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### IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING SKILLS OVER OTHER SKILLS

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**ABSTRACT:** *One of the important causes for miscommunication is poor listening skills. It is a fact that if a person does not listen to the speaker effectively, then there are more chances that he is not communicating properly; as a result, he may not understand the speaker's message. The same applies with the second language learning. Of the four linguistic activities, Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing; Listening is the most important skill to be acquired but it is ironical to note that this is only the skill being overlooked. Records say that Listening occupies 45 per cent of the time spent in communication where speaking accounts for 30 per cent, and reading and writing, which make up 16 per cent and nine per cent respectively. Despite its importance, students (and even teachers) often fail to pay attention to Listening. This is all the more remarkable as learners often say that listening is the most challenging of all the skills in any language. Unfortunately the tasks for Listening are not practiced in the labs unlike for the speaking skills. More emphasis should be given on listening skills which can be taught through direct, integrated, incidental, eclectic and dialogue approaches.*

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**KEYWORDS:** *Listening skills; language learners; listening practice*

#### INTRODUCTION

Language is a social activity comprising speaking, listening, writing and reading. Of the four linguistic activities, it is listening that most learners ignore. Listening plays a pivotal role in efficient communication. Importance of listening lies in the fact that it enables students become aware of the use of the language both grammatically and contextually. It should be noted that the learner of a language could not excel in other skills until and unless he/she has good Listening skills..Listening skills are not confined to a single area like learning second language, but its importance lies in different fields like Medicine, Science, IT, Agriculture, Trade, etc along with the personal life. Therefore a learner has to be aware of the fact that in order to have efficient communication skills one has to par 'take listening skills. A teacher should also take precautionary steps to use a variety of techniques to help students acquire effective listening skills.

#### Why Listening Is Vital for Language Learners

Listening unlike Hearing is a complex process which involves identifying, understanding and analyzing spoken languages. It also helps students to identify the accent of the speakers and thus helps them motivate to learn the accent and acquire detailed comprehension and makes them aware how language is used contextually and grammatically. It assists students learn a foreign language with greater confidence and expectation of success. Activities in listening stimulate the learner's imagination, motivate them to think and inspire them to speak. Students highly involved in listening learn better and faster and have sounder judgments and take good decisions about what is heard. If listening skills are improved then there is gradual development in speaking skills.

#### IGNORANCE OF LISTENING SKILLS

Many language learners focus on either speaking or reading or writing skills. They don't put conscious efforts on listening alone.

Listening seems like it should be simple, or secondary to other more active language skills. To the surprise of many new learners, listening to a foreign language is difficult. If you've ever had to sit for a second language test, you'll know that the listening section is almost always the hardest.

But, listening is a vital skill for language learning.

Research shows that during the process of communication, people spend around 40-50% of our time listening, 25-30% speaking, and 11-16% reading and only 9% writing that means we spend about half the time listening!

Now the question arises **do we spend half of our language learning time on listening exercises?**

... We probably don't.

But if an individual needs to learn a foreign language which comprises Speaking, reading, writing skills he/she has to definitely excel in Listening skills & spend more time listening in our second language. However, it's vital that we learn to listen effectively.

But the learners are not specifically taught how to listen in a foreign language, or if they have, they have not been taught properly. Listening is a challenging skill for the foreign language learners because this skill requires substantial endeavors by the learners. In case of acquiring our mother tongue we listen and speak, and then learn reading and writing but it is totally opposite when we are learning English— reading and writing and then so occasionally listening and speaking (*ibid*). Therefore, students face difficulty in case of listening English and they need to employ sufficient endeavors to acquire this skill. Unfortunately students are never given that chance, because as Saha (2008:193) explains that in the schools, colleges and even in the university education, learners are never directed how to listen.

As the learners are never exposed to listening they fail to manage any kind of interaction. (Bhattacharjee, (2008:18). Alam and Sinha (2009:20) claim that the neglect of listening skill in our language classes makes the learners less proficient in the spoken language also. It has been noticed that in most of the language courses in our country, listening is never taught (Saha, 2008) except in some of the institutions like EFLU and others.

To be efficient in English language it is necessary to be proficient in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills

The following reasons can be easily stated to observe practice of poor listening skills.

- Most of the educational institutions provide adequate practice of listening skills.
- Inappropriate syllabus and insufficient logistic support do not permit teachers to practice listening skills in the classrooms. So, language teachers hardly give attention towards this skill.
- Lack of exposure to listening due to limited resources. And if there is exposure through Audio-Visual aids, the source is in foreign accent which makes the students hard to understand the foreign accent.
- Teachers do not focus on the local materials; instead, focus on foreign culture-accent. While contextual background is necessary for understanding, lack of schematic knowledge dispels the learners' interest and participation and as a result language learning does not progress.
- Sometimes the audio of a listening source may not be clear, as a result, the student gets bored and loses interest.
- Lack of proper equipment updated software hinders the process of learning.
- A language class should not exceed 15-20 students,
- Marking system should be initiated even for listening skills
- Listening activities need to be practiced through argumentative and authentic topics.

**Apart from this the following are recommended**

- Effective and ideal English language courses need to be introduced to help the learners to be better listeners.
- Syllabus should emphasize the listening skills and university authorities need to provide the necessary logistic support for the teaching of this skill;
- Outlines should be prepared by allocating marks for the listening skills;
- Teachers need to be trained to take the language classes;
- Teachers should be mentally prepared to teach the listening activities with the existing constraints;
- Effective materials should be produced by the teachers to make the learning enjoyable and in this regard teachers need some expertise to prepare those.
- Materials should be used according to the learners' level and they should be given the scope to use their background knowledge to connect with the materials.
- Curiosity to learn and interest should be aroused among the learners to involve them in the listening activities.
- Exposure to sufficient English speech is necessary and in this regard  
Conversational clubs can be established

To be efficient in English language, it is necessary to be proficient in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Every individual should take initiative to acquire proper Listening skills instead of completely relying on the teaching system. The following are some **Barriers to Effective Listening which an interested learner should know so that he/she can overcome to become an efficient communicator.**

**Common Barriers to Listening:**

- Listening to more than one conversation at a time,
- Paying attention to the physical appearance of the speaker rather than listening to his words.
- You are not interested in the topic/issue being discussed and become bored.
- Not focusing and being easily distracted, fiddling with your hair, fingers, a pen etc. or gazing out of the window or focusing on objects other than the speaker.
- Feeling unwell or tired, hungry, thirsty or needing to use the toilet.
- Identifying the speaker's words rather than empathising
- Sympathizing the speaker rather than empathising
- Having prejudices or a closed mind regarding the speaker.

**CREATING AWARENESS OF LISTENING SKILLS:**

If one wants to improve listening skills, one has to know the following;

If the situation becomes difficult for a listener to comprehend then he can tap into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background information activates a set of expectations that assist the listener to interpret what he has heard and anticipate what he will hear next.

Listening for the major idea, Predicting, Drawing assumptions cutting the listener depends on the language in the message, that is, the arrangement of words, sound, and grammar that creates meaning are text based - Listening for specific information Recognizing cognates Recognizing word-order patterns. Listening for general details-also helps the listener to understand the situation.

They should put into use top-down and bottom-up strategies that are appropriate to the listening Students' comprehension improve and their confidence increases when they use top-down and bottom-up strategies simultaneously to construct meaning.

They should check knowledge while listening and when the listening task is ended. This helps students to detect comprehension failures, directing them to apply other strategies.

**FOCUS ON LISTENING:**

- To achieve this goal, instructors focus on the process of listening rather than on its product.
- Develop students' awareness of the listening process and listening strategies by asking students to think and talk about how they listen in their native language.
- Allow students to practice the full repertoire of listening strategies by using authentic listening tasks.
- Behave as authentic listeners by responding to student communication as a listener rather than as a teacher. When working with listening tasks in class, they show students the strategies that will work best for the listening purpose and the type of text.
- Explain how and why students should use the strategies. They have students practice listening strategies in class and ask them to practice outside of class in their listening assignments.
- Encourage students to be conscious of what they're doing while they complete listening tape assignments.
- Encourage students to evaluate their comprehension and their strategy use immediately after completing an assignment.
- Build comprehension checks into in-class and out-of-class listening assignments, and periodically review how and when to use particular strategies.
- Encourage the development of listening skills and the use of listening strategies by using the target language to conduct classroom business: making announcements, assigning homework, describing the content and format of tests.
- Mention how a particular strategy can be used in a different type of listening task or with another skill. By raising students' awareness of listening as a skill that requires active engagement, and by explicitly teaching listening strategies, instructors help their students develop both the ability and the confidence to handle communication situations they may encounter beyond the classroom. In this way they give their students the foundation for communicative competence in the new language.

### **Ways to improve listening skills:**

Non-Verbal communication plays a key role in efficient listening skills

1. Focus on using inviting body language, such as making eye contact, uncrossing your arms, and turning your shoulders so you're facing the person speaking. Use your body to show your interest and concern such as nodding ourhead.
2. Avoid thinking about what you're going to say next. Try not to get ahead of the speaker by finishing his or her thoughts in your mind before the person is finished speaking
3. Participate in active listening by encouraging the speaker with nods and affirmative words.
4. Paraphrase and repeat what you heard when it's your turn to talk. Don't interrupt – If you're interrupting the person speaking to get your point across, you're not listening
5. Ask questions or request examples for clarification and to get a better understanding of what is being said.
6. Stop doing other things — fidgeting, texting, reading, etc., — while someone is speaking to you.
7. Focus on content, not delivery. If you find yourself counting the number of times someone clears their throat, touches their nose or says uh, your attention is not on the subject matter and you need to refocus more on the message.
8. Ask open ended questions. Closed questions close the door to further conversation by giving a yes or no answer. Whereas, open questions allow for access to further dialogue. For example, the speaker might say,
9. Pay close attention to a speaker's body language – posture, eye movement and facial expressions. This will give you cues to the meaning behind the words being spoken and what he or she is really trying to convey.

### **Conclusion**

This paper throws light on the prevailing issue that listening skill is neglected and ignored in almost all the institutions in general and arrives at a point that the Basic English or Fundamentals of English courses of private universities are incomplete without practicing listening skill. Without this skill student can be found inefficient in English language. At the same time the findings of the study suggests that the use of appropriate strategies can improve the learners' listening skills as well as knowledge of English if listening skills are dealt with utmost care and intensive treatment. It also makes the readers aware that the learner of the language should also uphold the responsibility to improve efficient in listening.

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