

UNIVERZITA PALACKÉHO V OLMOUCI
PEDAGOGICKÁ FAKULTA

Diplomová práce

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Ústav cizích jazyků

Diplomová práce

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**Problems Students at Lower Secondary School
Encounter with Listening Exercises in ELT
Coursebooks**

Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím pramenů a literatury uvedených v seznamu literatury.

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Annotation

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Název práce:	Problémy studentů druhého stupně základní škol při poslechových cvičeních z učebnicí anglického jazyka
Název v angličtině:	Problems Students at Lower Secondary School Encounter with Listening Exercises in ELT Coursebooks
Zvolený typ práce:	Výzkumná práce – zpracování primárních dat
Anotace práce:	Diplomová práce se zaměřuje na zkoumání častých problémů s poslechovými cvičeními v učebnicích angličtiny. Práce se snaží najít nejčastější problémy, které žáci nachází při poslechových cvičeních a snaží se objasnit jejich příčinu.
Klíčová slova:	Poslechové dovednosti, poslechová cvičení, výuka jazyků, ELT, učebnice, poslechové problémy, nahrávky
Anotace v angličtině:	This diploma thesis focuses on the investigation of common problems with listening exercises in English coursebooks. The thesis tries to find the most common problems that students encounter in listening exercises and tries to identify their cause.
Klíčová slova v angličtině:	Listening skills, listening exercises, language learning, ELT, coursebooks, listening problems, recording
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List of abbreviations

L1	first (native) language
L2	second language
w.p.m.	words per minute

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Abstract

The aim of this diploma thesis was to introduce the common problems students of English encounter with listening exercises in their coursebook and find out the problems and problems students of seventh and eighth grade encounter the most and point to the possible sources of the problems. To investigate this, a triangulation of three methods, questionnaire survey, content analysis of coursebooks and interview with teachers was conducted. The research revealed that students found most problematic areas be the lack of time to write down answers, quick speech rate and information overload of the recording. Teachers confirmed the problematic areas with their interview answers and pointed to the source being insufficient listening practice and quick speech of the speakers in the recordings.

Introduction

Children usually utter their first words around the age of one and for many it is some sort of interpretation of the word 'mom' or 'dad'. How is it possible that these children are able to say those words without any previous knowledge of the language or formal training?

Before any language skills develop, children, to be specific babies, are put in the presence of input from their parents, family members or technology. It is with their endless listening and subsequent imitation that children are able to utter their first word and later learn to communicate in their first language. As is with any language, being able to listen and comprehend the input stands as a base for developing the other language skills- speaking, reading and writing.

Listening is not only an important predeterminant for the production of speech but furthermore, being able to listen to others and respond accordingly plays an important role in interpersonal relationships or interaction. Despite the fact that a person can have well-developed listening skills in their native language if that person decides to learn a foreign language, they need to acquire listening skills in the new language as well to be able to communicate.

Although, the topic of listening skills in a foreign language, specifically in English language, is seen as important, from the experience I gained in my teaching practices I have found that the students of lower secondary level in schools encounter difficulties with listening exercises for many different reasons.

This diploma project introduces the topic of listening exercises in English language coursebooks and aims to identify the most common difficulties students of Czech lower secondary level, specifically of seventh and eighth grade, encounter in regard to listening exercises found in their English coursebooks. The empirical part of this thesis aims to answer these four research questions:

- “What are the most common problems seventh and eighth grade learners face with listening exercises in English coursebooks?”
- “How do the teachers evaluate the quality of the listening exercises in coursebooks?”
- “Why do the teachers think the problems with listening exercises occur?”
- “What types of listening exercises are represented in the coursebook?”.

The theoretical part introduces the characteristics of the listening skill in general and listening in foreign language. Furthermore, the theoretical part continues to explain which parts make up listening exercises in coursebooks and present the different variations of such exercises. Lastly, the theoretical part mentions some of the more common difficulties found with the coursebook listening exercises.

The empirical part focuses on evaluation of two chosen English coursebooks commonly used in Czech schools of the lower secondary level to evaluate the quality of listening exercises. In addition, a questionnaire survey is conducted with students of English in the lower secondary level, specifically seventh and eighth graders, to determine which specific problems are most common with listening exercises. Lastly, in the empirical part, an interview with experienced teachers of English is done to gain more detailed understanding of the problems students encounter.

The last part of the diploma project is the conclusion that aims to summarize the findings, create outcomes and offer suggestions for further research and development of the researched area.

1 Listening

Rost (2011, p. 1) acknowledges the importance and the widespread usefulness of listening skills and mentions a wide range of fields in which listening has its use. Among those fields can be named political science, psychology, law and, of course, linguistics and education. While the study and teaching of listening has been gaining its deserved attention in the last 20 years, Osada (2004, p. 63) acknowledges that it is not enough compared to the other four skills of language learning. Therefore, while the importance of listening comprehension is understood and known across many circles of interest, in the field of language learning it seems to lag behind.

Learning a language requires the learner to acquire and efficiently use four skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each skill focuses on a different aspect of the language. Harmer (2010, p. 133) talks about the importance of acquiring the skill of listening as the means to improve not only listening comprehension itself but furthermore improving the skill of speaking. Rost (2011, p. 7) supports this claim by stating that listening is one of the core items to developing the speaking skill.

Rost (2006, p. 48) adds that to learn a second language one needs to be able to listen. Furthermore, Rost (2006, p. 48) holds listening to a such high status that he calls it “the primary vehicle by which a person acquires an L2 (second language)”. Supporting this claim, a study done by Ziane (2012, p. 7) found that having acquired the listening skill, students were able to improve not only their understanding of the speech of recorded texts but furthermore widened their vocabularies and improved their own speech.

It can be expected that the importance of acquiring the listening skill would be reflected in the English coursebooks, however, the representation can differ in each coursebook as the study by Maděřičová (2013, pp. 50, 61) reports that in the coursebook Project 5 listening was the second most practiced skill after reading and in the coursebook Way to Win 6 the skill placed third after reading and speaking. It can be deduced that the importance placed on the practice of the listening skill is subjective and can be monitored, among others, through the proportionate occurrence of all four language skills in the language coursebooks.

Understanding this connection, we can conclude that listening as a skill holds quite a significant role in language learning and should not be neglected. Focusing on the listening skill not only develops listening itself but furthermore contributes to developing other skills, such as speaking.

1.1 Listening and hearing

Another aspect of the topic of listening that needs to be mentioned is the difference between listening and hearing. The two words are frequently used in an interchangeable way in the everyday world, however, they are not the same as Tyagi (2013, p. 2) points out that hearing is a part of the process of listening, specifically the first stage. Tyagi (2013, p. 2) defines hearing as “the response caused by sound waves stimulating the sensory receptors of the ear”. Rost (2011, p. 12) makes a comparison between listening and hearing and concludes the main difference is the act of intention in listening. Therefore, hearing changes from hearing to listening when the hearer purposefully tries to acquire any information from the sounds being heard, in this case, a speech of any kind.

It can be deduced from the statements of Tyagi (2013) and Rost (2011) that hearing is the mechanical process the human body goes through involuntarily and passively. The body cannot stop hearing unless damage was done to the parts or organs of the mechanical process. However, listening is not continuous and needs to be done intentionally to serve its purpose successfully.

1.2 Extensive vs. Intensive listening

It is useful to mention the role and relationship of extensive and intensive listening, specifically in language learning. Intensive listening often finds its use in the classroom setting where learners are asked to listen for specific information, such as particular words or phrases, and with a certain language learning expectation, furthermore, the whole process is usually done with the monitoring and help of a teacher (Harmer, 2007, p. 273). Rost (2011, p. 184) emphasizes the importance of intensive listening practice by stating that a certain amount of time should be dedicated to it in every lesson as it builds up skills that are useful for better listening perception. It is desirable that the intensive listening experience is positive for the learners so that it motivates them to not only use the language in the classroom but moreover to seek out the language in their free time and use it for extensive listening (Rost, 2006, p. 49).

As was mentioned previously, extensive listening is frequently done outside of the school setting and carried out voluntarily with the student’s inner motivation to listen in the target language (Harmer, 2010, p. 134). Rost (2011, p. 194) distinguishes extensive listening from intensive listening by stating that it is inherently done for the purpose of enjoyment, however, other reasons, such as academic listening, can be considered extensive listening as

well. Another characteristic that differs is the time spent doing this activity, to be specific, extensive listening spans over longer periods of time than intensive listening (Harmer, 2007, pp. 272, 273).

For the purposes of this diploma project, the greater focus will be on intensive listening as it correlates with the topic of listening exercises which are mostly done in a school setting and with the presence of a teacher.

1.3 The listening process

1.3.1 The five stages of listening

As was mentioned before listening is a complex process requiring the listener's intention in getting information. Tyagi (2013, p. 2) divides this process into five stages- *hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding*. The hearing stage was introduced in the previous chapter as an involuntary mechanical process of the hearing organs responding to the sound waves of their surroundings.

The stage of understanding is set on the assumption of the listener's ability to discern the type of sound they are hearing and its meaning according to a social context (Tyagi, 2013, p. 2). The sounds can be either verbal or of any other source made intentionally towards the listener (DeVito, 2016, p. 24). DeVito (2016, p. 24) gives an example of an emotionally charged speech and Tyagi (2013, p. 2) mentions the example of clapping as a way to convey appreciation.

The remembering stage concerns the ability to accumulate and keep the perceived information in the brain for later use, however, DeVito (2016, p. 25) points out that the human mind cannot accurately store the received information without any alteration. The range of alteration then depends on what the listener thinks they heard.

The fourth stage of Tyagi's (2013, p. 2) division of the listening process is evaluation. Evaluation in the context of listening comprehension means that the listener differentiates the gathered information into factual one and one that may be fabricated or distorted by a prejudice (DeVito, 2016, p. 25). The final stage of responding is based on the physical response toward the speaker and the given response may be in the form of a speech or a body language (Tyagi, 2013, p.2).

The stages of the listening process may seem lengthy and difficult to carry out, however, by focusing on improving each of them one will enhance their listening comprehension. In

addition, by repeating the process of listening one will be able to move through the individual stages more naturally.

2 Aspects of listening comprehension in second language (L2)

The aspects that the listener uses in their listening comprehension can be divided into two broad categories, linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge (Buck, 2002, p. 1). While the linguistic knowledge focuses on the sole language content of the communication, the non-linguistic knowledge expects the listener to use the context of the communication and their own knowledge about the topic (Rost, 2011, p. 76).

2.1 Listening strategies

2.1.1 The bottom-up strategy

Based on the two previously mentioned types of knowledge, two listening strategies had been distinguished. The bottom-up strategy views listening as a sequence of understanding the most basic parts of speech, such as sounds and words, and moving on to larger and larger parts of speech, such as sentences (Tyagi, 2013, p. 3). Richards (2008, p. 4) refers to this type of mechanism as *chunking*.

Buck (2002, p. 2) notes that the assumption of acquiring information through sequenced understanding of individual parts of speech is incorrect, stating that the listener frequently moves disorderly through different stages of the processing sequence. Buck (2002, p. 2) promotes the faulty understanding of the bottom-up process through another situation where the process is not sequenced in an orderly manner, explaining that while listening, the listener acquires information using non-sequenced process using both their linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge in a way that is in the moment most convenient. In order to use the bottom-up strategy effectively, the learner needs to have great vocabulary variety and operate with a knowledgeable amount of grammar (Richards, 2008, p. 4). Therefore, Rost (2011, p. 132) points out that while the listener may start using the bottom-up strategy, they may turn to using the top-down strategy incorporating the non-linguistic knowledge as a result of lacking linguistic knowledge.

2.1.2 The use of bottom-up strategy in language learning

Although it may appear that the bottom-up strategy may not be appropriate as the sole strategy to use when practicing listening, Richards (2008, p. 4) states that it is used quite frequently in listening activities. The use of the bottom-up strategy can be seen in language learning in the form of tasks such as listening for specific details, recognizing similar words, and recognizing word-order patterns (Tyagi, 2013, p. 3). While the bottom-up strategy is

frequently used in the aforementioned types of tasks, it can be the source of problems with students who are knowledgeable in their first language (L1) in regard to literacy. The difficulty may occur because the L1 and L2 may contain various ways to differentiate individual words (Buck, 2002, p. 4). Learner can distinguish word boundaries in a text by looking for gaps. However, in communication, the learner needs to listen for the ‘gaps’ by using their grammatical and phonological knowledge. This phonological knowledge is a set of learned patterns when recognizing word boundaries that are then applied to every new communication (Richards, 2008, p. 4). The set of patterns, however, is specific to the L1 and, therefore, may negatively interfere when attempting to distinguish word boundaries in L2 (Rost, 2006, pp. 57, 58).

2.1.3 The top-down strategy

While using the top-down strategy, the listener incorporates their non-linguistic knowledge (Richards, 2008, p. 7). The top-down strategy focuses on acquiring information through the context clues of the information, for instance the topic, the characteristics of the speaker, or the previous experiences (Buck, 2002, p. 2). Using these clues, the listener holds certain assumptions about the conversation which help the listener decide and distinguish the meaning of different parts of language (Rost, 2006, p. 53). Richards (2008, p. 7) points out that while in the bottom-up strategy there is a great focus on the amount of linguistic knowledge, the top-down strategy is advantageous in that the listener does not need a great amount of previous linguistic knowledge to understand the conversation.

2.1.4 The use of top-down strategy in language learning

The top-down strategy is presented in listening activities in the forms of prediction of the continuation of the perceived conversation, listening for the main idea, or summarizing the perceived conversation (Tyagi, 2013, p. 3). Richards (2008, pp. 9, 10) mentions more specific examples of top-down strategy uses in classrooms, for instance organizing a set of questions about the soon-to-be perceived conversation or listing things from listeners’ general knowledge about the topic of the conversation.

In a school setting, listening activities utilize the aspects of both the bottom-up and the top-down strategies, therefore, listening tasks in coursebooks usually contain a mixture of tasks focusing on listening for specific information as well as questions about the general idea of the listened conversation (Richards, 2008, p. 10).

2.2 Other aspects affecting listening comprehension

When listening to a communication in L1, the listener may only focus on the two types of knowledge to acquire the information, however, listening in L2 may require more aspects to be taken into consideration.

Hayes (2004, cited by Rost, 2011, p. 131) highlights this fact by stating that learners who usually excel in their L1, frequently discover to have problematic areas in their L2 learning journey, specifically in the area of phonetic recognition. Rost (2011, p. 131) continues to say that these difficulties may be the result of the ‘surface’ characteristics of the speech, such as the accent of the speakers, speech rate, or intonation, rather than the language content of the subject.

This is not to say that learners solely find difficulties in the phonetic side of speech but the language content affects learner’s listening comprehension as well.

2.2.1 Accents

Typically, learners will start learning English at school where there is a chosen and used a certain type of English. Frequently, Standard British English is used in Czech schools at lower-secondary level because it usually correlates with the type of English used by the coursebook (Kundrová, 2015, p. 34). Therefore, learners mostly encounter one and the same accent throughout most of their English learning at lower-secondary school which can create problems when the learners are met with unfamiliar accent. Buck (2002, p. 34) acknowledges that unfamiliar accent can be one of the sources of a worse listening comprehension not only for L2 learners but furthermore for native speakers. However, Buck (2002, p. 35) continues to point out that native speakers usually take much less time of getting adjusted to hearing the unfamiliar accent due to the wider exposure to different types of English accents. A study conducted by Hasan (2010, p. 146) found out that learners’ listening comprehension was hindered by an unfamiliar accent in 70.3% where learners stated that it obstructed their listening *often* or *always*. However, Hasan (2010, p. 148) adds that learners’ problems with listening to unfamiliar accents could be solved with repeated exposure to the ‘problematic’ accent.

It can be expected that learner’s will find the accent of their teachers to be the easiest to understand because they are the most familiar with it and hear it almost on daily basis (Hasan, 2010, p. 148). Cunningsworth (1995, p. 67) elaborates on this fact by saying that while it is necessary to introduce learners to different accents, it is desirable that the characteristics of the accents do not differ much from the teacher’s accent. That is not to say that as learners’ listening skills develop, they should not be introduced to more diverse accents.

2.2.2 Speech rate

Speech rate is another aspect that can greatly affect the learners' ability to understand foreign conversation. Similarly with the accent aspect of the language, speech rate can bring difficulty to both native and non-native speakers. It is needed to be mentioned that native speakers are able to comprehend speech at higher speeds than non-native speakers (Buck, 2002, pp. 38, 41). Buck (2002, p.40) adds that the speech rate levels of comprehension are different among the non-native speakers as well. Although the native British-English speakers conversation speech rate is much higher, between 187 and 261 words per minute (w.p.m.), as a recent study revealed (Wang, 2020, p. 97), Thompson (1995, p. 39) points out that the learners of English as second language gain the largest listening comprehension with the speed of speech at 120 w.p.m. Therefore, while some learners may find a speech overly speedy, others may consider that same speech easy to understand.

This phenomenon can be supported by two different studies that, among other things, investigated the difficulties of speech rate. A study conducted by Hasan (2010, p. 147) presented results stating that 83.9% of participants reported having problems *often* or *always* deriving from speakers speaking too fast. However, as the level on the knowledge of the L2 progresses the mentioned listening problem weakens. In a study by Ziane (2012, p. 47) conducted on university students, 18% of researched learners had listening comprehension difficulties stemming from the speaker's speed of speech, which shows that much lower percentage of learners had problems as they developed their listening skills.

To counter this problem teachers may artificially slow down their speech by allowing greater pauses between words (Rost, 2006, p. 52) and as learners' listening abilities advance, the teacher can slowly speed up their speech to a normal level (Ur, 2009, p. 112). However, Ur (2009, p. 112) discourages teachers from enunciating words in a speech as how they would sound whilst standing on their own in attempt to help learners as it is not a natural way of speaking.

2.2.3 Vocabulary and recognition of words

The range of learner's vocabulary knowledge about the topic of the speech plays an important role in comprehending the message of the speech. Rost (2011, p. 168) explains that the lack of knowledge of a certain word in a given speech not only affects the understanding of the word itself but furthermore the understanding of the following items, which can create a snowball effect when the learner stops comprehending the whole speech from the anxiety and

confusion. In a study conducted by Frimmelová (2019, p. 63), 72% of the interviewed learners stated that they found the listening text to be more difficult when not understanding some of the words therefore hindering their listening comprehension. Harmer (2007, p. 272) acknowledges the problematic area and emphasizes the technique of pre-teaching vocabulary to ensure the avoidance of listening comprehension difficulties due to lack of vocabulary knowledge.

However, even if the learner possesses the necessary vocabulary, they might have problems recognizing the words in the process of speaking. Therefore, the learner not only has to recognize the word in its written form but in addition, connect the spelling with the pronunciation to be able to recognize the word in a speech (Rost, 2011, p. 168). This claim is supported by a study done by Frimmelová (2019, p. 67) which asked teachers about the difficulties learners of English face in regard to listening comprehension who mentioned that learners often are not able to recognize familiar words which are used in connected speech and further acknowledged that the problem may stem from differences in pronunciation in connected speech.

2.2.4 Information overload

When listening, many learners may find speeches overwhelming due to their overbearing nature in regard to information content. Although, natural speech does not always include important information in every utterance, listening exercises in language learning are often marked with information overload that hinder the learner's ability to fully comprehend the intention of the speech (Rost, 2006, p. 49). A study conducted by Frimmelová (2019, p. 79) found that more than half (61%) of the interviewed learners reported feeling overwhelmed by the amount and density on information mentioned in listening exercises. Ur (2009, p. 112) acknowledges this fact, however, argues that the problem may further stem from learner's inability to listen only for relevant information. Therefore, to mitigate this problem, Ur (2019, p. 63) proposes practicing listening for specific information while being able to overlook the redundant information.

2.2.5 Visual aid

Another aspect of listening difficulties may stem from the lack of visual aids and context of the listened speech. Especially, in a school setting, the majority of listening activities are done with an audio recording. This recording may or may not be supported by pictures, tables, and charts that presented alongside the activity. It is necessary not to forget in the school environment that a successful conversation consists not only of the linguistic aspects but in

addition the non-linguistic aspects that work together which the listener needs to be able to use (Tyagi, 2013, p. 1). Results from a study conducted by Hasan (2010, p. 146) support the need for visual aids in listening and show that visual aid was stated as helpful *often* or *always* in 81.4% of respondents, demonstrating the importance of it. Ur (2009, p. 108) emphasizes the importance of visual aid based on the notion of authenticity, stating that real-life listening often occurs while the speaker and listener see each other and therefore, listening exercises should not be different. Ur (2009, p. 108) continues to advise teachers to use unconventional means of listening media containing visual aid, such as the teacher's own monolog to practice learners listening skills. However, the most engaging and popular visual aid for practicing listening would be a video recording. The benefits of using video recordings will be discussed in separate chapter.

2.2.6 Relevance

The topic of relevance can be employed on many interactions in general as humans are naturally inclined to pay more attention to things that interest them. We can utilize this fact for the listening comprehension as well. Learners often report that listening to a topic that is not much of interest to them negatively affects their listening comprehension (Hasan, 2010, p. 147). Ur (2009, p. 117) suggests that the choice of a listening topic should not depend entirely on the learner's own interest but the teacher should furthermore take into account the learner's socioeconomic background to avoid indirect alienation of the learner. However, Frimmelová (2019, p. 60) presents different results in her study and reports that the choice of the topic does not affect the listening comprehension a significant amount. Rost (2006, p. 49) points out that using a relevant listening topic not only eases the listening experience of the learners, however, in addition, the positive experience can further inspire the learners to look for listening opportunities outside the classroom environment.

2.2.7 Recording

The qualities of the recording and the medium on which the recording is being played on can be a source of difficulties as well. Hasan (2010, p. 148) conducts from the results of his study that learners find inadequate quality of a recording or the recording medium affecting their listening comprehension in 80.1% of cases. Harmer (2007, p. 304) points out that not only the quality of the recording can be a source of distraction but the layout of the room where the recording is played can be as well. Results from a study by Hasan (2010, p. 147) support this

claim, showing that 74% of the interviewed learners reported experiencing listening comprehension problems resulting from inadequate listening conditions.

2.2.8 Tasks

Finally, even if the speech itself is comprehensive and the quality of the recording is acceptable, the tasks accompanying the listening activity may obstruct learners' ability to finish the activity successfully. Ur (2009, p. 108) criticizes some of the features of instruction giving, namely pointing out that wording, such as "*listen to the passage*", is insufficient and instructions should be designed to be more specific to the topic of the listening, e.g. "*husband and wife are talking about...*". Using more specific instructions can activate the background knowledge about the topic and make learner remember the appropriate vocabulary. Rost (2011, p. 188) brings out another feature of task design that is not always present in listening exercises and that is pre-listening activities focusing on presenting the topic of listening, verifying its familiarity with the students and reviewing the related vocabulary.

A problem may also occur when the task is too complex and contains many questions or questions that require the learner to create a long answer. Students usually find the task overwhelming as they are not able to focus on capturing all the answers while listening (Hasan, 2010, p. 148). Ur (2009, p. 112) acknowledges this problem and suggests that if the task contains an overwhelming number of questions, the solution could be stopping the recording after a certain stretch of time to let learners focus on a small number of questions at a time.

2.3 Alternative listening media

The most common media through which the learners listen to input is audio recording. Cunningsworth (1995, p. 68) argues that one of the reasons behind the more widespread use of audio recorders rather than the use video recording is the resources the language course package publishers provide. However, with current development of technology that is readily available to the general public and teachers, there are opportunities for more variety in listening input.

2.3.1 Video

As was previously mentioned, media for listening exercises does not have to be solely an audio recording and it would be rather helpful to use recording with visual aid, such a video. Video has many positive qualities that can be used to further the learner's listening ability. The most obvious distinction from an audio recording is the fact that it displays the mannerisms of the speakers which help learners acquire information using means other than their linguistic

knowledge (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 68). Harmer (2007, p. 308) adds that besides the gestures that usually represent some phrases, the learners can observe how the specifics of the language, such as intonation, affect the mimics on the face of the speakers which then the learners can imitate to better their speaking skills. Another positive aspect of using video is pointed out by Potosí et al. (2009, p. 28) who claims that learners who were exposed to video were naturally more intrigued by the pronunciation of the native speakers in the video and the videos were considered as a good example for pronunciation practice. The same study done by Potosí et al. (2009, p. 24) investigated the positive effects of video usage in listening exercises and found out that learners were able to produce a higher number of correct answers in the given tests.

However, there are certain negative opinions tied to using video in the classroom. While Tyagi (2013, p. 144) acknowledges the positive characteristics of the video usage, she argues that when watching a video learners need to focus their two senses, seeing and hearing, rather than just one, hearing, which makes one of the senses be put in the background of their attention. Harmer (2007, p. 308) draws on the leisure aspects that are associated with watching videos, stating that if the teacher decides to use video as a media for their listening exercise, they should avoid giving the learners boring tasks not to lose the learners' focus. It is, therefore, up to the teacher to assess their learners' attention while watching the video and shift their focus back to the language learning if they seemed to have lost interest. Another drawback of the usage of video can stem from the limitations of the equipment needed to play the video. Ur (2009, p. 191) acknowledges the positive effects of video usage, however, points out that the video equipment, such as projector or TV, are usually set in certain classrooms, usually specialized language-specific classrooms, and therefore, the teacher needs to plan their use for specific times when the equipment is available.

Taking into account both the positive and the negative aspects of video usage in listening comprehension exercises, it is nonetheless rather encouraged way to practice listening skills with the consideration to the task design.

2.3.2 Music

Music as another resource for listening exercises, although not as common as speech, can be used to make learners used to the spoken language, learn phonetic similarities or listening comprehension. Although songs and chants are known to be a prominent part of the learning process of younger learners, a study done by Maděřičová (2013, p. 53) shows the common occurrence of songs in coursebooks for the lower secondary school learners, namely *Project 5*

and *Way to Win*, stating that in the *Project 5* an exercise using the song could be found in every unit and in *Way to Win*, there are songs and raps present as well. Harmer (2007, p. 320) emphasizes the positive impact of music, stating that song lyrics are a great opportunity for learners to appreciate the language because it presents the language in a way that is close to the learners' interests, therefore making the learners pay attention more easily. Ur (2009, p. 113) points out that teachers should be careful when they let learners listen to the song without any attention to the language as it defeats the purpose of a listening exercise where learners should comprehend the information from the listening input.

3 Characteristics of an effective listening exercise

In the previous chapters has been established that developing listening comprehension is an important part of language learning and that learners are prone to having certain difficulties with listening input that may stem either from the input itself, for instance the accent or the talking speed of the speakers, or the learners' lack of language knowledge, such as an insufficient lexical knowledge. Therefore, to ensure learners' development of the listening skill, there are certain principles that should be followed while creating or engaging with a listening input or exercises.

3.1 Exposure

"Practice makes perfect", may be an overused phrase, however, it is true nonetheless. Harmer (2010, p. 135) stresses the idea that learners should come in contact with listening to spoken language using a variety of media as frequently as they can manage. As Hasan (2010, p. 148) emphasized the importance of exposure, stating that with repeated exposure to the input, learners get used to the language and find obstacles, such as an accent, less challenging. The frequency of focus on listening comprehension should be at least once every lesson, where the learners are not only focusing on the informational content of the input but in addition on the linguistic properties of the input (Rost, 2011, p. 184).

3.2 Authenticity

Another feature of listening exercises is the authenticity of the listening input as well as the listening conditions. The topic of authenticity brings up a few controversial opinions that may divide the discourse of a correct approach. Ur's (2009, p. 108) opinion deviates from the commonly used practice of replaying a recording to the learners and states that in the name of authenticity the learners should be prepared to listen to a recording only once as it is authentic that real-life conversations are not repeated either. Harmer (2007, p. 305) reacts to Ur's statement acknowledging the intention to prepare learners for real-life interactions, however, points out that listening to a recording is a one-sided interaction, therefore, it should not be compared because the learner cannot ask additional questions. Harmer (2007, p. 305) continues to say that learners should be able to ask for replay of the recording, even if it should be two or more times, as it helps learners fill the information gaps they may have encountered with the first listening.

Another aspect of authenticity is the language used. To avoid information overload and learners' fatigue and increase learners' comprehension, Rost (2006, p. 52) suggests using natural

characteristics of spoken conversation, such as pauses, repetition or paraphrasing. Harmer (2010, pp. 134, 135) points out that a problem may occur when the authentic speech shows to be too difficult for the learners and the failure to comprehend the speech discourages them from learning. Therefore, Harmer (2010, p. 135) suggests using a language which is modified, however, still carries the approximate characteristics of authentic speech. However, Rost (2011, p. 172) notes that this modification takes away from the authenticity of the speech and warns of the problematic nature of over-simplified speeches and therefore, altering of the language should be done adequately.

Authenticity also lies within the amount of context provided to the learner, for instance visual aids, situational context, or the ability to ask additional questions. The beneficial aspects of using a video recording for listening exercises were mentioned in the previous chapter, however, Hasan (2010, p. 146) proposes using other visual aids if a video recording is not available, for instance pictures, diagrams and charts. Richards (2008, p. 3) notes that real-life conversation usually uses situational context, such as listeners' previous knowledge or the environment clues, to make the conversation more easily comprehensible, therefore, teachers and the exercise should present situational context to the learners as well. Lastly, the tendency to ask clarifying questions is common in a real-life conversation. The ability to ask questions is naturally not possible with pre-recorded speech, however, it could be a possibility if the teacher uses their own speech as a listening exercise and given this possibility, Harmer (2010, p. 135) emphasizes the usefulness of learners asking additional questions about the speech. In conclusion, the exercise and the teacher should provide learners with as much additional and relevant information as possible to ensure sufficient listening experience.

3.3 Pre-listening activities

A good preparation always contributes positively toward the outcome of any task and with listening exercises it has the same effect. The preparation for the listening segment is a part of the pre-listening activities that familiarize the learner with the topic and the expectations of the listening and give a purpose to the listening exercise (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 67). Engaging in the pre-listening activities furthermore lets the teacher check how familiar the learners are with the topic and if a more extensive preparation is needed. Example of one the commonly used activities is pre-teaching the vocabulary that will appear in the listening segment to ensure that the learners can work with the listening more effectively (Harmer, 2007, p. 272). Pre-teaching vocabulary can in addition make authentic listening texts more manageable that would otherwise be too difficult for the learners to understand (Rost, 2011, p.

166). Another activity that is part of the pre-listening stage is one that activates learner's prior knowledge about the topic. Activities such as asking general questions about the topic (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 67) or asking learners to make predictions (Richards, 2008, p. 10) prime the learners for a greater success in the listening stage. Although, it would seem that judging from the established effectiveness of the pre-listening activities, coursebook listening exercises would contain the pre-listening stage in every case, Hrdá (2020, p. 41) found that 16 out of 46 listening exercises in the researched coursebook, Project 2, did not contain any pre-listening activities.

3.4 While-listening activities

It was established that a good listening exercise contains, pre-listening activities that prepare the learners for interaction with the audio input. Those activities, however, are not the main task of the listening exercise. The main tasks of the listening exercise are the parts that directly work with the listening input. Listening tasks can be commonly divided depending on what type of answers are expected of the learners and how they correlate one of the two listening strategies, top-down or bottom-up strategy.

3.4.1 Tasks using the bottom-up strategy

Tasks that stem from the bottom-up strategy require the learner to focus on specific details of the recording, which can be either focusing on the informational or linguistic side of the recording (Tyagi, 2013, p. 3). Ur (2009, p. 113) mentions tasks that require the learners to know the informational side of a recording, such as answering questions, gap-filling or deciding if statements are true or false. Such tasks can or do not have to be the source of difficulties depending on the skills of the learners.

However, Hasan (2010, p. 148) finds that learners often state that answering questions that require longer answers is difficult as it may confuse them and not actually teach them to listen. Tasks that focus on listening for specific information are fairly commonly occurring in the language classes. On the other hand, Richards (2008, p. 14) disapproves of the use of tasks that focus on the linguistic tasks such as listening for certain words, sounds (Rost, 2006, p. 57), derivatives of words, word patterns using the bottom-up strategy in listening for linguistic items (Tyagi, 2013, p. 3) as it may be an area where many learners find difficulties.

Frimmelová (2019, p. 67) notes in her study that learners often know the word by its spelling, however, are unsuccessful in recognition of the word in the listening as its pronunciation is different from the spelling, ending in the learner's inability to complete the

task. In addition, Ur (2009, p. 112) points out that learners have trouble recognizing words that are a part of a continuous speech as opposed to when the word is pronounced when it is standing on its own and its pronunciation is not affected by the surrounding words. A teacher interviewee in study done by Frimmelová (2019, p. 67) highlights the common problem learners have when not being able to recognize already known words whose pronunciation changes due to vowel reduction in connected speech. Taking a note of the mentioned problems of certain tasks can give teachers an incentive to focus their attention to practicing and improving of the specific part of listening ability that may lack behind.

3.4.2 Tasks using the top-down strategy

The use of a top-down strategy can be seen in tasks which focus on the overall intention of the listening input or general ideas about the topic of the listening exercise. As the top-down strategy suggests, learners use their previous knowledge and their deduction abilities to tackle the tasks. Tyagi (2013, p. 3) mentions top-down strategy tasks, for instance listening for the main purpose of the speech, predicting the content or continuation of the listening, or making summaries as some of the commonly occurring listening tasks. Tasks using the top-down strategy, for instance “note taking when listening to remember the main idea” are encouraged as they make learners practice their ability to distinguish what is important and what information is redundant (Al-Janaydeh and Deif, 2021, p. 224). Rost (2006, p. 54) emphasizes the usefulness of tasks which use the top-down strategy, stating that the process is very similar to a real-life interaction while speaking and listening. Therefore, showing its importance for interactions between native and non-native speakers because in this type of interaction the occurrence of miscommunication is more likely.

Most commonly, listening exercises are made up of several tasks, containing both the bottom-up and top-down strategies in order to create a balanced practice.

3.4.3 Types of tasks based on the type of expected answer

Another differentiation of tasks can be made while taking into consideration what type of answer is expected to be produced by the learner. Learners’ task is usually to listen to an excerpt of a conversation while focusing on certain information which then the learners have to note down based of the questions given. The tasks can be divided into tasks completed with short or long answer. Ur (2009, p. 113) presents examples of tasks using short answers, for instance obeying instructions, ticking-off item and marking statements true or false. Tasks in which the learners need to obey instructions can be seen in coursebooks in the form of repeating

new vocabulary, doing physical movements according to instructions or drawing/ mapping out according to instructions. Ticking-off items can be presented in coursebooks in a form of a table of items or a shopping list where learners need to listen for the mentioned items and mark the ones that are correct. Exercises containing statements that need to be marked as true or false, usually using a *tick* or *cross*, can contain information that is explicitly mentioned in the listening, however, the nature of the statement can in addition be one that is deduced from the listening, which some learners may find challenging as Frimmelová (2019, p. 62) found in her study.

Tasks which require the learners to produce longer, more intricate answers often show to be more difficult for the learners, however, it furthermore shows the learners' higher listening skills (Hasan, 2010, p. 148). The most commonly occurring tasks are answering questions which require more specific answers and cannot be answered with only *yes* or *no*, for instance wh-questions (Ur, 2009, p. 114). Other tasks that are expected to be answered with more than one-word answers are creating summaries of a listened speech or interpreting certain excerpts from the listening using the learners' own words (Ur, 2009, p. 114).

The difficulty of the tasks is in general linked to the amount of attention to detail and learner's comprehension ability. Therefore, tasks based on following instructions or answering simple questions are considered easier by the learners rather than tasks answering complex questions or making summaries.

3.5 Post-listening activities

Listening exercises usually do not end with tasks only concerning the direct work with the audio recording and present additional tasks concerning the topic of the listening and often tend to focus on the listeners' personal opinions, experiences and knowledge. The post-listening activities are usually a practice of other language skills, for instance speaking or writing while using the context of the listening (White, 2006, p. 116). Although the tasks in the post-listening phase, such as discussion, essay-writing or role-play, are not directly involved with the audio recording, they function as further comprehension check (Richards, 2008, p. 12). The presence of post-listening activities is not always a part of the listening exercise as the results of a study done by Hrdá (2020, p. 42) suggest, where out of 46 listening tasks in the researched English coursebook less than a half, specifically 13 tasks, of the tasks did not contain post-listening activities. The lack of post-listening activities may stem from the fact that they are focused on practicing other skills than listening and therefore, there is not a need to include them for the reason that the other skills are usually practiced in their own separate exercises.

4 Coursebooks

Most of the advice and guidelines on how to teach listening and listening practice will be used in language learning coursebooks in a school setting. It is not to say that coursebooks are not used outside the schooling establishments as they can be used in different circumstances, such as individual self-learning or private tutoring. However, for the purpose of this project, the focus will be on coursebooks used in the general school environment.

Coursebooks are used almost in every class, in every subject, however, its place of significance in the teaching process can differ greatly depending not only on the schooling system but even on the teacher itself. Therefore, teachers of the same schooling system or school can view the importance of a coursebook differently even if the teachers are bound by the same learning expectations. Some teachers may use the coursebook in every task of their lessons and some may not use the coursebooks at all.

4.1 Function of coursebooks

Some teaching methods do not require the use of a coursebook or even forbid it, however, coursebooks hold certain aspects that positively contribute to the process of teaching. Cunningsworth (1995, p. 10) acknowledges both ends of the spectrum of coursebook use and proposes the advantages and disadvantages. The common advantage and reason why some teachers may rely heavily on the coursebook may be their inexperience with teaching because they may be a novice teacher and therefore, use the coursebook as a sort of crutch to lean on and help them with the teaching process at the beginning of their career and as the teacher learns to be more independent with time, they commonly ease on the use of coursebook and incorporate their own ideas (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 10). Richards (2019, pp. 1, 2) presents other useful aspects of coursebooks such as their overall normative nature which can help mass language testing or save time with producing new material for the teachers. On the other hand, improper use or use of the coursebook over long periods of time can have negative effects on the learning experience of the learners because it can get repetitive, boring or not be accommodative to their specific learning needs which can hinder the pace of the learning (Cunningsworth, 1995, p. 10).

Although, it was mentioned in the paragraph above that the coursebook can be a tool for the teachers, however, Průcha (1998, p. 19) points out that the coursebooks were created primarily for learners and therefore, their function is mainly focused on the coursebook as a source for later revision or individual learning. According to Průcha (1998, p. 25), the contents

of the coursebook, especially the textual content should be assorted in such manner that the language used and the information conveyed is comprehensible to the age and level of knowledge of the learners as well as other characteristics of the learners and the learning conditions.

It can be concluded, as is with many things, a good balance is preferred when the teacher uses the coursebooks as a guide or source of ideas but does not limit the teaching process solely to the contents of the coursebooks. More often than not, coursebooks are used in classes and a coursebook's function is to serve both the needs of the learners and teachers therefore, its contents should be constructed accordingly.

4.2 Czech coursebooks and the guidelines of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports

According to the curricular document issued by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, learners are mandated to begin learning another language apart from their native language, which is most commonly English, at the third-grade level and continue study that language to the ninth grade where they should accomplish level A2 of English language (RVP ZV, 2023, p. 17).

Language coursebooks used in the Czech school system can gain a certification of approval by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, however, it is not a requirement, which gives the teacher a certain freedom of choice in how they approach their teaching, however, the coursebook needs to adhere to the expected outcomes of RVP framework and be approved by the principal of the specific school (ŠZ, § 27 odst. 2). Many schools may choose coursebooks that are already approved by Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports because it may appear as more secure way to ensure that the learners will meet the given expectations. Another reason may be that if a school chooses to use the coursebooks approved by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the financial burden of the purchase is carried by the state (ŠZ, § 160 odst. 1).

In conclusion, teachers have, with the approval of the principal, the opportunity to choose and use an English language coursebook that adheres to their requirements, besides the RVP framework, and therefore enhance the learning experience of their students specifically listening comprehension.

Empirical part

5 Research

5.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of the practical part of this thesis is to examine the most common problems students of seventh and eighth grade at lower secondary schools encounter with listening exercises in the English language coursebooks. To help examine the aforementioned topic, four research questions were formulated, which then determined the three methods of research.

The research questions are listed below and stated as follows:

- “What are the most common problems seventh and eighth grade learners face with listening exercises in English coursebooks?”
- “How do the teachers evaluate the quality of the listening exercises in coursebooks?”
- “Why do the teachers think the problems with listening exercises occur?”
- “What types of listening exercises are represented in the coursebook?”.

5.2 Research methods

To answer the research questions of this thesis three methods of acquiring data were chosen, one quantitative and two qualitative to create a methodological triangulation. Triangulation is procedure that uses two or more methods and is used to lessen the subjectivity of one-method researches and to create greater validity of acquired data (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 141).

The three specific methods were chosen as each source of the acquired data is able to point to different problematic areas of listening exercises and simultaneously, similarities between data can support the validity of the results. The method of questionnaire survey was chosen because it is able to collect a large number of data in small amount of time and acquire concrete answers to the given questions (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 317). To acquire data from the coursebooks, a content analysis method was chosen as it is able to analyze texts and convert their characteristics into quantifiable data (Cohen et al. 2007, p. 475). The interview method is advantageous when inquiring about deeper understanding of problems. In addition, the method helps to gain more efficient responses from the interviewees as the face-to-face interaction give more personal atmosphere (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 218). To be able analyze the information from

the interviews, the contents are sectioned into codes or categories, according to the chosen criteria, which helps convert the individual answers from the interviewees into general ideas or statements (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 368).

First method of acquiring data was a questionnaire survey that was administered to students in the seventh and eighth grade in two different schools. The contents of the questionnaire involved 13 items regarding specific problems with listening exercises that the students could evaluate on a 4-option Likert scale. The specific problems were chosen according to the mentioned problems in chapters 2 and 3 and their subchapters. An open-ended question was added to find out if students encountered any other problems with listening exercises there were not mentioned.

The second method used both quantitative and qualitative content analysis to evaluate two English coursebooks. The chosen coursebooks were Project 2 and Bloggers 2 for the reason that according to their level they are appropriate for the seventh and eighth grade students. The evaluation focused on researching the frequency of listening exercises, their types and characteristics of the recordings used for the exercises. The categorization of the exercises was done according to the chapters 2.1 *Listening strategies*, 2.2.1 *Accents*, 2.2.2 *Speech rate*, and 2.2.8 *Tasks*.

Both sets of data were then analyzed with the use of the spreadsheet tool Microsoft Excel and figures and tables with the data were created for better navigation.

Lastly, a qualitative method was carried out in which two teachers of the two lower secondary schools where the questionnaires were administered were interviewed in greater detail to help explain the possible reasons their students find certain characteristics in listening exercises problematic. The interviews were transcribed and the contents were categorized into main ideas that often occurred to help analyze the information.

6 Questionnaire survey

To examine the most common problems the students encounter with listening exercises, a questionnaire survey was administered to students that asked about their experiences with problematic areas of listening exercises.

The questionnaires were administered in two lower secondary schools in Šumperk. The first school (or referred to as School 1) has the capacity to teach 730 children that are divided into 23 classes from first grade to ninth grade. Students are taught the English language from the first grade and have one lesson per week until the third grade when it changes to three the lessons per week. From grade six and up, students have four lessons of English per week and use the Project series as their learning material. The second school (or referred to as School 2) can teach up to 490 children in 23 classes. The second school teaches students English from the first grade with one lesson per week and from the third grade to the ninth grade students attend three lessons of English per week. School 2 uses the Project series to teach English on the lower secondary level.

The data was collected from 113 students of seventh and eighth grade with 66 respondents being from one lower secondary school and 47 students were attendees of the second lower secondary school. The data can be further divided into specific grades where 28 students were seventh graders and 38 eighth graders of the first school and the second school provided data from 22 seventh-grade and 25 eighth-grade students.

The questionnaire survey involved 13 specific problems that were designed on the basis of the theoretical research in the chapter 2 and 3 and their subchapters in the first part of this thesis. The students were able to pick from four options on the frequency of their encounters with that specific problem and were constructed as such: *always*, *often*, *rarely*, and *never*.

In addition, to provide students with the opportunity to mention problems that may have been omitted from the questionnaire survey, an open-ended question was added.

All the data that is discussed in the chapters 6.1 to 6.2.13 along with the original version of the questionnaire can be found in the appendices 1 and 2.

6.1 Summary of the questionnaire survey

The results of the questionnaire survey were analyzed according to the individual questions and were compared throughout the grade levels and the different schools.

The additional open-ended question “Do you find any other problems that were not mentioned?” was answered negatively in all questionnaires.

This chapter summarizes and points out the problems that were most common among the individual groups and among all the respondents. The figures displaying the data show the numbers of types of answers each item had acquired and not percentages.

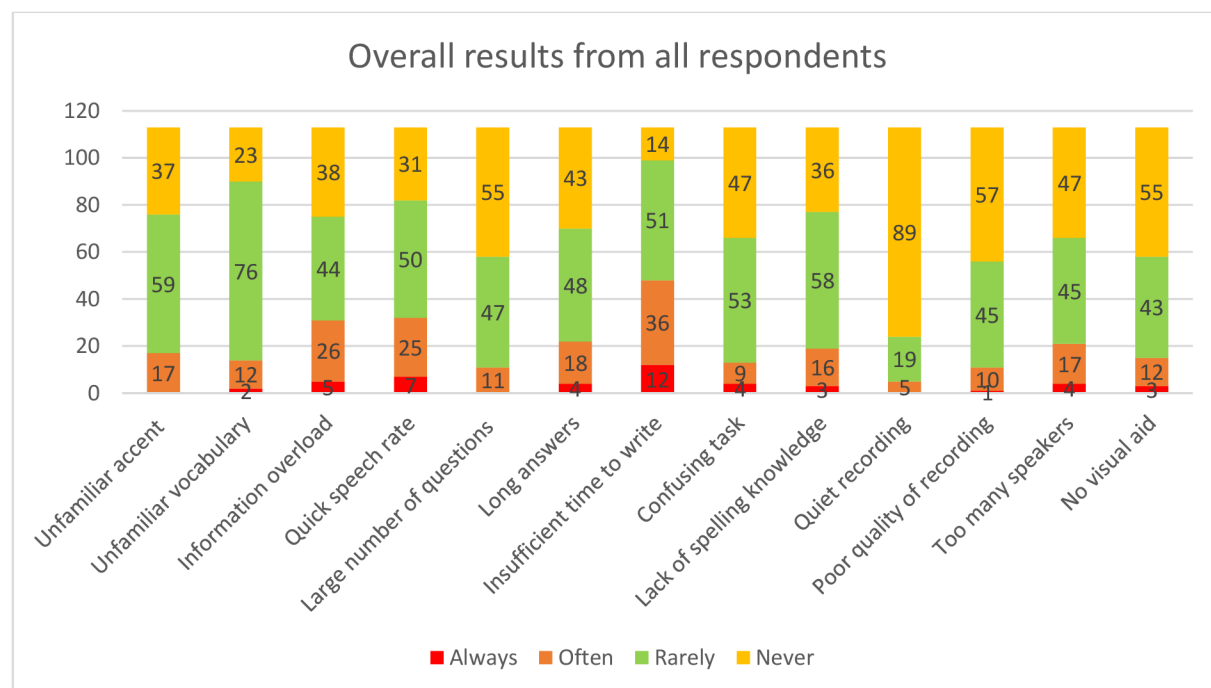


Figure 1, Results from all respondents

The overall results point to three main problematic areas of listening exercises. The item that the students picked the most as commonly occurring was *insufficient time to write* with 48 students (42%) marking as occurring it more often than not. Another item that was considered as often hindering was *quick speech rate*. In the questionnaire, 32 students (28%) responded that they feel that the problem is quite common while doing listening exercises. The last item that showed quite significant amount of answers *always* or *often* was *information overload* with 31 students (27%) ticking off the mentioned options. The rest of the items were not considered as common by the students and displayed under 20% of answers *always* or *often*. The items that showed to be the least occurring were *quiet recording*, *large number of questions* and *poor quality of recording* (Figure 1).

A study done by Hasan (2010, pp. 146, 147) investigated difficulties students have with listening exercises and similarly found that the quick speech rate is one the most hindering problems with 83.9% of respondents saying they encounter it often or always. Surprisingly,

problems such as *poor quality of recording* or *unfamiliar accent* that were one the lowest (4% and 15%) common problems showed much higher percentages (80.1% and 70.3%) of answers *often* and *always* in the study done by Hasan. The discrepancies may be the result of lack of resources to acquire better quality of recordings and the lack of opportunities to listen to the with the unfamiliar accents.

Another study done by Frimmelová (2019, p. 79) revealed similar results, pointing to 75% of questioned students considering quick speech rather difficult and 61% of respondents found the content of the speech too cluttered with information, which hindered their listening comprehension. Similarly to the study done by Hasan (2010), Frimmelová (2019) found that unfamiliar accent was one the more hindering aspects as 59% of respondents considered it difficult. However, in this study respondents were not as hindered by it and it was considered it often hindering by only to 15% of respondents.

Clearly, students find the speech, specifically speed and content of the speech, in the recordings quite problematic, which creates another major problem reported by the students that is the lack of time to write down the answers and therefore, successfully finish the task.

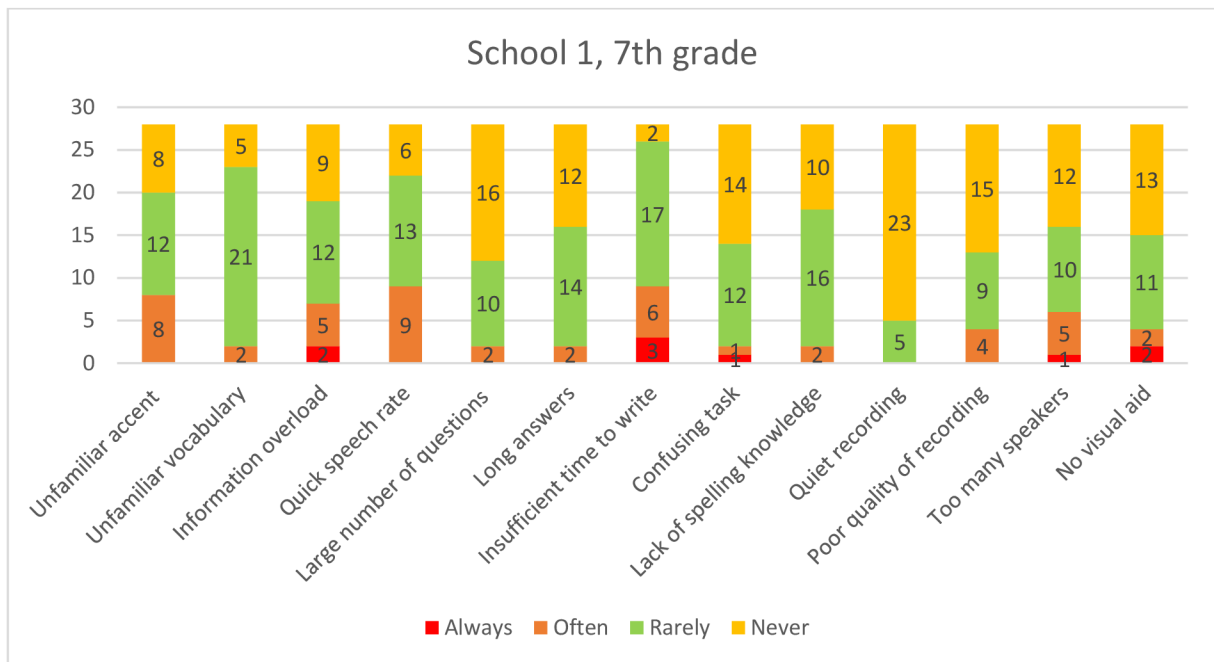


Figure 2, School 1, 7th grade

The first group had 28 respondents who were students of the seventh grade at School 1. The answers *always* or *often* from students did not display percentages higher than 32, showing that listening exercises do not pose a significant problem to them. The four categories that were considered as most problematic among the students were *insufficient time to write* (32%, nine students), *quick speech rate* (32%, nine students), *unfamiliar accent* (29%, eight students), and *information overload* (25%, seven students) (Figure 2).

The answers from the students show that the problems mainly regard the speakers in the recording rather than the design of the tasks given to them or the technical characteristics of the recording. The reason may be that the tasks themselves can be adapted to suit the students' level and to create lower difficulty. However, the teacher cannot manipulate the characteristics of the recording, therefore it is up to the students to be able to comprehend the speech in its original form.

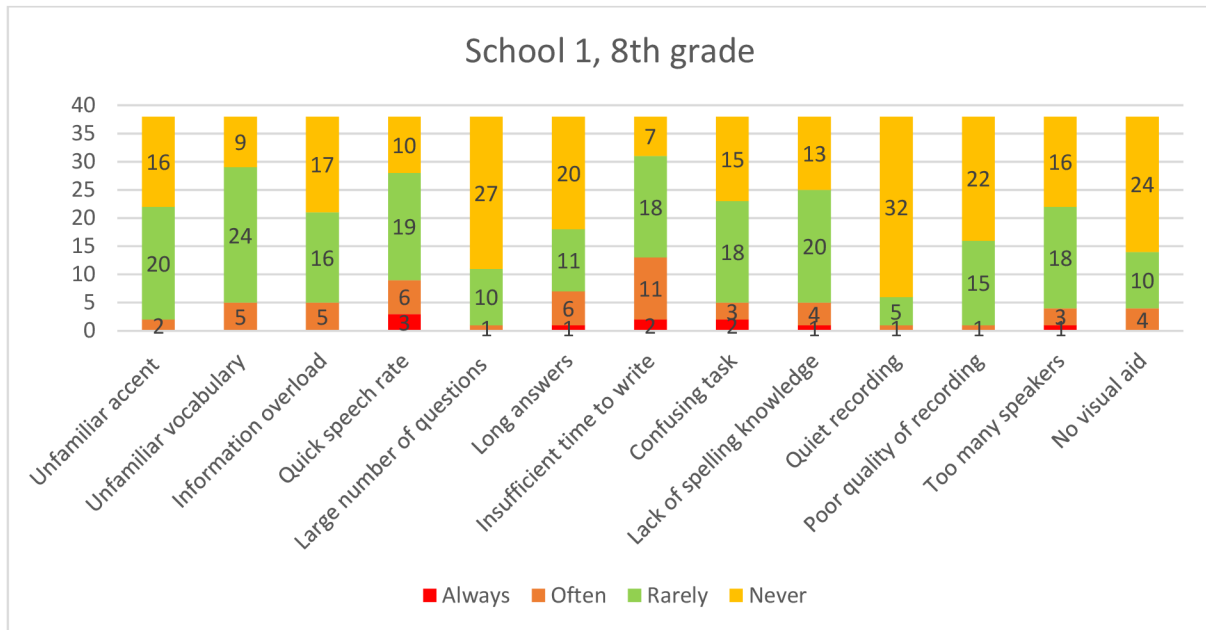


Figure 3, School 1, 8th grade

The survey at the same school involved 38 students of the eighth grade. Overall, the students' responses showed lower commonality of the posed problems. However, similarly to the seventh grade, the item *insufficient time to write* was the most problematic with 34% (13 students) of students saying the problem occurs *always* or *often*. The other two categories that hindered the listening comprehension the most were *quick speech rate* (24%, nine students) and *long answers* (18%, seven students) (Figure 3).

The common occurrence of the mentioned problems shows that the problems may influence each other as the expectation of long answers may create insufficient time to write and is only hindered by the quick speech of the speakers.

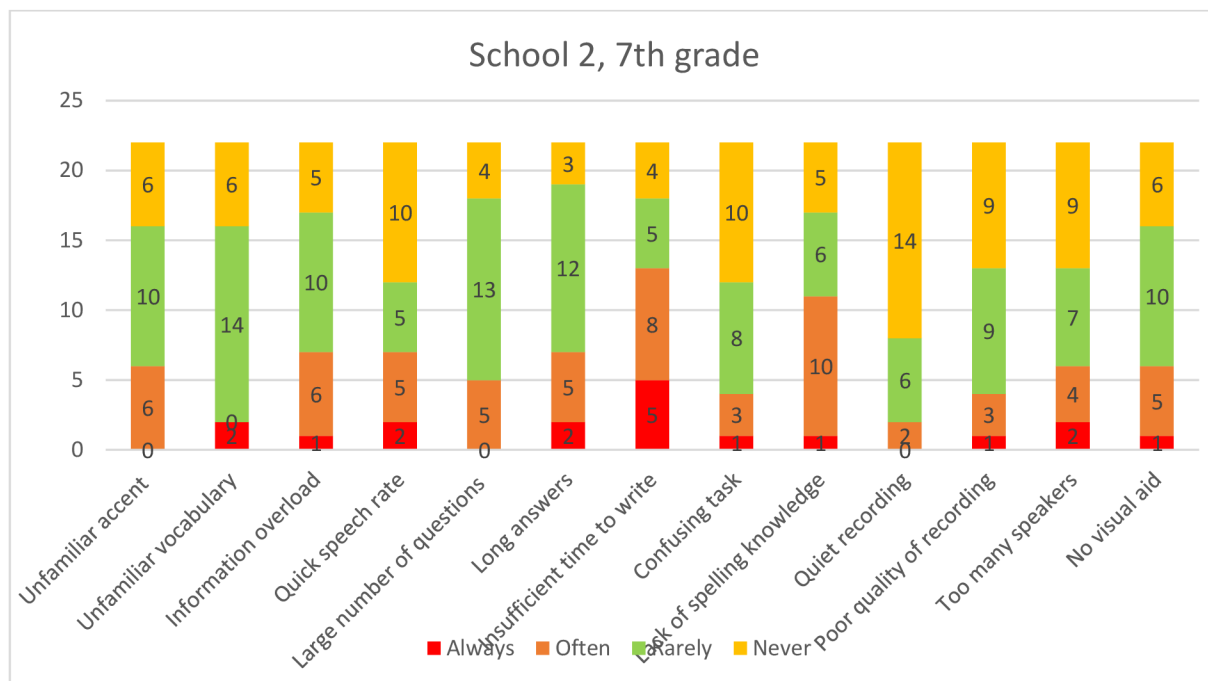


Figure 4, School 2, 7th grade

The 22 responding seventh-grade students at School 2 generally, displayed higher percentages of answers *always* and *often* on majority of the items compared to the other researched groups.

In addition, this group presented the highest number of students who considered the category *insufficient time to write* as often problematic at 59% (13 students). Another category that displayed high percentages of difficulty to students was *lack of spelling knowledge* with exactly half of the students (11 students) encountering this problem more often than not. The problems that occurred less, however, in a fairly significant amount were *information overload* and *quick speech rate* with both at 32% (seven students) (Figure 4).

The overall high percentages show that the students have a general problem with listening exercises. This may be due to lack of practice or insufficient help from the teacher as the students' listening skills are clearly not at a satisfactory level compared to the expectations from the coursebook listening exercises.

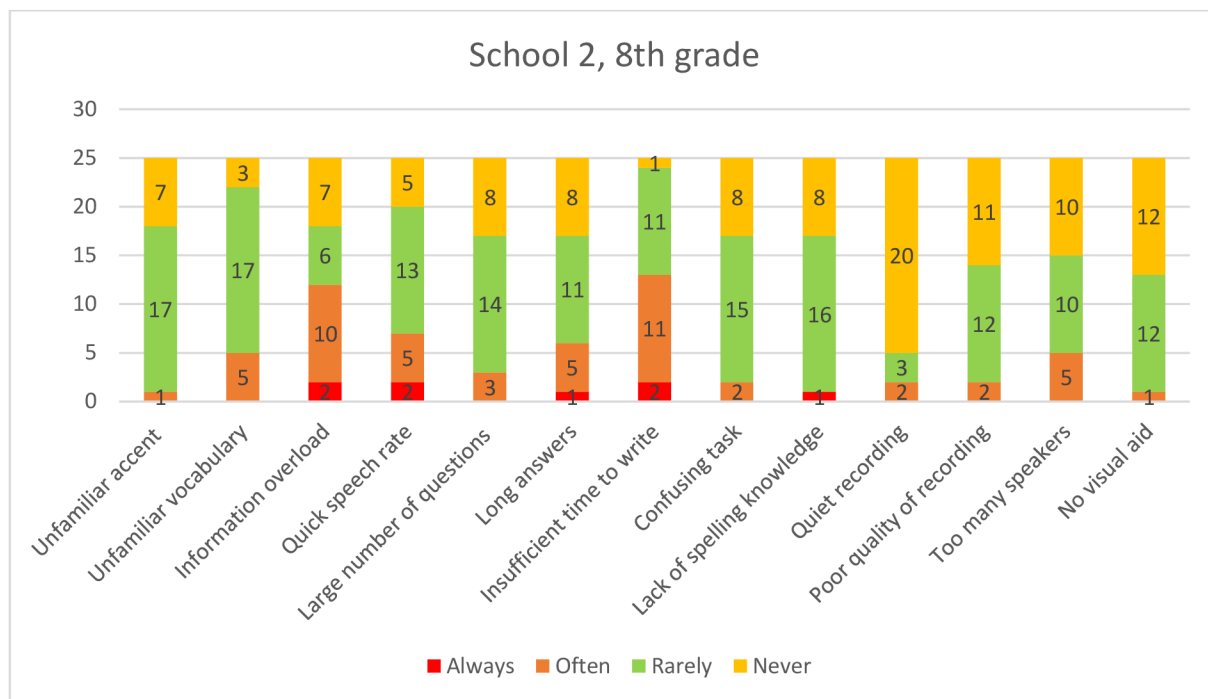


Figure 5, School 2, 8th grade

Lastly, the eighth grade (25 students) at School 2 displayed common occurrence in similar categories as the seventh grade in the same school. The category that dominated the answers was the previously mentioned *insufficient time to write* showing that 52% (13 students) of students considered the problem often occurring in their listening exercise experiences. The category *information overload* displayed the second highest percentages at 48% (12 students) of answers being either *always* or *often*. In addition, the students found the problem *quick speech rate* often occurring and 28% (seven students) of them chose the answers *always* or *often* (Figure 5).

The two high ranking categories, *insufficient time to write* and *information overload*, are items that are dependent on one another due the fact that if the students are given a lot of information at once and are expected to answer many questions, they are not able to answer all of the questions properly in time.

It can be seen that the item that ranked highest among all of the groups was the one regarding the lack of spare time to write down the answers for listening exercise. In majority of the researched groups, the item, *insufficient time to write*, displayed significantly higher number of answers *always* or *often*, which can be seen in the four figures above. Another item that displayed high concerns for the students was *quick speech* which showed 24% or more students *always* or *often* in every group. Last problem that generally ranked high between the individual

grades was *information overload*, which, apart from the eighth grade at School 1, showed that at least one fourth of students encountered this problem quite commonly.

6.2 Results of each questionnaire item

6.2.1 Unfamiliar accent

The problem of encountering an unfamiliar accent and therefore having difficulties understanding different pronunciation conventions was mentioned in the theoretical part in the chapter 2.2.1 as a common problem among learners who come in contact with accents that are new to them.

However, the results had shown that especially among eight-grade students the commonality of encountering accent, which would hinder their listening comprehension was rather rare as merely 1 student from School 1 and 2 students from School 2 have answered *always* or *often* regarding the problem.

The seventh-grade students regarded the problem of unfamiliar accent as having a greater effect on their listening with results displaying that eight (29%) students from the first school found it problematic more often than not and six (27%) seventh-grade students from the second school answered similarly.

The noticeable difference in answers between the grade levels could be attributed to the language experience the students acquire with time. In the theoretical part, Hasan (2010, p. 148) mentions that repeated exposure to an accent builds its easier comprehensibility to the listener. Therefore, it can be deduced that students of the eight grade have encountered unfamiliar accents more frequently and consecutively obtained the necessary exposure to consider the accent as comprehensible.

6.2.2 Unfamiliar vocabulary

The lack of vocabulary knowledge may stem from various sources. In the subchapter 3.3, it is mentioned that the presence of pre-listening activities such as pre-teaching vocabulary by the teacher or engaging with the pre-listening questions that are provided in the coursebooks can greatly lessen the problem of incomprehensibility of the recording due to insufficient vocabulary knowledge. Not taking these precautionary steps therefore often results in students having problems that may be easily avoidable.

The responses from the survey had exhibited that the students generally do not have problems regarding vocabulary. The answers of seventh-grade students had shown that no more than two (9%) from School 1 and two (7%) from School 2 considered the problem as hindering *always* or *often*.

The students of the higher level regarded the vocabulary used in the recording as burdensome a bit more with results showing five (13%) and five (20%) students from both schools chose to tick off the option *always* or *often*.

As was mentioned the sources of the phenomenon can be various. The disparities between the grades and individual schools could be attributed to the preparation done by the teachers as both grades and schools use the same coursebook, therefore having the same amount of pre-listening coursebook exercises.

6.2.3 Information overload

The problem of information overload usually appears when the speech in the recording is lacking redundant words and phrases, pauses that naturally occur in everyday speech and are rather overfilled with information (chapter 2.2.4).

The problem in recordings in listening exercises has been pointed out of previously and as the data from the survey showed, the problem is still prevalent.

The data had shown that three of the four researched groups consider the problem of information-filled recordings one of the most common problems with at least one fourth (seven and seven students) of both seventh grade classes and almost half (12 students or 48%) of the students in one of the eighth-grade classes reporting that they encounter this problem *always* or *often*. The group that rated the problem the lowest, however still in a significant amount, was the eighth grade at the School 1 where five (13%) students found the problem rather hindering.

To counter this problem, it is advised to teach students to be able to listen only for information that is important as was mentioned in subchapter 2.2.4.

6.2.4 Quick speech rate

A problem that can affect the feeling of information overload is the speed of which the person or people in the recording talk. Commonly, people are able to comprehend quicker speech in their native language more easily than listening to a second-language speech.

Therefore, it would be desirable to have the speakers of language learning recordings speak at a lower rate (chapter 2.2.2).

As was expected, the category of quick speech rate was another problem that ranked high among students. Both seventh grade classes found the problem quite common with seven (32%) and nine (32%) students answering on the side of the scale that displayed the more common frequency of the problem. The eighth-grade students showed slightly lower percentages, specifically 24% (nine students) and 28% (seven students).

The data shows that teachers encounter this problem quite frequently and therefore need to counteract it their own ways because they cannot alternate the recording itself. Often, the solution is to pause the recording after each sentence of a section to give the students more time.

6.2.5 Large number of questions

The overwhelming feeling that students may encounter from the aforementioned problems can be only heightened by the large number of questions accompanying the exercise. Students may be presented with a number of questions for which they have to write down an answer. However, they cannot possibly pay attention to all the questions at once, therefore, creating even more anxiety which in return hinders the overall comprehension (chapter 2.2.8).

Surprisingly, the data had shown that this category was one of the less common ones as students generally, found the problem as not much of burden to their listening comprehension. The group that found the topic most problematic was the seventh grade at School 2 that reported five (23%) students answered *always* or *often* in the survey. The eighth grade at School 2 followed with three (12%) students, seventh grade at School 1 with two students (7%) and eighth grade at School 1 with only one student (3%).

The results may possibly be attributed to assumption that the coursebook the students are learning from have lesser number of questions or that the teacher may section the questions and pause the recording after each question or section of questions is answered.

6.2.6 Long answers

Depending on what type of questions are asked of students to answer, the difficulty of the exercise may increase or decrease. As was mentioned in subchapter 3.4.3, questions that need a longer and more intricate answer show to be more difficult for students.

The answers from the question that looked into this problem had shown that many students consider it as a fairly common problem. Both researched groups from School 2 had found the problem more prevalent than School 1, with data stating that over one third (seven students or 32%) of seventh graders and slightly less than one fourth (six students or 24%) of eighth graders considering the problem common. The percentage of students from School 1 was slightly lower and had shown that having to write long answers commonly created problems in seven percent (two students) of seventh graders and in 18% (seven students) of eighth graders.

The common occurrence of the mentioned problem may stem from the questions proving to be confusing or that the students need to focus on more information to answer the questions and not just one word. Being able to answer more intricate questions may also be affected by the grammatical knowledge of the students as the answers are usually constructed in a sentence form. The ability to answer longer questions with greater ease will increase with practice and as the learner's language knowledge improves.

6.2.7 Insufficient time to write

The item that was ranked the highest as the most problematic in all of the researched groups was the lack of time to complete the tasks. Students considered the time that the teachers or that the recording provided to write the tasks assigned to them as insufficient. Therefore, it affected their results as they may have known the answers but were not able to write it down in time.

The results displayed that the problem at both grades at School 1 was prevalent in 32% (nine students) of seventh graders and 34% (13 students) of eighth graders, making over a one third of students that are hindered by this problem. The School 2 students expressed that the occurrence of the problem was nearly twice as much as in the first school, with 59% (13 students) of seventh graders and 52% (13 students) of eighth graders marking the frequency of the problem as *always* or *often*.

The high percentages in all of the groups display that the problem is of a regular occurrence and therefore should be looked into and solved. It would be advised that the teachers provide the students with more writing time either through dividing the tasks into smaller sections or pause throughout the duration of the recording.

6.2.8 The task is confusing

A problem can occur in a listening exercise even before the recording is played and that is when the students fail to understand their assigned task.

The data from the survey had shown that the occurrence of this problem is not significantly high. None of the research groups ranked the problem above 20%. Specifically, the highest percentage was given by seventh graders at School 2, 18% (four students), eighth graders at School 1 rated it a bit lower, at 13% (five students), and in seventh grader at School 1 and eighth grader at School 2 two (7%) and two (8%) students found it hindering..

The general lower percentages may have resulted from the teacher giving students additional instructions or questions on the task to ensure the listening comprehension is not hindered by other difficulties.

6.2.9 Lack of spelling knowledge

Besides the lack of time to write that hinders the student's ability to fulfill even if they knew the answers is the students' lack of spelling knowledge. English language is one of the languages where the spelling of words more often than not does not match the pronunciation, therefore, it can bring difficulties to students who may know the pronunciation of a certain word, however, are not able to write correctly (Frimmelová, 2019, pp. 66-67).

The majority of questioned students considered the problem as not burdensome while completing listening exercises. However, 11 students (50%) at seventh grade at School 2 marked the occurrence of the problem as *always* or *often*. The rest of the questioned grades, displayed data with much lower percentages, with eighth grade, School 2, at four percent (one student), seventh grade, School 1, at seven percent (two students), and eighth grade, School 1, at 13% (five students).

The disparity in percentages between the seventh-grade students at School 2 and the rest of the research groups may stem from the teacher's view on importance of spelling. The other teachers may put greater importance on this skill and practice it more with their students to ensure the occurrence of the problem in listening exercises would be lower.

6.2.10 Volume of the recording

The item regarding the volume of the recording deals with the problem that frequently occurs when students are not able to hear the speech correctly. This problem may stem from the

poor acoustics of the classroom, making the sound from the recording being heard only by the students nearest to the record player.

As was expected, the data from this item showed the students do not consider the problem as a frequently occurring as this item was one of the lowest rated in terms of frequency. None of seventh grade students of the first school considered this problem as *always* or *often* occurring. One student (3%) of eighth grade at School 1 found the problem common.. The students of the second school showed percentage slightly higher with seventh graders at nine percent (two students) and eighth grades one percent lower with 8% (two students).

The low percentage point to the adequate volume of the recordings that is usually manipulated by the teacher according to the students' needs and the classroom layout.

6.2.11 Quality of the recording

Another item that deals with the technical characteristics of the recording is the quality of the recording. This item delves into the problem of rattling sounds or otherwise disruptive sounds that may have been created on the recording due to its overuse or improper handling.

The percentages of answers *always* or *often* under this item showed to be a little higher than the problem of volume of the recording, however, were did not reach higher that one fifth. The groups that displayed the lowest percentages was the eighth grade at School 1 with three percent (one student), followed by eighth grade at School 2 with eight percent (two students), seventh grade at School 1, 14% (four students), and seventh grade at School 2 with 18% (four students).

The higher percentages of the two seventh grades may point to the lack of resources that the teachers may have and therefore, are not able to replace the faulty recording.

6.2.12 Number of speakers

Generally, any person can be overwhelmed while listening to more speakers. However, it can prove to be more difficult when the conversation is not in the native language and more so, if the listener does not have any visual support of who is talking at that given moment and is forced to rely only on the context or the difference in voice.

Students of the researched groups found the problem of too many speakers as one of the more common items from the survey. Besides the eighth grade at School 1, which displayed that four (11%) students found the problem occurring more often than not, the rest of the

research groups displayed percentages 20% percent or higher. Six students (21%) of seventh grade, School 1, six students (27%) of seventh grade at School 2, and five (20%) students eighth grade at School 2 found the item problematic.

The problem may stem from the lack of visual support that is offered by the recording which is still used by many teachers because a CD or an audio recording is one of the more common parts of the coursebook package. However, it needs to be mentioned that with the accessibility of technology rising more coursebooks include video as a part of their listening exercises.

6.2.13 No visual aid

The last item of the survey regarded the visual characteristics of the listening exercises. Although, it may seem usual for an exercise that focuses on the student's listening skill to involve visual support, the involvement of visual aids such as photos, videos and graphs gives students the contextual background they would most probably have while engaging in real conversation (chapter 2.2.5).

The responses to this item had shown that apart from one group, students generally do not encounter problems regarding the lack of visual aids. The one group was displayed the highest percentage of the answers *always* or *often* was the seventh grade at School 2 where six students (27%) found the problem commonly occurring. The seventh grade at School 1 followed where four (14%) students answered higher on the commonality scale, in eighth grade at School 1 four (11%) students and in eighth grade at School 2 one student (4%) picked the options *always* or *often*.

The results show that majority of students have a satisfactory number of visual aids accompanying the listening exercises and therefore, it does not affect their listening comprehension to a great degree.

7 Coursebook analysis

The research was conducted through content analysis of the listening exercises of the two coursebooks, Project 2 by Tom Hutchinson and Bloggers 2 by the collective Pavlína Hrabětová, Michaela Mikulková and Karen Cryer, had provided. The evaluation was focused on discussing the number of listening exercises, the types of tasks in the exercises, existence of pre- and post-listening tasks, and characteristics of the recording. The data was counted according to the layout of the coursebook exercises. Therefore, the direct use of one recording was accounted as one exercise. Some exercises were equipped with additional exercises either before the recording, pre-listening exercises, or after the recording, post-listening exercises which did not directly involve actively using listening comprehension but rather deeper engagement with the topic of the recording.

All the gathered data from the content analysis used in the chapters 7.1, *Summary of coursebook analysis*, up to the chapter 7.3.5, *Accent and speed of recordings*, can be found in the appendix 3.

7.1 Summary of coursebook analysis

Although the six units in Project 2 spanned over lower number of pages (76 pages) than Bloggers 2 (91 pages), the former offered more listening exercises than the latter. In Project 2 106 listening exercises were found and in Bloggers 2 displayed 77 listening exercises. Both coursebooks used pre-listening and post-listening exercises to enhance the practice of listening skills. It was discovered that in Project 2 pre- and post-listening exercises were more common, approximately in half (52% and 41%) of listening exercises, than Bloggers 2 which had the additional exercises in approximately above quarter (29% and 26%) of listening exercises. As was mentioned before, a balance in use of top-down and bottom-up listening strategies in exercises is advised. However, Bloggers 2 displayed quite disproportional (73% bottom-up and 27% top-down exercises) arrangement and Project 2 held a closer balance of the two strategies (57% bottom-up and 43% top-down exercises). Both coursebooks used a combination of both visual and textual aids the most often (48% and 49%). The separate use of the two aids was less common and quite a small number was of exercises with no aid (14% and 12%). Lastly, both coursebooks displayed a speech rate close to the recommended speech rate at 115 and 121 w.p.m. and generally committed to one type of accent throughout the exercises.

A study that focused on evaluating listening exercises in coursebook was conducted by Hrdá (2020, pp. 41, 42) and found that pre-listening exercises were existent in 30 out of the 46

(approximately 65%) evaluated exercises and post-listening exercises could be found in 33 (approximately 71%) exercises, which is generally higher than in both coursebooks that were analyzed in this study.

7.2 Project 2

The coursebook Project 2 is divided into six main units with a short zero unit called Introduction. The whole coursebook provided 106 recordings to use for listening exercises and the number of recordings per unit spanned from 14 to 19 apart from the unit zero, which had only four recordings. However, it needs to be pointed out that the unit zero was not designed in the same way as the other units and spanned over only four pages. The other units each spanned over 12 pages.

7.2.1 Pre-listening and post-listening exercises

Slightly more than a half, 55 listening exercises, were provided with pre-listening activities, such as asking general questions about the topic or making predictions. For example, a listening exercise that was discussing dates and birthdays provided pre-listening questions such as *“When is your birthday?”* or *“How many people have got a birthday in the same month as you?”* (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 11). The questions aimed to familiarize the students with the topic of the recording and help them provide the vocabulary they would need for the recording. Another listening exercise that had a pre-listening task was a quiz about general world facts (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 60). The students were asked to make predictions or guess the answers to the quiz and later use the recording which provided the right answers to check their prediction.

The number of recordings that had post-listening exercises was slightly lower, at 43 post-listening tasks. However, as was mentioned in chapter 3.5, the existence of post-listening exercises is not concretely displayed in the coursebook as post-listening exercises usually focus on practicing other language skills through the means of the topic of the recording. Therefore, the 43 post-listening tasks were considered as tasks that were directly a part of the listening exercise. An example of a recording with a post-listening task can be seen in the following example. In the example exercise, first, the students were asked to listen to a recording and answer the given questions. After finishing the task, the students were asked to do a role-play as a post-listening activity with instructions: *“Work with a partner. Ask and answer about the people.”* (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 4). A post-listening activity from another exercise asked students to have a discussion about important dates in their life after listening to a recording

about dates to further show their comprehension of the topic and the listening exercise (Hutchinson, 2014, p. 11).

7.2.2 Types of tasks based on expected answers

The tasks involving listening were divided into six categories depending on their expected answer and according to the findings from the theoretical part. The listening exercises in Project 2 were divided into the same categories as exercises in Bloggers 2, however, one category differed as both coursebooks had exercises with instructions which did not necessarily involve using information from the listening to elicit a specific new answer. The category that differed was the last category in each analysis. The specific categories are one with instructions “*listen and check*” in Project 2 and “*listen and read*” in Bloggers 2.

The first type of tasks that were analyzed were tasks practicing pronunciation with the instructions “*listen and repeat*”. The number of tasks presented in the coursebook was 11, therefore, 10% of the total 106 exercises in total. The tasks involved mainly presenting and practicing new vocabulary and its pronunciation. The pronunciation tasks were usually presented at the beginning of a subunit did not require high listening skills, however, the students were expected to focus on the pronunciation differences.

The second category of tasks still involved appreciation for pronunciation, however, its focus was on other tasks as well. The category involved tasks using rhymes and songs as the source of the listening. The instructions for the tasks were designed as following: “*listen and sing*” if the task focused only on the song aspect of the exercise or “*find the (specific words) in the song*” or fill-in tasks that also relied on the students’ knowledge of rhymes. After the analysis of the coursebook, six exercises (6%) involving songs or rhymes were found.

The third category regarded tasks involving questions that required short answers. The tasks that were included were fill-in tasks, yes or no questions, marking sentences as true or false, and tasks that involved ticking off items from a list. The reason for putting the mentioned tasks in the same category was that as was mentioned in the theoretical part, the tasks that require short one-word answers are generally considered more manageable by the students. The analysis showed that this category was prevalent in 23% of the total number of listening exercises.

The tasks that required students to write out longer answers to the questions or make summaries of the recording made up the fourth category. These types of listening exercises

seem to be more problematic for students because they do not rely only on their listening comprehension, however, in addition, require the students' grammatical knowledge to create a correct sentence as an answer. The fourth category made up the largest portion of the listening exercises in the coursebook with 35% of exercises requiring more complex answers.

The fifth category focused on exercises using matching of items according to the recording to complete the task and made up 17% of the total number of exercises. The exercises used either combination of pictures or pictures and words/ phrases or words and words. The exercises using matching are generally considered as less problematic because they are usually provided with visual aid or textual aid that points the students in a direction of the information the students need to pay attention to.

The last category is reserved for checking if students answered correctly in the exercises. The aim of the tasks is not to give students new answers, more so, it is to confirm the students' work they did on their own. Therefore, the recording is not necessarily needed for the task to be finished, however, being able to check the answers practices the students' listening comprehension. The exercises that involved the instructions "*listen and check*" made up 9% of the total number of exercises.

7.2.3 Types of tasks based on the used strategy

As was mentioned in the theoretical part, listening tasks can be divided according to the strategy it uses, either bottom-up or top-down strategy (chapter 2.1). Both strategies practice different aspects of listening comprehension and they should be equally practiced (chapter 2.1).

The bottom-up strategy can be seen in tasks that focus on listening for specific information, such as answering specific questions, fill-tasks, or ticking-off items. The number of tasks using the bottom-up strategy was slightly higher at 57%, which matched the assumption that the tasks are more common than task using the top-down strategy in language learning in the chapter 2.1.2. The afore mentioned tasks using the top-down strategy included tasks with aims of summarizing the recording, predicting the continuation of the recording or matching order of events according to the recording and made up 43%.

The analysis of the coursebook revealed that the division of exercises based on the listening strategy they utilize is quite balanced, which helps to practice and improvement of listening comprehension using both strategies.

7.2.4 Types of tasks based on provided aid

The listening comprehension in coursebooks can be enhanced with aids, either visual or textual or the combination of both. Aids are additional materials that help students to improve their listening experience and gain additional information from the recording.

The analysis of the coursebook revealed that 86% of the total number of exercises were facilitated with some kind of aid to help students' listening comprehension. Out of the 86%, taking up the largest portion with 48% were exercises that utilized both visual and textual aid. The exercises with their visual or textual aid both took up the same portion and that was 19%.

The overall use of aids in listening exercises shows the beneficial effect and may be the necessity of having visual or textual aids to supplement the contextual cues that would be present in a real-life conversation.

7.2.5 Accent and speed of the recordings

The characteristics of the recordings themselves may be the source of comprehension difficulties for students. The chapter 2.2.1 mentions that accent, specifically unfamiliar accent, is an aspect of the recording that frequently hinders students' abilities to complete the given tasks. Therefore, the recordings in the coursebook should provide one kind of accent to maintain a familiarity with the accent and the type of English the coursebook focuses on.

For the purposes of the analysis a recording from each unit was chosen as a sample, therefore, six recordings were analyzed in total. The analysis revealed that in every recording native British speakers were talking and their pronunciation was clear and understandable.

The use of the same accent throughout the coursebook was consistent and therefore, beneficial for the students because it eliminates the problem of lack of comprehension due to encountering unfamiliar accents.

Another aspect of the recording that often creates difficulties is the speech rate of the speakers. Although, the speech of native speakers of English may be understandable to other native speakers, students find it difficult to keep up at the same speech rate, therefore, it is necessary to provide recording that have artificially slower speech rates. The appropriate speech rate is approximately 120 w.p.m. (chapter 2.2.2). The analysis was conducted with the same sample of recordings from each unit as was done for analysis of the accent and the approximate speech rate was then calculated. The analysis revealed that the approximate speech rate is 121 w.p.m. with speech rates ranging between 102 w.p.m. and 142 w.p.m. The results show that the

speech rate is of an appropriate range to be understood by the students of English and therefore, should not create comprehension difficulties.

7.3 Bloggers 2

The coursebook Bloggers 2 provides the students with six units, starting from unit zero to unit five. The total number of exercises practicing listening comprehension is 77 and the number of recordings per unit ranged from 10 to 15. It needs to be mentioned that the coursebook often uses video as a source of listening exercises, therefore the exercises were accounted to the total number of exercises.

7.3.1 Pre-listening and post-listening exercises

The analysis of the coursebook found that the pre-listening exercises that were supposed to introduce the students to the context of the recording and help them prepare for smoother listening comprehension only present in 22 recordings out of the 77. The pre-listening exercises consisted mainly of general questions or discussion about the topic of the recording. For example, a recording about burrito preparation had pre-listening questions such as “*What is a burrito?*” and “*Do you remember the ingredients for burrito?*” to check the students’ knowledge about the topic and prepare them for the recording (Hrabešová et al., 2019, p.52). Another exercise used discussion as a form of pre-listening exercise. The students were asked to discuss with their classmates about their idols as a means of introducing the topic of the recording where a boy talks about his idol (Hrabešová et al., 2019, p. 95).

Post-listening exercises were slightly less common with only 20 recordings having exercises that further developed and engaged with the topic of the recording. The tasks were often designed as questions asking about the students’ personal experiences or opinions or finding more information about the topic on the Internet. For example, a recording that discussed an alternative boarding school had a post-listening question about the students’ opinion about the school (Hrabešová, et al., 2019, p. 20). A different post-listening exercise that utilized the means of Internet to further the engagement with the topic was preceded by a recording that discussed the British town Liverpool and its famous landmarks where students were asked to find more information about the town (Hrabešová et al., 2019, p. 25).

7.3.2 Types of tasks based on expected answer

The first category of practicing and appreciating pronunciation was prevalent in the Bloggers 2 coursebook as it was the second most common type of exercise at 30%. The

exercises involved not only introducing new vocabulary but also practicing grammar or phrases using tables and occasionally visual aid. The lack of visual aid seems to show that possibly the students are already expected to know the words because they not able to use any visual cues that would otherwise help them decipher the meaning. The tasks were presented with the simple instructions “*listen and repeat*”.

The exercises using songs or rhymes as a source for listening comprehension were not present at all. The lack of exercises using song and rhymes shows that the educational value was possibly regarded as not important or useful to the authors of the coursebook.

The category that involved most exercises, 24 out of 77 (31%), was where there were tasks that needed to be completed with a short type of answer. Common were tasks where the student needed to decide if certain statements were true or false and multiple-choice quizzes. The prevalence of this category shows that the students should find the listening comprehension tasks less problematic and be more confident in their abilities.

The fourth category regarded tasks expecting more complex answers such as summaries or wh-questions that were needed to be answered with whole sentences. The category involved slightly smaller number of exercises with 23% exercises expecting long answers to complete the tasks. For example, a recording where a girl talks about her pets has questions “*What kind of pet has she got?*” or “*What does the pet look like?*” where the students are expected to answer with a whole sentence, therefore practicing not only their listening skills but also the grammar knowledge and sentence structure (Hrabeořvá, 2019, p. 64).

Exercises using matching were not as common as only 5% involved the matching of pictures to words or phrases according to the information the students gained from the recording.

As was mentioned in the chapter 7.2.2, the last category differs from the one mentioned in the evaluation of Project 2. The category focuses on exercises with the instructions “*listen and read*” where the exercise is aided with a transcript of the recording and the students’ task is to listen and follow the speaking with the textual aid. Therefore, as was with the last category in the chapter 7.2.2, the recording is not the only source of information because students would be able to get the same amount of information without the recording. The category made up 10% of the total number of listening exercises.

7.3.3 Types of tasks based on the used strategy

In the theoretical part of this thesis was mentioned that although the use of bottom-up strategy is more common in the learning environment, it is advised to use both strategies in a balanced manner (chapter 2.1.1).

Unfortunately, the results showed that the portions of the two strategies are quite unequal with exercises that use the bottom-up strategy making up the majority of the total number of exercises with 73% and top-down strategy making up the rest of the exercises. The exercises using the bottom-up strategy incorporated answering specific questions, doing quizzes, or fill-in tasks. The top-down strategy could be seen in tasks such as ordering of items according to the recording or summarizing the main idea of the recording. For example, in a recording where two friends talked about one of them getting a pet, the students were asked to say which pet did the friend choose and why, therefore they needed to listen for the overall purpose of the conversation rather than specific aspects of the conversation.

The unbalanced distribution of listening strategies used lessens the opportunities to use and practice both strategies, therefore hindering the students' listening skills.

7.3.4 Types of tasks based on provided aid

Context clues help participants in in real-life conversations to add additional information to help gain clearer understanding. Unfortunately, the recordings the students are listening to in the listening exercises lack the characteristics of real-life conversations. Therefore, exercises often provide some sort of aid to subsidize the audio recording (chapter 2.2.5).

The analysis of Bloggers 2 showed that the coursebook often used video which provided visual aid and when the subtitles were present provided additionally a textual aid. Other exercises that did not use video, had pictures of charts to help students gain context. The largest category of exercises utilized both visual and textual aid and made up almost half, 49%, of the total number of exercises. The second category used textual aid with 32% of exercises. The category mainly consisted of exercises presenting new vocabulary or grammar in a form of tables where students were asked to listen and repeat. Exercises that used only visual aid made up the smallest portion with 6%. Lastly, exercises where students had to rely only on their listening skills and were without any aids to help them made up 12%.

Overall, the exercises are well facilitated with aids and the common use of video as a resource for listening exercises positively affects the students' motivations and listening skills.

7.3.5 Accent and speed of the recordings

The designs of the tasks or the provided aid are not the only aspects of listening exercises that can be source of difficulties for students. Students often mention that the speakers are talking too quick or that they cannot understand them due to the accent. Therefore, adequate speech rate and recognizable accent are necessary for the recording to be comprehensible to students.

The analysis of the coursebook was done on one recording from each unit to provide a sample, therefore six recordings in total. The recordings were analyzed and the results showed that overall, the coursebooks maintained one type of accent throughout majority of the listening exercises. Specifically, out of the six recordings four used non-native speakers who did not carry any distinct English accent and further analysis showed the speakers were of Czech origin, albeit playing as people of other nationalities. One of the recordings had a speaker with American accent and the remaining recording was narrated by a person with British accent.

The coursebook used a variety of different accents, which gave students an opportunity to come into contact and familiarize themselves with them. However, it could also create comprehension difficulties when the students are met with an accent they do not recognize. To mitigate this problem, it would be recommended a repeated exposure to the unfamiliar accents as the students would gradually get used to it and find it less problematic (chapter 2.2.1).

The analysis revealed that the approximate speech rate of the recordings was 115 w.p.m., which is slightly lower than the recommended speed of 120 w.p.m. (chapter 2.2.2). The range of the speech rates was slightly unbalanced as the bottom speed was 95 w.p.m. and the top 145 w.p.m.

8 Interview

For the purposes of the thesis, two teachers participated in a structured interview to gain a deeper understanding of the problems students might face during listening exercises. Moreso, the teachers of English were purposefully chosen to be of different lower secondary schools in Šumperk to acquire a more diverse perspective on the issue.

The interview was recorded and the teachers were informed that their answers would be used for the purposes of this diploma thesis only. The anonymity of the teachers will be maintained with the aliases Teacher A and Teacher B. The interview with the Teacher A was done in the Czech language due the teacher feeling more comfortable speaking in Czech rather than English. The recording from that interview was transcribed and translated into the transcript. Teacher B was answering the interview questions in English, therefore the recording was only transcribed and did not have to be translated. The teachers were given nine questions and four sub-questions regarding the teachers' experience with listening exercises. Both transcripts from the interviews that are cited in the chapters 8.1 to 8.5 can be found in the appendices 4b and 4c and the list of questions can be found in appendix 4a.

8.1 Summary of the interview

Clearly, both teachers considered listening as one of the more important language skills and therefore, focused regularly on practicing it and improving it in their lessons. Both teachers used pre-listening exercises such as questions or discussion to introduce the students to the listening exercises. Although both teachers evaluated listening exercises in their coursebooks as generally sufficient, they observed that their students were having difficulties, mainly with the speed of the recordings. To mitigate the problems, one teacher replays the recording several times. However, the second teacher does not adapt the listening exercises in any way as they do not consider it necessary. Apart from using listening exercises from their coursebook, both teachers often use YouTube as a source of additional video material.

Overall, answers from Teacher A showed that they try to accommodate their students' needs as much as possible for them to be able to succeed in the listening exercises. The teacher also understood the individual character of students and in return accommodated their teaching accordingly. Teacher A also regarded practice as quite important aspect of developing listening skills and understood the beneficial aspects of video use.

Generally, Teacher B showed answers that pointed to the expectations of independence of the students as the teacher did not consider adapting the exercises and purposefully kept the exercises challenging. Teacher B also showed the positive outlook of use of alternative listening media and Internet to practice listening skills and stated that they use it quite often.

In a study done by Frimmelová (2019, p.79) is stated that students often find difficulties in the speed of speech in the recordings, which correlates with the observations stated by the two teachers in the interview. Hasan in a study done in 2010 (p. 148) points out that students often have problems gaining general understanding when the recording is played once, therefore, as Teacher A mentioned the necessity of replay of the recording is prevalent.

8.2 Importance of listening skills and practice

The first category of the interview focused on finding how the teachers feel about the listening skill in general and therefore how their opinion reflects in the practice of listening skills.

Both teachers regarded the topic quite enthusiastically and with clear understanding for the importance of the listening. Teacher A used a comparison to the other skills to show their opinion and said: *“I’d say, I put the same importance as for speaking and speaking is my number one.”*. The teacher B clearly regarded the listening skills highly as well when they said: *“Well...actually in my lessons, I always try to do at least one listening exercise per lesson. So it is very important skill for me.”*.

As Teacher B already mentioned, they practice listening quite often and although, Teacher A did not specifically say how often they practice listening with their students, they pointed out the insufficient opportunities to practice the listening skill and the need to practice more: *“...they have 45 minutes of English and even there, the whole class is not only in English so therefore, I think there is lack of listening...or lack of opportunities to listen.”*.

It can be seen that Teacher A regards practice as the major source of improvement of students’ listening skills, or skills in general, when they continued to say: *“It’s about practice really, so more opportunities to listen, more practice and that makes better skills.”*. Teacher B noticed the development of students’ listening abilities through practice as well as they mentioned that students who learn English longer develop better skills: *“I think their skills usually become better in the first term in the eighth grade. So between seventh and eighth graders there’s a jump when they become better.”*.

The answers of both teachers show their resolute opinion on the importance of practicing listening and its greater importance compared to the other skills, apart from speaking as Teacher A mentioned. Therefore, both teachers tend to put emphasis on practice as an important aspect of developing students' skills.

8.3 Working with listening exercises

The second category regarded how are teachers working with listening exercises and managing the exercises for better experience of the students. Before the teachers directly work with the listening exercises, they both mentioned the use of pre-listening activities, either the ones provided by the coursebook they use or their own sources.

Teacher A shows that they rely mainly on the pre-listening activities offered in the coursebooks: *"So I use mainly the exercises that are provided in the coursebook, the pre-listening questions..."*. However, they add that they use further questioning of their own: *"...I ask if the students know the general context, like listening for gist, of the listening."* Teacher B uses discussion and vocabulary review as a form of pre-listening exercise: *"Um, we usually discuss the topic before we listen, I try to use listenings with the vocabulary we are going through. But we don't learn all of the words... that wouldn't be challenging at all."*

Both teachers also mention certain flaws in the exercises. When working with the listening exercises, Teacher B finds the instructions sometimes confusing for the students: *"I'd say the instructions may not be clear."* They continue to add that the order of questions can be a source of additional confusion: *"...when the questions for the listening are not ordered in the same order as the recording."* However, Teacher B said that they do not adapt the exercises in any way to accommodate the students. Clearly, although the teacher pointed out earlier that the instructions may be confusing at times, they do not consider it as an aspect that would need to be adjusted for the students.

Teacher A focused their dissatisfaction more on the speech of the recording as a source of difficulties and said that they replay the recording and even translate the speech to ensure students' understanding and success of the listening exercise. Although the teacher mentioned that some students do not need any adjustments and are able to finish the task after the first listening, they said that majority needs the recording to be replayed. They said: *"First, I play the recording once in full length, (...) later I pause the recording, sentence by sentence and then I try to have some students translate it, (...) then I play the recording again and pause it. And now, that they hear the sentence from the recording, I repeat it slower."*

The teachers' answers differ greatly as Teacher A likes to use questioning as a preparation for the exercises and Teacher B uses discussion and vocabulary review to ensure students' knowledge about the topic. Both teachers use reliable pre-listening activities that help students prepare and engage with the listening exercises more. Although both teachers found certain aspects of the listening exercises insufficient, only Teacher A stated that they adapt the exercises to accommodate the students' needs, which may point to their different opinions on adjustments of listening exercises for the students.

8.4 Speech rate and time management

The third topic that was often mentioned by the teachers was the hindering speech rate of recording and the students' inability to write down answers in time.

When Teacher A was asked a question regarding the difficulties students encounter with listening exercises, they answered immediately and with certainty in their voice. They said: "*Speed. Mainly, speed of the recording.*". In addition, they mentioned an interesting observation: "*...the students speak slowly as well as listen slowly.*" This statement points to the connection between the skills of listening and speaking, therefore the practice and level of one skill determines the level of the other.

Teacher B mainly mentioned time management as hindering aspect of the listening exercises and said: "*The students, they have problems with time management. I mean it in a sense that the recording starts to play but the children aren't focused yet and they aren't quick enough to write down the answers in time. (...).*" This statement points to the students' inability to quickly move on from one information to another while maintaining their attention. The teacher continues to say the source of the problem may be the speed of the recordings and offers possible solutions: "*Well the recordings can be a bit quick for the children so, like, if the speakers made pauses or something it'd be better.*"

Both teachers found that the speed of the recording is quite hindering and as Teacher B mentioned it can cause other problems such as the inability to finish the tasks of the listening exercises. Both teachers show that being able to discern the problematic aspects of the listening exercises gives the teachers the ability to try and mitigate the problem.

8.5 Teaching materials

The last category focused on the usual materials the teachers use to practice listening skills and the unconventional materials used to enhance the students' experience with listening exercises and their evaluation.

Both teachers mentioned the use of the Project series to teach English, specifically Project 2, and in addition Teacher B said: *"...sometimes if the class is good we move quicker through the coursebook so we move onto Project 3 in the eighth grade."*

Both teachers found the listening exercises in their coursebooks adequate and did not find any major issues. Teacher A gave a short and firm answer regarding the evaluation of the coursebook: *"It is. It is sufficient."* Teacher B displayed their satisfaction with the exercises in a similar manner, although they pointed out some deficiencies: *"They're all good but sometimes the listenings for tests that are part of the Project tests are harder than the normal listenings in the coursebook."*

Both teachers also stated that they regularly use other materials other than the coursebook, mainly using Internet websites such as YouTube or English learning websites provided by publishing houses.

Teacher A mentioned videos, specifically of the website YouTube. The teacher considers it as a source for variety of videos on many topics: *"I like that there are thousands of videos that are made according to the level of English, for the beginners up to the more skilled ones. I choose videos according to the topic."* The teacher then added that the feature of subtitles is quite useful and they use it often to give the students textual aid to the video.

Teacher B mentioned YouTube videos as well. In addition, the teacher said that they use videos and worksheets provided by the Cambridge and Oxford publishers: *"I use a lot of YouTube videos and also other Cambridge and Oxford online sources, worksheets and videos."*

In addition, both teachers said that they use video regularly, however, at very different frequency. Teacher A said that the use of video mainly depends on the topic taught at the moment but made a general statement of: *"Therefore, two or three times a month or month and a half."* However, Teacher B seemed more enthusiastic about the use of video as a source for listening exercises and gave quite an interesting answer when they said that they use video on daily basis: *"Almost every lesson... they're part of our online recourses from the coursebook so*

I use it often...so stuff like videos and comics. ”. Although, both teachers gave different answers, they understand the necessity of video use in their lessons and use it regularly.

The teachers’ answers show that they do not feel restricted by the number of coursebook listening exercises and are able to use outside sources, mainly YouTube videos, to provide more opportunities for practice.

9 Limitations

The questionnaire surveys and interviews were carried out in two different schools to create a broader sample of data. However, as was later examined from the interviews, both schools used Project 2 to teach the seventh and eighth grade students, which may have slightly lessened the additional diversity of the data.

During the interview Teacher B gave quite short answers compared to Teacher A, which may have limited amount of information gained from the interview. The teacher may have felt the need to answer in short simple sentences to not take up too much time even though they were informed about the duration of the interview prior to the interview as well as at the beginning of the interview or they may have felt nervous.

10 Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to address the common problems students of lower secondary school, specifically seventh and eighth graders, encounter in listening exercises in their coursebooks in the theoretical part and through research investigate what problems are most commonly encountered by seventh and eighth grade students in listening exercises in coursebooks and what is the source of the problems. Another aspect that was investigated was the listening exercises in coursebooks themselves to find out if the design of the exercises is adequate according to the guidelines in the theoretical part and teachers' own evaluation. The research involved a questionnaire survey of the students' experiences from two schools, content analysis of two coursebooks and interview with two teachers.

The theoretical part discusses the listening strategies used in listening exercises and aspects of efficient listening exercises and mentions alternative listening media. It also points out the common problems students encounter while practicing the listening skill.

The research in the empirical part aimed to answer the four research questions:

- “What are the most common problems 7th and 8th grade learners face with listening exercises in English coursebooks?”
- “How do the teachers evaluate the quality of the listening exercises in coursebooks?”
- “Why do the teachers think the problems with listening exercises occur?”
- “What types of listening exercises are represented in the coursebook?”.

The first research question was answered with the use of questionnaire survey and revealed that the students found the insufficient time to write down answers to the tasks of listening exercises as the most hindering aspect. Connected to the mentioned problem is the speech rate of the speakers in the recordings, which was the second most often-occurring problem as it seemed too fast for students to comprehend. The third category that showed in a significant amount concern from the students was the feeling of being overwhelmed by the amount of information given in the recording.

The second question was answered by the teachers using an interview that displayed that they both find the listening exercises in the coursebooks they use, specifically Project 2, sufficient. However, acknowledged that the speech rate is quite high for the students to

comprehend and the instructions can be confusing, making them the main sources of problems, which simultaneously answered the topic of the third question

The last question was answered using the content analysis of the two coursebooks, Project 2 and Bloggers 2, and showed both coursebooks display a variety of exercises, such as pre-listening and post-listening exercises, exercises using short and long answers, practicing pronunciation or matching items. The analysis also revealed that Project 2 had a more balanced diversity of types of listening exercises regarding the two listening strategies. However, both coursebooks displayed sufficient use of visual aids, which accommodated the majority of exercises, adequate speech rate that was close to the recommended number, and generally maintained consistent use of accent.

Surprisingly, both responses from students and teachers showed the discontent with the speech rate of the speakers, albeit the exercises in the coursebooks displayed a speech rate, which should be comprehensible according to the theoretical research. The discrepancy between the theoretical assumption and the experience of the students proposes an area of reevaluation of what is deemed adequate for the students at their level of listening skills.

However, it should be noted that the design of the listening exercises in the coursebooks may not be the sole perpetrator on the difficulties and that amount of listening practice and the skill level of the students may be contributing to the problem as well.

Further research on a larger scale and diversity would help to reveal data with larger validity confirming this problem and therefore, helping to promote the consideration of the redesign of listening exercises in coursebooks and put greater focus on students' needs.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire for the seventh and eighth grader students at School 1 and School 2:

Dobrý den,

Jmenuji se Anna Třetinová a jsem studentkou druhého ročníku navazujícího magisterského oboru Učitelství Anglického jazyka pro ZŠ. V rámci mé diplomové práce na téma Poslechová cvičení v učebnicích anglického jazyka, jsem sestavila dotazník, který se zabývá možnými problémy, které mohou žákům ZŠ ztížit poslech při poslechových cvičeních. Tímto bych Vás chtěla požádat o vyplnění tohoto dotazníku, který mi pomůže nasbírat data pro mou práci. Výsledky dotazníku budou sloužit pouze pro účely mé diplomové práce a jsou anonymní.

Problems with listening exercises in ELT coursebooks-students' opinion

Při poslechu nahrávky v AJ mi dělá problém...	Vždy	Často	Občas	Nikdy
Neznámý přízvuk lidí				
Neznámá slovíčka				
Věty obsahují příliš mnoho informací najednou				
Rychlost mluvy				
Moc otázek v zadání				
Odpovědi na otázky jsou moc dlouhé				
Nestíhám zapisovat odpovědi				
Nepochopení zadání				
Nevím, jak se odpověď správně píše (spelling)				
Nahrávka je potichu				
Nahrávka má špatnou kvalitu				
Několik lidí mluví najednou/neorientují se kdo právě mluví				
Nemám žádnou vizuální podporu (obrázky, grafy, video)				

Nacházíš při poslechu nějaké další problémy, které nebyly zmíněny?

Appendix 2: Responses from the questionnaire survey

Answers from all the respondents (total 113)

Listening problems	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Unfamiliar accent	0	17	59	37
Unfamiliar vocabulary	2	12	76	23
Information overload	5	26	44	38
Quick speech rate	7	25	50	31
Large number of questions	0	11	47	55
Long answers	4	18	48	43
Insufficient time to write	12	36	51	14
Confusing task	4	9	53	47
Lack of spelling knowledge	3	16	58	36
Quiet recording	0	5	19	89
Poor quality of recording	1	10	45	57
Too many speakers	4	17	45	47
No visual aid	3	12	43	55

Answers from the 7th grade students at School 1 (total 28)

Listening problems	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Unfamiliar accent	0	8	12	8
Unfamiliar vocabulary	0	2	21	5
Information overload	2	5	12	9
Quick speech rate	0	9	13	6
Large number of questions	0	2	10	16
Long answers	0	2	14	12
Insufficient time to write	3	6	17	2
Confusing task	1	1	12	14
Lack of spelling knowledge	0	2	16	10
Quiet recording	0	0	5	23
Poor quality of recording	0	4	9	15
Too many speakers	1	5	10	12
No visual aid	2	2	11	13

Answers from the 8th grade at School 1 (total 38)

Listening problems	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Unfamiliar accent	0	2	20	16
Unfamiliar vocabulary	0	5	24	9
Information overload	0	5	16	17
Quick speech rate	3	6	19	10
Large number of questions	0	1	10	27
Long answers	1	6	11	20

Insufficient time to write	2	11	18	7
Confusing task	2	3	18	15
Lack of spelling knowledge	1	4	20	13
Quiet recording	0	1	5	32
Poor quality of recording	0	1	15	22
Too many speakers	1	3	18	16
No visual aid	0	4	10	24

Answers from 7th grade students at School 2 (total 22)

Listening problems	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Unfamiliar accent	0	6	10	6
Unfamiliar vocabulary	2	0	14	6
Information overload	1	6	10	5
Quick speech rate	2	5	5	10
Large number of questions	0	5	13	4
Long answers	2	5	12	3
Insufficient time to write	5	8	5	4
Confusing task	1	3	8	10
Lack of spelling knowledge	1	10	6	5
Quiet recording	0	2	6	14
Poor quality of recording	1	3	9	9
Too many speakers	2	4	7	9
No visual aid	1	5	10	6

Answers from 8th graders at School 2 (total 25)

Listening problems	Always	Often	Rarely	Never
Unfamiliar accent	0	1	17	7
Unfamiliar vocabulary	0	5	17	3
Information overload	2	10	6	7
Quick speech rate	2	5	13	5
Large number of questions	0	3	14	8
Long answers	1	5	11	8
Insufficient time to write	2	11	11	1
Confusing task	0	2	15	8
Lack of spelling knowledge	1	0	16	8
Quiet recording	0	2	3	20
Poor quality of recording	0	2	12	11
Too many speakers	0	5	10	10
No visual aid	0	1	12	12

Appendix 3: Data from coursebook analysis:

Project 2:

Unit	1+0	2	3	4	5	6	
Exercises per unit	18+4		14	13	19	17	15

Types of exercises according to answers	Numbers	Percentages of the total
Pronunciation	11	10%
Rhymes/songs	6	6%
Short answers	24	23%
Long answers	37	35%
Matching	18	17%
"Listen and check"	10	9%

Types of exercises according to strategy used	Numbers	Percentages
Bottom-up strategy	61	57%
Top-down strategy	45	43%

Types of exercises based on provided aid	Numbers	Percentages
Listening with no aid	15	14%
Listening with visual aid	20	19%
Listening with textual aid	20	19%
Listening with both aids	51	48%

Unit	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Page (recording)	p.14	p.20	p.32	p.46	p.58	p.68	
Speed (w.p.m.)		109	102	117	131	142	125
Accent	British	British	British	British	British	British	

Bloggers 2:

Unit	0	1	2	3	4	5	
Exercises per unit		10	15	11	12	15	14

Types of exercises according to answers	Numbers	Percentages
Pronunciation	23	30%
Rhymes/songs	0	0%
Short answers	24	31%
Long answers	18	23%
Matching	4	5%
"listen and read"	8	10%

Types of exercises according to strategies used	Numbers	Percentages
Bottom-up strategy	56	73%
Top-down strategy	21	27%

Types of exercises based on provided aid	Numbers	Percentages
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Listening with no aid	9	12%
Listening with visual aid	5	6%
Listening with textual aid	25	32%
Listening with both aids	38	49%

Unit	0	1	2	3	4	5
Page (recording)	p.10	p.34	p. 50	p.66	p.82	p.98
Speed (w.p.m.)	121	98	117	116	145	95
Accent	American	Non-native	Non-native	Non-native	Non-native	British

Appendix 4: Interview questions and transcripts

Appendix 4a: Interview questions:

Problems with listening exercises in coursebooks of students of 7th and 8th grade- teacher's opinion

- 1) How much of importance do you put on listening (compared to the other language skills)?
- 2) What kind of preparation do you do for learners before they listen to a recording?
- 3) What listening problems do you observe with your students while doing listening exercises?
 - a. What kind of problems are more common?
- 4) Where do you think these problems stem from?
- 5) How would you describe your learners' listening skills?
 - a. How did they change throughout the years?
- 6) What coursebook do you use?
 - a. How would you rate the quality of listening tasks in the coursebook?
- 7) Describe how you adapt the listening task in the coursebook.
- 8) What other listening materials do you do outside of coursebook
- 9) How frequently do you use video as a medium for listening exercises?
 - a. What types?

Appendix 4B: Transcript of interview with the teacher A

Interviewer: "The questions of this interview will be about problems students encounter with listening exercises, specifically in the seventh and eighth grade. Your responses will be anonymous and use only for the purposes of the research for my diploma thesis. Do you approve of this interview being recorded for the purposes of transcribing your answers and your answers used in my diploma thesis?"

Teacher A: "Yes"

Interviewer: "The interview will take around fifteen to twenty minutes, depending on how you answer. First question is *How much of an importance do you put on listening?*"

Teacher A: "**thinks for a bit** I'd say, I put the same importance as for speaking and speaking is my number one. Meaning, ... from my experience, if I want to be able to speak well, first I need to be able to listen well."

Interviewer: "Second question, *What kind of preparation do you do for learners to listen to a recording?*"

Teacher A: "So I use mainly the exercises that are provided in the coursebook, the pre-listening questions. That means the questions prepare, very easy questions, on the situation that we will hear. So they are used as the general first introduction to the listening so they (students) know what is going on and after that I ask if the students know the general context, like listening for gist, of the listening. So these things... first general questions and later specific questions about what we are listening to. Right?"

Interviewer: “Alright. Now, next question, *What listening problems do you observe with your students while doing listening exercises?*”

Teacher A: “Speed. Mainly, speed of the recording. Recently, I observed, I thought about, that the speed of coursebook recordings throughout the grades is, more or less, appropriately chosen to the age of the students. The majority of the students, I observed it today in my classes, in the English class of more or less 15 kids, seven or eight of them immediately understand the recording after first listen and because of the second half of the students, the recording needs to be replayed two or three times, I say that they have “slow ears”. Although, everyone works differently.”

Interviewer: “Any other problems that you observed?”

Teacher A: “So speed and then...then...vocabulary, in the sense that in connected speech the students’ ears are not able to decipher the individual words. Because there is a one long sentence. Or if the students read the subtitles or I give them the tape script, the students say “Ah, I understand that.” Therefore, the students speak slowly as well as listen slowly. But after the third, fourth listening, sometimes they get bored, but they understand. The first listening...the first listening is always a problem.”

Interviewer: “I see, so *Where do you think these problems stem from?*”

Teacher A: “**thinks for a bit** Well, students are used to hearing Czech all day. I always say the kids that they are surrounded by Czech from their parents, friends, everywhere and then suddenly they have 45 minutes of English and even there, the whole class is not only in English so therefore, I think there is lack of listening...or lack of opportunities to listen. Some students watch English serials in their free time which better their listening, however, the typical Czech students do not engage much with English outside of the class.”

Interviewer: “Next question, *How would you describe your learners’ listening skills?* “ *

Teacher A: “I would say...above average, they are not bad. However, the groups vary, it is very individual. It’s so individual, there are groups and groups and generations and generations. But I always see improvement. It’s about practice really, so more opportunities to listen, more practice and that makes better skills. Some are slower than others but we try to achieve what is asked of us by the framework. Sometimes, I like to look back to the older generations because to me it seems that the students were maybe more eager for English and tried harder to learn it. Nowadays, students have English everywhere and maybe are not as interested in it and learning it.”

*(The question *How did they change throughout the years?* Was not asked because the teacher already answered it in their first answer)

Interviewer: “The sixth question is *What coursebook do you use?*”

Teacher A: “So I use Project at lower secondary level and with seventh and eighth graders I specifically use the level two Project. The fourth edition, we are using the fourth edition.”

Interviewer: “*How would you rate the quality of listening tasks in the coursebook?*”

Teacher A: “It is. It is sufficient.”

Interviewer: “*Describe how you adapt the listening task in the coursebook.*”

Teacher A: “I make it easier, I do. Depending on the group of the students I adapt the listening task. Some students understand the task easily and do not need any adaptation, but it is not a lot if we count the groups of 15 kids. First, I play the recording once in full length, which is enough for the more skill-full students, it is more or less five students out of the 15. But the majority needs more time. So, later I pause the recording, sentence by sentence and then I try to have some students translate it. For some students this is enough, so let’s say another 5 students, and for the rest of the students, I play it a third time with pauses. Those are the one that I say have *slow ears* and or the listening is a general problem for them even in Czech, not just English. So then I play the recording again and pause it. And now, that they hear the sentence from the recording, I repeat it slower. And finally, in that moment they are like “Aha! That’s it!” and they understand.”

Interviewer: “*What other listening materials do you use outside of coursebook?*”

Teacher A: “Yes. We have special classrooms for that where we can play videos. We as teachers prepare something we find on YouTube. Nowadays, that’s THE source of everything good and bad. But of course, for English there is a lot of videos. I like that there are thousands of videos that are made according to the level of English, for the beginners up to the more skilled ones. I choose videos according to the topic. For example, recently we watched a video about London. Of course, there are also videos for with quick listenings but they are for let’s say universities but we need the one for elementary school... And, the good thing is that some videos have subtitles and the kids can read it and sometimes add new vocabulary they don’t know. It is not every time but sometimes.”

Interviewer: “To hop from what you have said, “*How frequently do you use video as a medium for listening exercises?*”

Teacher A: “Well, um, depending on what is taught at the moment with the specific group. But usually, two or three times for one Unit in the coursebook. Therefore, two or three times a month or month and a half.”

Interviewer: “Okay, this was the last question. Thank you again for your participation.”

Teacher A: “Of course. I hope it helps.”

Appendix 4c: Transcript of interview with the teacher B

Interviewer: “Thank you for being here today with me. So first, I’d like to just ask you a general question about the formalities of this interview. The interview will take about fifteen to twenty minutes, depending on how long your answers are. Do you agree with this interview being recorded for the purposes of transcribing your answers and your answers used in my diploma thesis?”

Teacher B: “Yes, I hope the recording will be used only for the transcript. I don’t want my voice anywhere *chuckles*.”

Interviewer: “Of course, don’t worry and thank you again. Let’s start with the first questions then. *How much of an importance do you put on listening?*”

Teacher B: “Well... actually in my lessons, I always try to do at least one listening exercise per lesson. So it is very important skill for me.”

Interviewer: “I see. The second question is *What kind of preparation do you do for learners to listen to a recording?*”

Teacher B: “*thinks for a bit* Um, we usually discuss the topic before we listen, I try to use listenings with the vocabulary we are going through. But we don’t learn all of the words... that wouldn’t be challenging at all.”

Interviewer: “Moving on to the next question, *What listening problems do you observe with your students while doing listening exercises?*”

Teacher B: “The students, they have problems with time management. I mean it in a sense that the recording starts to play but the children aren’t focused yet and they aren’t quick enough to write down the answers in time. They focus on the recording not from the early beginning so we have to play it more times. Another problem is when the tasks are jumbled.”

Interviewer: “What do you mean by jumbled?”

Teacher B: “Um, when the questions for the listening are not ordered in the same order as the recording. You know, like sometimes the children won’t hear the answer to the first question first. So I’d say the instructions may not be clear.”

Interviewer: “Oh, I get it now. So in your opinion *What kind of problems are more common?*”

Teacher B: “The time management definitely. Often, I need to stop the recording to let the children write down their answers.”

Interviewer: “Okay, and *Where do you think these problems stem from?*”

Teacher B: “*thinks for a bit* Well the recordings can be a bit quick for the children so, like, if the speakers made pauses or something it’d be better.”

Interviewer: “Okay the fifth question. It’s two questions actually. *How would you describe your learners’ listening skills? And How did they change throughout the years?*”

Teacher B: “I teach children from the sixth grade to the ninth. I think their skills usually become better in the first term in the eighth grade. So between seventh and eighth graders there’s a jump when they become better. Of course, there are exceptions as is with everything *chuckles* But just from overall observations, I think eighth graders are very skilled.”

Interviewer: “Next question is simple, *What coursebook do you use? and How would you rate the quality of listening tasks in the coursebook?*”

Teacher B: “So I use Project for all of my classes and specifically for the seventh and eighth graders we usually stick to Project 2 but sometimes if the class is good we move quicker through the coursebook so we move onto Project 3 in the eighth grade.”

Interviewer: “And How would you rate the Project 2 then?”

Teacher B: “Oh, yes, sorry. *chuckles* Well... They’re all good but sometimes the listenings for tests that are part of the Project tests are harder than the normal listenings in the coursebook.”

Interviewer: “Now I’d like you to please *Describe how you adapt the listening task in the coursebook.*”

Teacher B: “*chuckles* Well, I don’t adapt them at all because I think they’re okay as I said.”

Interviewer: “Okay, I understand. *What other listening materials do you use outside of coursebook.*”

Teacher B: “Well...besides the coursebook? I use a lot of YouTube videos and also other Cambridge and Oxford online sources, worksheets and videos. There’s a lot on the Internet and if you know what to look for it, you can find pretty useful stuff.”

Interviewer: “So regarding videos... *How frequently do you use video as a medium for listening exercises?*”

Teacher B: “Almost every lesson...they’re part of our online resources from the coursebook so I use it often...so stuff like videos and comics.”

Interviewer: “I see. Well thank you, this was the last question so with this the interview is over and I’d like to say that I appreciate your participation.”

Teacher B: “Don’t mention it. I hope my answers will be useful.”

Resumé

Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na zjištění nejčastějších problémů, se kterými se žáci sedmých a osmých tříd setkávají při poslechových cvičeních v učebnici. K výzkumu této problematiky bylo využito dotazníkového šetření, obsahové analýzy učebnic a rozhovoru s učiteli. Výzkum ukázal, že nejčastější problémy, se kterými se žáci setkávají jsou nedostatek času na zapsání odpovědí, příliš rychlá mluva a zahlcená obsahová část nahrávek.