An Analysis of Listening Task Types in Middle School English Activity Books

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Jeon, Eun-Young. (2013). An Analysis of Listening Task Types in Middle School English Activity Books. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal, 21*(3), 231-249. This study classified types of listening tasks in level-differentiated middle school English activity books in order to examine whether English activity books were properly performing their role in facilitating level-differentiated learning. A total of fifteen activity books (i.e., five different series from grade 1 to grade 3) were analyzed with regard to task type distribution in proficiency levels and grade levels. Although task types used in proficiency levels were somewhat different, they bore similarity in frequent uses of answering tasks and in rare uses of problem-solving, (re)ordering, and classifying tasks. Kendall's W and Spearman's rho were employed to identify statistical concordance and correlation of listening task type distributions. The result showed that the task types in different proficiency levels were, in fact, not significantly different from one another. Moreover, low and intermediate level books employed similar task types throughout middle school years which could lose students' interest.

Key Words: listening, task type, middle school, English activity book

1. Introduction

Listening is a very important skill because it is an essential skill for communication. As learners need to understand the spoken speech in order to communicate, developing listening skills is necessary for promoting second or foreign language competence. Listening is the primary channel for language input and acquisition (Peterson, 2001). Also, through listening, learners can

develop linguistic awareness and establish a foundation for more productive skills. Thus, special attention should be given to listening.

Korean English education has been greatly affected in various ways by the global trend which puts more emphasis on aural and oral communication in language teaching. National English Curriculum and English textbooks, first of all, have shifted their focus from translation through grammatical analysis to promoting communicative competence. Moreover, in 2014, listening will be emphasized on the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) in Korea by increasing listening items to 50 percent from current 34 percent (Hankyoreh, 2011). The policy, in turn, will lead Korean English education to lay more focus on aural and oral communication.

Another notable change in Korean English education is level-differentiated curriculum whose purpose is to take individual learner differences into account (Ministry of Education, 1997). The implementation of the level-differentiated curriculum, however, has been repeatedly questioned for its feasibility in the classroom context owing to lack of explicit guidelines and available teaching materials. Calls have emerged for the need to develop materials to support students' learning in different levels. Thus, English activity books have been adopted for level-differentiated learning in the Revised 7th National Curriculum because the activity books consist of tasks in different proficiency levels (Ministry of Education & Human Resources Development, 2006). The activity books have been used in the classroom since 2009.

Due to the short period of use, there has not been much research on the activity books compared to the main textbooks. Most studies on activity books have been mainly focused on the distribution of listening task types (Cho, 2010; Choi, 2011; Shin, 2010; Yoon, 2010). However, the research findings could not be compared or generalized since the criteria for the analysis or the subjects of analysis were different. As a matter of fact, the different criteria for task types resulted in different findings, which made it difficult to understand the nature of our EFL materials used in Korean schools.

Another weakness of previous studies is the scope of the analysis. In other words, one particular grade of either middle school or high school books has been analyzed, which made it very difficult or impossible to understand the nature of listening tasks and to judge their level-appropriateness. Thus, the

whole series from grade 1 to grade 3 need to be analyzed in order to gain overall understanding on the distribution of listening task types. In short, it is necessary to examine the activity books in holistic and systematic ways.

The purpose of this study is to examine listening task types in the proficiency levels (low, intermediate, advanced) and grade levels (grade 1, grade 2, grade 3) of middle school English activity books. It is assumed that there should be differences in task types among different proficiency levels to support level-differentiated learning. Also, task types should vary as grade goes up to trigger students' interest. Otherwise, students will be exposed to similar task types throughout middle school years. In order to satisfy the purpose of the study, the following research questions are formulated:

    1. Is there a significant difference in listening task types among low, intermediate, and advanced levels of middle school English activity books?

    2. Is there a significant difference in listening task types among grade 1, 2, and 3 of middle school English activity books?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Classification of Listening Task Types

Task classification is useful since it can function as a guide to incorporate various types of tasks in teaching materials. Also, it enables teachers to identify and incorporate certain type of tasks according to students' needs or preferences (Ellis, 2003). Task was classified differently among researchers based on the definition of the task. Two types of task definitions are prevalent in the field of Second Language Acquisition. The first defines tasks as a learner response that showed his or her understanding of the language (Richards, Platt & Weber, 1985) and the second defines tasks as achieved outcome from given information (Prabu, 1987). The listening task types are categorized in the Table 1 depending on the task definition. That is, the classifications of Cha and Lee (1993), Lund (1990), Richards (1983) and Ur (1984) which correspond to the former definition were classified into Category 1, while that of Morley (2001) which correspond to

the latter definition were classified into Category 2. Although classifications of listening task types among researchers had some commonalities, their focuses were somewhat different.

Table 1. Task Classification in Previous Studies

Category 1	Cha & Lee (1993)	Choosing correct sentences or pictures, dictating, answering after being provided with background knowledge on input, selective listening, answering orally, figuring out the main idea or topic, summarizing or note-taking, solving problems, role-playing, presenting on the topic or debating.
	Lund (1990)	Doing, choosing, transferring, answering, condensing, extending, duplicating, modeling, conversing.
	Richards (1983)	Matching, transferring, transcribing, scanning, extending, condensing, answering, predicting.
	Ur (1984)	Listen and make no response, listen and make a short response, listen and make a longer response, listen as a basis for study and discussion.
Category 2	Morley (2001)	Listening and performing actions and operations, listening and transferring information, listening and solving problems, listening, evaluating, and manipulating information, interactive listening and speaking, listening for enjoyment, pleasure, and sociability.

Cha and Lee (1993) proposed ten prevalent listening task types from their analysis of six textbooks widely used in Korea: listening and choosing correct sentences or pictures, listening and dictating, listening and answering after providing background knowledge on input, selective listening, listening and answering orally, listening and figuring out the main idea or topic, listening and summarizing or note-taking, listening and solving problems, listening and role-playing, and listening and presenting on the topic or debating. The task types were presented in the order of difficulty from easy to difficult. Listening and choosing a correct picture, for example, was an easy task that required teacher's control. Listening and debating, on the other hand, was a difficult task that required creativity from learners.

Lund (1990) classified listening tasks into nine different categories according

to listener responses: doing, choosing, transferring, answering, condensing, extending, duplicating, modeling, and conversing. Similarly, Richards (1983) categorized tasks according to the type of listener responses and proposed eight listening task types commonly used in teaching materials: matching, transferring, transcribing, scanning, extending, condensing, answering, and predicting.

The listening task type classifications of Lund (1990) and Cha and Lee (1993) were very similar to that of Richard (1983) because their task types overlapped a great deal. For example, Richard's task types (e.g., matching, transferring, transcribing, scanning, extending, condensing, and answering) were similar to Lund's types (e.g., choosing, transferring, answering, condensing, extending, duplicating) and Cha and Lee's types (e.g., listen and choose, dictation, answering and note-taking).

Ur (1984) divided listening-for-comprehension tasks into four categories depending on the length of learner responses: listen and make no response, listen and make a short response, listen and make a longer response, and listen as a basis for study and discussion. Ur (1984) considered tasks which required learners to make little or no response to be passive tasks, whereas tasks that required learners to make a longer or sophisticated response to be active tasks.

Morley's (2001) classification of listening task types, however, differed from the previous ones. As Morley's classification of listening task types was based on the outcome students produced after listening, listening task types were categorized depending on the outcome where the outcome was defined as a realistic task that people can envision themselves doing and accomplishing something (p. 79). She divided tasks into six categories depending on the communicative outcome: listening and performing actions and operations, listening and transferring information, listening and solving problems, listening, evaluating, and manipulating information, interactive listening and speaking: negotiating meaning through questioning/answering routines, and listening for enjoyment, pleasure, and sociability.

Morley (2001) noted that the purpose of oral communication in the real world was to achieve a genuine outcome which could be as simple as enjoying sociable conversation or as complex as understanding intricate instruction. She argued that "Listening comprehension in today's language curriculum must go far beyond a 20-minute tape a day or a paragraph or two read loud followed by

a series of test questions about the factual content" (p. 79).

2.2. Previous Studies on Activity Books

There was not much research on activity books owing to the short period of use. The focuses of previous studies were on the distribution of task types (Cho, 2010; Choi, 2011; Jung, 2009; Shin; 2010; Song, 2009; Yoon, 2009), appropriateness of task difficulty (Choi, 2011; Choi & Lee, 2010; Ha, 2009; Woo, 2009, Yoon, 2010) and the use of activity books in the classroom (Jung, 2009; Lee, 2009; Yang & Shin, 2009). Studies on listening tasks, in particular, were mainly concerned with the composition of task types.

Cho (2010) analyzed three middle school grade 1 activity books with an instrument adopted from Lee (2007) and Nam, et al. (2004). Listening tasks were classified into 8 different categories of matching, understanding the main idea, choosing an appropriate response, understanding a particular thing or a person, determining true or false, putting a check, responding, and dictating/filling in blanks. The most frequently used task was dictating/filling in blanks which composed 35% of the total task types, followed by matching (13.9%), understanding the main idea (12.7%), and choosing an appropriate response (11.9%). Other task types were minimally used.

Choi (2011) categorized the listening task types in six middle school grade 2 activity books. The criteria developed by Willis (1996) was employed. Accordingly, tasks were categorized into 6 categories of listing, ordering, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experience, and creative tasks. The result showed a heavy concentration on problem-solving task type, which constituted 69.4% of the total task types. Moreover, rare use of task types, such as sharing personal experience and creative tasks, did not correspond to the purpose of the 7th National Curriculum, which was to promote language skills for actual use.

Jung (2009) classified listening tasks into 20 different categories in ten middle school grade 1 activity books. The criteria was based on the study of Dubin & Olshtain (1986). The top three frequently employed tasks were answering multiple choice questions (15.0%), choosing an appropriate picture (11.9%), and filling in blanks (8.7%). Jung (2009) noted that majority of tasks were passive in

nature: more like a comprehension check up rather than inducing active responses from students.

Shin (2010) analyzed three high school grade 1 activity books with the classification of listening tasks by Lee (2007) where listening tasks were categorized into 15 different categories. Task types which required mechanical responses, such as, giving an appropriate response (18.6%), understanding the main idea (12.0%) and understanding details (18.2%) were most frequently used whereas cognitively demanding task types, such as, figuring out the mental state was not used at all.

While previously mentioned studies focused on the analysis of activity book itself, the study of Lee (2009) and Yang & Shin (2009) looked into how activity books were perceived among students and teachers. In the survey among 571 middle school students and 20 teachers, the students answered that tasks were boring and did not trigger any interest. While, the teachers, on the other hand, pointed out that little difference existed task types between the activity books and the main textbooks (Lee, 2009). Moreover, the self-reported questionnaire by 47 middle- and 54 high-school teachers revealed that most task types were not feasible in the Korean context and there were little difference in task types among different proficiency levels (Yang & Shin, 2009).

In short, certain issues had been raised regarding the types of tasks in the activity books. Unfortunately, however, it was not possible or quite difficult to compare and generalize the findings because of the differences in the use of the criteria and the subjects for analysis. Moreover, there had not yet been any study that analyzed activity books from grade 1 to grade 3. This posted the necessity of a systematic study to investigate task types with a more comprehensive framework.

3. Methodology

3.1. Materials

This study randomly chose five out of different series (grade 1: 25 series, grade 2: 19 series, and grade 3: 15 series) of English activity books used in

Korean middle schools which had been approved for the school use by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology under the Revised 7th National Curriculum. The activity books were randomly chosen in order to avoid researcher bias. They were classified as Book A, Book B, Book C, Book D, and Book E. A total of 15 books were analyzed because each series consisted of three books, a book for grade 1, 2, and 3, respectively. Tasks in each Book were divided into three proficiency levels: low, intermediate and advanced level. The present study analyzed the listening sections in each activity book. Books A and Book C had separate listening section, but Book B, Book D, and Book E had listening tasks under the title of listen and speak or listen and talk. However, listening and speaking tasks were clearly divided in each activity book and only the part of listening task was reviewed in this study. This study defined the task as an activity or action that is carried out as the result of processing or understanding language (Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics, p. 289). Thus, all the listening exercises and activities in the book were identified as listening tasks. The contents of activity books used in the study were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Contents of Activity Books Used in the Study

Activity book	No. of Units (per each grade)	Contents
Book A	10	Listening
Book B	12	Listen and Speak Plus
Book C	12	Let's Listen
Book D	12	Listen and Talk 1, Listen and Talk 2
Book E	12	Listen and Speak 1, Listen and Speak 2

The structures of all the activity books were not the same although they were very similar. For example, Book A was consisted of ten units whereas other activity books were composed of twelve units. Moreover, Book B, Book D, and Book E had an integrated section of listening and speaking while Book A and Book C had only listening section.

The tasks were analyzed in terms of proficiency levels to examine whether differences existed among different proficiency levels to support level-differentiated learning. Also tasks were analyzed in terms of grade levels to examine whether there were a significant variation in task types as the grade went up.

3.2. Criteria for Listening Task Type Classification

The criteria for the listening task type analysis were mainly adopted from the combination of task types proposed by Richards (1983), Lund (1990) and Cha and Lee (1993). This was because their definition of task was more appropriate for classifying listening task types in EFL textbooks which required different learner responses rather than different outcomes. Also their criteria were based on the analysis of teaching materials which fit to the purpose of this study. The criteria were then modified by the researcher with reference to the study of Willis (1996) since it offered useful pedagogic classification of tasks for textbook materials. It included learner's operation of listing, ordering and sorting, comparing, problem-solving, sharing personal experiences, and creative tasks. Ordering and sorting tasks which involve sequencing, ranking, categorizing, or classifying items were adopted in this study as '(re)ordering' and 'classifying' since those types were included in activity books.

The combination of categories from previous studies produced 13 classification of listening task types as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Template of Thirteen Listening Task Types

Task type	Descriptions
1. Matching	Choosing a written or pictorial form that corresponds with what is heard. (e.g., match a picture with a corresponding expression, select an appropriate expression for a statement)
2. Discriminating	Deciding whether a statement is true or false on the basis of the listening text. (e.g., true-false questions, choose a statement that does not agree with the heard information)

3. Problem-solving	Providing a solution to a given problem by using the heard information (e.g., listen to an instruction and figure out the final destination, listen to a description of a room and draw picture of it, listen to direction and mark it on the map).
4. Transcribing	Dictating or filling in the blanks with a missing word, a phrase, or a sentence (e.g., complete a sentence, write down the sentences)
5. Extending	Going beyond what is provided in the text and inferring what is not said (e.g., reconstruct a dialogue based on the given information, provide a conclusion to a story)
6. Note-taking	Reducing what is heard to an outline of main points (e.g., complete a telephone memo or an advertisement)
7. Answering	Answering given questions on the basis of heard information (e.g., answer some details, select a correct answer from given examples)
8. Summarizing	Making a short statement that presents the major points of a heard information (e.g., complete the summarized statements)
9. Correcting	Revising syntactic or semantic errors on the basis of a heard passage (e.g., correct the wrong statements)
10. (Re)ordering	Arranging pictures or sentences that are placed in the wrong place (e.g., arrange the pictures in the right order)
11. Classifying	Grouping words or expressions into similar or right groups (e.g., choose all the words corresponding to the given category)
12. Identifying	Finding a particular word or expression that are used in the speech (e.g., identify a word that is used, identify the expression used in the conversation)
13. Reconstructing	Creating a new form based on a heard text (e.g., complete a response letter, make an invitation card)

3.3. Data Analysis

In the task type analysis, listening task types were classified into thirteen different categories according to the template shown in the Table 2. A dual task, which involved two different task types in one listening task, was classified as two different task types. Then task type was ranked with regard to frequency and percentage. Finally, differences in the distribution of task types among the proficiency levels and the grade levels were investigated using Kendall's coefficients of concordance (Kendall's W) and Spearman's rank order correlation coefficients (Spearman's rho). Kendall's W was often used as a statistical technique to investigate the agreement of nominal data among three groups or over which ranges from 0 (no agreement) to 1 (complete agreement). Spearman's rho was often used to investigate correlation between the rank of two groups. Kendall's W enables to identify agreement of ranks among proficiency levels regarding task type frequency and Spearman's rho shows which pair of proficiency level contributed to the high or low agreement.

4. Results and Discussion

The difference among proficiency levels (i.e., low, intermediate, and advanced levels) with regard to their use of task types from grade 1 to grade 3 was examined. Table 4 shows the listening task types with regard to the frequency and proportion.

Table 4. Listening Task Types in Activity Books

Task type		G 1	G 2	G 3	Total
1. Matching	L	80 (62.02)	53 (41.41)	72 (45.28)	205 (49.28)
	I	46 (31.94)	49 (32.89)	46 (26.59)	141 (30.26)
	A	17 (12.60)	15 (10.64)	16 (11.19)	48 (11.56)
2. Answering	L	14 (10.85)	48 (37.50)	56 (35.22)	118 (28.37)
	I	28 (19.44)	32 (21.48)	48 (27.74)	108 (23.18)
	A	34 (25.18)	39 (27.66)	26 (18.18)	99 (23.63)
3. Transcribing	L	4 (3.10)	2 (1.56)	2 (1.26)	8 (1.92)

	I	19 (13.19)	15 (10.07)	28 (16.18)	62 (13.30)
	A	22 (16.30)	27 (19.15)	22 (15.38)	71 (16.95)
	L	4 (3.10)	2 (1.56)	7 (4.40)	13 (3.13)
4. Discriminating	I	17 (11.81)	19 (12.75)	17 (9.83)	53 (11.37)
	A	15 (11.11)	22 (15.60)	27 (18.88)	64 (15.27)
	L	11 (8.53)	13 (10.16)	10 (6.30)	34 (8.17)
5. Extending	I	7 (4.86)	5 (3.36)	8 (4.62)	20 (4.29)
	A	4 (2.96)	5 (3.55)	4 (2.80)	13 (3.10)
	L	2 (1.55)	1 (0.78)	3 (1.89)	6 (1.44)
6. Summarizing	I	3 (2.08)	8 (5.37)	8 (4.62)	19 (4.08)
	A	16 (11.85)	9 (6.38)	14 (9.79)	39 (9.31)
	L	2 (1.55)	2 (1.56)	0 (0.00)	4 (0.96)
7. Note-taking	I	8 (5.56)	7 (4.70)	4 (2.31)	19 (4.08)
	A	11 (8.14)	6 (4.26)	7 (4.90)	24 (5.73)
	L	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
8. Reconstructing	I	0 (0.00)	1 (0.67)	5 (2.89)	6 (1.29)
	A	4 (2.97)	6 (4.26)	19 (13.29)	29 (6.92)
	L	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)
9. Correcting	I	2 (1.39)	4 (2.68)	6 (3.47)	12 (2.58)
	A	2 (1.48)	9 (6.38)	7 (4.90)	18 (4.30)
	L	5 (3.88)	3 (2.34)	4 (2.52)	12 (2.88)
10. Identifying	I	6 (4.17)	6 (4.03)	0 (0.00)	12 (2.58)
	A	1 (0.74)	1 (0.71)	0 (0.00)	2 (0.48)
11. Problem-solving	L	4 (3.10)	3 (2.34)	2 (1.26)	9 (2.16)
	I	4 (2.78)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	4 (0.86)
	A	6 (4.44)	1 (0.71)	0 (0.00)	7 (1.67)
	L	2 (1.55)	1 (0.78)	3 (1.89)	6 (1.44)
12. (Re)ordering	I	4 (2.78)	2 (1.34)	0 (0.00)	6 (1.29)
	A	3 (2.22)	1 (0.71)	1 (0.70)	5 (1.19)
	L	1 (0.78)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	1 (0.24)
13. Classifying	I	0 (0.00)	1 (0.67)	3 (1.73)	4 (0.86)
	A	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)

Note: L: low, I: intermediate, A: advanced, ( ): percentage

A total of 1,301 listening tasks were used in the activity books. The task types most frequently used in the middle school activity books were matching and answering whereas classifying appeared only five times among fifteen activity books. While the task types of discriminating and transcribing were moderately used, those of identifying, problem-solving, and (re)ordering were relatively less used in the activity books.

There were similarities and differences among the three levels of activity books. The similarities were that matching and answering tasks were the most frequently used task types in the books. In fact, they constituted 77.65% of low level, 53.44% of intermediate level, and 35.19% of advanced level task types. Moreover, problem-solving, (re)ordering, classifying were used in the least for all proficiency levels. For example, problem-solving, (re)ordering and classifying were not used much in the low level (2.16%, 1.44%, 0.24%) and intermediate level (0.86%, 1.29%, 0.86%). Similarly, classifying tasks were never used and (re)ordering (1.19%) and problem-solving (1.67%) tasks were minimally used in the advanced level.

One of the differences was that low level task types were heavily concentrated on matching (49.28%) and answering (28.37%) while other proficiency levels included transcribing (intermediate: 13.30% ; advanced: 16.95%) and discriminating (intermediate: 11.37% ; advanced: 13.27%) tasks in their top four task types. Moreover, unlike the advanced level, reconstructing was one of the least used task type in both low and intermediate levels. In fact, it was never used in the low level and only used six times in the intermediate level while 29 occurrences appeared in the advanced level.

In order to judge the agreement among the low, intermediate, and advanced levels in terms of task types, Kendall's W and Spearman's rho were conducted as shown in Table 5. According to Kendall's W, there was a significant concordance among the three proficiency levels (W=.941, p<.01). This agreement seemed to result from the significant correlation between low and intermediate levels (rs=.607, p< .05) and between intermediate and advanced level (rs=.807, p<.01). However, the correlation between low and advanced level was not significant (rs=.364, p>.05). In other words, task types used in low and advanced levels were not similar whereas task types used in intermediate and advanced levels as well as low and intermediate levels were quite similar. This could be

due to high proportion of matching task in low level (49.28%) which was not used as much in advanced level (11.56%). Also frequent use of summarizing, transcribing and reconstructing tasks in the advanced level which were not used as much in the low level could have caused those differences.

Table 5. Rank Order of Task Types in Activity Books

Task type	Low				Intermediate				Advanced				Total
	G1	G2	G3	ST	G1	G2	G3	ST	G1	G2	G3	ST	
1. Matching	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	3	4	5	4	1
2. Discriminating	6	7	4	4	4	3	4	4	5	3	1	3	4
3. Problem-solving	6	4	8	6	8	13	12	12	7	12	12	10	11
4. Transcribing	6	7	8	7	3	4	3	3	2	2	3	2	3
5. Extending	3	3	3	3	6	8	5	5	8	9	9	9	5
6. Note taking	9	7	11	10	5	6	9	6	6	7	7	7	7
7. Answering	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2
8. Summarizing	9	9	6	8	10	5	5	6	4	5	6	5	6
9. Correcting	12	12	11	12	11	9	7	8	11	5	7	8	9
10. (Re)ordering	9	9	6	8	8	10	12	10	10	12	10	11	12
11. Classifying	11	12	11	11	12	11	10	12	13	13	12	13	13
12. Identifying	4	4	5	5	7	7	12	8	12	12	12	12	10
13. Reconstructing	12	12	11	12	12	11	8	10	8	7	4	6	8
Kendall's W	Proficiency level				.941 **								
	Grade level				.969 **								
Spearman's rho	Proficiency level				L and I (.676)*, I and A (.807)**, L and A (.364)								
	Grade level				G1 and G2 (.919) **, G1 and G3 (.770)**, G2 and G3 (.913)**								

Note: G1: Grade 1, G2: Grade 2, G3: Grade 3, ST: Sub Total, p<.05*, p<.01**

Regarding the tasks in different grades, they showed significant concordance

(W=.969, p<.01) as well as correlation (G1 and G2: rs=.919, p<.01, G1 and G3: rs=.770, p<.01, G2 and G3: rs=.919, p<.01) in distribution of task types. Specifically, both low and intermediate levels showed similar task distribution throughout the grades. This was shown through very significant concordance among grade 1, grade 2 and grade 3 in the low level (W=.741, p<.05) and the intermediate level (W=.938, p<.01). Specifically, the low level and the intermediate level showed heavy concentration of certain task types from grade 1 to grade 3. In the low level, for example, matching, answering, and extending constituted over 80 percent, while in the intermediate level, matching, answering, and transcribing tasks were used over 60 percent. This implies that students in low and intermediate level would have to practice listening with very limited types of tasks throughout the middle school years, which could wade students' interest in listening. The advanced level, on the other hand, did not reach the significance level (W=.505, p>.05) which implied that only advanced level students are exposed to variety of task types from grade 1 to grade 3.

5. Conclusion

Listening is important since it serves as a basis for communication and language acquisition. In addition, the global trend which focuses on aural/oral communication in language learning has influenced Korean National Curriculum to pay more attention to listening. Another global trend is to acknowledge individual differences of students and to provide customized learning. In order to take individual differences into account, level-differentiated curriculum has been adopted since 1997 and activity books to support level-differentiated learning have been used in classroom since 2009.

This study examined whether there is a difference in activity book listening task types used among low, intermediate, and advanced level and among grade 1, 2, and 3. The results revealed that similar task types were used among different proficiency levels (W=.941, p<.01) which resulted from significant correlation in use of task types between intermediate and advanced level (rs=.807, p<.01) as well as between low and intermediate level (rs=.607, p<.05).

The statistical result supported the teachers' view on activity books that the distinction of task types among different proficiency levels was not clear (Yang & Shin, 2009). Also, the finding that low and intermediate level used similar type of tasks throughout the grades explains the lack of interest found among middle school students.

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are made with regard to listening task type. First of all, middle school English activity books need to include various types of tasks, depending on the proficiency levels to promote level-differentiated learning. Current activity books include different task types only between low and advanced levels. Differences in the use of task types should also exist between low and intermediate levels and between intermediate and advanced levels.

Secondly, middle school activity books need to include the different types of tasks on grade levels. In low level, for example, top three task types (matching, answering, extending) remained the same throughout three years in middle school. Similarly, in intermediate level, top four task types (matching, answering, transcribing, and discriminating) remained the same throughout the middle school years. Only advanced level showed some variations in the use of task type as the grade went up. This calls for a change since a narrow range of task types can lose students' interests and, as a result, de-motivate them.

Finally, heavy use of specific task types should be avoided. Especially, matching, answering and transcribing were heavily used, whereas (re)ordering, classifying and identifying were rarely used in all the proficiency levels and in all the grades. Thus task types should be selected with much care or converted to less frequently used task types to accommodate students' needs and to promote English learning. For example, transcribing which was minimally used in the low level (1.92%) should be increased gradually over the years so that low level students can have more chances to practice matching of the heard sounds to the letters. As for the intermediate level, cognitively more demanding task types, such as summarizing and reconstructing, should be employed more often to arouse students' desires for the challenges. Despite the fact that the advanced level included more variety of task types than other proficiency levels, it did not include classifying tasks at all. Thus, classifying tasks can be devised for the advanced level and be added.

This study has limitation that it did not analyzed all activity books (grade 1: 25 series, grade 2: 19 series, and grade 3: 15 series) but only five series of activity books used in Korean middle schools. Also, this study only investigated listening tasks and did not look into speaking, reading, and writing tasks. Accordingly, the findings may not be generalized to other task types and a careful interpretation of the findings is needed.

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