



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Listening Comprehension Problems, Corresponding Factors and Strategies for Better or Enhanced Listening Skill**

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**ABSTRACT**

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The basic purpose of language is to communicate and this communication is being done through four basic pillars, among all listening skill is of major concern but as is neglected in research and teaching. This study is designed to focus on the problems that affect listening and strategies to improve language learning of ESL learners with the help of enhanced listening comprehension which is the most important aspect in recent researches. The data has been collected from the experienced teachers through means of semi-structured interviews which has been analyzed by thematic analysis, as the research is qualitative in nature. The results have indicated the need to learn and focus listening comprehension. The corresponding strategies can be implied to lessen the extent of problematic factors which affect the listening process.

**Introduction**

The communication is being processed with the four basic skills and listening forms the macro pillar of that process in ESL teaching and learning. Listening is considered the most challenging element to contribute to communication. Listening takes up 40-50% of the communication whereas the other basic skills take up to 25-30% speaking, 11-16% reading and about 9% writing (Mendelsohn, 1994). Although it has been observed in many ESL learning programs that listening comprehension is the most neglected aspect (Mendelsohn, 1994, p.9), but as far as the recent researches are concerned listening has been given much importance in both SLA and ESL classrooms. The construction of meaning from non-verbal and verbal messages is considered an active process in listening to decipher correct meaning (Nunan, 1998).

The term listening can be defined through a number of ways, as Chastain

(1971) identified the goal of comprehending through listening comprehension is an automatic condition at normal speed. In accordance to Hamouda (2013) understandable input can only be acquired through listening skill as input provides the basic grounds for learning language. Mohammad Raza Ahmadi and Pourhosein Gilakjani (2011) stated that listening comprehension contributes to communication process to a great extent. They also notified the listening as the most significant skill for communication among the other basic skills as writing, reading and speaking. According to Goss (1982), a meaning is tried to be constructed by listeners in listening comprehension when the listeners are provided with information extracted from the source of listening.

Rost (2009) specified the listening comprehension as an ability which can be processed easily. This particular phenomenon also helps us to understand the necessary parts of successful communication and the world around us (Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Ahmad and Pourhossein Gilakjani (2011) quantified that listening for intentions, feelings, thoughts are all involved in listening which also includes the practice, effort and active involvement on the part of listener.

Listening comprehension can be defined in a number of ways as it is termed as the different process of comprehending spoken languages for better understanding. The implication of individual words, comprehension of the meanings, comprehension of the syntactic scheme of the sentences and knowledge of speech sounds are involved in Listening comprehension (Nadig, 2013as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). As referred by Hamouda (2013), listening comprehension involves the ability of listener to understand and repeat the text without repeating the sound with real comprehension.

In spite of the fact that the process of language acquisition involves listening comprehension as the fundamental skill, learners seem unable to master that skill with proper accuracy. Furthermore, learners are subjected to face difficulty in the exchange of information for not having good oral listening comprehension (Rost, 2002; Underwood, 1989). However poor listening ability is considered one of the factors affecting communicative competence of learners in negative way (Anderson & Lynch, 2003; Nguyen & Tran, 2015; Ur, 1996). It has been observed that the EFL/ESL learners need to be fully equipped with language input along with listening skills.

Hamouda (2013) stated that listening comprehension is one of the crucial problems that ESL learners have to face as much attention is paid to vocabulary, reading and grammar. Additionally, speaking and listening are not focused by teachers and these are also neglected to be the significant part of the books for the courses of ESL teaching.

According to Osada (2004), listening is being treated as of less importance by

teachers and listeners and this basic skill is subjected to be neglected by learners and teachers in the process of learning and teaching a language respectively. As a result of this, the listening comprehension cannot be developed among learners for enhanced learning.

According to Anderson and Lynch (1988), there are mainly four sources of listening difficulties as the listener, the speaker, the message subjected to be listened and the physical setting. Physical setting involves the noise of environment and noise during recording which can hinder the listening process. Orally listening a taped message rather than reading a written piece is also notified as one of the main problem in listening comprehension. As the listening of any material seems more convenient and easy still learners find it difficult to listen and comprehend spoken messages. Whereas, this strategy helps the advanced learners to 'turn to' speaker's speech style and message. The lack of provision of sufficient teaching material for proper listening is also a major source of difficulty in learning listening comprehension. As American or British accents are considered the standard accents for teaching ESL and learners find it difficult to comprehend when they are subjected to a number of various accents thus communication process is subjected to be affected greatly. Lack of contextual, factual and sociocultural knowledge of the target language also serve as an hindrance to listening comprehension as the language is subjected to express its culture, values and norms with the help of connotation and the lack of such understanding will lead to poor communication skills (Anderson and Lynch 1988).

### **Listening Comprehension Strategies**

Listening strategies are termed as the conscious action and thought which is focused by learner to determine learning objective through a course of actions (Chamot, 2004, p. 14). Actions are planned by learners to be performed in the learning environment. Additionally, listening process is subjected to plan its own listening strategies during class to enhance listening skills with the help of number of strategies.

The difficulties in listening have been observed for many ESL learners in recent years. Thus these problems need to be tackled and improved with the help of certain strategies for better listening comprehension. According to Renukadevi, activities and techniques are used to contribute listening strategies to recall and enhance listening input. Therefore, for the enhancement of listening comprehension the ESL learners need to acquire listening comprehension techniques.

Field (2008) stated that activating prior knowledge and knowing the purpose of listening are part of listening comprehension strategies which are required to be implied in the classes for better and improved comprehension of ESL learners. As teaching listening is directly linked with the purpose of listening so the teacher must be able to know the purpose of listening. According to O'Malley and Chamot (1990),

significance of listening is linked with the knowledge of purpose for reflection and management to support listening. To enhance listening comprehension, the knowledge of strategy is itself important.

### **Strategies to Improve Listening Comprehension**

The recent researches have specified a number of strategies to overcome the problems of comprehension which arouse the need for devising listening comprehension strategies for ESL learners. Hamouda (2013) stated the need to provide suitable and useful material by teachers including background and linguistic knowledge based material, useful exercises for the students and pleasant classroom conditions which can enable learner to learn efficiently and effectively. The difference between ability and learning style can hinder the listening comprehension of ESL learners so the teachers are needed to adapt and adopt that particular material which relates with the background and interest of the learners. It is also noted that provision of a number of effective input such as announcements, interviews storytelling, lectures, everyday conversation, TV plays, films and radio news for the enhancement of listening comprehension.

According to Howatt and Dakin (1974), the greatest obstacle in listening comprehension for ESL is the lack of improved vocabulary. Thus teachers are required to provide students with certain beneficial keywords to trigger their listening comprehension. The learners' vocabulary can be activated by asking them the relevant words for meaning in context before explaining the meanings of the particular words. It is required on the part of the teacher to use effective diagrams, visual aids and can draw pictures relevant to the particular listening topic to imagine and guess actively in related context. Additionally, visual aids increase learners' motivation and attention to help them to relate to the spoken text which helps to overcome comprehension problems of minimal pairs of words and unknown words (Rubin, 1994).

Lynch (2012) explained that the knowledge of accents helps learners to develop understanding of different native accents during the process of communication through listening. Furthermore, strong regional accents are not recommended for listening training, yet native speakers possess certain accents in spontaneous conversation. Furthermore, the American accent differs significantly from that of Australians and Britons. Thus, better comprehension in extensive listening needs the learners of ESL to have access and practice of different accents. Anne Anderson & Tony Lynch stated major obstacle in listening comprehension such as lack of knowledge of distinctive features, thus the teachers are required to use the strategy to make sure the complete understanding of such features as the language usage in the form of connected speech is characterized by assimilation, elision, contractions and weak forms. The listening comprehension can be enhanced with the help of activating prior knowledge. As this helps in the listening task to create link

with the new information. Thus the great extent of prior knowledge will lead ESL learners to extract and improve particular meaning and learning respectively.

### Material and Methods

The present study is carried out at university level in The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. As ten ESL teachers have been selected for data collection by inviting to take part in semi-structured interviews. All of them have at least five years' experience of teaching English as a second language. The data collection tools are questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The collected data has been analyzed through SPSS and results have been extracted by qualitative interpretation of the interviews. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire used Likert scale and was subjected to be piloted with few teachers to check the content and form of the measurement instrument. The semi-structured interviews have been used to collect qualitative nature of data. The teachers have been provided comfortable environment to freely express themselves without being biased at any point.

### Results and Discussion

#### Thematic Analysis of Interviews

**Table 1**  
**The Teachers' Demographic Information**

Variables/ Gender	Numbers	Percentages
Male	4	40
Female	6	60
years of teaching experience		
1-5	5	50
6-10	2	20
11-15	3	30

Table 1 demonstrate that corresponding study is consisting of 40% male and 60% female teachers and the corresponding number 5, 2 and 3 are based on the years of experiences with 50, 20 and 30 percentages respectively.

**Table 2**  
**Listening Difficulties and Descriptive Statistics in Each Individual Component**

Components	N	M	SD
<b>Process</b>	10	3.46	1.212
Listener	10	3.37	1.2413
Speaker	10	3.38	1.2204
Affect	10	3.31	1.1305
Context	10	3.33	1.261
Input	10	3.36	1.181
Valid	10		

Table 2 is illustrating the listening difficulties in each individual in accordance to the statistics. The components under observation as Process, Listener, Speaker, Affect, Context and input have been observed through SPSS and simple analysis of Mean and SD is used to decipher the factors contributing to the listening problems.

**Table 3**  
**Listening strategies and Descriptive Statistics in improvement**

Strategies	M	SD
Purpose	3.46	1.221
Prior Knowledge	3.37	1.2511
Input	3.38	1.2314
Audio- Visual Aids	3.33	1.140.4

Table 3 is illustrating the usage of listening strategies in each individual in accordance to the statistics. The strategies under observation as Purpose, Prior knowledge, input and audio-visual aids have been observed through SPSS and simple analysis of Mean and SD is used to decipher the strategies contributing to the listening comprehension in a positive way.

According to the survey results and the semi-structured interviews, nearly all of the ESL students at Islamia University had a variety of difficulties with listening during the course of their studies. To begin with, according to the responses of teachers the pupils had difficulty understanding English pronunciation and controlling the pace of the spoken material due to a lack of prior knowledge. Due to a lack of sufficient input, it might be assumed that the first language (L1) affects second language (L2) acquisition. Secondly, the pupils lacked the linguistic skills needed to understand the listening and readings completely. Most of the students also have problems with syntax and semantic issues. For example, some complex sentences they had just heard made it hard for them to understand. Furthermore, long sentences in the listening text and a lack of time contributed significantly to the misinterpretation of the audio substance. In addition to the two issues previously mentioned, most learners encountered a number of issues associated with discourse features during their listening phase. Usually, individuals were unable to comprehend the intended message of the listening text despite being able to understand the meaning of specific words. Unfamiliar themes were also a common source of listening comprehension issues. Finally, the teachers' responses shows that the learners struggled to organize the concepts in a listening text in order to establish the relationship between them.

Low comprehension of ESL learners has been observed due to cognitive factors such as self-efficacy, motivation, linguistic knowledge (syntactic knowledge and vocabulary), practical knowledge, Meta cognitive knowledge, prior knowledge, sound discrimination ability, discourse knowledge, first language listening ability, and affective factors such as anxiety. As the students could not encounter unfamiliar

terms, they were forced to pause and consider its meaning, causing them to miss the remainder of the speech. Due to a lack of syntactic knowledge, learners found it challenging to put words and phrases together.

There are many texts that do not give much attention to listening and speaking skills, and teachers do not give much attention to these skills in their classes. The importance of listening is moderated by both educators and students, according to Osada (2004), neither educators nor students are required to assess or teach listening skills. Thus, it remains the less appreciated aspect of language instruction.

### **Conclusion**

It has been concluded from the corresponding study that some teachers holds the view as listening is the easiest skill to teach, whereas the majority of students consider that it is the most challenging to improve. This contradiction suggests that some parts of listening teaching should be looked into further. Those holds the perspective "the easiest to teach" may mean that it does not require a lot of time-consuming lesson preparation and that all they have to do is to play the recordings and verify their students' comprehension. In other words, it true to conclude that only testing can teach you how to listen well. To improve the listening abilities, the learners must understand activities are most successful to foster listening skills. Therefore, the teachers need to put the corresponding information and these activities into practice in ESL classes. At the same time, listening comprehension tactics must be used. Students should be taught appropriate listening methods by their teachers. This study uncovered the factors that contributed to some of the most serious issues with learners' listening comprehension, as well as practical ideas for teachers and students to improve their listening comprehension skills. The results of this study are expected to contribute in the progress of listening comprehension learning and teaching. This study has been done on the grounds provided by Musa Nushi and Fereshte Oroujion the topic "Investigating EFL Teachers' Views on Listening Difficulties among Their Learners: The Case of Iranian Context". This particular research holds that listening can be improved through the use of proper listening comprehension strategies.

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