and extra effort are required to understand and recall this information. In this case, therefore, if the listener does not possess or use the skills, he/she may fail to understand the information.

From the above points it seems reasonable to infer that if learners are subjected to a relatively long and informationally dense text, and are then asked questions on the content, they are being subjected to a very difficult kind of listening task.

2.3.1.2 Quality of the text to generate interest

It is important to pick topics that will be interesting for students of college age. When a topic is interesting, it generates enjoyment that contributes to motivation. Thus, learners' interest should be taken in to consideration during selecting or preparing listening materials.

In colleges, we may have diverse students with varying interests and needs, however, it should be stressed that it is important to pick a subject matter at least which can address the interest of the young at college ages. If the information to be heard is interesting, it motivates the learners by making the listening activity enjoyable; it catches the attention of the learners and also encourages the learners to actively engage in the activity. Underwood (1989) put the contribution of 'interest' to attentive listening in terms of 'concentration': "*If students find the topic interesting, they will find concentration easier*." This shows that when the listening topic is interesting, students simply find listening work very enjoyable, because they are motivated to attentively follow what they listen to. To the contrary, if the topic is not interesting, the listening activity can be boring. And this can interfere with their concentration which is a major problem in listening activity to the fact that (Underwood, 1989) even the shortest break in attention can seriously impair comprehension.

2.3.1.3 Conceptual Difficulty of the text

Difficult concept can be a factor that affects students L2 listening comprehension. If the concept of a listening passage is difficult, comprehension of that passage can be difficult. During selecting or preparing listening materials therefore, we should make sure that whether the difficulty level of the concept is manageable to all the students in the level. According to Dunkel (1986) and Dougill (1987), themes that discuss about people, environment and social issues are familiar while much theoretical concepts interfere with the students' comprehension

regardless of their level. In relation to this, however, there are some people who neglect the higher level classes as opposed to the lower level classes. This may be partly due to the idea that the higher level students are able to cope with any kind of material with whatever difficult concept it contains. However, the difficult job lays on the selection of materials to the students of the higher level classes. Comparing the two, Ur (1984: 27) points out the following:

> *In lower-level classes selecting topics is not so much of a problem since the vocabulary available limits the range to subjects such as the family, the house, animals, the body and so on. Later, however, the students' command of language allows a much wider selection of topics. Here, we must try to avoid boring or over-theoretical subjects, using as far as possible ones we think our students may be interested in, that seem of practical relevance, that may arouse or stimulate them.*

This implies that the difficulty level should be taken in to account while selecting materials for all levels. If the information of the listening text becomes full of theoretical concepts and if it becomes beyond the learners' experience, it leads to frustration rather than motivating to listen to it. This is because a difficult concept demands rich past experiences of the learners in addition to the linguistic abilities that are required to attain it. It seems for this reason that Ur (1984) asserts that giving easy material is less damaging than giving difficult material since listening passages that are too difficult can actually cause harm by frustrating, demoralizing, and demotivating students.

2.3.1.4 Syntactic Complexity of the text

According to Brown and Yule (1983), there are a number of differences between spoken discourse and written discourse which are important in learning EFL listening. That is, while the spoken language is syntactically simpler, the written language is relatively complex. Let us see an example given in the work of Underwood (1989:12) that illustrates how an ideal spoken discourse composed of simple sentences is structured when it is transformed to written discourse. Imagine the difficulty for EFL listeners! *"The plant died. They have been away. Nobody watered it. They'd left it in the sun, you see."* In written language, all these simple sentences would probably be linked together to form a compound-complex sentence made up

of main clause and subordinate clauses: *"The plant, which they'd left in the sun, died because nobody watered it while they were away."*

In this case therefore if the listener is unable to segment complex embedded sentences into more basic syntactic units or if the listener cannot parse the complex sentences into their constituents, comprehension will suffer. What is not clear at the present time is how much difficulty poor comprehenders have with this type of task. While the cognitive task of making sense of embedded sentences requires analysis of the complex utterances into more basic units, the listener must also know how to add the missing elements in incomplete elliptical sentences. If the listener fails to do this requirement which is necessary for good listening comprehension, comprehension can suffer. In the case of the target study, the listening texts in the module are made up of passages originally composed as written texts (extracts from novels, news paper articles, and so on). These give certain opportunities for the learners to practice listening. However, the complexity of the sentences, which are originally not from natural spoken discourse, is a matter of concern to the researcher. Such complexity may interfere with the learners' listening comprehension.

2.3.1.5 Complexity of tasks

In real life, the listener has a definite non-linguistic reason for listening, i.e., either for the sake of communication or entertainment. In listening classrooms, however, the reason for listening is purely linguistic, i.e., to improve the students listening skills. It is for these reasons that students are required to do something in response to what they hear that will demonstrate their understanding. Thus, students are encouraged to carryout tasks so that the outcome of the performance will be available for checking. Here the responses may be in the form of action, marking, drawing, writing or speaking.

The problem arises here however when the tasks require responses beyond checking the students listening skills. Penny Ur (1984:26) asserts "...tasks that involve a lot of reading (such as answering multiple-choice questions) or a lot of writing (such as taking notes) have disadvantage." Her justification for this point is that the existing difference between the effort taken to understand heard information and to read the questions (or to write the required response).

Here if the purpose of the tasks is to endorse all language skills other than targeting listening in particular, it may be necessary to employ tasks that involve reading, speaking or writing. But if the purpose of the task is to improve students' listening skills in particular, the response of the tasks should require responses which help to check only students' listening and understanding. Therefore many writers agree that listening task should be one which requires quick simple responses and which do not demand the skills of reading, speaking and writing at the expense of listening (Ur, 1984; Hughes, 1989). Even, as far as the feedback on listeners' performance is concerned, these writers advise that the listening check should be predominantly listening- based, rather than reading-, writing-, or speaking-based.

In Ethiopian context, especially in the target case however, most of the listening tasks that are practiced in the listening lessons are tasks that demand skills of reading, speaking and writing at the expense of listening. This can be one problem that may affect students EFL listening performance. Whatever good the students are at listening and understanding, their performance may not be good due to their poor skills of reading, or speaking or writing. The purpose of the listening tasks, which at the beginning were intended to improve comprehension, can be highly questionable.

2.3.2 Speaker Characteristic

Comprehending spoken language is a complex process in which the listener constructs meaning out of the information provided by the speaker. Constructing meaning out of the speaker's message depends partly on speaker's factors which are external to the listener. Failure to comprehend may result from unique speaking style of the speaker, or from poor communication skills on the part of the speaker, or from unfamiliar feature of the (L2) speech of the native speakers.

As far as the spoken feature is concerned, perception of sounds can be made difficult due to various characteristics of the spoken features of the language, particularly of the speech characteristics of the native speakers. Iskold (2006) claims that most students at the intermediate level have had little prior exposure to unmodified authentic discourse; in such cases, therefore, the L2 listeners have imperfect control of linguistic code. Ur (1984) also gives another explanation for the

problem. She says that perception of sounds is made difficult by the different pronunciations of words across versions of the same language (e.g. British, Indian, Pakistani, Canadian, Australian, and regional U.S Englishes). She further states that sound perception is also made difficult by the different rhythms and tone patterns in the L2 compared with the rhythms and tone patterns in the students' native language.

The other problem that makes difficult to understand the native speaker English may be the learners past experience of learning. Here the researcher tries to mention his own past experience of EFL learning in high schools. As a student, for example, the spoken feature of English to which we were accustomed to be was to our teacher's speech which was characterized by over clear enunciation (intelligible pronunciation) and slow rate of delivery. The reason why teachers make use of these strategies was in order to make their message more clear to their students. When students who are accustomed to their teacher's accent, come across the pronunciation of the native speakers characterized by fast rate of delivery, unstructured language with incomplete sentences, and false starts, and hesitations; it may be difficult for them to understand the EFL listening text. Yagang (1994:190) describes it as follows:

> *Learners tend to be used to their teacher's accent or to the standard variety of British or American English. They find it hard to understand speakers with other accents. Spoken prose, as in news broadcasting and reading aloud written texts, is characterized by an even pace, volume, pitch, and intonation. Natural dialogues, on the other hand, are full of hesitations, pauses, and uneven intonation. Students used to the former kinds of listening material may sometimes find the latter difficult to understand.*

This seems the reason why Underwood (1989) criticizes the use of non-authentic texts instead of the authentic one for the teaching of listening. She says that using non-authentic texts for listening causes students to pose an additional problem of having to try to transfer what they have learned by listening to non-authentic materials to their attempts to understand authentic speech.

According to Ur (1984), authentic feature of English (which exist in real-life listening) is characterized by colloquial, spontaneous and informal conversation,

and she suggests that classroom practice should usually incorporate such characteristic of real life listening. However, the listening exercises in many of the English textbooks of Ethiopia for primary and secondary schools are not accompanied with recordings which contain the authentic feature of the language. Instead, most of the listening passages in the textbooks are made up of passages originally composed as written texts (extracts from novels, newspaper articles, and other textbooks of horizontal disciplines e.g. biology, geography, and so on). Despite this gives a certain type of practice, it may not provide any realistic preparation for real life listening. It may be partly due to such reason that the students who enroll in the first year of English in the universities are not familiar to the authentic features of the language. Therefore, when they are engaged in real life listening (that is similar to the listening activities in the listening course), they may face difficulties that are difficult to cope with.

The above point was concerned with the natural speech of the native speakers which in the case of the target listening course are mostly available in recordings. In 'live' conversation (as in that of a lecture), on the other hand, writers advise that a speaker should be aware of the needs of his audience and should make sure that his message is clear and effective, especially when he/she communicates with nonnative audiences. To communicate effectively, in this regard, the speaker should be aware of not only the needs of the listener but also the other factors which influence comprehension, including the amount of information a listener has on a topic, the educational and intellectual level of the listener, the listener's interest in the discussion topic, and momentary fluctuations in attention, because these cautions help the speaker to decide the type of words to use as well as the rate of information to deliver. If these are inappropriate for the needs of the listener, however, comprehension will suffer. Samuels has clearly put the key questions that a speaker should consider before having a 'live' conversation (1984:184).

> *Has the speaker correctly judged the level of background knowledge of the listener? Is there an appropriate match between information presented by the speaker and the listener's background knowledge? Does the speaker make appropriate adjustments for the listener's background in terms of examples*

given, rate, and pacing of information presented? Is the speaker aware of the need to modulate the loudness of the voice according to the distance between the speaker, the listener, and acoustic properties of the room? Is the vocabulary appropriate? Is the sentence structure too complex for the listener?

If the speaker fails to address the above important points that are key for comprehension of the listener, it can be difficult for the listeners to understand what the speaker is saying.

2.3.3 Listener Characteristic

Listener characteristic appear to have considerable impact on an individual's listening comprehension. Some researchers have sought to identify the listener factors that influence L1 listening comprehension in positive and negative ways. Carroll (1977) and Watson & Smeltzer (1984), for example, highlight some factors that can hinder native language listening comprehension, including the listener's (a) degree of motivation to comprehend and learn the information contained in the message and the amount of interest in the topic of discussion; (b) ability to perceive relations among elements of the discourse, and ability to focus attention on the discourse and ignore distractions in the environment. Samuels (1984) also claims that background knowledge is one of the more important variables that can influence listening comprehension while Wolvin and Coakley (1988) mention the influence of culture on the listener's participation in the communication process. We will try to see each of these variables in the following sections.

2.3.3.1 Background knowledge

Background knowledge, also called “world knowledge” or “schemata”, has an impact on understanding a subject that a student is going to learn. Learners construct meaning during the comprehension process by segmenting and chunking input (i.e., from which they hear or read) into meaningful units, actively matching the intake, with their existing linguistic and world knowledge, and filling in the gaps with logical guesses. Leinhardt as cited by Block (1997:192) indicates, “*….the kind of knowledge learners have before learning a new topic affects how they make sense of the new information.”* From this one can understand that students having varying levels of prior knowledge about a subject are very likely to understand,

interpret and analyze the new information in different ways, and these students try to make sense of new information using their existing behavioral or operational schemata that are engaged in a process of comprehension; in other words, students try to make sense of what is new by relating it to what is familiar using their prior knowledge and strategy. These concepts of learning, in general, indicate that listeners' past experiences strongly affect the way in which the listeners interpret a passage. To make the points more clear to readers, we will see the concept of background knowledge from three different perspectives: topic familiarity, authentic speech and culture familiarity.

a) Listeners' awareness to a topic

Listening comprehension may be thought of as an interactive process in which the listener's knowledge is used to make sense of information provided by the speaker. The ability to understand and to construct meaning out of what a speaker is saying is determined, in part, by the listener's prior knowledge. Current views on listening comprehension agree that prior knowledge of a topic can affect listening comprehension, including the recall measures of the comprehension. Students recall significantly more information from a familiar topic with which students ascend their comprehension by relating the new information to the pre-existing one. Eggen and Kauchack (1999) state that students construct their understanding of the subject they learn on the basis of their experiences; their schemes then determine how effectively new experiences can be assimilated and accommodated. They further suggest that if these experiences are lacking, however, the prerequisite schemes to which new learning can be attached won't exist. Nuttall (1996) also asserts that if communication is to take place, the learner should have certain things in common with the subject under discussion. She further suggests that a more interesting requirement to understand a text is that the learner should share certain assumptions about the subject and the way it is applied. Problems arise, therefore, when there is a mismatch between the subject and the previous experience of the student. From the above statements it seems reasonable to infer that if students have no prior knowledge about a subject, they encounter difficulties in listening and understanding that subject because perception and subsequent comprehension depend on background knowledge.

It is obvious that students will find it easier to listen to a passage on familiar topic than on unfamiliar one. Moreover, in order to make students familiar to a topic, scholars advise to activate the learners' schemata. Activating the students' background knowledge prepare the students to use what they know about a topic, and to facilitate effective comprehension. Many teachers gain such awareness from their college education. It is difficult to be sure, however, how many teachers are handling these methods appropriately. Further study needs to be conducted in this regard.

b) Cultural awareness

Lack of sociocultural and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an obstacle to comprehension as language is culture specific. For Wolvin and Coakley (1988), culture can be explained as what the society thinks and does, and the language is the expression of the ideas of the society; language carries knowledge and cultural information and it reflects the substantial and particular ways of thinking of people. It seems for this reason that Brown (1994) says *the marriage between language and culture is inseparable*. Culture plays a significant role not only in comprehension but also in learning a foreign language as a whole. Regarding this Brown states the following points.

> *"...culture, as ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is a part of culture and a culture is a part of language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one can not separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture."* (1994:165)

From this one can infer that the student with no background knowledge of culture in English, American or other English speaking countries, is unlikely to understand Anglophone modes of thinking as expressed in the English language.

In addition, on studies conducted on the effects of pre-established background knowledge on reading comprehension, Brown et al (1977) cited in Long (1989) found out that subjects performed significantly better when they are provided with reading passages that reflected their own cultural background. This further demonstrates that background knowledge of culture is a significant factor that affects comprehension.

It is obvious that the native speakers of English live in temperate and cold zone of the globe. Snow is a common phenomenon in these areas, and skiing and snowboarding is part of their culture. According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, 'Skiing' is a kind of sport or activity of moving over snow on skis. 'Snowboarding' is also another kind of sport of moving over snow on a snowboard. These sports are common in the culture of the native speakers of English, particularly, in the United States, Canada and the UK. Let us see the following statements related to cultural factors regarding this issue. Example, "Fred wanted to go skiing, or he wanted to go snowboarding." Interpreting these sentences may be difficult for students who have never ever experienced snow/skiing/snowboarding in their life time. Thus, issues about 'skiing' or 'snowboarding' or 'snow' may be misunderstood by foreign listeners who didn't have prior exposure. Underwood (1989:19) states, "*Students who are unfamiliar with the cultural context may have considerable difficulty in interpreting the words they hear even if they can understand their 'surface' meaning*."

According to Brown (1994), culture includes the sociolinguistic aspects of language which deal with politeness, formality, metaphor, register, and other culturally related aspects of language as dialects and figures of speech. He adds that if the L_2 learners are not familiar with the sociolinguistic aspects of the language, they may misunderstand intended meanings of utterances within the contexts.

c) Familiarity with natural feature of spoken English

The spoken features of native speaker English can be difficult for EFL learners who do not have previous exposure. Regarding this Ur (1984) describes that non-native learners who are unfamiliar with authentic features will have difficulty in perceiving aspects of listening such as hearing the sounds, understanding intonation and stress, and redundancy under colloquial vocabulary and understanding different accents.

It is apparent that the beginning task of L2 listener is, first of all, to perceive and to break out the important sounds from the ongoing stream, and to differentiate units. In this process the students may face problems. Underwood (1989) says the problems the students face may be partly due to the strange

sounds that are unusual to the L2 listeners. She notes that *in English (just as in other languages), there are sounds which are unusual for foreign listeners, and which they may therefore fail to distinguish from other similar sound or even fail to hear at all.* The sound /**θ**/ as in '*think'* for example does not exist in Amharic. A native Amharic speaker may not notice at first that it occurs in English and he may simply assimilate it to the nearest sound familiar to him and say /**s**/ or /**t**/. Such sound used to cause confusions when we learned English as a foreign language at lower classes. This also has its own impact on listening comprehension and can interfere with the foreign learner's proper understanding of spoken English particularly of those learners who are unfamiliar to the speech of the native speakers. Underwood asserts that learners who have been left to acquire intuitively more detailed knowledge through exposure to plenty of native speech are aware of such problems, and therefore are efficient listeners. From this we can infer that the learners who maintained familiarity with the spoken features of the target language are efficient listeners while those students who are not familiar with such features may fail to understand an oral text.

In the English textbooks of elementary schools of our country, listening exercises that give our students practice in identifying correctly different sounds, sound–combinations, stress and intonations are presented in the English textbooks of primary schools. Such exercises aim at letting the students practice 'listening for perception'. But how many of our primary schools have recordings of native speaker that train the learners to perceive correctly the different sounds, stress, and intonation patterns of the speech of the native speakers. In reality, many of such listening practices in our primary schools are not supported with recordings. This may be one factor that makes the spoken feature of the native speech unfamiliar to our students. This by itself may be one factor that affects students listening comprehension.

The other listener factor which causes failure to understand EFL listening may be the inability of the students to recognize the discrepancy between the spoken and the written English, which is part of the natural feature of the language. In Ethiopian case, when a student learns a new word or expression, it is believed he/she usually learns both its written and spoken form. Furthermore, many

students have considerable experience of EFL reading and writing. However, if the students have only little or no experience in listening, they may fail to connect the sounds they hear with words they have seen and recognized in their printed form and may find the whole experience confusing and discouraging. For example, a student who is familiar with the word 'coup d'etat' in reading or writing may fail to realize that it is heard as /ku:deɪ'ta/ in listening.

2.3.3.2 Language proficiency level

In the review of this literature, we have seen that listening is a process in which the listener constructs meaning from the language that he hears. At this point, however, failure to comprehend the message may result from low proficiency level on the part of the listener. Rost (1990) and Rubin (1994) claim that language proficiency is a major variable that influences L_2 listening comprehension. The justification some scholars give for the impact of proficiency level on listening comprehension is that the varying nature of the learners' cognitive processing. The scholars assert that cognitive processing will vary depending on learners' knowledge of the foreign language. For example, Rost (1990) asserts that more advanced learners, with a greater store of linguistic knowledge, and a more sophisticated control over this knowledge, achieve greater understanding of speech. But those students at low English proficiency level, with a lesser store of linguistic knowledge, and less sophisticated control over this knowledge may encounter problems in understanding speech.

If a student is having trouble with listening comprehension, one of the first questions generally asked is whether the student's level of intellectual functioning is sufficient for the task in spite of the fact that most students have the necessary level of functioning to make sense of what the speaker is saying, except for a very small percentage of the population. For such learners at low proficiency level, it may be difficult to understand not only the L2 listening tasks but also the other learning tasks, too. Ur describes the challenges that the low proficiency learners face when they come across authentic spoken features of the language as follows (1984:7): *in ordinary conversation, redundant utterances of the speaker may take the form of repetitions, false starts, re-phrasings, self-corrections, elaborations, tautologies, and apparently meaningless additions* such as *I mean* or *you know*. These redundancies,

repetitions and other elaborations are natural features of speech and may be either a help or a hindrance to the comprehension process, depending on the students' proficiency level (Ur, 1984; Rubin, 1994). Both Ur and Rubin claim that while these redundancies and repetitions are helpful for students at higher proficiency levels, they may make it more difficult for students at lower proficiency levels to understand what the speaker is saying.

The other point which should be considered in this section is proficiency in relation to use of strategy. Rost and Ross (1991) assert that strategies varied by proficiency level in that while the low proficiency level students have a persistent pattern of global queries (asking for repetition, rephrasing, or simplification) across settings, speakers, and topics, whereas more advanced students used forward inference (asking a question using information already given in the story) and continuation signals (backchannel communication) which are important strategies that facilitate comprehension.

Similarly, O'Malley et al. (1989) looked at differences in strategy use by proficiency level of the students. O'Malley et al claim that the more advanced students seemed to be aware when they are distracted and make an effort to redirect their attention to the task, where as the low proficiency level students usually just stop listening or fail to be aware of their inattention when they encountered an unknown word or phrase in a listening text.

2.3.3.3 Application of Strategies

As it is indicated in the review literature of this study, listening is described as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding, and creating meaning. In order to go well through these processes, the importance of applying strategies is unquestionable. Harmer (1991:183) illustrates these strategies, which he calls *micro skills,* as follows: *predictive skills, extracting specific information, getting the general picture, extracting detailed information, recognizing functions and discourse patterns and deducting meaning from contexts*. He says that an effective listener is the one who is capable of employing the appropriate strategies of listening simultaneously. He advises that EFL listeners should employ these strategies of listening in order to be successful in listening comprehension because

listeners' success at understanding the content of what they hear depends to a large extent in their expertise on the micro skills.

O'Malley & Chamot (1990) add that listeners use these strategies to facilitate comprehension and to make their learning more effective. The strategies are important because they regulate and direct the learning process of EFL listening. These scholars add that the use of such strategies helps students to manipulate learning materials and apply specific techniques to a listening task. Moreover the strategies describe the techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding and to lower anxiety.

One factor for the existence of the students listening problems may be the failure of the students in using the particular strategy of listening that is appropriate to a particular listening activity, such as , listening for gist, listening for specific information, listening for implied meaning, and so forth. Regarding to this, Dunkel (1986) says that learners who are not aware of such strategies are unsuccessful in listening comprehension.

Wenden (1986) cites research findings stating that unsuccessful learners are generally less aware of effective ways of approaching the learning tasks. Learners may use ineffective strategies falsely assuming that their strategies help them in listening comprehension. For example, learners may wrongly think that they have to listen to every word and detail to get the main idea of the text. They may be unwilling to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from the context of the spoken text. Awareness of effective strategies would benefit both learners and teachers. In fact the recent English listening tasks in Ethiopian text books are designed in a way that the students practice the various listening skills and strategies. However, the problems may partly be due to the fact that learners are more inclined to resort to their old ineffective listening habits than trying to practice the listening strategies introduced in the EFL listening lessons.

2.3.3.4 Knowledge of Vocabulary

Another area that is claimed to affect EFL listening comprehension is the student's limited lexical knowledge. Underwood (1989:17) says "*For people listening to a foreign language, an unknown word can be like a suddenly dropped barrier causing them to stop and think about the meaning of the word and thus making then miss the next*

part of the speech." This tells that one requirement for good listening comprehension is knowledge of the vocabulary used in the listening text.

A problem many EFL learners have, has to do with the multiple meanings of words and the fact that many students know only the most common meaning of a word. When the word is encountered in one of its less common uses, students are confused. This can be illustrated with a sentence in which a word appears several times, each time with a different meaning. Or, when the listening text is crowded with several unfamiliar words which demand deep knowledge of vocabulary, then it leaves the learner groping for the meaning of such unfamiliar words.

The other problem of EFL listening in relation to vocabulary is getting words which seem similar in sound. In English there are different words which seem similar in sounds but different in meanings (as ship/sheep, meat/meet, fit/feet, write/right, sight/site, light/light, etc) (Underwood 1989:9). When the foreign listeners come across such words, they may fail to distinguish one word from the other with similar sound. Those foreign listeners who often depend on context are easily able to distinguish between such words. This happens because the context nearly always makes it obvious which of the two words is being spoken.

Words with similar sound confuse the learners when occur within a stream of speech. Therefore, a student should be exposed for such words and needs to learn their differences in meaning. In addition, the learner needs to learn the expressions that are common in spoken English. Underwood (1989:13) asserts that foreign listeners are required to recognize the most commonly used interactive expressions (such as well/uhuh/mhm); their role in speech is valuable.

2.3.4 Listening Environment

Listening factors that are related to the physical setting where the teaching-learning process of EFL listening is taking place can affect the learners listening comprehension. Some of these factors that are claimed to affect the students EFL listening comprehension are those concerned with environmental distractions or associated visual support.

As far as the environmental distractions are concerned, environmental noises may originate from the surrounding sounds at the time of listening. If these noises come while the students engaged in listening, they can be a potential source of

disturbance that affects the learners' listening comprehension. Yagang (1994) asserts that noise, including both background noises on the recording and environmental noises, can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage. Similarly, Watson and Smeltzer (1984) also cite environmental variables that can disturb and confuse L1 listening comprehension. These scholars state that environmental distractions, such as, phones ringing, and other external voices can affect the learners' listening comprehension.

Most scholars agree about the impact of the distractions on listening comprehension, but they attribute the source of distractions to various origins. Some say the distraction originates form the listening environment while others say the distraction can emerge from the listening equipments (such as, machines, cassettes, volume control, etc), but this problem is particularly concerned with learners who get their listening from recordings. Regarding this Yagang (1994:192) says, "*Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener's comprehension*." Greenberg and Roscoe cited in Rubin (1994) also claim that tone control interferes with listening comprehension.

Another barrier of listening comprehension, which can be associated with *environment*, is lack of visual support. Yagang (1994) says that not seeing the speaker's gesture and facial expressions makes it more difficult for the listener to understand the speaker's meaning. Many scholars agree that visual support has advantages of displaying picture and motion combined with sound, and it affords the opportunity to show the relationship of language and paralinguistics. Regarding to this point, for example, Harmer (1991) claims that the major advantage of visual support is that learners can see people speaking and can have a visual context for what is being said. This is because visual support enables learners to point out the many visual clues which listeners use to help them understand what they hear. Emphasizing this point, Underwood (1989:96) says:

> *Students will see whether the speakers are young or old, happy or angry, requesting or complaining. They will see the physical context in which the speakers are speaking. They will see the facial expressions and gestures and, in some instances, the reactions of those whom the speaker is addressing.*

These factors are important not only because they contribute to the immediate act of comprehension, but because they help the students to build up the kind of knowledge of context which is important for successful listening. As can be seen from the above statements, students who get visual clues can easily comprehend messages through the active listening they are engaged. Those students, whose listening is based only on audiotape without getting visual support, may face problems resulting from lack of paralinguistic elements. In most real life situations, the speaker is actually visible to the listener and his facial expression and gestures provide some aids to comprehension. However, in case of the listening materials of BDU, the listening sources are recordings; thus, our learners are deprived of getting visual clues in the listening activities.

Chapter Three: Methods of the study

This chapter comprises three sections. The first section introduces the target population, including the setting where the study took place, and the selection of subjects. The second section describes the data gathering instruments. The third section discusses the techniques of data analysis and the complete procedures taken in the data collection.

3.1 Target Population & Sampling

The subjects of the study were freshman students of the 2007/08 academic year who were learning English as a foreign language at Bahir Dar University. They were registered for a semester listening course designed for English major students and all of them were exposed to spoken texts of the course. The total number of the subjects was 160. There were three sections: A, B, & C and the number of students in each section was 40, 60, and 60 respectively.

At the time of data gathering the students were just completing the listening course. The students' results in the course showed that most of the students were extremely weak in their listening performance.

As far as the selection of subjects was concerned, purposive sampling technique was employed to select the subjects of the study. The reason why purposive sampling was employed was that first year English major students were special college students who were registered for *'Listening Skills'* that is an independent semester course at BDU.

3.2 Data Gathering Instruments

The instruments used in this study were: (1) a questionnaire, (2) a semi-structured interview with the subjects, (3) a structured interview with the EFL listening instructor of the subjects, (4) observation of the listening environment, and (5) material analysis, and (6) document analysis. These instruments are described in detail below.

The first instrument which was employed in this study was questionnaire. The questionnaire was used to get information about the difficulties the students faced in EFL listening while taking the listening course at BDU. The questionnaire was designed after a review of the literature (Carroll, 1977; Watson & Smeltzer, 1984;

Samuels, 1994; Ur, 1984; Underwood, 1989; Rubin, 1994; Yagang, 1994; Long, 1989; Dunkel, 1991; see also references of this research) about factors that influence listening comprehension. The initial drafts of the questionnaire consisted of 15 close-ended and 2 open-ended questions. To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to three specialists in English language Education for judgment and amendment. The insights gained from the comments of the specialists were taken into consideration, and then the initial draft was modified. When modifying the initial draft, items of the questionnaire were increased to 22 questions (i.e., 18 close-ended and 4 open-ended questions) and certain questions were reformulated so as to be clearly understood by the respondents. For the close-ended items in the questionnaire, the researcher used a five-point scale where 1-represents the lowest and 5-represents the highest experience of listening difficulties. Here, the numbers 1 to 5 were designated by the adverbs of frequency: 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Sometimes', 'Often', and 'Always' respectively. The open-ended questions, on the other hand, were designed in a way that the students are able to express their feelings and to add supplementary listening difficulties on the course if there were any that were different from those presented in the close-ended questions.

The second data gathering instrument which was employed in this study was interview. The purpose of the interview was to triangulate the information that was obtained through the questionnaire; to obtain data on how the listening difficulties which had been identified through the questionnaire affected the learners' listening comprehension; to obtain information about the reasons behind the learners' difficulties of listening comprehension; and to find out if there are any other listening difficulties that affect the learners' listening comprehension. On the other hand the instructor interview aimed to provide information about his approach in the teaching of the listening course, about the quality of the listening materials in the lab, about the support he provided while the learners engaged in listening and the opportunity he gave for the students to practice in the lab.

The third data gathering instrument which was employed in this study was observation. The observation was used to get information about the current physical appearance of the listening environment and the equipment in the

laboratory. The researcher had taught in the target institution between 2004 and 2005. He observed the listening environment to see if any change has been made to the equipments and the machines of the laboratory in the past two years. In fact, it was important to conduct classroom observation while the course was in progress in order to see how the teaching-learning process of the EFL listening was going on. This didn't happen because the course had been completed at the time of data gathering. However, the researcher tried to fill the vacuum with the interview of the course instructor and the students. Valuable information was obtained from the interviews regarding the teaching-learning process. In addition, the researcher had observed similar students for two semesters while he was offering the same listening course in the same listening environment at BDU. His experience gave him invaluable information about it.

The fourth data gathering instrument which was used in this study was materials and document analysis. The analyses were used to see the students' results they achieved in the listening course and to examine the nature of the listening materials employed in the course. While the analysis of the learners achievement in the course helped to get information about the extent of the students EFL listening ability, the analysis of the listening materials helped to get information about the kind of listening tasks employed in the course in particular, and the weaknesses of the listening materials in general. These helped to identify whether the students problem(s) of EFL listening emerged from the listener or from the listening materials themselves.

3.3 Techniques of data collection and analysis

As mentioned above, data was collected using questionnaire, interview, observation, material analysis and document analysis. The data collection was completed from March 2008 to May 2008. This section discusses the complete procedures taken in the data gathering and the techniques of data analysis.

The questionnaire

As mentioned earlier, the total population was 160; however, only 149 students were available at the time of administering the questionnaire. Thus, the questionnaire was administered to the 149 EFL learners during class time. The subjects were asked to identify their listening problems by responding to

statements arranged, on the basis of the five-point scale (never, seldom, sometimes, often, always) and by providing open-ended responses to add other different listening problems if there are any that were not addressed in the close-ended questions. Oral instructions and explanations were given (in English and in Amharic) to the respondents by the researcher himself to avoid any misunderstanding. Finally, the data obtained from the questionnaire was presented, and frequencies and percentages were calculated.

The interviews

As far as the students' interview is concerned, a semi-structured interview was conducted in mid May 2008, i.e., three weeks after the data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed. Thirty students volunteered to be interviewed. Each participant was interviewed in the laboratory of the English department at BDU. The participants were allowed to respond in Amharic so that they could speak freely what was on their mind. Each interview lasted for 10-20 minutes. At the interview, the students responded to four open-ended questions, which the researcher had prepared, regarding the students' past experience of L_2 listening, their learning process of L_2 listening, their use of listening strategies and the listening difficulties they encountered in the EFL listening. At the time of the interview, the researcher encouraged the learners to talk about specific EFL listening experiences. The researcher asked the students to describe in detail the problem they had faced and asked them why they thought these difficulties emerged. Whenever someone reported situations in which they had encountered difficulties, the researcher would probe further and ask them what they thought had made them encounter the listening difficulties. The researcher used the same type of probes when they reported success with comprehension. After the interview was completed, the data were transcribed and analyzed. In the analysis, a numerical system was applied to identify each data entry. The code for each account indicated the learner ID which is assigned by the researcher. For instance, "S_3" stands for the student which was interviewed thirdly.

In addition, the instructor was interviewed after the students' interview was completed. The interview was conducted at his office and it was a structured type. At the interview, he responded to seven open-ended questions which were

prepared by the researcher. The interview lasted for 20 minutes and was recorded. This was later transcribed and analyzed.

Observation of the listening environment

As mentioned earlier, the researcher of this study is familiar with the target listening environment. The observation was used to get recent information about it and to see if any change has been made to the electrical equipment (such as, tape recorder, television, video player, cassettes, video tapes) which was recently used in the course, to see the quality of the playing machines, head phones and seats which were claimed (in the interview) to be sources of problem in learning to listen and to check whether each equipment is working well. For example, the researcher examined whether every headphone or playing machine is working properly or not.

Materials and Document Analysis

As mentioned earlier, the analyses were used to examine the listening materials employed in the listening course and to see the students' performance in the listening course.

As far as the listening materials are concerned, there were two textbooks, "Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2" and a module. Both of these materials were described and analyzed. The analysis of the materials helped to evaluate just how far the listening practice materials used in the listening classrooms provide the necessary tools in preparing learners for the development of listening skills, and to find out if there are elements of the materials which could be the source of the students listening difficulties. The analysis is conducted based on the standard of EFL listening teaching materials evaluation given in the review of literature (Samuels, 1994; Ur, 1984; Underwood, 1989; Rubin, 1994; Yagang, 1994; Long, 1989; see also references of this study) about elements that should be and should not be included in EFL listening texts. Although the criteria are not specifically targeted to evaluate EFL listening practice materials, the researcher used them in the belief that they can indicate elements that should be and should not be present in the selection and preparation of such materials. Based on the criteria, therefore, the material analysis examines whether the target listening materials are adequate to meet the intended objectives of learning to listen, and evaluates how far logical

is the cognitive complexity of the contents and activities of the listening tasks, how far the material keep students' learning needs, and how far the learning process is considered while the material is employed.

As far as the learners' listening achievement is concerned, the researcher analyzed the students' results in successive tests which were recorded to determine students' grade in the listening course of 2007/08 academic year. The analysis was based on the standard scale given by the Educational Testing Service of TOEFL. In addition, an attempt was made to see the results of Communicative English Skills (FLEE 101e) in which listening is an integral part of the course.

Techniques of Data Analysis

The data obtained through the questionnaire, the interview, the observation the material analysis and the document analysis were organized and analyzed. While the data obtained from the questionnaire and the document analyses were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively, the data obtained from the interview, the observation, and the materials analysis were analyzed qualitatively. And the results of the instruments identified the listening problems that affected the EFL learners of Bahir Dar University.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the study. The first section discusses the analysis and the findings of the questionnaire. The second section discusses the results of the interviews. The third section reports the data of the observation of the listening environment. Finally, the results of the material analysis and the document analysis are presented at the end of this chapter.

4.1 Data of the Questionnaire

As mentioned in chapter one, the purpose of this study was to identify the listening difficulties that affected the EFL learners of Bahir Dar University. To this end, a questionnaire was administered to all first year English major students. The close-ended and the open-ended items in the questionnaire required students to identify the listening difficulties they faced in the listening course. Furthermore the students were asked to identify the listening barrier that poses the most difficulty for them. The responses to the questionnaire were gathered. Then, the data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. They are presented in the following section.

4.1.1 Analysis and Results of the Questionnaire

The study identified eighteen factors that the researcher believed had influenced the EFL learners' listening comprehension and eighteen factors the subjects believed had influenced their listening comprehension. These have been further organized into four categories according to their common characteristics: text, speaker, listener, and environment.

In fact, it is difficult to clearly demarcate a borderline between speaker, listener, and text factors because they are interrelated, and one factor can be associated with the other one; for example, 'pronunciation' is a speaker factor if the way the speaker pronounces interferes with the listener's comprehension, at the same time it can be a listener factor if it interferes with the listener's comprehension to the fact that the listener may fail to grasp the pronunciation. Similarly, 'density of a message' can be a text factor if the density interferes with the listener's comprehension and it can also be a listener factor at the same time if the listener is not able to grasp the densely packed information.

However, to make the analysis easily readable, the researcher used the existing systems in the literature to provide a categorization scheme, the characteristics or categories had to be derived directly from a predetermined scheme suggested by Yagang (1994) and Rubin (1994). Based on categorization scheme of the literature, the data were divided into four categories: listener, text, speaker, and environment factors. Furthermore, questions that refer to factors related to the listeners, to the message, to the speakers, and to the environment were put together under their respective categories. Finally, they were tabulated and presented as follows. (See 4.1.1.1, 4.1.1.2, 4.1.1.3, and 4.1.1.4)

4.1.1.1 The listening text

The listening text itself may be the main source of listening comprehension problems. In particular, unfamiliar words, difficult grammatical structures, and the length of the spoken text may present students with listening problems (Table-1a, Table-1b, Table-1c, and Table-1d).

Table-1: Factors related to **listening texts**

Item No	**Statements**
1	Unfamiliar words including jargon and idioms interfered with my listening comprehension.
2	Complex grammatical structures interfered with my listening comprehension.
3	Long spoken text made me tired and interfered with my listening comprehension.
4	Information that was not crucial to me and that could not generate sufficient interest to me did not make me to continue listening.
5	The length and complexity of sentences interfered with my listening comprehension.
6	Unfamiliar topic/subject matter interfered with my listening comprehension.

Table-1 shows factors related to listening texts. Let us see them in detail in the following four tables: Table-1a, Table-1b, Table-1c, and Table-1d.

To make the analysis easier, item number 1, 2 and 5 are presented and analyzed together on Table-1a because all of them are factors directly related to bottom-up processing strategy in which learners make use of the analysis of words and sentence structure to enhance their understanding of the spoken text.

Table-1a: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to unfamiliar words, difficult grammatical structures, and complex sentences

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
1	7	4.69	13	8.72	20	13.41	44	29.53	48	32.21	37	24.83	129	86.57
2	13	8.72	25	16.77	38	25.49	44	29.53	35	23.48	32	21.47	111	74.48
5	4	2.68	12	8.05	16	10.73	33	22.14	49	32.88	51	34.22	133	89.24

The first question was asked to know whether unfamiliar words, including jargon and idioms, interfered with the learners' listening comprehension. The great majority of the students 129/149 (86.87%) have responded that unfamiliar words, including jargon and idioms (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension, and more than half 85/149 (57%) of the students have also responded that this problem often or always interfered with their listening comprehension.

The second question was asked to know whether complex grammatical structures interfered with the learners' listening comprehension. The great majority of the students 111/149 (74.49%) have responded that difficult grammatical structures (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension.

Similar to item number 2, more specific cross-examining question was asked, which appeared on item number 5, to know whether length and complexity of sentences interfered with the learners' listening comprehension. The great majority of the students 133/149 (89.24%) have responded that complexity of sentences (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension, and more than half 100/149 (67.1%) of the students have also responded that this problem often or always interfered with their listening comprehension.

From the result obtained above, it is possible to generalize that unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, and complex sentences interfere with the listening comprehension of the great majority of the students. This confirms Rubin's opinion (1998) which shows that the difficulty in listening comprehension is

partly due to the structural component of the text. This might be due to completely relying on the bottom-up processing strategy in which learners make use of the analysis of words and sentence structure to enhance their understanding of the spoken text, and this might be due to the inadequacy of the top-down processing strategy in which learners make use of their previous knowledge, which is not directly encoded in words, that means, without examining words and structures.

Table-1b: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to listening message that cannot generate sufficient interest in the learners

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
3	7	4.69	9	6.04	16	10.73	40	26.84	49	32.88	44	29.53	133	89.25

Table-1b shows that the great majority of the students 133/149 (89.25%) have responded that a listening message that was not crucial to them and that could not generate sufficient interest in them interfered with their listening comprehension. More than half (62.41%) of the students have also responded that this problem often or always interfered with their listening comprehension.

From this result it is possible to infer that a listening message that can not generate sufficient interest in the learners can interfere with their listening comprehension. This is consistent with Underwood's statement (1989) which shows that if a topic is not interesting, the listening activity can make the listeners inattentive. This also interferes with the learners' concentration which is a major problem that can seriously impair comprehension.

Table-1c: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to long spoken text

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
4	24	16.10	23	15.43	47	31.53	38	25.20	40	26.84	24	16.10	102	68.14

Table-1c reveals that the majority of the students, i.e., 102 (68%) out of 149 students have responded that a long spoken text (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension. This result clearly shows that the length of the text can be one major factor that negatively affects the learners' listening comprehension. This confirms Ur's assertion (1984) which justifies that the difficulty in listening comprehension is partly due to the length of the listening text itself which bore listeners and distract their concentration. Therefore, it is possible to infer that long spoken texts interfere with the learners' listening comprehension.

Table-1d: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to unfamiliar topic

Item No.	**LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY**													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
6	6	4.02	19	12.75	25	16.77	30	20.13	46	30.87	48	32.21	124	83.21

Table-1d shows that 124 (83%) of the students have responded that unfamiliar topic (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension. More than half of the students (63%) have also responded that unfamiliar topic often or always interfered with their listening comprehension.

From the above result, therefore, it seems reasonable to generalize that unfamiliar topic hinders the listening comprehension of the majority of the students. This is also consistent with Nuttall's declaration (1996) which shows that a more interesting requirement to understand a text is that the learner should share certain assumptions about the subject to the fact that students construct their understanding of the subject they listen on the basis of their experiences; problems arise, therefore, when there is a mismatch between the subject and the previous experience of the learner.

In general, Table-1a, Table-1b, Table-1c, and Table-1d indicate that the listening text itself can be the main source of listening comprehension problems. In

particular, unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, long spoken text, a topic that cannot generate interest to listeners, complexity of sentences and unfamiliar topic pose listening difficulties to EFL learners.

4.1.1.2 Listener factors

Listeners' problems may arise from inability to use appropriate listening strategies, inability to grasp pronunciation, frustration, listen only to voice without seeing the speaker's facial expressions and gesture, and the demand of other skills at the expense of listening (See Table-2a, Table-2b, Table-2c, Table-2d, and Table-2e).

Table 2: Factors related to listeners

Item No	**Statements**
7	At the time of listening I found it difficult to predict what would come next.
8	I found it difficult to recognize the words I know because of the way they are pronounced.
9	I found it difficult to understand the meaning of the spoken text without seeing the speaker's body language (e.g. facial expressions of anger)
10	There were words that I would normally understand in writing, but when I heard them in a stream of speech, I found it difficult to tell where one word finishes and another begins.
11	I found it difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening.
12	I feel worried and discouraged when I don't immediately understand the spoken text.
13	I found it difficult to answer questions which require other than a short answer (e.g. why or how questions, or writing a summary).
16	The speech of the native speakers with different pronunciation from what is familiar to me interfered with my listening comprehension.

Table-2 shows factors related to listeners. Let us see them in detail in the following five tables: Table-2a, Table-2b, Table-2c, Table-2d, and Table-2e.

To make the analysis easier, item number 7 and 11 are presented and analyzed together in Table-2a. The reason that these two items are presented together is that both of them are concerned with listening strategy. The skills of predicting and getting the general idea of a text are some of the most important listening strategies which help listeners to understand a text. However, EFL learners encounter certain problems in applying such listening strategies. The listening difficulties presented in the following table are also evidence for this.

Table-2a: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to the skills of predicting and getting a general idea of a text.

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
7	4	2.68	9	6.04	13	8.72	49	32.88	51	34.22	36	24.16	136	91.26
11	2	1.34	9	6.04	11	7.38	38	25.50	49	32.88	51	34.22	138	92.6

As can be seen from Table-2a, almost all of the students in the study (91% and 92%) have responded that they found it difficult to predict what would come next and to get a general idea from the first listening, respectively. More than half of the students (58% and 67%) have also responded that they often or always found it difficult to apply the aforementioned listening strategies (i.e., the predictive skills and the skills of getting the general idea, respectively).

From the above results, we can conclude that almost all of the students in the study had difficulty in applying predictive skills and skills of getting general idea of a text. This has also its own implication on listening comprehension. There are evidences which show that employing listening strategies promote listening comprehension while inability to employ listening strategies affects listening comprehension. For example, Rost and Ross (1991) studied the relationship existed between listening strategies and listening comprehension; they found a positive correlation between them. This is also in line with Harmer's opinion (1991) which shows listeners' success at understanding the content of what they hear depends to a large extent on their expertise in the listening strategies.

Table-2b: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to native speakers' pronunciations.

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
8	0	0	2	1.34	2	1.34	18	12.08	39	26.17	90	60.40	147	98.65
16	2	1.34	2	1.34	4	2.68	16	10.73	39	26.17	90	60.40	145	97.3

Table-2b shows that the majority of the students, i.e., 129 (87%) students out of 149 have responded that they often or always found it difficult to recognize the words they knew because of the way they were pronounced. And the majority of the students, i.e., 60% of the students under the study have also responded that they "always" encountered such problem. On the other hand, the same number of students (87%) have also responded almost the same in the cross-checking question which appeared on item number 16.

From this result it is possible to generalize that most students find it difficult to recognize the words they knew because of the way they are pronounced. This result is also consistent with Ur's declaration (1984), which states that if a word is pronounced differently from the way it was said when it was learnt, the listener may not recognize it as the same word, or may even miss its existence completely. At this point, this problem interferes with the learners listening comprehension.

Table-2c: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to facial expressions and gesture of a speaker

Item No.	**LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY**													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
9	14	9.39	21	14.09	35	23.48	41	27.51	32	21.47	41	27.51	114	76.49

Table-2c shows that almost half (49%) of the students often or always found it difficult to understand the meaning of a spoken text without seeing the speaker's facial expressions and gesture (non-verbal clues).

From this result, we can understand that lack of non-verbal clues for what a speaker is saying can interfere with learners' listening comprehension although the problem may not be as serious as those listening problems presented earlier. However, this problem can pose serious difficulty particularly for those language learners whose cognitive style of language learning is visual (Kolb, 1984 cited in Spinney & Jordan, 2004). This is also consistent with Oxford's study (1988) which shows that students' cognitive style has a significant influence on students' choice of learning strategies so that it affects their learning outcomes.

Table-2d: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems due to the discrepancy between written and spoken language.

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
10	2	1.34	9	6.04	11	7.38	25	16.77	48	32.88	65	43.62	138	92.61

Table-2d shows that the great majority of the students, i.e., 76% of the students have responded that they often or always found it difficult to identify the words they knew in their written form when they hear them in a stream of speech.

From this result, we can conclude that there are words that most students normally recognize in their written form, but which the learners find difficult whenever they hear them in a stream of speech. In the Ethiopian case, when a student learns a new word or expression, it is believed the student usually learns both its written and spoken form. His recognition of the new word is linked to his knowledge of what it looks like on paper and what it sounds like when carefully pronounced by the teacher. If the student is not aware of what the new word sounds like when it is said quickly and juxtaposed with other words, the student may not realize that this may affect its pronunciation. This is also consistent with Ur's statement (1984) which shows that difficulty in listening comprehension is partly due to listeners' confusion that appears when they encounter juxtaposition of two words in which one of the sounds at the junction point has disappeared or is assimilated with the other. In this case, therefore, the learners fail to recognize the combined word.

Table-2e: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to the ability of managing tasks.

Facing frustration due to failure to perform tasks, and listening tasks that demand the skills of writing at the expense of listening are the main points which will be presented as follows. To make the analysis easier, item number 12 and 13 are presented together to the fact that both factors are directly related to the managing of listening tasks.

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
12	8	5.36	13	8.72	21	14.08	58	38.92	37	24.83	33	22.14	128	85.90
13	9	6.04	12	8.05	21	14.09	51	34.23	42	28.19	35	23.48	128	85.89

Table-2e shows that the great majority of the students (85%) have responded that they (sometimes, often, always) feel worried and discouraged when they don't immediately understand. This result indicated that many students feel worried and discouraged when they don't immediately understand the spoken text. It seems for this reason that many scholars advise to employ simple passages with the minimum of necessary information that gives students more opportunity to understand the information. Ur (1984) says, when the learners get simple passages, their grasping of the message will be much better. At this point, therefore, the affective barriers decrease.

Table-2e further shows that the majority of the students (85%) have responded that they (sometimes, often, always) found it difficult to answer questions which required other than short answer. From this result, it is possible to infer that many students find it difficult to answer listening questions which require longer answers (which demands writing skills at the expense of listening). This confirms Ur's statement (1989) which justifies that the difficulty in listening performance is partly due to the provision of irrelevant tasks that demand the skills of reading, speaking and writing other than the skills of listening. This is also in line with Hughes's statement (1989) which says that if the purpose of the task is to improve listening skills in particular, the response of the task should demand only responses which help only to check the learners' listening skills.

In general, Table-2a, Table-2b, Table-2c, Table-2d and Table-2e showed that listeners' factors can interfere with learners' listening comprehension. The learners' inability to apply listening strategies, their inability to grasp pronunciation, inability to manage challenging tasks, and frustration interfered with their listening

comprehension. Moreover, the result pointed out that a listening text without visual support or the speakers' facial expressions and gestures interfere with learners' listening comprehension.

4.1.1.3 Speaker factors

Speaker factors can be a source of listening comprehension problems. Problems of listening comprehension related to speaker can be seen in relation to natural speech, pronunciation, and varied accents (Table-3).

Factors related to speakers

Item No	**Statements**
14	Speaker's fast speech interfered with my listening comprehension.
15	The speech of the native speakers with different speaking styles from what is familiar to me interfered with my listening comprehension.

Table-3: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to speech of the native speakers

Item No.	**LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY**													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
14	2	1.34	1	0.67	3	2.01	11	7.38	29	19.46	106	71.14	146	97.98
15	3	2.01	8	5.36	11	7.37	25	16.77	44	29.53	69	46.3	138	92.6

Table-3 shows that almost all (91%) of the students have responded that fast speech often or always interfered with their listening comprehension. The great majority (76%) of the students have also responded that the different speaking styles of the native speakers often or always interfered with their listening comprehension. This is in line with the findings of previous research which indicate that hesitations and pauses in spontaneous speech cause perceptual problems and comprehension errors for non-native speakers (Voss, 1979).

From the result obtained, therefore, we can understand that the natural speech of the native speakers (which the students perceive as fast speech, and different speaking styles) interfere with the listening comprehension of many of our

students. In the Ethiopian context, the spoken features of English to which the students are accustomed to is to their teacher's speech with over clear enunciation. When such students who are accustomed to their teacher's accent, come across the pronunciation of the native speakers characterized by fast rate of delivery, unstructured language, incomplete sentences, false starts, and hesitations; it is difficult for them to understand the listening text (Underwood, 1989; Yagang 1994).

4.1.1.4 Environmental Factors

The environmental factors can be one source of listening comprehension problems. In particular, unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment and lack of sufficient time to accomplish tasks may influence students' listening performance (See Table 4a and Table-4b).

Table-4: Factor related to the listening environment

Item No	**Statements**
17	Unclear sounds resulted from poor quality tape-recorder or cassettes interfered with my listening comprehension.
18	Lack of sufficient time for carrying out the tasks interfered with my listening performance.

Table-4a: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to the listening recording material

Item No.	**LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY**													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
17	13	8.72	18	12.08	31	20.8	41	27.51	43	28.85	34	22.81	118	79.17

Table-4a shows that the great majority of the students (79%) have responded that unclear sounds resulting from poor quality tape-recorder or cassettes (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension. And 50% of the students have responded that they often encountered such problems.

From the above, we can deduce that poor-quality recording materials interfere with the listening comprehension of too many students. This is in line with Yagang's statement (1994) which shows that the difficulty in listening comprehension is partly due to unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment.

Table-4b: Learners' responses that refer to listening problems related to insufficient time to accomplish a task

Item No.	LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY													
	Never		Seldom		**Total positive**		Sometimes		Often		Always		**Total negative**	
	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %	Students' No.	Students' %
18	7	4.69	5	3.35	12	8.04	27	18.12	44	29.53	66	44.23	137	91.94

Table-4b reveals that the majority of the students (73%) have responded that lack of sufficient time for completing the tasks often interfered with their listening performance. From the result obtained, it is possible to say that lack of sufficient time for completing the tasks often interfere with the listening performance of too many students.

In general, Table-4a and Table-4b showed environmental factors can interfere with learners' listening comprehension. In particular, poor recordings and lack of sufficient time for carrying out tasks interfered with the learners' EFL listening comprehension.

4.2 Other factors that affect the learners' listening comprehension

The subjects were asked to add other listening difficulties on the course if there are any that were different from those presented in the close-ended questions (See item number 19 in Appendix A). Then, the learners listed down nineteen additional factors that they believe influenced their comprehension in the listening classes.

Note: The question was in relation to the learners' listening comprehension, but some of the students have responded to it in terms of their listening performance. With regard to competence versus performance Brown (1994:31) states that "*…competence is the underlying knowledge of the system of language- its rules of*

grammar, its vocabulary, all the pieces of language and how those pieces fit together. Competence is realized through the actual production (speaking, writing) or the comprehension (listening, reading) of linguistic events." From this one can infer that listening competence is manifested through listening comprehension, and listening comprehension is also realized through the actual listening performance. Based on this inference, therefore, the responses of the learners which are answered in terms of performance are presented as they are.)

1. Insufficient number of headphones and playing machines. (The number of students in one section and the number of headphones & playing machines in the laboratory were not in equal amount.)
2. Malfunctioning of the headphones (students reported that some of the headphones do not work properly.)
3. Lack of sufficient time to grasp the message (Some students have reported that they are given only two chances to listen to the listening text, and the gap between the two listening activities was also too short so that they had no enough time gap available to process between the first and the second listening.)
4. Inadequate class time; 2 hours per week (Here, one student responded by asking another question, "How does a student improve his skills of EFL listening by practicing for 100 minutes per week?")
5. Lack of interest and motivation in the course. (Some students reported that they were assigned to English department without their choice and consent.)
6. Unfamiliarity to the listening course itself. (There were students who reported that they didn't practice listening skills in their primary, and secondary schools.)
7. Disturbing noise (some students have reported that there was lack of discipline while they were engaged in listening; as a result, the students' side talk distracted their attention. Some other students also reported that disturbing noise that comes from the neighboring construction sites distracted their attention.)
8. Lack of support and encouragement (Some students reported that they did not receive the necessary support and encouragement from the instructor. The students mentioned, for example, the instructor was sometimes not available in

the class; instead, he use to leave them to the laboratory technician while they were engaged in listening to recordings.)

9. Unfamiliar tasks in the exam (Some students reported that the listening activities in the exam were quite different from the usual classroom's listening activities.)
10. The difficulty of the concepts of the listening messages (Some students have reported that the listening messages were packed with difficult concepts.)
11. The complexity of the tasks (Some students have reported that most of the listening tasks in the course were difficult to manage. The instructions of the tasks were not even clear.)
12. Inconvenient class time to attentively concentrate on listening. (Some students reported that the listening class was always held in the hot afternoon immediately after lunch, so it was not convenient for them to learn to listen.)
13. Lack of opportunity to get extra practice in the lab. (Some students have reported that they couldn't get an opportunity to practice in the lab in spite of their interest to do so.) (This was with respect to the institution)
14. Lack of extra time to practice listening (some students have reported that they have not extra time to practice listening out side class.) (This was with respect to the students)
15. Interruption of message during listening. (Here, the students did not clearly indicate whether the problem was directed to the phone, or to the playing machine, or to the cassettes.)
16. Lack of confidence in their listening ability. (Some students reported that they have a feeling they are not able to understand what they listen from authentic materials such as BBC.)
17. Unscheduled or sudden tests of listening (Some students complained that they were not informed to make themselves ready before coming to class for a test.)
18. Involvement of many speakers in a conversation (Some students reported that since many speakers were involved in a conversation, it was difficult for them to differentiate which speaker was talking at a moment.)

As listed above, the study identified eighteen factors that the learners believed had influenced their listening comprehension/performance. These have been further

organized into four categories according to their common characteristics: speaker, listener, listening materials and listening environment. They are summarized and presented in Table-5.

Table- 5: Other factors that affected the learners listening performance

Category	Factors
Speaker	1 Involvement of many speakers and overlap of speech
Listening Materials	2 The difficulty of the concepts in the listening texts 3 Unfamiliar tasks in the exam 4 The complexity of the tasks
Listener	5 Inadequate class time (2 hours per week) 6 Lack of interest and motivation in the course 7 Unfamiliarity to the listening course itself 8 Lack of extra time to practice listening skills outside class 9 Lack of confidence in their listening abilities
Listening Environment	10 Disturbing noise 11 Insufficient number of headphones and playing machines 12 Lack of support & encouragement 13 Inconvenient class time 14 Lack of opportunity to get extra practice in the lab 15 Lack of sufficient time to grasp the message 16 malfunctioning of the headphones 17 interruption of message at the time of listening 18 sudden/unscheduled tests of listening

4.3 The listening factor that poses the most difficulty for the learners

As mentioned in chapter three, the questionnaire was administered to 149 EFL learners during class time. As far as item number 20 was concerned, however, only 130 questionnaires were accepted for the study. The other 19 questionnaires were not taken seriously by the respondents, and were excluded from the study.

Table-6: Learners' responses that refer to the listening problem that poses the most difficulty for them

Item No	Statements	Students No.	Students %
1	Unfamiliar words including jargon and idioms interfered with my listening comprehension.	2	1.5
2	Complex grammatical structures interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	0.77
3	Long spoken text made me tired and interfered with my listening comprehension.	8	6.15
4	Information that was not crucial to me and that could not generate sufficient interest to me did not make me to continue listening.	2	1.5
5	The length and complexity of sentences interfered with my listening comprehension.	2	1.5
6	Unfamiliar topic/subject matter interfered with my listening comprehension.	3	2.3
7	At the time of listening I found it difficult to predict what would come next.	5	3.8
8	I found it difficult to recognize the words I know because of the way they are pronounced.	24	18.5
9	I found it difficult to understand the meaning of the spoken text without seeing the speaker's facial expressions & gesture (e.g. frowning face of anger)	4	3
10	There were words that I would normally understand in writing, but when I heard them in a stream of speech, I found it difficult to tell where one word finishes and another begins.	4	3
11	I found it difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening.	4	3
12	I feel worried and discouraged when I don't immediately understand the spoken text.	1	0.77
13	I found it difficult to answer questions which require other than a short answer (e.g. why or how questions, or writing a summary).	2	1.5
14	Speaker's fast speech interfered with my listening comprehension.	26	20
15	The speech of the native speakers with different speaking styles from what is familiar to me interfered with my listening comprehension.	11	8.5
16	The speech of the native speakers with different pronunciation from what is familiar to me interfered with my listening comprehension.	26	20
17	Unclear sounds resulting from poor quality tape-recorder or cassettes interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	0.77
18	Lack of sufficient time for carrying out the tasks interfered with my listening performance.	4	3

The target students were asked to identify the particular listening problem (from the factors presented in 4.1 and 4.2) that poses the most difficulty for them (See Item No 20 in Appendix A). As can be seen in Table-6, 26 (20%) out of 130 students have responded that the speech of the native speakers was the main factor which posed the most difficulty for them. The same number (20%) of students have also reported that speaker's fast speech posed the most difficulty for them. Almost the same number of students (24 out of 130) have also reported that a listening difficulty related to the native speakers pronunciation was the main factor that posed the most difficulty for them. (Note: Item No 16 was a cross-examining question for Item No 8.)

In other words, 58.5% of the students' response shows that the major source of their problems in EFL listening were the speech style of the native speakers, the pronunciation of native speakers and, fast speech, and all of them are related to the natural spoken features of the native speakers. From this result, therefore, it is possible to infer that most of the target students have identified that the natural features of native speaker English was the major factor which posed the most difficulty for them.

4.4 Analysis and Results of the Interview

This section presents and discusses the results of the study concerning the data obtained from the students semi-structured interview and the instructor structured interview. While the first section presents the data of the students interview, the second section presents the data of the instructor interview.

4.4.1 The students' interview

As mentioned in chapter three, a semi-structured interview was conducted three weeks after the data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed. Thirty students volunteered to be interviewed. At the interview, the students responded to four open-ended questions regarding the students' past experience of EFL listening, their learning process of listening, their use of listening strategies and the listening difficulties they encountered in learning to the EFL listening. Finally, the data of the interview was analyzed, and presented. First, let us see the following note.

As indicated in chapter one, before this study was started, there was an assumption that (1) Ethiopian students learn EFL listening at the lower classes and (2) college students are experienced with EFL listening activities. From the data obtained through the questionnaire, however, many of the subjects reported their experiences which seem to sharply contradict with the above assumptions. Thus, cross-checking questions were asked to cross-examine the reliability of the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Q_1: Before you joined the university, what experiences did you have in gaining listening skills?

- Did you get opportunities to practice listening skills? If that was so, in what way?
  - What kind of listening activities did you practice?
  - Were you exposed to the native speaker English?

Most of the interviewees reported that they have deep-rooted difficulties of EFL listening for the reason that they didn't practice it at lower classes. Different students gave different reasons for this case. One learner (S_1) reported that she didn't practice EFL listening while she was in high school. This was because her English teacher always skipped over the listening lessons of the textbook "My English teacher used to skip over the listening lesson whenever he got to the lesson." The other learner's (S_2) blame his poor listening performance on his rural background and on lack of access to resources of the EFL listening, "I came from rural area where there was no DS-TV or video that can help me to practice the EFL listening."

The researcher got some students who went through EFL listening practices while they were at high schools. The EFL listening experiences of these students was, however, based on the teachers' 'reading aloud'. Therefore, they have not been exposed to the native speaker English. The reason they presented for this case is that they did not get opportunity to be acquainted with the speech of the native speakers. This can be one factor which makes the students unfamiliar with the natural feature of spoken English.

Q_2: After you joined a university, particularly at the time you were taking the listening course, when and how much time did you practice listening, in and outside the class?

- What kinds of listening tasks did you do in class?
- Were the listening tasks you did in the course (FLEE 105) similar to the ones you had done in the English classes of your high schools?

All participants reported that they spent about two hours a week practicing listening in the language laboratory. The researcher got only three students whose average time of practicing listening outside class was 3 days a week and 40 minutes a day. Among whom, one was a student who had a personal habit of listening to English music and the other two were students who had a habit of watching movies. However, the remaining students reported that they never practice listening outside class. Their reason for not doing this was lack of opportunity to do so. The researcher disagrees with this idea to the fact that this reason was not true. At least, there is DS-TV in the auditorium of the University which gives 24-hour free service for all students.

Students were asked to report the kinds of listening tasks they do in the listening classes, and some of the tasks mentioned by the students are summarized as follows. In the listening course, there were activities in which the students were made to listen to a recorded interview (of native speakers) and then to carry out various tasks (such as, multiple choice, filling the blank, matching), to listen to a recorded 'real life' conversation (of native speakers) and then to carryout various tasks, to listen to a recorded story or an incident and to fill charts, and transfer information, to listen to a recorded speech of BBC and to answer comprehension questions, to listen to live English radio broadcasts and to report it to the class, and to listen to live BBC television news and to write the summary of the news, etc,. Many of the interviewees reported that these listening tasks they carried out in the listening course were quite different from the listening practice they experienced in the English classes of their high schools.

Some students also reported that their listening difficulty of understanding the native speech was related to the impact of their past experience of listening at lower levels. Some of such students reported that their difficulties of understanding

the native speech was due to their past learning habit of listening which was absolutely based on reading aloud. In the high school's listening lessons, it was their teacher who used to read aloud the listening passage for them; as a result, they are accustomed to their teachers' accent. Whenever they come across the natural speech of the native speakers, they said, they fail to grasp the pronunciation.

Some other students also reported that their difficulties of EFL listening came out of their rural background. There are students who claimed they came from rural area where there is no movie and plasma television. Personally, the researcher disagrees with this idea. These days, at least the radio is available in every household of the rural areas of Ethiopia. If a student is inspired and motivated to listen to English, that student can listen to the English radio broadcasts, such as BBC, VOA, etc.

Q_3: You were registered for the listening course in the first semester of this year (2007/08).

- How did you find the course?
- Are you interested in the listening course? Why?
- Why do you think some students are not interested in the listening course?

At the interview, many students reported that they found it difficult at all to take the listening course. Furthermore, from the data obtained through the questionnaire, it was indicated that many students were not interested in the listening course as well as in the department itself. At the interview, students were asked why they were not interested in the course. The reason many of the interviewees gave for this case is concerned with their low proficiency level of English. Many of them admitted that they are unable to communicate with the language. For example, one learner (S_4) reported that his English is so poor that it is difficult for him to communicate with the language through speaking and writing, "I'm poor in writing and speaking, so I had no intention to join the English department, but I have been forced to be English teacher in the future." Similarly, another learner (S_5) reported "I'm not competent enough to join the English department." The other learner (S_6) said, "Since I came from a newly established high school, we had no good English teacher, so it was difficult for me to communicate with English." One learner (S_7)

also reported, “What I have learned English through out my high school was in Amharic, so I don’t think I have got good background knowledge of English.”

The data of the students’ interview indicated that there is a problem related to the learners’ English proficiency. It seems this problem which made them to lose confidence in joining the English department and in enrolling in the target course. In fact, further study is needed to find out the specific problems concerning the learners’ English proficiency. The case indicates, however, a lot should be done to make an increase in the level of the students’ language competence that lead to direct boost in their confidence and their future professional status.

Q_4: What were the factors that affected your listening comprehension while you were taking the listening course (FLEE 105)?

In the data of the students’ interview, some listening difficulties such as affective barriers, learning difficulties related to individual learner's information processing, English proficiency, and problems centering the nature and procedures of strategy use; and problems of the listening materials were identified. After the analysis of the data obtained from the students’ interview, three major categories of listening difficulties were derived, including 14 minor groups. The categories are listener, speaker and text factors. An overview of the findings shown in Table -7.

Table-7: EFL listening barriers identified through the interview

Category	**Factors**
Listener	1. Affective factors 2. Lack of background knowledge 3. Fatigue 4. Poor English proficiency a) Limited English vocabulary b) Poor knowledge of grammar c) Poor listening ability 5. Difficulties related to listening strategies a) Forgetting to apply strategies b) Inability to apply strategies c) Ineffective use of strategies
Speaker	6. Spoken feature of the native speakers 7. Fast speech 8. Number of speakers and overlap of speech
Text	9. Difficulty of listening materials 10. Difficulty of the concept of the listening message

Even though the factors identified through the interview were almost similar to those of the listening difficulties identified though the questionnaire, their details are presented under their respective categories. Let us begin with the listeners' factors.

I. Listener factors

This category contains the factors that are related to the listeners. The minor groups of this category include affective factors, fatigue, lack of background knowledge, poor English proficiency, and difficulties related to listening strategies. Each of them is presented as follows.

1) Affective factors

Some affective factors might distract learners from listening and understanding. The affective factors that play a negative role in listening comprehension include anxiety, frustration, and resistance. For example, learner (S_{18}) felt depressed when she failed to comprehend: "I felt so depressed because I was totally lost in my personal matter outside class." Another learner (S_3) related her comprehension failure to the failure of the listening strategies she applied: "The strategies I learned were not helping me enough." Likewise, learner (S_{15}) experienced similar affective influence when a self-monitoring strategy was not functioning well: "I couldn't get the details out of the text even though I felt I had self-monitored myself . . . Feeling so depressed. It's so difficult for me to feel like giving up." The frustration led to thoughts of giving up the listening task. Some other students also reported that their frustration was related to their unfamiliarity with the speech of the native speakers. Learner (S_7) reported, "I have never ever been exposed to the speech of the native speakers until I enrolled in the listening course, so I feel worried whenever I engage in listening to the recordings." Another Learner (S_{16}) reported, "I didn't practice listening skills at lower levels, so the listening course here was strange for me. Frankly, when I come to the listening class, I always feel worry."

2) Lack of background knowledge

Some learners experienced problems regarding to interpretation of the perceived input. Some Learners were also unable to find the appropriate meaning or interpretation of particular vocabulary items, expressions, or entire text. The reasons for this might be associated with learners' ability of contextualizing the

input, activating related schemata, or simply lack of cultural awareness.

One learner (S_{18}) reported that it was difficult for her to understand the message which was related to the historical “the American Civil War”,” I was not a social science student so that I didn’t learn History; it was difficult for me to understand the story.” For learner (S_{19}), the interpretation of the whole text remained problematic, although certain strategies, such as inferencing were involved: "I inferred the word meaning from the context. Sometimes I understood all the words, but when all the parts were put together, I didn't know what the speaker was trying to say." Learner (S_{20}) could not decide how to interpret the meaning of the word "hide" from the context: “Once, I remember, the speakers in the dialogue were mentioning the word ‘hide’ several times, but it was very strange for me. After I went home, I looked it up in the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary. Then, I realized there were several meanings in ‘hide’. But to tell you the truth, I didn’t know which meaning was the right one.” And, learner (S_{22}) did not succeed in applying a prediction skill to listening comprehension due to insufficient background knowledge or schemata: "Prediction was hard for me when I got a topic, story, or report that I have never heard of."

3) Fatigue

Some learners mentioned fatigue as one of the causes for not being successful in spoken word processing. For learner (S_{23}) and (S_{24}), their attention or other mental efforts for listening were affected by their overall condition, i.e., whether they were tired or not. As stated by learner (S_{25}): "my attention to listen is depended on whether I am tired or not. When my energy is low, I can't listen very well. Maybe listening to English songs is all right, but not the tests and the assignments." The other learner (S_{26}) also reported: "I had to work full time in the other courses. When I got into the listening class in the hot afternoon immediately after lunch, I was exhausted. I did not feel like using my brain. When I listened to English at that time, I got dizzy."

4) Poor English proficiency

The students’ result in the listening course showed that most of the students were extremely weak in their listening comprehension. Many students also admitted (in

the interview) that their English is poor. The researcher interviewed the students in this regard to find out the reasons behind their poor listening comprehension. The learners put the blame on their limited English vocabulary, their poor knowledge of grammar and their poor listening ability. Each of them is presented as follows.

a. Limited English vocabulary

Some learners regarded their limited English vocabulary as an obstacle to their listening comprehension. For example, learner (S_{27}) believed that the first priority in improving listening comprehension was to increase her vocabulary instead of doing the exercises. She thought that once she increased her English vocabulary, listening comprehension would fall into place: "I think if I can improve myself to remember more vocabulary, maybe I can get the main idea more smoothly." When learner (S_{28}) came across unfamiliar keywords, she applied 'guessing' but without satisfaction: "Even if I know some words might be the key words due to the stressed emphasis, I still don't know what they mean. . . . Maybe it is because I know too few English words. So, even if I try to guess the words, there are still some sentences that I don't understand." It seems that she could identify some keywords, but she failed to understand the meanings of the words. In her own analysis, a limited vocabulary was considered responsible for the comprehension breakdown.

b. Poor Knowledge of Grammar

Some learners implied the importance of grammar in relation to listening comprehension. For instance, learner (S_{29}) says: "I don't think 'knowing a lot of vocabulary' only is useful ability for me. . . . My ability to listen for complex sentences is too bad, and also I know my English grammar is as terrible as my ability to English conversation." Similarly, learner (S_{30}) states: "My grammar is poor so my English isn't good. . . . They [listening, reading, and writing] all need grammar, vocabulary, and so on. . . . In the listening class, I feel this way, too." Although the learner did not explicitly illustrate the relationship between grammar and listening comprehension, the concern was there.

c. Poor Listening Ability

There were learners who attributed the listening difficulties to their overall listening ability. As learner (S_{22}) claimed, the failure of the listening comprehension resulted

from his poor listening ability: "It was not the fault of the listening materials; it's all my fault because of my poor listening ability. I'll work harder." Learner (S_3) also articulated his listening problem: "My English is not good. In addition, I had not a habit of EFL listening in the past, so it's difficult for me to listen and understand."

5) Difficulties related to listening strategies

This group contains the listening difficulties that are attributed to the listening strategies. The components of this group include forgetting to apply strategies, inability to apply strategies, and ineffective use of strategies. They will be discussed one by one.

a. Forgetting to apply strategies

Learners sometimes forgot to apply listening strategies while they are engaged in listening. For instance, learner (S_{11}) responded, "I can't always remember the inferencing strategy and cannot use it often." Learner (S_{18}) attempted to use self-monitoring and directed attention strategy, but often forgot to employ them in listening process: "sometimes I forgot to remind myself." This might imply that strategy use has not yet reached an automatic stage of learning for these learners, or might imply that strategies were not yet internalized as part of their existing listening skills.

b. Inability to apply strategies

Some learners encountered practical problems while trying to put their understanding of strategies into practice. This might be due to the learners' unfamiliarity with the procedures for specific strategy application. As exemplified in learner's (S_5) response: "Roughly, I know what 'elaboration' is about. But, when it comes time to apply it, it gets somewhat difficult," the learner understood the strategy of elaboration but was unable to apply it in listening process.

c. Ineffective use of strategy

There is also a failure of comprehension even after applying strategies. Another frequent report from learners was that the texts were still not comprehensible in spite of strategy use. As learner (S_6) indicated when the inferencing strategy was used: "I inferred the word meaning from the context" but still "when all the parts are put together, I don't know what the speaker is trying to say." Likewise, learner (S_5) probably used the imagery strategy, but was left puzzled: "Easy to imagine. Hard

to know what the people are going to say exactly. . . . I don't know what they mean." A problem also emerged while the learner (S_6) attempted to practice the strategy of directing attention: "What's difficult for me is after focusing my attention; I still can't understand."

II. Speaker Factors

This category contains the listening difficulties that are attributed to native speakers of English. The minor groups in this category include spoken feature of the native speech, fast speech and the number of speakers in the listening text. Each of them is presented as follows.

1) Spoken feature of the native speech

Some learners reported that the difficulties in EFL listening comprehension were complicated due to spoken-word recognition problems. Some, like learner (S_8), reported that they were having trouble with the matching task between the pronunciation of the spoken words and the words they already knew in their written forms. Others, like learner (S_9), also reported that they were unable to recognize the spoken words because of the pronunciation. There were also some learners, such as (S_{10}), who experienced both problems mentioned above. One of the learners (S_{11}) remarked, "I can't listen to phrases clearly." This shows the difficulty of identifying or differentiating individual sounds in a stream of sounds. Similarly, learner (S_{12}) couldn’t recognize key words due to the barriers in perceiving or differentiating sounds that seemed to sound alike to the learner. Here, the students were not able to give good examples. Another learner (S_{13}) was able to identify or differentiate the flow of sounds, but matching the pronunciation with the word meaning was difficult for him. The response from the learner (S_{14}) specified this problem: "Even when the pronunciation is familiar to me, I sometimes forget what the word is." Another learner (S_{15}) encountered both problems addressed above, reporting: "Some spoke very differently. . . . I couldn't hear clearly about the pronunciation. . . I thought of certain words but it turned out that they were the other words instead."

2) Fast speech

Some learners reported their failure to process spoken input was due to the speed

of delivery of the native speakers. For example, learner (S_{16}) pointed out a general problem when trying to comprehend: "The native speakers usually speak too fast for me to grasp the information. It takes too much time to grasp the information. So, I don't feel like understanding the message." It seemed to learner (S_{21}) that processing input with listening to fast speech took up additional mental efforts and precious processing time; thus, frustration was heightened, “My problems appear when I listen to fast speech. Before I can react, it's over.” For learner (S_{17}), although an effort to grasp the message was attempted, he failed due to the speed of processing problem: "I couldn't react to the words that I listened to as fast as possible, even though I've sensed that they might be the key words."

3) Number of speakers and overlap of speech

The other reported issue by the subjects was related to difficulties faced due to the number of speakers involved in a text and due to the overlap of speeches while two or more people are involved in a talk. Learner (S_6) reported “it is difficult to identify who is speaking at a moment in a conversation where many speakers are involved.” Learner (S_{12}) responded “The other man starts talking while the first one was talking. If they talk turn by turn, it may be easier for me to identify who is speaking.” Learner (S_{23}) also reported, “Sometimes two persons talk at the same time, so it was difficult for me to differentiate who said what.”

III. Text factors

This category also contains the listening difficulties that are attributed to the listening materials of the course. The minor groups include the difficulty level of the listening materials and the difficulty of the concept of the listening message. They will be presented in the following section.

1) The difficulty level of listening materials

Learners were more inclined to practice listening skills with materials that were not too difficult for them. When the learners encounter listening materials that were above their level to a certain degree, complaints were often made about the difficulties of the listening process. For instance, learner (S_{30}) compared two sources of English listening texts, one a narration that accompanied "the module" and another authentic material from the English service of the “BBC". For the

learner, the former material (the narration) was easier to follow because of the text level: "listening to a slow speech is a good idea because the narrator says slowly. However, working with the talks in the BBC would be a very difficult job for me." Learner (S_{26}) compared two levels of text complexity (in reference to the former and the latter) EFL listening texts. She chose the former text claiming that it is easier to understand and to practice strategies: "But, if it's the BBC (which she claimed is difficult), I feel it's a little hard to understand. So, I prefer to listen to the easier one."

2) Difficulty of the concept of the listening message

Some learners regarded the difficulty of the concept of the message as a barrier to their listening comprehension. For example, learner (S_6) reported that the concept of the message he heard about 'why butterflies surround light' was very difficult for him, and was unable even to get the general idea, "The concept about 'butterflies' was very difficult for me. Believe me or not, I didn't understand anything in that text." Learner (S_7) also reported that the idea heard about 'how to make a good quality glass' was difficult for him, "The concept which was very difficult for me was the idea I heard about 'making glasses'. This was the most difficult concept I have ever got in the listening classes." Some students were not able to remember the particular concept that was most difficult for them; there were some students, however, who were able to remember it. Many of these students pointed their finger at the topic "why butterflies surround light". Learner (S_{17}) said "I don't forget it because I scored zero in it." This test was taken out of 10% and the student reported that many students scored zero in the test. The course instructor confirmed that many students scored zero in the aforementioned test; however, the score was cancelled for the reason that many students failed. At the interview, many of the students complained that most of the topics in the listening materials of the listening course were full of difficult concepts.

4.4.2 The instructor interview

As it is mentioned in chapter three, a structured interview with the instructor of the listening course was conducted after the students' interview had been completed. At the interview, the instructor responded to seven open-ended questions

regarding his approach in the teaching of the listening course, about the quality of the listening materials in the lab, about the support he provided while the learners engaged in listening and about the opportunity he gave for the students to practice in the lab. This was later transcribed and analyzed. Results are given in the order of the questions being asked.

Q_1: How did the instructor approach the teaching of listening comprehension?

In order to improve the students' L_2 listening skills, the instructor emphasized on the teaching and training of listening strategies, such as, predictive skills, extracting specific information, getting the general picture, extracting detail information, recognizing functions and discourse patterns and deducting meaning from contexts. In addition he was not restricted to one particular teaching method; he preferred to combine some teaching methods depending on the students' proficiency level and learning condition. He was strict to the students because he strongly believed that students should practice very hard and make good progress.

Q_2: What teaching materials, teaching activities, and listening tasks were employed in the course?

- What teaching activities did the instructor have for the students to enhance their comprehension of English?
- What teaching materials did the instructor prepare for the students?
- What listening tasks did the instructor require the students to perform in and outside class?

The instructor reported that he used two textbooks, "Listening to TOEFL: Test kit 2" and a Module prepared by himself in 2007. The instructor required the students to do the exercises from these two textbooks and to take one quiz for each unit in the regular classes. He also asked the students to practice in the ELIP center of the English Department.

The instructor provided the students in-class activities and tasks taken from "Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2", and from the module with 10 to 15 minutes listening activities, and training strategies and tests. The question types of the tests taken from "Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2" were presented in the form of multiple-choice questions, and matching. The instructor let the students listen to a recorded

interview (of native speakers) and then to carry out various tasks, and listen to a recorded 'real life' conversation (of native speakers) and then carryout various tasks, etc. The instructor also let the students do listening activities such as dictation and other comprehension questions in class regarding each unit of the module. In addition to these, he let them do extra exercises of authentic listening activities, such as, listening to a recorded speech of BBC and answering comprehension questions, listening to the BBC radio broadcasts and to report it orally to the class, and listening to live BBC news and to write summaries of the news. The instructor believed that low achiever students in particular needed to practice their listening by doing various kinds of listening tasks. Whenever the learners are engaged in listening, they would go through the practice of the macro and micro skills of listening. The listening tasks of the module are also designed in such a way that they help the learners develop the skills and strategies of L_2 listening. For example, when the students get to listen to an event told by a native speaker, they will be given listening exercises that get them to infer, extract specific information, get general idea, deduct meaning from context, etc. Now the question by the researcher is "Do these students really use these receptive skills while engaged in listening?" and "To what extent do the students use these skills and strategies?" It is beyond the scope of the study to try to answer these big questions; it needs further study.

Q_3: What was the goal that the instructor expected to achieve for the course?

The instructor wished to help the students to improve listening skills, use listening strategies effectively, build confidence in listening, and become independent listeners.

Q_4: What does the instructor think about the students' motivation and attitude towards learning to EFL listening?

The instructor thought that the students were not that much motivated to learn EFL listening and they did not even know how to improve their listening comprehension. This may be due to the students' past experience and their poor listening ability. The listening materials were selected assuming that they are fit and necessary to College Level English major students. However, the students didn't have the

necessary skills and knowledge of English to handle the tasks well. The students were below the level expected of them so that the listening tasks and the learners' English proficiency were not balanced. This seems the reason that made them discouraged and not to be motivated to learn. Instead, the learners always preferred to complain about the difficulty level of the listening texts.

Q_5: What did the instructor consider as problems for the students in the learning of listening?

The instructor repeated the statement he gave under Question Number-4 regarding the students' poor listening ability and their incompetence to the level expected of them. The instructor thinks that the students are poor in the overall language skills, they did not have enough vocabulary, enough knowledge of grammar, they were not active in practicing listening, and they did not use effective strategies to handle their listening problems; moreover, their poor management of time also affected their listening performance.

Q_6: The students reported that they didn't get extra opportunity to practice in the laboratory. Why didn't the instructor arrange extra opportunity for the students to practice in the laboratory?

Besides the listening course, there were other courses (such as spoken English) which used the laboratory. And to learn the aforementioned courses, there were various groups of students who work in the lab from Monday to Friday. Even the remaining days of the week (Saturday and Sunday including the evening classes) were occupied by extension students. As a result, the lab was busy for the whole week.

However, there is a language club established by the English major students (with the help of the English department). A student who becomes a member of that club is allowed to use the ELIP center. In that language center, there are tape recorders, cassettes, video-tape recorders, and video cassettes which promote language learning practice. Those students who are members of the club can get the opportunity to practice in the ELIP center, and this was also publicly announced for all students of the English department.

Q_7: The instructor was told that some students complained they were demotivated during taking the course, and he was asked to add if he wants to add anything (comment, compliment, or suggestion).

The students are very poor in the over all language skills, so it was difficult for the students to bring the needed behavioral change within a semester listening course. It was really a very difficult job for him to handle students who didn't have the necessary prerequisite to the target course. As a solution, thus, the instructor advised that the students who are going to join the English Department should be only those students who are able to pass the English Language Aptitude Test. This advice seems quite acceptable.

4.5 Analysis of the observation of the listening environment

Here the listening environment refers to the place and the setting where the teaching learning process of the EFL listening was taking place. The language laboratory is also a part of the listening environment where the learning of listening took place. We will see the strengths and the weaknesses in this regard. Let us begin with the strengths.

As mentioned in the background, the language laboratory of BDU was built in 1995 and it has been giving service for 13 years. It has been used for teaching of Listening Skills, Spoken English-I and Spoken English-II for various groups of students. To learn the aforementioned courses, the regular, the extension, and the summer students use the lab. While the regular students work in it from Monday to Friday, the extension students work on Saturday and Sunday including the evening classes. There are also summer students who work in it in the summer time.

In the language laboratory, there are three televisions, one computer, video and tape recorders. All these electrical equipment use in the teaching of the listening course. There are also blank and recorded cassettes including video cassettes in the lab. All these helped in introducing students to various EFL listening activities and in exposing the students to native speaker English. There is also a satellite-television broadcast received via satellite-dish. The students are sometimes exposed to authentic news comes live by satellite from the British Broadcasting Corporation. Furthermore, there are individual tape recorders and

headphones for each student, and the language laboratory is equipped in such a way that each student uses his/her own head phone with its own respective volume, and when the students get to listen to a spoken text, they will always be instructed to use their head phone. These were some of the strengths of the laboratory.

When we come to the weaknesses of the lab, giving service (for all days of the week, for all the weeks of the month, and for all the months of the year, including summer) for 13 years made the lab very old and the quality deteriorated. Some of the equipment torn apart, which in turn led to the malfunctioning of the equipments. For example, some of the headphones and the playing machines are not working properly, so frequent interruptions of messages during listening become a common phenomena. It is difficult to be successful in comprehension particularly for those students who are compelled to use such damaged equipments.

In the lab, there are 48 head phones, 48 playing machines and 48 seats even though the number of students in one section reaches to sixty. Consequently, the number of headphones and playing machines is not sufficient when compared to the number of students in a section. This was really an extra challenge particularly for the students of section B and C whose class-size is sixty each. This is to mean that 12 students in each section were missing the practice of listening in every listening class. Depriving such students from doing practice can be one factor which influenced their listening performance.

To see the effect of the shortage of head phones, playing machines and seats in the lab, the researcher observed when students entered the lab to attend Speaking Course (FLEE 202). The students were pushing each other while entering the class to the fact that the number of head phones, playing machines and seats was not sufficient for all of them. For example, many students were running and competing to get a seat, and those who lagged behind were compelled to bring a chair from other neighboring rooms. Even though these students get a chair, they were to be left to listen without wearing headphones and getting their own playing machines. Instead, they were made to listen from the speaker of the master tape recorder which is far away from them. Furthermore,

these students were exposed for a disturbing sound of machines which comes from the neighboring construction sites. This by itself was a barrier for the comprehension of these students, who were left to listen with out headphone. This case was really an extra burden for the students who were learning in the lab.

As far as the playing machines are concerned, one master tape-recorder and 48 individual-tape recorders are available in the lab. While the master tape recorder is controlled by the instructor and the lab technician, the individual's tape recorders are controlled by the students themselves. The students have some control on their respective tape recorder, but the master tape recorder is beyond their control. Unless the willingness of the instructor is granted, it is impossible for a student to work independently, i.e., to rewind, or to forward, or to stop the player as much as he/she wants. This condition prevents the students from having independent listening.

As far as environmental noise is concerned, recently, it is obvious that the government of Ethiopia is building new universities, and it is expanding the older ones. The target university in this study is also one of the relatively older institution in which such development is in place. As a result, there are lots of construction works in the compound, and some of the construction sites are around the language laboratory where the teaching-learning process of listening is taking place. At the time this study was conducted, there was a disturbing sound of machines which emerge from the construction sites.

In addition, all the learning rooms including the language laboratory are built very near each other. When the students enter and get out from classes, the noise which comes out from the crowd disturbs those students who are engaged in listening at the same time. This and the above problems were some of the factors which affected the learners listening comprehension.

4.6 Materials and Document Analysis

This section examines the listening materials used in the target course and analyzes the students' performance in the course. This section comprises two parts. The first part discusses about the listening materials. The second part also discusses the extent of the students' achievement in the listening course. We will begin with analyzing the listening materials.

4.6.1 The Listening Materials

As shown in the data of the interview, the instructor used two textbooks, “Listening to TOEFL: Test kit 2” and a module prepared by himself. The researcher got copies of both listening materials from the instructor and he described each of them. First we will discuss about “Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2” and then we will see the module of the listening course.

4.6.1.1 Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2

The “Listening to TOEFL”, which is about two hours long, is designed to evaluate the English proficiency of students whose native language is not English. The material is particularly designed for secondary-level students preparing to study in the Colleges of USA.

The questions in the test are based on common problems that nonnative speakers of English may have with the language. The statements and conversations in the listening comprehension section are samples of what the learners are assumed to hear in English classrooms. The questions include combinations of sounds and words that are frequently difficult for nonnative speakers, as well as the grammar that is used in spoken English. All the questions are believed to test the learners understanding of the spoken language.

There are three parts in this listening material. In Part A, the learners hear a statement; then they read four sentences. They must choose the written statement that is closest in meaning to the statement they heard. Many times the incorrect choices contain words or sounds similar to the ones the students hear on the recording. However, they do not have the same meaning. Therefore, it is important to listen very carefully to the recording.

In Part B, the students hear short conversations between two people. At the end of each conversation a third person asks a question about the conversation. The students must choose the one best answer from the four answer choices given for each question. It is important that the students listen carefully to the recording. Many times the incorrect choices will contain words that are in the conversation but, that do not answer the question.

In Part C, the students hear either a long conversation, or a short talk, or lecture. After each conversation or lecture, the students must answer thee to five

questions about what the learners' heard. The talks are about a variety of subjects; they do not contain specialized information that gives advantages to individuals who have specific knowledge about the subjects discussed.

As far as the contents are concerned, "Listening to TOEFL: Test kit 2" contains four units, three of which are believed to provide the students with different kinds of practice opportunity. Unit 1 contains the answer choices for 175 questions of the kind that are found in Part A and Part B of the listening comprehension section of TOEFL. Unit 2 contains two complete listening comprehension sections (Part A, B and C) that have been used in the real TOEFL in the past. Unit 3 contains two complete TOEFL examinations. Unit 4 contains the correct answers for all questions. All the three units (1, 2, and 3) are accompanied with audio-cassettes.

As far as the topics are concerned, "Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2" contains personal account, narration, dialogues, conversation of three participants with the following topics: a student vacation, why butterflies surround light, island of the deaf, American culture, History of the Americans, How to make good quality glass, etc.

As far as the listening activities are concerned, the activities in the Test Kit 2 involve listening for perception, and listening for comprehension. While the listening for perception deals with word level and sentence level listening practices, the listening for comprehension deals with discourse level exercises that include narration and conversation. The listening exercises are arranged from simple to complex; they begin with accurate aural perception (i.e., word and sentence level language) and gradually shift to listening for comprehension (discourse level language).

The maximum numbers of participants in the listening text are three: one woman and two men. While the two persons are the participants in the conversation, the third person is the one who asks the comprehension questions.

Strength and weakness of the text book

It is important to notice the advantages of "Test Kit 2" which is believed to help the students to improve their listening skills. It is also important to see the weaknesses of "Test Kit 2", which might be the source of the learners listening difficulties. Looking into the weaknesses can help to evaluate how much the material was fit

for the teaching of listening and to judge whether the problems of the material were part of the listening difficulties, which affected the learners' listening comprehension.

Strength

1. "Listening to TOEFL" gives the learners the opportunity to hear and practice the kinds of listening comprehension that are contained in real life communication.
2. The participants in the listening material are all native speakers of English. This helps the learners familiarize themselves with the spoken feature of the language which in turn prepares them for the real world listening of English broadcasts.
3. The listening exercises are arranged from simple to complex; they begin with word and sentence level language and then gradually shift to discourse level language.
4. In the data of the questionnaire there were some students who reported that the number of speakers in the material is so many that the learners were not able to identify who was speaking at a moment. However, the study identified that the numbers of participants in the conversations are not more than three. In most of the conversations, there were two participants (one man and one woman) who were engaged in the talk. This less number of participants as well as the gender mix is believed to help the learners to easily identify which one is talking in a turn.
5. At the interview, there were many students who reported that the speech of delivery in the text was fast. This seems however, a matter of perception rather than fact. The researcher analyzed the audio-cassettes which accompany the textbooks, but he didn't get any speech of delivery as fast as is claimed by the subjects. All the speech was delivered at normal speed. Therefore, it seems the perception of the students which made the delivery fast rather than the speed of the actual speaker in the target material. If the students had been familiar with the spoken feature of native speech, they would have not perceived it as fast speech.

Weakness

1. As indicated in the description of the target material, the exercises include identifying combinations of sounds and words that are frequently difficult for nonnative speakers. This nature of the exercises traps the learners to easily commit errors. This makes the exercises of the book difficult for our learners. This can be one reason which made the learners perceive the speech of the native speakers as difficult to understand.
2. As the name of the material implies (TOEFL - Test of English as a Foreign Language), it is a proficiency test that is purposely designed to measure non-native people's ability in English to decide whether an individual is capable to study in the Colleges of USA. Thus, the material focuses on the elements of testing rather than letting the students practice the various listening skills and strategies. For example, the material lacks pre-listening tasks; as a result, it doesn't encourage practicing the predictive skills of EFL listening.
3. Comprehension of some of the topics of the text requires the background knowledge of the history and the culture of the Americans. Thus, some of the topics might be difficult for those students who do not have background knowledge about the history and the culture of the Americans. There are also topics with difficult theoretical concept such as "why butterflies surround light" which require the learners' knowledge of theory related to a particular subject matter. Such topics may be difficult for the learners to understand the listening message, and the tasks related to these topics might be beyond the learners' cognitive capacity and experience. This can make the learners to be frustrated rather than being motivated to listen.
4. The material was purposely designed to evaluate the learners EFL listening ability so that the listening tasks were intended to demand the skills of listening. However, most of the tasks in the material demand a range of linguistic abilities (such as vocabulary, grammar, reading skills, etc). These made the students' success of listening to be depend on their knowledge of reading skills, vocabulary and grammar other than their skills of listening. This can be one factor which affected the students' listening performance.

5. The listening material introduces students only to one particular accent, i.e., to the accent of US English particularly of the mid west accent of the US (http://www.toefl.org/research/rrpts.html). As a result, the learners were deprived of receiving the various accents of English (such as, the British, Australian, Canadian, New Zealander, Nigerian, Jamaican, Indian, etc) which exist in the real world English.

The result of the analysis of the textbook (Test Kit 2) indicates that the target listening material itself can be a source of listening comprehension problems. In particular, the difficulty of the tasks, unfamiliar topics, lack of activities that let the students practice various strategies, and the demand of a range of linguistic abilities other than listening, all these factors might influence the students EFL listening performance in the listening course.

4.6.1.2 Analysis of the Module

As indicated in the data of the interview, the module of the listening course is prepared by the instructor of the target course. The module is designed in line with the course objectives and the course description of the institution. According to the objectives, at the end of the course the trainees are expected to be able to: have a clear understanding of the theoretical bases of listening, apply various specific skills and strategies that are used for effective listening, and develop a good attitude towards learning to listen in English independently. The module is assumed to provide the learners with means and opportunities to achieve the objectives of the course.

There are six units in the module. Unit 1 contains theoretical perspectives of listening. The theoretical discussion includes approaches to learning to listen, characteristics of effective listening, and some problems in learning to listen in English and their teaching implications.

Unit 2 contains elements of predicting and inferring skills of EFL listening. This part includes the devices that let the students practice the skills of predicting what a speaker is going to say, the skills of inferring meaning of words that might be new to the learners and inferring meaning of words a learner can not hear.

Unit 3 introduces the skills of recognizing the sections of a talk. This part

includes activities that let the students practice deciding whether information in a section of a talk is important, identifying where a section of a talk begins and ends, and explaining how the various parts of the talk are related. This part also includes transition markers (words and phrases).

Unit 4 contains the issues involved in recycling, i.e., in reformulation and in repetition. This part includes activities that let the students take note of main points they missed in a lecture when the points are recycled. This is believed to help the students practice listening less intensively whenever a main point that they already understood is recycled.

Unit 5 contains activities that let the learners apply strategies which help them to identify cause/effect relationships in arguments which are developed by a speaker. This part emphasizes markers of cause/effect relationship that usually appear in a spoken language.

Unit 6 contains activities that let the learners practice identifying a contrast relationship of ideas developed by a speaker. This part also includes background reading, contrast markers (words and phrases), note taking, and prediction practice.

Each unit focuses on discussing issues related to developing the learners' listening skill. The issues are presented in the form of activities which enable the learners to develop concepts related to the given listening skills. Similarly, each unit (except the first unit) has also a corresponding audio-cassette with a total of one hour long.

The stories in the audio-cassette (that accompany the module) are narrated by two native speakers of English (with US accent), a man and a woman, who were a staff member of the English department of Bahir Dar University. After the practices of all the activities of the module, it is assumed the students will be able to make use of the knowledge and skills they gained in the course in various real life listening situations.

As far as the topics are concerned, the major listening topics of the module are: (1) Urbanization, (2) Tourism, (3) Preventive Medicine, (4) Food Supply, and (5) Microchip Technology. There are also sub-topics under each of the above major topics. The listening activities of the module are based on each sub-topic.

Strength of the module

1. The module provides the learners with the opportunity to hear and practice EFL listening comprehension.
2. The module gives the learners the opportunity to practice the skills and strategies of listening, such as, understanding the setting or context, understanding the central idea, predicting, understanding the structural organization of a text, ignoring unknown or irrelevant words or details, understanding implied meaning, and listening for specific information or details
3. The narrators in the listening material are native speakers of English. This helps to familiarize the learners with the spoken feature of the native speakers' English.
4. The number of speaker involved in the talk is one, and the seaker presents the talk in the form of narration. This does not confuse the learners to identify the speaker unlike those listening activities in which two or more speakers are involved.

Weakness of the module

1. The listening passage of the module was taken from written discourse so that the listening activities are almost similar to those of the 'reading aloud' (i.e., saying words as they are written). As a result of this, the material lost the natural feature (quality) of spoken English which is characterized by colloquial language, informal and spontaneously produced conversation. This artificial nature of the language doesn't give real life listening practice that must make the learners familiar to the natural feature of the spoken language.
2. Transforming the written discourse to spoken discourse has also another disadvantage. (a) With regard to density, the information in the written English is packed densely when compared with that of the spoken English (Ur, 1984; Underwood, 1989; McDonough & Shaw, 1993). The density of the information can interfere with the learners' listening comprehension. (b) When the two are compared in reference to syntax: while the spoken language is syntactically simpler, the written language is relatively complex (Brown & Yule, 1983). Such complexity can also interfere with the learners' listening comprehension.

3. The listening activities of the module are not organized following-up the three stages of the most common pattern of teaching listening: pre-, while- and post-listening stages, which let the students apply different listening strategies (such as predicting, inferring, transferring ideas, etc).
4. As indicated above (in No 3), with the exception of Unit 2 and Unit 6, the module does not have pre-listening tasks. As a result, students who have no background knowledge about the target topics can be affected by the missing of the pre-listening tasks. As indicated in Table-1d of this chapter, more than half (63%) of the participants in this study have responded that unfamiliar topic often or always interfered with their listening comprehension, and also as indicated in Table-2a, more than half (58%) of the participants have responded that they found it difficult to predict what would come next at the time of listening. The cause of these problems may be due to lack of pre-listening tasks in the module that help to activate the learners' schemata, which in turn lead the learners to prepare themselves to listen.
5. In the analysis of the module, it is indicated that the number of speaker in the listening activities is one and the way the talk is presented is in the form of narration. This type of talk in which only one speaker is engaged and only one type of speaking style (i.e., only narration) prevailed has its own disadvantage. Such speech characteristics may not provide the learners with the opportunity for adequate real life EFL listening practices. The reason why this happens is that such kind of talk may not let the learners be familiar with the natural conversation of the real life which usually involve two or more participants.
6. The listening topic of the module particularly under the title "preventive medicine" contains some medical words (jargon of medicine) that seem unfamiliar to the students. Having jargon might make the topic difficult for those students who didn't have good background knowledge of medicine.
7. Each unit of the module is devoted to introducing either one or two listening strategies at a time. It would have been better if each unit had been devoted to exposing students for various types of listening skills and strategies at the same time. When the materials give abundant opportunities to practice the skills in systematic and comprehensive ways, the students get more chance to practice

the skills and the strategies again and again. These continuous practices of the skills make the learners more familiar with the strategies (O'Malley et al, 1989).

8. Some scholars (like Atkins, et al, 1995) assert that good listening lesson will obviously involve students in using more than one skill and may require all the skills to be employed. Keeping this point as it is, other scholars (like Hughes, 1989, Underwood, 1989) also assert that if the purpose of teaching is intended for practicing the skills of listening, the exercises should not be dominated by questions which demand a wide range of linguistic abilities rather than the skills of listening. When we evaluate the module from this point of view, the listening exercises were purposely designed to let the learners practice the skills of listening. However, most of the exercises in the module (in the course as a whole as well) demanded the skills of writing, speaking, and reading comprehension at large. These made writing, speaking, and reading have a strong influence on the students' success of listening achievement other than the skills of listening. This can be one factor which affected the students' listening performance.

The results of the analyses of the two textbooks, "Listening to TOEFL: Test kit 2" and the module of the target course indicate that the listening materials themselves can be the sources of the learners' listening difficulties. In particular, the difficulty of the tasks, lack of some activities that let the students practice the strategies, the demand of a wide range of linguistic abilities, lack of pre-listening tasks, the presence of difficult concepts, the inclusion of unfamiliar topics and jargon, and the syntactic complexity and the densely packed information of the listening passages, all these factors might influence the students' EFL listening comprehension.

4.6.2 Analysis of the learners' achievement scores

This part discusses about the target students' performance in the 'listening course' as well as in the other 'English courses' which were offered in the first semester of 2007/8 academic year in the Department of English at BDU.

4.6.2.1 Achievement scores in the listening course (FLEE 105)

The researcher conducted document analysis regarding the results the students achieved in the listening course in the first semester of the year 2007/8.

Successive ‘progress achievement tests’ were employed through out the course to see the students’ progress and to measure the students’ listening performance. At the end, these tests were recorded to determine students’ grade in the listening course.

The tests were taken from “Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2” (see pp 70). 90% of the semester score of the students were results of the total sum of these tests which were given on a continuous basis. In the continuous assessment of the course, for example, there were activities in which the students were made: to listen to a recorded interview (of native speakers) and then to carry out various tasks (such as, multiple choices, filling the blank, matching), to listen to a recorded ‘real life’ conversation (of native speakers) and then to carryout various tasks, to listen to a recorded story of an incident and to answer comprehension questions, to listen to a recorded dialogue and to answer comprehension questions, etc,. The students’ results of the total sum of all the tests in the listening course were considered as the students’ listening achievement. The analysis of the scores helped to determine the students listening ability.

The analysis was based on the scale given by Educational Testing Service of TOEFL (http://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/TOEFL/pdf/Score). The scale has four levels of listening abilities: (1) Strong, (2) Average, (3) Minimal, and (3) Poor listening abilities. The scale is also expressed in numbers rated zero to six. Based on the scale, the extent of the examinees English listening ability was determined. According to the scale, for example, a score of 6 indicate strong listening abilities, 5 indicate average listening abilities and 4 indicate minimal listening abilities. A score of 3, 2, or 1 also show lack of listening ability. This implies that a student who scored below half of the given scale can be labeled to be weak in listening ability.

When we come to the particular intent of the analysis, the students’ results of the semester showed that 81% of the students scored below 50%, which indicated many of these students to be extremely weak in their listening performance (see Appendix F). This implies that the learners' listening ability is poor, and this poor listening ability also can be one factor which affected the learners EFL listening comprehension.

4.6.2.2 Achievement scores in 'Communicative English Skills' (FLEE 101e)

According to the syllabus published by the Ministry of Education of Ethiopia (MOE, 1994), by the end of grade 12, the students gain sufficient mastery of the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in English which enable them to study effectively at school, and to use the language whenever necessary in everyday situations and in the world of work. Therefore, when the students join Colleges and Universities, there is an assumption that the students have the necessary prerequisite skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in English that enable them to study effectively at the tertiary levels.

When we come to the particular intent of the point, the participants of this study have taken English Courses, such as, Communicative English Skills, Reading Skills, Methods of Teaching English, and Practicum-I including the target listening course. The researcher has tried to see the students' results which were recorded to determine the students' grades particularly of Communicative English Skills in which listening is one of the components of the course. The results in this course were not as low as that of the listening course (with the exception of the results of some students); however, the students' results in most of the assessments (of listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in the Communicative English Skills were not good enough. This shows the learners achievement in the over all English skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) was low. This may imply that the learners' English is poor. The learners' poor English can be one factor which affected the students listening comprehension.

Effective comprehension in foreign language requires the knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, and the overall skills of the target language (Rost, 1990; Rubin, 1994). Therefore, listening comprehension may be difficult for these students whose English is poor. Further more, it is difficult for such students to apply the various listening strategies whenever they are engaged in EFL listening. The finding presented in Table-2a can be evidence for this case, and this is also in line with Murphy's study (1985), which shows that students with poor English proficiency are not able to employ the appropriate strategies whenever they are engaged in EFL listening activities. Similarly, the study of O'Malley et al (1989) identified differences in the frequencies and varieties of strategies that more

proficient (top ranking) versus less proficient listeners (bottom ranking students) used. The study found out that the less-proficient learners do not use various listening strategies frequently when they are compared with the more-proficient ones.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter contains three sections. The first section summarizes the major findings of the study. The second section provides the conclusion. Finally, the recommendations are presented in the last section.

5.1 Summary of the Results

In this study the main point of discussion has been to identify the factors that contribute to the problems learners encounter in EFL listening comprehension, to assess whether the factors are associated with text, speaker, listener, or environment, and to identify which particular factor poses the most difficulty for the learners. The subjects of the study were first year English major students of Bahir Dar University. Data was collected using questionnaire, interview, observation, material analysis and document analysis. The following are the major findings of the study.

1. The study identified a range of factors: text, listener, speaker, and environment factors. The discussion and interpretation sections of the study reveal that these factors influenced EFL listening comprehension.
2. As far as the listening materials used in the course are concerned, various limitations have been identified. This was done through the analysis of not just the students' response only but also through thorough investigation of the materials themselves in the light of the principles of ELT materials preparation and selection. The results of the analysis indicate that the materials are not appropriate for the training of necessary skills and strategies of listening to the target students. For example, the textbook was purposely designed for testing, not for teaching. Similarly, the module also contains texts which are not appropriate for teaching listening. Moreover, the tasks are also found to be very difficult. For example, the level of difficulty of the listening materials of the target course was also found to be above the students' ability.

3. The result of the observation of the listening environment indicates that unclear sounds resulting from poor quality tape-recorder and cassettes, insufficient number of headphones and playing machines, malfunctioning of some of the headphones, and disturbing noises from neighboring areas played a negative role on the learners' listening performance.
4. The analysis of the students' listening achievement scores which were recorded to determine the students grade in the listening course showed that most of the target students achieved poorly.
5. The factors, which were identified in the study, have been organized into four categories. Although it was difficult to make clear demarcations between some of the factors, they are presented here under four categories: text, speaker, listener, and environment. The following table shows these four categories and the individual factors identified under each category. It should be noted that the individual factors are put in no particular order.

Table-8: Factors that influenced the learners' listening comprehension

Category	Factors
Text	1. Unfamiliar words including jargon and idioms 2. Difficult grammatical structures 3. Long spoken text 4. Information that can not generate sufficient interest 5. The length and complexity of sentences 6. Unfamiliar topic/subject matter 7. Unfamiliar tasks in the listening tests 8. The difficulty of the concepts in the listening texts 9. The complexity of the tasks (e.g. demanding a wide range linguistic abilities)
Listener	10. inability to predict 11. inability to get general idea of a text from a first listening 12. Unfamiliarity to the natural speech of the native speakers. 13. unfamiliarity to the culture of the native speakers 14. inability to understand the discrepancy between the spoken and the written English 15. anxiety and frustration 16. Lack of interest and motivation in the course 17. Unfamiliarity to the listening course itself 18. Lack of extra time to practice listening skills outside class 19. Lack of confidence in their listening ability 20. Fatigue

Speaker	21. the pronunciation of native speakers 22. fast speech 23. the overlap of speeches when two or more speakers are involved 24. speaking style of native speakers (spoken features of English)
Environment	25. Unclear sounds resulted from poor quality tape-recorder or cassettes 26. Inadequate class time (2 hours per week) 27. Lack of sufficient time to grasp the message 28. Lack of sufficient time to complete tasks 29. Disturbing noise emerged from the environment 30. Insufficient number of headphones and playing machines 31. Lack of support and encouragement 32. Inconvenient class time 33. Lack of opportunity to get extra practice in the laboratory 34. malfunctioning of the headphones 35. interruptions of messages at the time of listening 36. sudden/unscheduled tests of listening

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study the following conclusions are drawn.

1. The study confirmed that the target college students encountered listening difficulties while they were engaged in EFL listening, which was practiced in the listening course (FLEE 105).
2. The study reveals that the learners' listening difficulties emerged from the defects of the listening materials used in the course, from the students' poor listening ability and unfamiliarity with native speakers' English, and from the limitations of the listening environment where the EFL listening took place. Especially the results of the analysis of the questionnaire and the interview indicate:
   2.1 Unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, long spoken text, complexity of sentences, unfamiliar topic, and a topic that cannot generate interest to listeners pose listening difficulties for EFL learners.
   2.2 The learners' inability to apply listening strategies, their inability to grasp pronunciation, inability to manage a bit challenging tasks, and the consequent frustration negatively affected the learners' listening comprehension.
   2.3 Unfamiliarity of the students with native speaker pronunciation (i.e. not especially carefully enunciated)**;** overlap between speakers**;** and normal

rate of delivery (which the learners perceived as fast speech) interfered with the learners listening comprehension.

2.4 Poor recordings and lack of sufficient time to carrying out tasks affected the learners' listening comprehension.

3. The result of the observation of the listening environment also indicates that part of the blames for the students EFL listening difficulties lays on the inconvenience caused by the lab and its surrounding. The language laboratory could not accommodate the large number of students. The pieces of equipment in the lab are not only few in number but more importantly they are very old and defective. Furthermore, the noise from the nearby construction sites has also been reported as a major source of problem, especially for those students who had to listen without headphone.

4. With regard to the analysis of the listening materials used in the listening course (FLEE 105), the following results were obtained.

4.1 The result of the analysis of the textbook (Listening to TOEFL: Test Kit 2) show that the target listening material itself was a source of listening comprehension problems. In particular, the difficulty of the tasks, unfamiliar topics, lack of activities that let the students practice various strategies, and demanding a wide range of linguistic abilities influenced the students EFL listening performance in the listening course.

4.2 The results of the analyses of the module also indicate that it was inadequate in many aspects. Lack of pre-listening tasks, the presence of jargon, the syntactic complexity, and the densely packed information in the listening passages were part of the problems that affected the learners listening comprehension.

5. The analysis of the students listening achievement scores as well as the instructor's and the students' responses indicate that most students' listening performance was low. The students' low scores could lead to the conclusion that the students have poor listening ability. This was partly responsible for the learners' poor listening comprehension.

6. As shown in Table-8, thirty six factors which influence the learners' listening comprehension are identified. From the students' point of view, the factors

which pose the most difficulty for the learners are: native speakers' pronunciation and fast speech. However, the result of the researcher's examinations of the recorded materials contradicts to some extent with the students' responses. It has been found out that the speeches in the recordings were delivered at what appears to be a normal speed, and the pronunciation was also intelligible. In spite of all these, the students found it difficult. In other words, no matter how normal the speed of delivery is or no matter how intelligible the pronunciation may be the students reported that this was the major cause of their listening problem. This could be due to the learners' unfamiliarity with the natural feature of the spoken English.

5.3 Recommendations

The study confirmed that EFL learners in college encounter listening difficulties whenever they are engaged in EFL listening activities on the listening course. Furthermore, the findings of the study shows that the learners' listening problems emerge from the defects of the listening materials, from the students lack of exposure to native speaker English, and from the inconvenience of the listening environment where the EFL listening takes place. To solve these problems the following recommendations are made.

1. The top listening problems of the students are inability to grasp and understand native speaker pronunciation and fast speech. Both of them are related to the natural features of the spoken English. Students should be adequately exposed to the features of spoken English prior to coming to higher institutions. Teachers of English at earlier school levels should make every effort to familiarize their students with these features of the spoken English.
    1.1 As far as the pronunciation is concerned, teachers should expose learners to recordings which provide students with practices of word level exercises (that deal with the practice of different sounds and sound combination which occur with single words) and sentence level exercises (that deal with the problems that emerge when words are put together to make sentence, e.g., assimilation or elision, contraction, distortion of sounds with in common collocation).

1.2 With regard to fast speech, instructors should encourage students to listen to authentic texts of English so that they gain more chances to be acquainted with the real life EFL listening and to be familiar with the natural feature of the spoken English. The other way of tackling the above problems is through encouraging independent listening out side class. English songs, movies, videos, and other English language broadcasts including the satellite TV and the widely available radio programmes provide learners with opportunities to listen to English outside the classroom.

2. These days listening is incorporated in the English syllabuses of primary, secondary, and preparatory levels of the Ethiopian education system. As it has been found out in the study, however, many students didn't have pre-college exposure to the real life listening.

   2.1 For lower level students, therefore, it is advisable to make use of every situation out side classes, like tuning into various radio programs of the English broadcasts, listening to English music and to be engaged in watching Hollywood movies to improve their ability of understanding the authentic spoken English.

   2.2 For teachers at these levels, the first thing is, using recordings (e.g. of authentic radio program), i.e., the teacher should let his/her students practice listening to real life texts. In addition, the teacher should be aware of the fact that only classroom exposure to non-authentic materials is insufficient. Therefore, responsible teachers are advised to initiate students to engage in real life listening, such as, listening to the BBC, VOA and other English broadcasts in order to make them familiar with the authentic speech of the native speakers.

3. As far as background knowledge is concerned, instructors should note its significant role in the interpretation of discourse. In the classroom, therefore, before asking students to listen, instructors should particularly take care about establishing common semantic fields between the listening topics and the listeners, especially when the topics demand cultural backgrounds that differ from that of the student. Instructors must ensure that students understand the

context of the discourse before asking that they listen to a dialogue, joke, story, or any other spoken message.

In order to activate the students' schemata, teachers could do the following:

3.1 Before students actually start listening, they should be given some information about the Content, Situation, and Speaker(s) of the listening text. This arouses expectation and helps to familiarize the Topic.

3.2 Before students actually start listening, students should be told what they are going to do based on the listening text in which the listener is required to give some kind of overt response in what has been said (heard). Besides activating the learners' schemata, this helps to create purpose.

4. The study showed that inability to predict what a speaker is going to say was one difficulty. In real life when we go for a job interview we usually know what the interviewer is going to talk about; this is something we can predict as we often have some background information about the job and the subject which is going to be discussed. Similarly, in order to help our learners predict what speakers are going to say we should provide them with enough information before we give them a listening comprehension exercise. Preliminary elicitations such as 'What do you know about this topic?', 'What could the passage be about?' are helpful for learners to make predictions.
5. The study indicated that text and environmental factors were part of the problems which affected the learners' listening comprehension. Defects of the listening materials and the laboratory equipments were some of these factors. The concerned bodies in the institution should find solutions to tackle the problems. As far as the language lab is concerned, for example, there should be a regular maintenance and a timely repairing of the equipment. Changes should be made to accommodate the large number of students (e.g. increasing the number of seats and headphones are important actions to be implemented). As far as the course module is concerned, revising is an option, or preparing/selecting another material is a better solution.
6. The study revealed that most of the subjects achieved very low scores in successive listening tests. The low score may indicate the weakness of the learners; above all the low score could affect the learners' motivation and

confidence. The listening materials which are selected for the teaching of EFL listening should be compatible with the learners actual language competence rather than the level they are currently found. To this end, teachers should select listening tasks that require reasonably less complex activities. Furthermore, the tasks should be success-oriented and should focus on training not on “testing” listening comprehension.

7. Since our purpose of teaching listening is to improve the learners listening skills, instructors should concentrate on aural comprehension itself, and it is best to base the task on exercises that demand predominantly listening and understanding (rather than reading, speaking and writing). For the success of these intentions therefore, listening tasks should include exercises that require quick simple responses.
8. In the context where this research is conducted, it has been found that a two-hour time allocation per week is not sufficient. Since listening is the foundation of language learning, it should have a prominent place in the teaching schedule. To get more opportunity to practice,
   8.1 Students need to make the most effective use of the teaching facilities at the institution (i.e., the language laboratory, the ELIP center and the satellite TV broadcast available in the campus) to practice listening skills in their spare time.
   8.2 Teachers need to assign students to outside-class listening tasks (assignments). For example, when students watch films or listen to news in English, they may be asked to share what they have heard.

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APPENDIX-A

Questionnaire

Dear student: The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather information about the listening difficulties learners face while they are engaged in listening to English. Your responses are of considerable importance for the success of the study, so you are kindly requested to provide genuine responses to the questions. Thank you very much in advance for your cooperation!

Part-I

Direction: The following are list of statements that will help you to identify the difficulties you faced while you were engaged in listening to different texts on the listening course (FLEE 105), which you took in the first semester of this year (2007). Read each statement and provide your responses based on the listening difficulties you experienced in the course according to the following scale.

Circle 5 if you **always** face the problem
Circle 4 if you **often** face the problem
Circle 3 if you **sometimes** face the problem
Circle 2 if you **seldom** face the problem
Circle 1 if you **never** face the problem

Item No.	***Statements***	Level of difficulty				
		Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	Unfamiliar words including jargon and idioms interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
2	Complex grammatical structures interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Long spoken text made me tired and interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Information that was not crucial to me and that could not generate sufficient interest to me did not make me to continue listening.	1	2	3	4	5
5	The length and complexity of sentences interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Unfamiliar topic/subject matter interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
7	At the time of listening I found it difficult to predict what would come next.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I found it difficult to recognize the words I know because of the way they are pronounced.	1	2	3	4	5

9	I found it difficult to understand the meaning of the spoken text without seeing the speaker's facial expressions and gesture (e.g. frowning face of anger; smiling face of happiness)	1	2	3	4	5
10	There were words that I would normally understand in writing, but when I heard them in a stream of speech, I found it difficult to tell where one word finishes and another begins.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I found it difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening.	1	2	3	4	5
12	I feel worried and discouraged when I don't immediately understand the spoken text.	1	2	3	4	5
13	I found it difficult to answer questions which require other than a short answer (e.g. why or how questions, or writing a summary).	1	2	3	4	5
14	Speaker's fast speech interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
15	The speech of the native speakers with different speaking styles from what is familiar to me interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
16	The speech of the native speakers with different pronunciation from what is familiar to me interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Unclear sounds resulted from poor quality tape-recorder or cassettes interfered with my listening comprehension.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Lack of sufficient time for carrying out the tasks interfered with my listening performance.	1	2	3	4	5

Part-II

Direction: All the following questions are based on the listening problems you experienced while you were taking the course "Listening Skills" (FLEE 105). Read each question and provide your responses on the space provided.

19. Did you face any other listening difficulties on the course "Listening Skills" (FLEE 105) that were different from those that were mentioned in **Part-I**? If there were any, please list them below.

    .....
    .....

20. Put the factors listed in **Part-I** and **Part-II, No 19** in hierarchical order, arranging them beginning from the factor that poses the most difficulty to the least difficulty for you.

    NOTE:

    Don't forget to include the factors you added in question No 19.

    .....
    .....

21. What measures do you think should be taken to avoid or at least minimize the difficulties you face in listening comprehension?

    .....
    .....

22. Would you like to give any other information regarding the difficulties you faced on the listening course (FLEE 105)?

    .....
    .....

APPENDIX-B

Students Interview Guide

1. Before you joined the University, what experiences did you have in gaining listening skills?
    - Did you get opportunities to practice listening skills? If that was so, in what way?
        - What kind of listening activities did you practice?
        - Were you exposed to the native speaker English?
2. After you joined a university, particularly at the time you were taking the listening course, when and how much time did you practice listening in and outside the class?
    - What kinds of listening tasks did you do in class?
    - Were the listening tasks you did in the course (FLEE 105) similar to the ones you had done in the English classes of your high schools?
3. You were registered for the listening course in the first semester of this year (2007/08).
    - How did you find the course?
    - Are you interested in the listening course? Why?
    - Why do you think some students are not interested in the listening course?
4. What were the factors that affected your listening comprehension while you were taking the listening course (FLEE 105)?

APPENDIX-C

Instructor Interview Guide

1. How did you approach the teaching of listening comprehension?
2. What teaching materials, teaching activities, and listening tasks were employed in the course?
    - What teaching activities did the instructor have for the students to enhance their comprehension of English?
    - What teaching materials did the instructor prepare for the students?
    - What listening tasks did the instructor require the students to perform in and outside class?
3. What was the goal that you expected to achieve for the course?
4. What do you think about the students' motivation and attitude towards learning to listen to spoken English?
5. What did you consider as problems for the students in the learning of listening?
6. The students reported that they didn't get extra opportunity to practice in the laboratory.
    - Why didn't you arrange extra opportunity for the students to practice in the laboratory?
7. The instructor was told that some students complained that they were demotivated during taking the course, and he was asked to add if he wants to add anything (comment, compliment, or suggestion).

APPENDIX-D

Observation checklist

Item No.	***Things to be observed***
1	What kind of listening materials are available in the course? e.g. - text books, - module, - radio broadcasts, - TV broadcasts - recordings,
2.	What kinds of equipment are available in the lab that were involved in the teaching of listening? - tape recorder, - television, - video player, - cassettes, - video tapes
3	The number of listening materials and other equipments
4	Does each material or equipment function properly?
5	Observing the surrounding environment where the teaching-learning process of listening was taking lace. - checking whether there is a disturbing noise that distract the learners' listening
5	Observing if any change has been made to the equipments of the laboratory in the past two years. - Have the equipments in the laboratory changed, i.e., improved or deteriorated in terms of , e.g., quality of records, headphones, playing machines, etc

APPENDIX-E

Material Analysis Checklist

Item No.	***Things to be analyzed***
1	What are the listening materials used in the teaching of listening? - strength of the listening materials - weakness of the listening materials
2	What kind of listening tasks are used in the listening practice?
3	How are the listening tasks used in the teaching of listening? e.g. - Does the teacher let the students be engaged in pre-listening tasks?
4	To what extent are the contents (messages) of the listening passage clear? - Do they seem familiar or strange to Ethiopian students? - To what extent is the level of difficulty for the students?
5	Who are the speakers in the listening texts? e.g. - native speakers - non- native speakers - number of participants and gender mix
6	Where is/are the source (s) of the listening texts? e.g. - British Council, - BBC, - VOA

Document Analysis Checklist

Points to be considered
• How much did the students achieve in the courses? - Analysis of students' results in successive tests which were recorded to determine students' grade in the course 'listening skills'. - Analysis of students' results in the other English courses which were recorded to determine students' grade in the semester of 2007/08 academic year.