

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the results of the present study will be discussed in order to address four research questions raised in Chapter One. Section 5.1 discusses listening materials from the cognitive perspective. Section 5.2 discusses low-achievers' learning motivation. Section 5.3 discusses the integration of MI theory into curriculum development. Section 5.4 discusses low-achievers' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Section 5.5 discusses present study vs. previous studies. Section 5.6 presents the pedagogical implications of the study. Section 5.7 explains generalisability. Section 5.8 offers the recommendations for further research.

5.1 Listening Materials from the Cognitive Perspective

This section discusses the results of Research Question 1: What kind of listening materials meet low-achievers' cognitive needs? Overall, low-achievers have limited linguistic competence which leads to their resistance to English learning. To strengthen low-achievers' linguistic knowledge, two kinds of listening tasks, namely English songs and English passages in the present project will be discussed below.

5.1.1 English Songs

Low-achievers in the present study stated that English songs, including popular songs (top 10), commercial songs on TV, and theme songs for movies, improved their listening abilities, motivated their English learning, and helped them review lexis, phrases, and syntactic structures they previously learned. Such finding is consistent with what was found in many previous studies (Finocchiaro, 1983; Richards, 1983; Leslie Eloise, 2000;

Lo, 2002; Chiang, 2003; Hsu, 2003; Chen, 2004.)

For low achievers, pop songs (top 10), commercial songs on TV, and theme songs for movies may not be easy to sing but are very pleasant to listen to, particularly when the lyrics are known and the melodies are familiar to low achievers. For this reason, low achievers are motivated to review vocabulary, idioms, and sentence patterns. In addition, English songs with fewer lexical items and simpler grammar are especially beneficial for students to improve their English listening abilities. The result echoes previous studies (Kent, 1999; Cullen, 1999; Leslie Eloise, 2000; Saricoban & Metin, 2000; Cunningham, 2001; Schoepp, 2001) that effectively using English songs in the classroom helped learners improve their listening abilities.

As the nature of songs is fairly repetitive and consistent (Schoepp, 2001), utilizing songs can assist low-achievers to review lexis, phrases and grammar. To sum up, songs offer opportunities for language acquisition (Gatbonton, 1983).

5.1.2 English Passages

Comprehensible English passages related to learners' daily life (i.e. sports, housework, English, safety, manners, technology, transportation, school life, health, entertainment, morals, and pets) were preferred by the low-achievers in the present study. The finding corresponds to the previous studies (Chen, 2002; Wu, 2004) that comprehensible input (as Krashen's input hypothesis, 1987) activated English listening comprehension. More specifically, listening passages including vocabulary, phrases, and grammar that low-achievers previously learned helped them build up confidence in comprehending listening passages.

5.2 Low-Achievers' Learning Motivation

This section discusses the results of Research Question 2: How to motivate

low-achievers in listening course affectively? Generally speaking, in English class low-achievers generally show little motivation due to anxiety, defense of self-esteem, and lack of self-confidence. To motivate low-achievers, classroom atmosphere, teacher-student interaction, and peer interaction should be taken into account.

5.2.1 Classroom Atmosphere

As Table 11 in section 4.3.2 showed, 93 percent of low-achievers in the present study are satisfied with pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere. The result is consistent with what MacIntyre (1999) pointed out that language anxiety is proved to be a forceful factor inhibiting second language acquisition achievement. Hence, the best solution is to create a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere (Dornyei, 2001). In order to protect their self-esteem and to increase their self-confidence, low-achievers were encouraged to take risks in listening class and were told that making mistakes is a natural part of learning. There is no tension in the classroom, neither sharp comments nor sarcasm. Instead, language classroom is full of mutual trust and respect. In sum, low-achievers considered the classroom their second home where the use of humor is allowed. They enjoyed English listening in a safe, warm and supportive classroom.

5.2.2 Teacher-Student Interaction

As Table 11 in section 4.3.2 showed, 86 percent of low-achievers in the present study reported that they learned best and expected success through frequent teacher-student interaction in the process of listening comprehension. The finding is similar to Dornyei's (2001) study that the language teacher should offer concrete and immediate assistance, correct papers for listening training promptly, and show concern in the process of listening.

5.2.3 Peer Interaction

As Table 11 in section 4.3.2 showed, 86 percent of low-achievers in the present study reported that they had more positive attitudes toward listening activities through interactions among the peers. Such interactions protect their self-esteem and increase their self-confidence. This result is congruent with the findings of the previous studies (Dornyei, 2001; Chen, 2002; Wu, 2004) that cooperative and small group tasks are particularly motivating because students know that they have their peers working toward the same goals, resulting in a kind of safety assurance.

In summary, in listening class, small group work or pair work provided low-achievers with opportunities to share mutual support and an increased responsibility for achieving the group goals. As a result, the more low-achievers enjoyed the peer interaction in the listening process, the more they wanted to belong to the class.

5.3 The Integration of MI Theory into Curriculum Development

This section discusses the results of Research Question 3: How to apply MI theory into listening curriculum development for low-achievers? Overall, according to students' journals, low-achievers in the present study have less ability in the four skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing), particularly in listening, writing and spelling. To motivate them and to increase their self-confidence, six subsections (i.e. verbal/linguistic, musical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligences) of the eight intelligences were taken into account while designing courses. Courses were designed into three stages: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening in order to instruct low-achievers to enhance their listening comprehension ability systematically.

5.3.1 Pre-Listening Activities

In the present study, pre-listening activities integrating verbal/linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences provided low-achievers with various ways which helped them review lexis, phrases, syntactic structures, and comprehend the topical background knowledge. To enhance their linguistic competence, low-achievers acquired prior knowledge, including lexis, idioms, grammar by role-play and group work. They understand the meaning of lexis, idioms, grammar and know how to use them. Such pre-listening activities helped them complete listening tasks at the while-listening stage. As Rost (2002) claimed that a variety of pre-listening activities, alone or in combination, would serve to activate the information and vocabulary learners would need to listen fluently.

The result of the present study is that low-achievers comprehended better on listening materials through pre-listening activities. It is congruent with the results of some relevant studies (e.g. Arnold & Brooks, 1976; Hare & Devine, 1983; Chiang & Dunkel, 1992; Schmidt-Rinehart, 1994; Teng, 1998a; cited by Hu, 2000; Hsiung, 2002). These investigations showed that background information played a critical role in listening comprehension.

5.3.2 While-Listening Activities

Most low-achievers in the present study reported that they were able to comprehend listening materials and achieve listening tasks through audiotape repetition, visual aids (i.e. pictures and cues), small group works, and instructor's assistance. The finding is similar to the recent finding shown in Lin's (2000), Chen's (2002), and Wu's (2004) research. These scholars stated that during the listening period learners had confidence in comprehending listening texts by means of repetition, clues, and teacher's help.

According to students' journals, low-achievers in the present study are poor at

linguistic competence, particularly in listening, writing and spelling. Incorporated musical, verbal/linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences into listening activities, the listening activities in the present study are not restricted to pencil-and-paper ones. For example, based on students' journals, their favorite song activities were listed in order: drawing the song, strip song, structure review, modified cloze test (with word list provided), and making connections. Whereas, their favorite passage activities were listed based on the level of simplicity: listen to tape and circle the word, listen to tape and select the picture, listen to the statement, write T on the picture related to it, and write F on the picture irrelevant to it, listen to the dialogue and select suitable answers according to the pictures, listen to the dialogue and choose the correct answers, listen to tape and fill in the blank with a proper word, and sentence dictation. Compared with song activities, low-achievers considered listening cloze and sentence dictation the most difficult without word list provided. As Haggerty (1995) pointed out that employing multiple types of evaluation will allow learners to show their multiple intelligences and to perform optimally.

5.3.3 Post-Listening Activities

Most of the low-achievers in the present study stated that journal writing offered them not only introspection on listening activities and learning barriers, but also immediate feedback from the instructor. The result is similar to Lin's (2000) study that post-listening activities provided learners with opportunities on discovering listening difficulties, seeking a solution, and sensing listening progress as well.

In the present study, based on the concept of intrapersonal intelligence in the MI theory, post-listening activities included peer correction, oral test (i.e. students recited song lyrics in front of the teacher), and journal writing. Through peer correction, students got immediate feedback from peers. Oral test helped students review listening texts by

speaking and reading so that their speaking and reading abilities were improved steadily. Journal writing was favored by low-achievers because they had a channel to completely express their ideas on listening activities. In addition, journals played a critical role in student-teacher communication.

5.4 Inspiring Low-Achievers' Extrinsic and Intrinsic Orientation

This section discusses the results of Research Question 4: How to trigger low-achievers extrinsically and intrinsically in English class? Generally, low-achievers in the present study receive poor grades and show inability to comprehend English, particularly in listening comprehension. To initiate their behaviors intended to overcome the learning difficulties, extrinsic rewards and intrinsic factors should be applied in the learning process respectively.

5.4.1 Extrinsic Rewards

Most of the low-achievers in the present study expressed that they obtained positive feedback, and received better grades through listening treatment. The results supports Hu's (2000) and Hsiung's (2002) research that students getting positive feedback or assistance in the listening process performed considerably better and received better grades in the listening comprehension test.

The instructor provided low-achievers with immediate assistance (e.g. background knowledge of listening materials at the pre-listening stage, visual aids and tape repetition at the while-listening stage, lower oral evaluation standard at the post-listening stage) which led to better grades at the post-listening stage and praise from the instructor. In short, grades and positive feedback are typically extrinsic rewards accelerating learners' orientation in language acquisition (Brown, 2000).

5.4.2 Intrinsic Factors

As indicated in Table 11 section 4.3.2, more than sixty percent of the low-achievers in the present study reported that their self-confidence was built up through listening activities. In the listening process, low-achievers' self-confidence was established through close rapport between the teacher and students and through personalizing curriculum (i.e. different evaluation standards meet low achievers' diverse level). The findings are similar to the findings of the previous research (Wang, 2000; Wu, 2004) which indicated that the goal of listening treatment is to build learners' self-confidence in listening ability so that they have autonomy in English acquisition.

Self-confidence of low-achievers in the present study was gradually built from extrinsic motivation (i.e. better grades and positive feedback) to intrinsic orientation, listening to English songs other than the ones practices in class. Close rapport between teacher and students was established on the basis of teacher's acceptance of their poor linguistic competence, encouragement, and protecting students' self-esteem. MI- based curriculum helped them improve their listening ability. As Table 10 in section 4.3.1 showed, more than fifty percent of low-achievers in the present study became autonomous learners to listen to English songs every day. In summary, according to students' journals, as long as learners are intrinsically motivated (i.e. comprehensible input, self-confidence, autonomously listening to English songs, and accomplishing listening tasks independently), they strive for excellence, autonomy, and self-actualization (Brown, 2000).

5.5 Present Study vs. Previous Studies

The results of the present study mostly correspond with those of the previous related research. However, there are still some new findings in the study.

5.5.1 Consistent Findings

The present study is congruent with previous research in the following findings.

First, according to students' journals, low-achievers in the present study reported that they favored topics of the passages relevant to their life and the level of difficulty, language input which is comprehensible. Such findings are consistent with what Beebe (1985) claimed that relevant material is essential to progress in listening comprehension. Moreover, English passages including vocabulary, phrases, and grammar that low-achievers previously learned are suitable for an improvement in listening ability. Sperber and Wilson (1986) also pointed out that based on human cognition people only concentrate on relevant and familiar information. Therefore, listening materials (topics, input) relevant to learners' goals and interests help them increase self-worth (Rost, 2002).

Second, according to students' journals, students learned to integrate top-down and bottom-up processing to become effective listeners so that they had the capability to listen for gist and for specific information. The findings echoes the claim of some researchers (Yao, 1996; Lee, 1997; cited by Wang, 2002; Chen, 2002) that effective listeners tended to integrate top-down and bottom-up strategies in the listening comprehension. That is, effective listeners start from meaning, but in the process of doing the task, using vocabulary and sentences structures (grammar) connected with the task, and topic (Helgesen & Brown, 1995).

Third, according to students' journals, listening activities comprising tape repetition and a visual cue (i.e. pictures given, related background knowledge including words, phrases, grammar) benefited most of the learners in the listening comprehension process. The findings not only corresponds with the results of Chen's (2002) and Wu's (2004) studies that repetition assisted listeners to clearly comprehend the relationship between syntactic structures and semantic meaning, but also supports many researchers' (Mueller, 1980; Snyder, 1988; Su, 1994; Teng, 1994, 1998a; Chung, 1999; cited by Chen, 2002)

praises of the effects of visual support. They all claimed that visual cues facilitated listeners' comprehension. As Rost (2002) pointed out that repetition helped learners to acquire listening techniques in the listening process. Repetition can improve listeners' comprehension and facilitate maintaining information (Ho, Kung, & Shen, 1999; cited by Chen, 2002). In addition, Wright (1987) believed that visual aids would assist listeners to get useful information.

Fourth, according to students' journals, low-achievers in the present study reported that they were motivated through teacher-student interaction. The more assistance the teacher provided, the less anxiety low-achievers felt. Such findings is consistent with what Vaughan (2005) claimed that the role of a teacher in the classroom should change from lecture and grader to facilitator and guide. A teacher not only teaches low-achievers skills necessary to become successful, autonomous learners but also provides them with appropriate assistance through teacher-student interaction to achieve their tasks. Thus, small-group instruction through teacher-student interaction is an efficient method to help low-achievers (Polloway, Cronin, & Patton, 1986; cited by Karge, 1998). The groups can be cooperative and peer learning under the teacher's guidance. Therefore, through teacher-student interaction low-achievers are provided with immediate feedback to the learning sequence (Rosenshine & Stevens, 1986; cited by Karge, 1998).

Finally, according to students' journals, English singing program improved low-achievers' listening comprehension competence, motivating them to take autonomous English learning attitudes, and increasing their senses of achievements in English acquisition. This supports some scholars' (Lo & Fai Li, 1998; cited by Cakir, 1999; Saricoban & Metin, 2000; Cunningham, 2002; Schoepp, 2001) findings that English songs are precious resources to develop learners' abilities in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In addition, English songs motivate learners to acquire vocabulary, phrases, grammar in a relaxed classroom atmosphere. As Saricoban & Metin (2000) and

Cunningham (2001) agreed that learners' listening abilities are improved in a relaxing learning environment. According to Krashen's input hypothesis ($i+1$), humans acquire language by understanding messages, or receiving 'comprehensible input'. As a result, English singing programs are designed in such a way to supply learners with enjoyable and easy to understand input to enhance learners' linguistic and listening abilities (Cakir, 1999; Saricoban & Metin, 2000).

5.5.2 New Findings

The new findings in the present study are presented as follows.

Listening materials reviewing low-achievers' prior linguistic knowledge (i.e. lexis, phrases, and sentence structures) effectively motivated them and considerably improved their listening ability.

The finding of the present study indicated that listening activities with the picture format at the "while-listening" stage helped low-achievers comprehend listening passages effectively. In the present study at the pre-listening stage, pre-listening activities were used to activate the background knowledge related to listening content and to review vocabulary/phrases/grammatical structures low-achievers needed to listen. However, previous studies (Mueller, 1980; cited by Wu, 2004) found listening activities with picture format "before listening" are considered the most beneficial for the subjects with lower linguistic proficiency.

Many listening activities found effective with high-achievers were proved to be effective with low-achievers in the present study as well. Some of the past studies (Lin, 2000; Chen, 2002) found that listening activities such as "Mark the new vocabulary and phrases," "Look up the new vocabulary and phrases in the dictionary," "Listen with viewing the written text," "Mark the parts that I do not understand," "Pay attention to the Chinese explanation given by the Chinese teaching assistants," "Memorize the important

words, phrases and sentences,” “Listen to the listening passages twice,” “A picture cue is provided before and after listening” were suitable for high-achievers. However, those activities were also successfully applied to low-achievers in the present study as long as listening activities were carefully designed and appropriately simplified, meeting low-achievers’ level and taking affective factors into account.

5.6 Pedagogical Implications

This section presents the pedagogical implications of the present project for EFL teachers in Taiwan. Teachers can utilize the implications below to assist low-achievers to improve their listening ability more effectively.

First, teachers should protect low-achievers’ self-esteem and increase their self-confidence. According to the results in the present study, owing to their poor linguistic competence, low-achievers were eager for a helpful guide in the process of listening comprehension. Students who lack self-confidence easily lose faith in their capabilities and are likely to give up (Dornyei, 2002). Hence, the only way true self-esteem is built is through making students successful (Dornyei, 2002). According to students’ journals, low-achievers in the present study expressed that they obtain prompt assistance from their teacher and the peers in the process of listening. Understanding English songs and English passages help them get a sense of achievement. Self-esteem and self-confidence make students an effort to succeed (Covington, 1999). Therefore, teachers should believe in low-achievers and encourage them to build up their self-esteem and self-confidence.

Second, teachers should thoughtfully choose listening materials, especially for low-achievers. According to students’ journals, low-achievers in the present study stated that familiar and cheerful song melodies motivated them impressively; in addition, pop songs (top 10), commercial songs on TV, and theme songs for movies which have short

lyrics, with 10 lexical items at most, and 3 simple grammatical points at most usually suit students' needs. Besides, singer's clear pronunciation of authentic songs can lead to an improvement in listening comprehension (see Table 9 in section 4.3.1). As Cullen (1999) claimed that songs are one of the language resources that most students love because they can figure out the words of their favorite songs in addition to understanding the gist of the song lyrics.

Third, teachers are encouraged to integrate MI theory into listening activities to enhance low-achievers' listening ability. Based on Gardner's findings, human cognitive competence actually is pluralistic in design (Haggerty, 1995). According to students' journals, low-achievers in the present study expressed that they like listening activities considerably due to systematic and well-organized curriculum (i.e. pre-listening, while-listening, post-listening). Pre-listening activities in the present study integrating verbal/linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences focus on helping low-achievers review lexis, phrases, syntactic structures they previously learned and offer them with topical background knowledge, which accelerate listening comprehension at while-listening stage.

Fourth, pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening activities should be carefully designed to meet students' needs. For example, pre-listening activities, which focus on warming up, in the present study integrated verbal/linguistic, bodily/kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences. Low-achievers favored role-play (e.g. ask volunteers to act out lexis or phrases so that the whole class guess the meanings of them) and group-competition (e.g. write out phonetic symbols of lexis and Chinese on the blackboard). While-listening activities in the present study incorporated musical, verbal/linguistic, bodily-kinesthetic, and interpersonal intelligences are not restricted to pencil-and-paper ones. Students' favorite activities are drawing pictures based on the songs and strip song. Post-listening activities in the present study based on the concept of

intrapersonal intelligence in the MI theory provide low-achievers with introspection. Their favorite activities are oral test and journals writing.

Fifth, teachers have to create a delightful and supportive classroom atmosphere. The essence of the classroom with a motivational atmosphere for learning is neither anxious nor insecure (Scheidecker and Freeman, 1999: 138). According to students' journals, low-achievers in the present study stated that they feel comfortable taking risks in listening class because they will not be embarrassed or criticized if they make a mistake. Therefore, teachers should establish a norm of tolerance to have mistakes accepted as a natural part of learning, and encourage humor in the classroom (Dornyei, 2002).

Finally, teachers must create low-achievers autonomy by means of promoting learners' motivation from extrinsic to intrinsic. To increase low-achievers involvement in listening activities, teachers should allow them to select the peers they want to work with; encourage them to do peer teaching (Dornyei, 2002). Consequently, low-achievers got both better grades and praise from the teacher through listening treatment. Better grades breed self-confidence. According to students' journals, low-achievers stated that listening treatment improve their listening ability which helps them get a sense of achievement and make it a rule to listen to English songs every day; most importantly, they are motivated to engage in English learning.

5.7 Generalisibility

The limited sample and the results probably cannot be generalized to a very large population. However, as the purpose of the project was to help low-achievers to improve their listening ability, the subjects may well represent senior high low-achievers in Taiwan, especially those students with special talents (i.e., sports, arts, or music etc.) who need to participate in different competitions and could not attend class as regularly as other

students.

5.8 Suggestions for Future Research

This section offers the recommendations for future investigations. The present study focused on improving low-achievers' listening ability, using PE students as an example. It is expected that these findings can contribute to further research in this area. In order to have a deeper understanding of related issues, future researchers may take the following suggestions into consideration.

First, future studies may reduplicate the same research method to investigate whether the treatment will produce the same effectiveness on the other groups of low-achievers, such as the students at art class, music class, dance class, or at vocational schools. The present study was limited to finding out the listening comprehension problems that senior high PE students in Taipei County in Taiwan had. It is worth investigating with other groups of low-achievers if one intends to promote low-achievers' listening ability.

Second, the time for further research is needed to be expanded. The time for conducting the present study was about twelve weeks. If the study time were expanded, the result may be more reliable.

Third, further investigations with listening texts including lexis and grammar beyond the textbook are needed. To motivate low-achievers, to build up their self-confidence in English learning, and to improve their English listening ability, English songs and English passages in the present study were selected based on the vocabulary, phrases, and sentence structures related to the textbook they previously learned. Thus, future research may select listening texts comprising lexis, idioms, grammar that go beyond the textbook the listeners previously learned to see whether the effects would be the same.

Last, future research with multiple instruments is needed. Multiple instruments are required to draw out more information about learners' listening problems. Although journals have a valuable place in the overall methodological repertoire of the language researcher (Nunan, 1992), journals have their limitations. Therefore, the researcher recommends other tools such as think-aloud method, interviews, observation, portfolios, and case study, to recompense for the defect of journals.