

## **LISTENING HABITS OF HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS OF ENGLISH: AN ANALYSIS**

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### **Abstract:**

Listening Skill of any language is the key to all effective communication. Like any other language, listening skill is essential for English Language. English as a language is given very much importance in Pakistan's educational system so the paper aimed to evaluate the listening habits of Higher secondary school students and the observations of their teachers. For this paper, two questionnaires were used to gather data about the listening habits of higher secondary school students. The sample, comprising of 240 students and 200 subject specialists, was chosen from the various institutes of Karachi, the metropolitan city of Pakistan. The data was analyzed descriptively and the recommendations were made on the basis of findings and conclusions.

**Key Words:** Listening skill, Listening habits, Listening comprehension, English classroom

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

Listening Skill of any language is the key to all effective communication. Like any other language, listening skill is essential for English also. English as a language is given very much importance in Pakistan's educational system (Naeem, 2013). So, keeping in view the importance of English in the educational system of Pakistan and importance of Listening comprehension in communication system, this paper aims to evaluate the listening habits of higher secondary school students and the observations of their teachers.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE:**

Listening is essential to the process of communication and students acquire maximum knowledge through listening. This fact makes listening essential for students to avail opportunities to become and behave as effective listeners. However listening is not merely hearing but much more than that. To comprehend spoken language a person needs to get involved in skills and strategies that are process - oriented. A person develops effective listening alongside developing of language abilities because listening process involves the simultaneous use of language and thought. It is not by chance that effective listening abilities are developed rather active listening experiences are needed to be structured into daily language activities. Students also value listening when it is given a place and importance in classroom while teaching a language and is 'meaningfully integrated' with 'viewing, reading, representing, speaking, and writing experiences' (Listening, n.d., p. 1). Language teachers specifically at middle level should consider the important role played by active listening and that students become active listeners only when they 'deliberately attend' to what is being said by the speaker. The students should also immediately apply or assess the ideas or information what they listen to. For example, they may make notes or offer words of agreement, ask or formulate questions, evaluate the message, determine the speaker's intentions and motives and distinguish between fact and opinions (Listening, n.d., p. 1).

There are certain habits that if exercised by learners can prove fruitful in Learning English, or any language. Learners need to put efforts to develop the right listening habits. Few habits that can help ESL students in this regard are as follows:

- Learners need to plan their learning and set realistic goals. Learners must plan their learning schedule with a weekly timetable and dedicate one day for self-study, and reviewing lessons. Planning will make it easier to measure progress (Sketchley, 2010). It is recommended that for at least a week the listener must conclude with a summary at the end of every conversation. Summarizing helps in follow-ups particularly in conversations in which the result is in agreements about obligations and activities that are to be met in future. Moreover, summarizing in this case will be accurate and feel perfectly natural. On the other hand, in conversations where agreements are not involved, if summarizing feels awkward, the listener needs to understand that it is being done only as an exercise (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- Listener must face the speaker and maintain eye contact. Habits like scanning the room, studying a cell phone or computer screen, or gazing out the window, prevent listeners from effective comprehension because the attention is divided and any reason of not looking into eyes of the speaker such as shyness, uncertainty, shame, guilt, or any other emotions, can become distraction and reason for not understanding properly. The listener must remain focused even the speaker exhibits such distractions (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- At the same time, the listener must be attentive, but relaxed especially when eye contact is established. This should not change into staring the fixedly. It is very important to be

attentive (Naeem, 2013). This means that the listener must be present, giving attention and remaining ready to reply. It is the duty of the listener to mentally screen out distractions, such as any ongoing background activity or noise. In addition, the listener must not be too focused on the accent or speech mannerisms otherwise these also become distractions. Likewise listener must not be distracted by own thoughts, feelings, or biases (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).

- The listener must pay attention to nonverbal cues (Harris, 2003). Majority of direct communication is nonverbal that includes the tone of a person on telephone and enthusiasm, boredom, irritation in the expression and movements of eyes, mouth, shoulders, in face to face conversation with a person. These are clues nobody can ignore and help a listener to comprehend better (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- The listener must record new vocabulary and this should be done in a way that it becomes easy to review. There should be vocabulary notes from particular theme-based lessons e.g., shopping, music, family and in this way the vocabulary is to be organized in various forms and their uses and pronunciation, etc. (Sketchley, 2010).
- During learning process, the learners are too active and in control. If they are passive, they would not be able to find out from their teachers what are their strengths and weaknesses neither they will be able to ask their fellows anything like their opinion on their pronunciation. Likewise, the learners can mutually set up an English-speaking club to practice their learning even after the class (Sketchley, 2010).
- Learners need to listen and watch interesting things as much as possible. Habit of watching and listening to TV shows, movies, songs etc. is very helpful in this regard as the opportunities of listening to English as global language are endless (Sketchley, 2010).
- Listening habit of trying to understand every word in what the learners hear is not appropriate unless in specific situations (Yıldırım & Yıldırım, 2016). Listening for gist is appreciated by the researcher. When listening, it is appropriate to get the ‘whole picture’ but keeping in mind the sequence of the information. In this regard, content words can help in forming an overall picture of the gist. (Ahmed, 2015). It is therefore necessary that while listening, the listener creates a mental model in mind with the help of information being communicated. Whether literal or abstract, this picture makes the brain fully alert while listening (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- The listener must have or develop the habit of predicting the text contents. News report, university lecture, supermarket conversation all have different contents which active listeners can successfully predict. They can predict the kind of words and style of language that would be used by the speaker. Their world knowledge or background knowledge or stored vocabulary helps them to anticipate and predict the information they are likely to listen (Ahmed, 2015).
- The listener must give regular feedback in forms of expressions, words or sentences to show that he understands whatever the speaker is saying. This gives the speaker an impression that the listener is active and following his thoughts (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- The listener while listening should not spend the listening time in planning what he is to say when it is his turn. He should concentrate on what the speaker is saying even if he lacks in interest. He should refocus himself if he feels that his thoughts are wandering (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).

- The listener must detect ‘signposts’ in language which link ideas in text help learners to follow particularly important in presentations and lectures. For example, words and phrases like, ‘first of all’, ‘moving on to’ and ‘in summary’ clarify to a listener what he is going to listen (Ahmed, 2015).
- Sometimes situation demands listening for details such as listening about some crime as a detective or a superhero. This time, the listener should look for specific information and reject any irrelevant details such as a number, name or object. This helps a listener to narrow down search and gain the required and relevant details which are needed to understand the text. For example, if in a listening test, if listeners are required to note the age of a person, they need to focus on the words which are related to age, e.g. ‘old’, ‘young’, ‘date of birth’, etc. (Ahmed, 2015).
- The listener should listen with an open mind and should not judge the speaker neither mentally criticize him. When the listener gets indulged in judgmental bemusements, it is like compromising effectiveness as a listener (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- The listener must not jump to conclusions. He must remember that the speaker only represents his thoughts and feelings. The listener only comes to know about the feelings and thinking of the speaker when he listens to him openly. So while listening, the listener must avoid interrupting the speaker and imposing ‘solutions.’ It is not necessary for the listener to suggest solution if someone is talking about a problem, suggest solutions. Sometimes the speaker is not desiring a piece of advice. If it is necessary to give a solution, it may be given at least with permission e.g. by asking the speaker, ‘Would you mind hearing my ideas in this regard?’ (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- Talk shows and reality programs on television help to adjust listener to various paces and rates of speaking. A quick listener needs patience for a slow speaker or a fast speaker also. Therefore these shows are a must watch/listen (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- The listener needs to wait for the speaker to pause in case something is not understood. Questions to clarify must not be asked by the listeners immediately. Likewise, the clarifying questions should not lead speakers to other directions which are not relevant to the actual topic of discussion going on (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- The listener must avoid acting as a sentence-grabber. If the speaker cannot slow his mental pace enough to listen effectively, so may try to speed up the listener’s pace by interrupting and finishing sentences which are to be spoken by the listener on his turn. Likewise, this ultimately results in less comprehension by the listener if he also grabs speaker’s sentences (Tyagi, 2013: Schilling, 2012).
- Inferring meaning helps to understand the meaning or context of words that are not known by the learners. For example, if the speaker seems to say something apologetic in response, and the listener does not understand exact words, yet he can conclude that his request is turned down e.g. Use of credit card by a restaurant is not available and the customer needs to pay cash. This habit of inferring meaning is effective if clues and prior knowledge are actively used (Tyagi, 2013).
- The listener should try to feel what the speaker is feeling because effectiveness as a listener is assured when the listener feels sad if the speaker is telling something about his grief and excited when he is sharing some joyful experience. Empathy is the heart and soul of good listening for which the listener has to put himself in the speaker’s place. This is not an easy though and demands energy and concentration. On the positive side, this habit makes the

listener generous and helpful apart from facilitating the communication (Tyagi, 2013; Schilling, 2012).

### **METHODOLOGY, POPULATION AND SAMPLE:**

The population for this study consisted of subject specialists (teachers of English) and students of English language studying in the higher secondary schools of Karachi. Sample of the study comprised of 240 students and 200 teachers selected randomly from different institutes of Karachi. The study used two Questionnaires for data collection from subject specialists and students. Data was collected through personal visits to higher secondary level institutes and analyzed descriptively. After findings, recommendations were proposed. The data was collected by the researcher with the help of respective class teachers.

### **RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS:**

Two questionnaires, prepared on Linkert rating scale (Best & Kahn, 2007, p. 318), to gather data about participants' particulars and to provide directions for answering, were designed with 20 items to determine listening habits being practiced at the educational level under review.

### **DATA ANALYSIS:**

The collected data was descriptively analyzed combining the scores of SA (Strongly agreed) and A (Agreed) as Agreed while D (Disagree) and SD (Strongly disagree) as Disagree for ease of scoring. The analysis came out as follows:

**Table 1 Listening Habits (200 Subject Specialists)**

S No	Statements	A %	U %	D %
1.	I advise students to spend time on listening in English to learn English Comprehension.	36.00	24.00	40.00
2.	I advise/assign students to regularly watch English media even outside the class.	18.50	19.00	62.50
3.	I suggest/assign practicing of Listening to my students in their spare time.	14.50	17.00	68.50
4.	I suggest/assign students to spend more than 15 minutes while listening in their daily routine.	32.00	21.00	47.00
5.	I advise/prefer students to take notes or close their eyes to concentrate on listening.	17.00	13.00	70.00
6.	I advise/assign students to search for the answers, and listen to the dialogue at the same time.	19.50	10.00	70.50
7.	I don't find students anxious while listening.	46.00	18.00	36.00
8.	I try/help to make students understand word or sentences into mother language.	24.50	21.00	54.50
9.	After listening, students feel a requirement to look up dictionary to check their comprehension.	33.50	23.00	43.50
10.	Students use abbreviations, symbols, and visual forms to write key words.	30.50	27.00	42.50
11.	My students wait until I have finished before reflecting on the subject matter or formulating questions.	24.50	21.00	54.50
12.	My students give me their full attention for the duration of speaking time, even when they are not especially interested.	10.00	25.71	64.29
13.	Students avoid filling silence if I do not immediately answer a question.	65.71	21.43	12.86
14.	Students take the time to listen more carefully and accurately to important information.	0.00	4.29	95.71
15.	Before students start to listen, they quickly look over the instruction and find out more about the topic/task.	1.43	2.86	95.71
16.	Students ask me to repeat or paraphrase to clarify comprehension.	67.14	21.43	11.43
17.	Students, according to the title, the instruction, and the questions, predict or make hypotheses about the possible content.	2.86	2.86	94.29
18.	Students decide in advance to attend to the specific aspects of input and focus on hearing information.	10.00	25.71	64.29

19.	Students try to remember the key points, and mentally organize the concepts.	12.86	47.14	40.00
20.	I advise students first to listen for gist and then details.	42.86	25.71	31.43

**Table 2 Listening Habits (240 Higher Secondary School Students)**

S No	Statements	A %	U %	D %
1.	I spend time on listening in English to learn English Comprehension either in the class or in my spare time.	9.58	4.58	85.83
2.	I feel anxious and cannot keep calm while listening.	52.08	21.25	26.67
3.	I like to listen and encourage others to talk by showing interest, smiling, nodding, etc.	16.25	22.50	61.25
4.	I stop listening and paying attention to a someone who has nothing interesting to say.	47.50	22.50	30.00
5.	I either take notes or close my eyes to concentrate on listening.	14.17	10.83	75.00
6.	I try to avoid distractions whenever possible.	16.25	8.33	75.42
7.	I inform the speaker if I don't understand anything.	39.58	22.50	37.92
8.	I try to translate spoken content into native language.	36.25	25.00	38.75
9.	After listening, I consult dictionary to check my comprehension.	16.67	26.67	56.67
10.	I try to put myself in speaker's position to see things from others' perspective.	16.67	6.25	77.08
11.	During conversation I repeat back to speaker in my own words to make sure that I understood completely whatever was said.	52.86	20.00	27.14
12.	I spend at least 15 minutes while listening in my daily routine.	0.00	4.29	95.71
13.	I look at the person speaking.	65.71	22.86	11.43
14.	To people who seem similar, I pay more attention than to those who seem different.	60.00	11.43	28.57
15.	I evaluate words and nonverbal communication as someone speaks.	61.43	25.71	12.86
16.	I pay complete attention to the speaker even if I am interrupted.	42.86	25.71	31.43
17.	I allow the speaker to finish and do not interrupt, anticipate or jump to conclusions.	58.57	11.43	30.00
18.	I stop listening to those who do not match or agree with my views.	74.29	14.29	11.43
19.	I can predict if the speaker has useful things to tell even before completion of message.	54.29	32.86	12.86
20.	Finding missing or contradictory information, I pose direct question to understand explicitly.	40.00	25.71	34.29

## FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

Subject specialists usually do not regularly advise and assign their students about watching of English media outside the classrooms or practicing English language listening in their spare time also. As a result, the students do not carry this practice. Students feel anxious and cannot keep calm while listening. This is apparently because of lack of practicing listening skill as the findings show that majority of the students does not spend even 15 minutes while listening in their daily routine.

There are certain good listening habits which are found in students. They generally listen with interest while others talk and show interest by smiling, nodding, etc. They maintain eye contact and evaluate words and nonverbal communication conveyed through the speakers. They allow speakers to finish without interrupting and anticipating or jumping to conclusions. They are good at inferring and also avoid distractions whenever possible. They also ask clarifying questions and repeat back their own words to make sure that they understood the information. Self-review and looking up dictionary after listening are further good habits that are found in students.

On the other hand, there are certain bad habits and practices of students which are considered hindrance to successful listening comprehension. Students usually do not wait until their subject specialist has finished before reflecting on the subject matter or formulating questions. They usually do not give their full attention to the subject specialists for the duration of speaking time. They do not take the time to listen more carefully and accurately to important information. Moreover, they avoid filling silence if the subject specialist does not immediately answer a question. Before students start to listen, they do not quickly look over the instruction and find out more about the topic/task. Students also lack in empathy and do not put themselves in speaker's

position to see things from speaker's perspective. People with similar interest are their focus of attention more than those with different point of view.

There are certain habits of students which can be attributed toward the lack of guidance by their subject specialists. For example, subject specialists do not advise or prefer that their students take notes or close their eyes for concentration of listening. Resultantly, the students do not take notes or close their eyes to concentrate on listening. Most of the subject specialists do not advise and assign their students with activities which involve searching for the answers and listening to the dialogue simultaneously. Translating to mother language is also done by the subject specialists to make students understand word or sentences. Students cannot predict or make hypotheses keeping in view the titles, instructions, or the pre-listening questions when it comes to classroom listening. They cannot pre-decide which aspects of input they should attend and focus on hearing which of the pieces of information.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Subject specialists should regularly advise and assign their students about watching of English media outside the classrooms or practicing English language listening in their spare time also.
2. To lower the students' level of anxiety during listening, subject specialists must help them by implementing required remedies.
3. Students should be advised to practice listening at least for 15 minutes a day.
4. The subject specialists should specifically teach their students to wait for the speaker to stop and then reflect on the subject matter or formulate questions.
5. Subject specialists should make sure that the students give their full attention to them or the speaker for the duration of speaking time.
6. Students should take the time to listen more carefully and accurately to important information.
7. Students should be taught how to fill the silence if the subject specialist or the speaker does not immediately answer a question.
8. Before students start to listen, they do not quickly look over the instruction and find out more about the topic/task.
9. To develop empathy, the students must be educated properly.
10. Subject specialists must use strategies which can eliminate bad listening habits in students such as not taking of notes, lack of concentration, need for mother language translations, being unable to infer and failing to focus on specific content etc.

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