

# Testing EFL Listening in the Moroccan Public High School: A Mixed-Method Approach

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**Abstract:-** This study examines the testing of EFL listening in the Moroccan public high school classroom. The study adopted a mixed-method design with regard to data collection and data analysis. The data were obtained through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. The study was carried out through distributing questionnaires to 54 public high school teachers of English, holding interviews with 7 public high school teachers of English, and analyzing 23 quizzes of continuous assessment devised and administered by different public high school teachers of English. The data was analyzed by triangulation through cross-checking and cross-examination. The results indicate that teachers never test listening because most of them do not teach it. Also, the results indicate that teachers do not test listening because it is not tested in the National Baccalaureate Exam. The pedagogical implications of the study include the need to include the listening component in the Moroccan National Baccalaureate Exam so that teachers and students take it seriously in terms of teaching and testing. For research implications, further research is needed to examine the effect of not testing listening in the quizzes of continuous assessment on students' English language learning. Future studies are thus indispensable to fill in this gap in the existing literature with a view to determine the effect of neglecting the testing of EFL listening on English language proficiency in general and listening proficiency in particular.

**Keywords:** *Testing, EFL Listening, Formative Assessment, Summative Assessment.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that listening plays an essential role in language learning in general and EFL learning in particular (Vandergrift, 2007). It is also common knowledge that testing listening provides the teacher with feedback about his teaching practice and the progress his students are making in the listening skill. Nonetheless, this skill receives little attention compared to other language skills (Nunan & Miller, 1995). In fact, listening counts as the least understood, the least studied (Vandergrift, 2007), the least tested and therefore the least taught of all skills (Berne 2004; Mendelsohn, 2001, 2006; LeLoup & Pontiero, 2007). This secondary status of listening in theory and practice has likely led to very few studies focusing on the testing of listening in the Moroccan public high school

EFL classroom context. The washback effect appears to have been a major contributor to the neglect of EFL listening in the classroom. In this context, Richards (2008) postulates that listening will not be taught as long as it is not tested. By implication, one of the major reasons listening should be tested is that once tested, it will be taught. Therefore, listening must be tested so that it can be taken seriously by teachers and students alike.

Although ignoring EFL listening in the classroom is so widely recognized that it is regarded as the Cinderella skill (Nunan & Miller, 1995), the studies that have investigated testing students' level and performance in EFL listening are hard to find. Because listening is not tested in an institutionalized manner in formative and summative assessment in many education systems, this information is not readily available and accessible. The tests that test listening are the pre-tests and post-tests used to determine the success of an experiment with two groups of learners (Vandergrift, 2007) and such English language proficiency tests as TOEFL and TOEIC but the results of these tests are not generalizable given that they are not broad, institutionalised and objective (Berne, 2004), especially that such tests can only test certain aspects of listening or test listening as part of a general English proficiency test by devoting a section to the listening component (Buck, 1991). In addition, these tests test academic listening since passing these tests is a requirement for admission to universities and higher education institutions where the language of instruction is English or they test listening for social or immigration purposes. For example, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) is an admission requirement for immigration or overseas education and focuses on the use of language in a social and academic context (Nakatsuhara, Inoue & Taylor, 2017; Phakiti, 2016). In terms of design, the IELTS Listening Test (LCT) is intensive, i.e. it is played only once; it is also in read-listen-write format (Field, 2012). Such a test is overwhelming because learners have to pay attention to three skills simultaneously: listening, reading and writing, so it is considered demanding in terms of information processing, which underrepresents the IELTS listening construct (Aryadoust, 2012).

Also, listening tests have been devised to meet a demand for listening evaluation procedures. Rubin, Daly, McCroskey, and Mead (1982) reviewed thirty-two listening tests with respect to administration, target population, scoring procedures,

format, and potential biases. Most of the tests studied were standardized. Grunkemeyer (1992) studied 18 listening tests taking into account eight criteria; namely, profitability, educational use, commercial use, reliability, validity, adult audience, high school student audience. The study evaluated each test in terms of cost, use (educational or professional), reliability, validity, audience and potential barriers. Grunkemeyer (1992) came to the conclusion that the Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test (KCLT) counts as the most versatile and cost effective for its ease of use with groups and for individuals and the ability of the test to test the listening skills of people from fourteen years old to adulthood. According to Wolvin and Coakley (1994), the validity claims of the Watson-Barker listening test are partially supported by data, and the test has been widely accepted. Despite the availability of such tests, these tests are taken voluntarily by students wishing to attend universities where the language of instruction is English and therefore require students to have good academic listening skills to ensure that students can understand courses taught in English. In other words, these tests and the listening sections of the International English Proficiency Tests do not test the general listening skills of public school students. In other words, testing students' listening ability is not systematic and institutionalized and hence the identification of their strengths and weaknesses is not available, which negatively affects the choice of an effective approach to improve their listening.

Access to listening student scores is not possible as such tests are taken on an individual, confidential, and voluntary basis rather than on a systematic and institutionalized basis, which does not provide any information on the students' performance in EFL listening. In an attempt to improve the status of listening, some educational systems have tried to include the listening component in English language assessment. In Taiwan, English learning in high school focused primarily on reading, with particular emphasis on memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules. Listening to English has been marginalized and is only officially taught in the first year of university. In 2012, the Joint Board of College Recruitment Commission in Taiwan passed a law making the new English Listening Comprehension (TELC) test a requirement for college enrollment and part of the entrance exam for high school students. According to Chou (2015), the implementation of this new English listening test policy had an effect on its key stakeholders, especially students. The study explored how TELC affected Taiwanese high school students' language learning and their expectations of listening instruction in English classes. The results revealed that the TELC had a general influence on all the participants and that certain components of the TELC caused greater differences in the perception of the students' English listening proficiency than their specialization. These results suggest that the introduction of this new listening test serves as a lever for change in English language teaching in Taiwanese secondary schools in the future. Additionally, Nepal urged teachers to test listening in

formative assessment, but teachers soon gave up and started giving students full marks without actually administering listening tests to students because listening is not tested in the summative examination (Rana, 2019). In the study conducted by Rana (2019), students confessed that their teachers only gave them grades without testing their listening because the listening component is not part of the summative assessment.

The same situation in the EFL context could be true of the Moroccan EFL context. In Morocco, the pedagogical guidelines (2007) state that listening should be taught regularly and accordingly tested using performance-based assessment. Also, the Note (a kind of circular) N° 07-142 - relating to the educational assessment of English as a second foreign language in senior high school levels points out to the inclusion of listening in alternation with reading in the quizzes of continuous assessment. This ministerial circular organizing the design and administration of continuous assessment quizzes in the Moroccan public high school stipulates that listening comprehension can be tested alternately with reading comprehension.

Nevertheless, despite this improved status of listening in the official documents, the general impression reigning amongst the ELT professionals in Morocco is that English teachers neither teach listening nor test it in the continuous assessment quizzes, probably because the listening component is not tested in the National Baccalaureate exam, which is considered the most important summative and certification assessment the Moroccan students sit for to graduate from high school. However, this impression will remain a mere assumption; or rather a hypothesis unless research is conducted to confirm it or invalidate it. This leads one to such a general research question as the following: Do public high school teachers test listening in the Moroccan EFL classroom? Based on the literature reviewed, the hypothesis guiding the current study to answer the research question could be stated as follows: public high school teachers never test listening in the Moroccan EFL classroom.

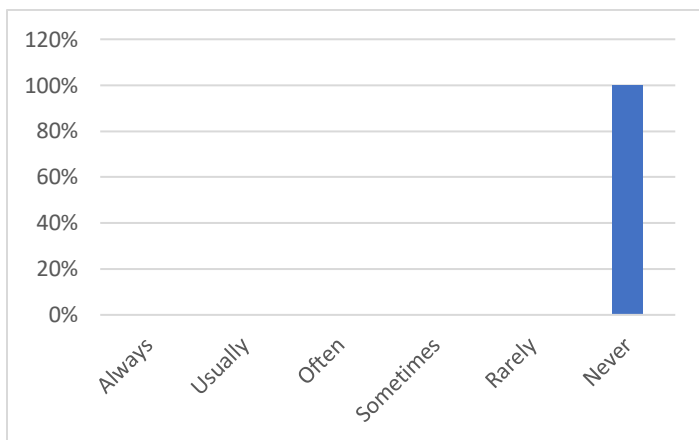
## II. METHOD

To obtain a complete and comprehensive picture of the situation of the testing of listening in the Moroccan public high school EFL classroom, the study adopted a mixed-method design with respect to data collection and data analysis. The data was obtained through questionnaires, interviews and document analysis. 54 public high school English teachers were surveyed through questionnaires, interviews were held with 7 public high school English teachers and 23 quizzes of continuous assessment devised and administered by different public high school English teachers were analyzed to check whether they test listening or not. The data was analyzed by triangulation whereby data congregated by different instruments were cross-checked and cross-examined all throughout the study. Hence this study provided quantitative

and qualitative data that complemented each other during data collection and data analysis. In doing so, the study not only identified the status of the testing of listening, but more importantly, it provided both confirmatory and explanatory information about the testing of listening.

### III. RESULTS

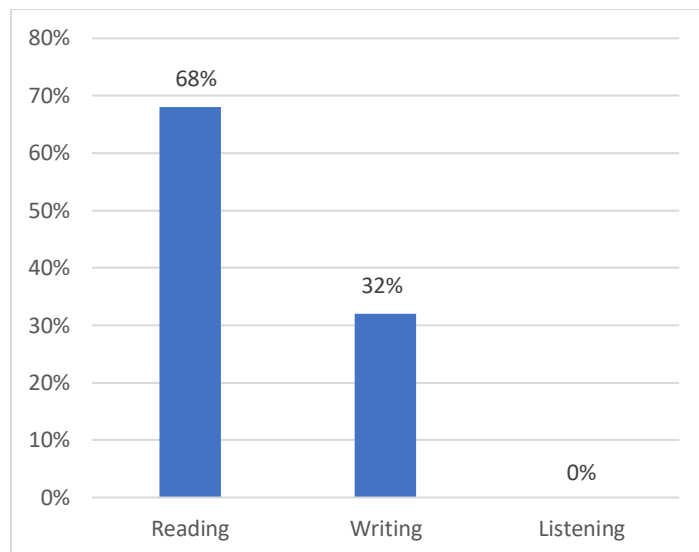
The results obtained by the various data collection instruments (questionnaires, document analysis, and interviews) indicate that EFL listening is never tested in the Moroccan public high school in formative assessment. As figure 1 below illustrates, all teachers who filled in the questionnaire answered negatively a question asking them about the frequency of their testing of listening. The question read as follows: how often do you test listening in the quizzes of continuous assessment? and all teachers answered "Never".



**Fig 1** Question: How often do you test listening in the quizzes of continuous assessment?

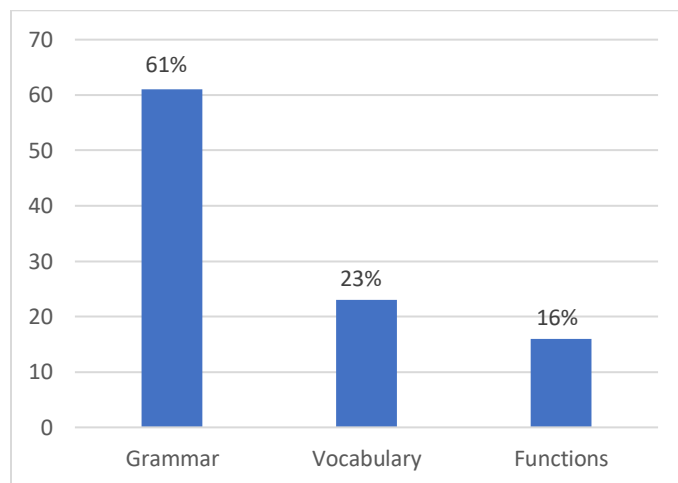
To justify this inappropriate pedagogical practice, the respondents mentioned a certain number of constraints in answer to a questionnaire question about the reasons for the neglect of testing listening. The question was as follows: Why do some teachers ignore testing listening? The reason that was mentioned by an overwhelming majority of respondents remains the one related to finishing the syllabus and preparing students for the National Baccalaureate exam. In this regard, the teachers surveyed by the questionnaire mostly indicated that they test what will be tested in the National Baccalaureate Exam.

A survey of the quizzes administered to students revealed the same tendency. The quizzes contained reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and functions, but none of them contained listening. As shown in figures 2 below, the most tested skill is reading followed by writing.



**Fig 2** Testing of language skills in the quizzes of continuous assessment:

With regard to the most tested of all language components, grammar counts as the most widely tested language component followed by vocabulary and functions, as figure 3 below illustrates.



**Fig 3** Testing of language components in the quizzes of continuous assessment:

It is worth mentioning that the language areas and skills tested in these quizzes and the way the students are tested on them are very close and similar to the ones in the Baccalaureate National Exam. Thus, listening is absent from the continuous assessment quizzes as is the case in the Baccalaureate National Exam whose specifications detail the skills and language components tested in the form of sections and rubrics. The latter were confined to reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and functions.

While the questionnaires and document analysis provided quantitative data, the interviews conducted with the teachers served to provide confirmatory and above all explanatory information on the testing of listening. At first, most of the interviewed teachers were very surprised to be asked about their testing of listening. For them, the answer is obviously no and answering such a question does not require conducting a study for there is no section testing listening in the National Baccalaureate Exam. When the interviewer drew the interviewed teachers' attention to the fact that the official documents urge them to test listening comprehension, most of the teachers did not know that they were pedagogically and professionally required to test listening in alternation with testing reading. Those who know of the note or circular said they opt for the testing of reading for practical and logistical reasons but also and most importantly on account that reading is the skill students will be tested on in the exam at the end of the year. Additionally, teachers report that teachers are not held accountable by the headmasters and supervisors when they do not test listening, whereas they are accused of not finishing the syllabus if they do not test reading, writing, grammar points, vocabulary items and social functions.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

The situation in the EFL context seems to apply to the Moroccan EFL context regarding the testing of listening. The washback effect of the summative assessments leads teachers to teach to the exam. Based on the results of the data collected, the teachers never test listening since the specifications of the Baccalaureate Exam do not oblige them to do so. These specifications specify the reading and writing subskills targeted by the exam in the form of rubrics but do not make any mention of those related to listening as the listening component is not tested in this summative assessment. In addition to this, the ministerial note is not firm enough to « push » teachers to test listening. This circular was interpreted by teachers as giving them a margin of choice rather than requiring them to alternate testing reading with testing listening. Because it seems to give teachers a choice between testing reading comprehension and testing listening comprehension in the continuous assessment quizzes, teachers just do not test listening and test reading tested in the National Baccalaureate Exam. Also, teachers seem to opt for the former for the convenience and practicality of its administration, which is consistent with Newton and Nation's (2020) claim that listening tests are overlooked in assessments due to the impracticality of administering listening tests to students as compared with the reading tests and, by implication, speaking and writing tests. Also, the results of this study indicate that teachers do not teach listening and, by extension, do not test listening in continuous assessment quizzes. According to the continuous assessment circular, teachers can test listening comprehension alternately with reading comprehension in continuous assessment quizzes. The results indicate that teachers do not teach listening because they do not test it, and they do not test it in continuous assessment quizzes

because it is not tested on the National Baccalaureate Exam. It can be deduced from these results that the teachers are exam-oriented. In other words, this neglect of listening in formative assessment is due to the washback effect of the National Baccalaureate Exam because the latter impacts; or rather determines the teaching and testing practices and behaviors of the teachers with regard to listening assessment. These results are congruent with Richard's (2008) assertion that listening will not be taught as long as it is not tested and vice versa. The results of this study also corroborate those yielded by Chou (2015) about the effect of implementing a listening test on teachers in Taiwan. Students and teachers take listening and its testing seriously once it is tested in a summative assessment required to graduate from or enter an institution. Also, the results of the current study confirm those obtained by the study conducted by Rana (2019) in the sense that teachers in Nepal and Morocco do not test listening for one and the same reason; namely, listening is not tested in the summative assessment. Public high school teachers in Morocco do not teach listening because it is not tested in the summative assessment called the National Baccalaureate Exam and the teachers in Nepal gave up testing listening in the formative assessment and started giving students full marks without administering listening tests because listening is not tested in the summative examination in the country.

The teaching of listening, the testing of listening, and the inclusion of listening in summative assessment are inextricably linked and interdependent in the sense that listening is not taught because it is not tested and it is not tested because it is not taught and it is not taught because it is not tested in the National Baccalaureate exam. In other words, if the people in charge of devising and designing the National Baccalaureate Exam continue to ignore listening in the English exam, this vicious cycle of neglecting teaching listening and testing it in formative assessment will never stop. As a result, information about the performance of students in listening is difficult to obtain in the Moroccan EFL context since listening is neither taught nor tested. Getting a full picture of students' listening skills as a component of learning English in the EFL classroom and a means of gaining knowledge inside and outside of school is essential to understanding how the neglect of testing listening actually affects students' listening skills in a globalized world characterized by the use of new technologies offering large masses of listening media. Assessing listening skills is not only important in terms of identifying the status quo of the listening skill. More than that, such an assessment is essential to determine students' strengths and weaknesses in listening as a first step towards choosing the approach that can capitalize on these strengths and overcome these weaknesses.



## V. CONCLUSION

The study examined the status quo of testing EFL listening in the quizzes of continuous assessment administered to Moroccan public high school students. Its results were contrasted and compared with each other and with what is known in the existing literature. The situation of EFL listening in the Moroccan public EFL high school context is similar to that prevailing in the EFL context with regard to EFL listening. Testing listening is not given the importance it deserves because of the secondary status accorded to its teaching and the washback effect that the National Baccalaureate exam exerts on teachers and students. The enhancement of testing listening necessitates the promotion of the teaching of listening and the inclusion of the listening component in the summative and certification assessment of the National Baccalaureate Exam.

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