

Factors Affecting the Listening Skill of Non-Native English Speakers

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Abstract

This study examines the extent of influence of the identified factors to the listening skills of non-native English speakers. Listening comprehension is a critical skill for effective communication, yet non-native speakers often encounter significant difficulties, especially when exposed to a variety of English accents. Data were collected through a survey questionnaire to non-native English speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The findings show that Motivation and having positive attitude towards learning English; Regular exposure to English through media, conversations, and formal education; and Supportive and resource-rich learning environment that facilitates better listening practice improvement significantly affects the listening skills of our respondents. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the positive attitude of our learners towards learning English is a crucial role in listening effectiveness and the quality of the listening environment, including the level of background noise, and clarity of audio significantly influences the listening skills of non-native English speakers in improving listening skills. Recommendations were drawn in this study, to incorporate diverse, interesting, and relevant listening materials into curriculum that cater to student's interests and real world. Invest in or upgrade multimedia language labs where students can regularly engage with English media in a focused setting. Equip these labs with complete materials. Ensure that resources are regularly updated to keep content relevant and engaging.

This research highlights the necessity for tailored instructional strategies to address the specific needs of non-native speakers in mastering listening skills.

Keywords: Listening; Listening Skills; Listening Comprehension;

1. Introduction

Listening comprehension is a critical skill in language acquisition, serving as the foundation for effective communication. For non-native English speakers, mastering this skill poses significant challenges, influenced by a myriad of factors such as accents and speech rates. These challenges are not merely linguistic but also cognitive, as listeners must decode, process and interpret spoken language in real time. Understanding the nature of these challenges is essential for developing effective teaching strategies and tools that can aid non-native speakers in improving their listening comprehension abilities.

According to Rost (2009), listening helps us to understand the world around us and is one of the necessary elements in creating successful communication. Listening is a vital primary stage of language acquisition. If students do not listen or learn to listen well, then the latter stages of the complex pattern of language acquisition within a productive framework in the communicative classroom will be difficult said by Rintaningrum (2018).

According to Hamouda (2013) listening skill is an important element in obtaining understandable input. Hamouda (2013) expressed that listening comprehension provides the appropriate situations for the acquisition and expansion of other language skills while Rost (2002) expressed that the development of listening is related to the attainment of proficiency in speaking. He continued that listening is the most important skill in language learning because it is the most widely used language skill in normal daily life.

Pourhosein Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) said that listening plays a significant role in the communication process. Therefore; it is obvious that listening is very important for the lives of everyone since it is used as a means of learning at all phases of instruction.

Holden (2004) viewed listening comprehension as a complicated activity that needs mental exertion to ensure understanding. Furthermore, the author argued that listeners have to listen passively and then produce what they have comprehended. Thus, listening is vital and necessary not only as a receptive language skill but also as a tool required for the development of spoken language ability as mentioned by Namaziandost et. al., (2018).

Accents both native and non-native, play a substantial role in listening comprehension difficulties. Non-native speakers are often exposed to variety of English accents, which can vary significantly in pronunciation, intonation, and rhythm.

Accordingly, Tokumoto and Shibata (2011) investigated L2 English users' introspection by bringing their attention to and having them evaluate their own accents. They compared the evaluative responses from college students in three Asian countries: Japan, South Korea, and Malaysia. The results showed the distinctive perception of their own English varieties. They concluded that the emphasis in English instruction and socio-historical factors in each country appear to influence L2 English speakers' construction of attitudes toward a target language.

Familiarity with a specific accent can enhance comprehension, whereas unfamiliar accents can hinder understanding. Additionally, the prevalence of non-native English accents due to the global nature of English as a lingua franca, adds another layer of complexity. As stated by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), unfamiliar listening topics may also hamper students' listening comprehension.

Furthermore, according to Thomson (2003), the listeners are active in the process of listening comprehension, not passive. In this regard, Jinhong (2011) argued that listening comprehension is not only “a process-oriented activity in which listeners need to deal with the input actively step by step” but also “a creative activity [that] listeners construct or assign meanings based on the given information or their experience and background knowledge”.

Chang’s (2011) small-scale research project focused on improved listening fluency through reading while listening to audio books. Chang (2011) states that reading while listening (RWL) was chosen as a method for the study due to the fact that it can be used with participants with low listening proficiency. It can also increase exposure to aural input and can be completed as a self-study exercise. Chang (2011) mentions that this may be useful for teachers dealing with time constraints in the classroom.

Chang (2011) explains the difference between listening while reading (LWR) and reading while listening (RWL). In the former, reading is the main function, which is helped along by aural input-the listening- to encourage a faster and more fluid reading pace. Whereas, the main aim of RWL is listening comprehension. The aural input, whether that is in the form of conversations, movies or lectures is there to support listening comprehension. Osada 2001 and Vandergrift 2007 (cited in Chang, 2011) claim that RWL helps learners develop a number of skills including “auditory discrimination and word recognition, get used to the spoken rate, rhythm and natural flow of language, and understand chunks of texts.”

Given the importance of listening comprehension in language proficiency, it is crucial to explore these challenges in depth. This research aims to examine the extent of influence of the identified factors to the listening skills of non-native English speakers. By examining the extent of influence of the underlying factors that contribute to these factors affecting their Listening skills, we can develop targeted educational strategies and technological tools to enhance listening skills among non-native speakers. Ultimately improving listening comprehension will facilitate better communication and integration in English-speaking environments, promoting greater linguistic and cultural understanding.

In this paper, identified factors of Non-native English speakers concerning their Listening Skills were reviewed. The researcher defined the terms listening, listening comprehension, mentioned the reasons for listening and stated the importance of listening.

1.1. Research Design and Methodology

The researcher used Quantitative- Descriptive method of research. The researcher used this method to gather information in order to achieve the objective of the study which aimed to provide factors affecting the listening skills of non-native English speakers.

1.2 Population and locale of the study or participants

The population of this study are the Grade 12 Senior High School students from Lingsat Integrated School. A total number of 96 students responded. Thirty-six (36) from Grade 12 Escoda, Thirty (30) from Grade 12 Magbanua and Thirty (30) from Grade 12 Gomez.

1.3 Sampling Determination

The researcher used the Slovin's Formula in determining the sample size of the study. The total number of Grade 12 Senior High School students in Lingsat Integrated School were 126, using the Slovin's Formula 96 respondents were determined. Stratified sampling was used to determine the number of each subgroup.

1.4 Data Instrument

The instrument used for data gathering of the study is in a form of Survey questionnaire. The survey questionnaire consists of ten (10) identified factors made by the researcher. The researcher conducted a reliability test of the survey and found a **Cronbach coefficient of 0.91**. The tool used a five-point Likert scale with responses such as "Highly Influential, Very Influential, Moderately Influential, Least Influential and Not Influential. The positive items in the scale scored in the form of 5,4,3,2,1 and the negative items will be scored reversely. While the highest point that will be obtained from the instrument will be accepted as factors affecting the listening comprehension of non-native English speakers.

1.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher asked permission from the respondents through a letter sent through messenger to conduct a survey questionnaire regarding the Factors affecting the listening skills of Non-native English speakers. The questionnaires were sent via Google Form for them to answer, after explaining the nature and scope of the study. All the respondents were willing to participate in the research. After collecting all the answers, the researcher started to treat the data. Author Artwork

1.6 Treatment of the Data

The researcher used Weighted Mean to analyse the data. It was used to measure the response of Non-native English speakers to the identified factors affecting their Listening Skills. To provide the quantitative analysis to the computed mean for each item, the 5-point Likert scale was used.

Table 1. Factors affecting Listening Skills Five Point Likert

Rating	Mean Interval	Description	Interpretation
5	4.00- 4.99	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL	Dominant influence to the listening skills of non-native English speaker.
4	3.00- 3.99	VERY INFLUENTIAL	Significant influence to the listening skills of non-native English speaker.
3	2.00-2.99	MODERATELY INFLUENTIAL	Moderate influence to the listening skills of non-native English speaker. It holds a balanced authority, capable of swaying certain influence but not dominant.
2	1.00-1.99	LEAST INFLUENTIAL	Minimal influence to the listening skills of non-native English speaker. It may influence minor aspects but not critical ones.
1	0.00-0.99	NOT INFLUENTIAL	Has no influence to the listening skills of non-native English speaker. It is completely disregarded.

2. Results, Conclusion, Recommendation

Table 2. Factors affecting Listening Skills of Non-native English Speakers Analysis

Statement	Mean	Extent of Influence
Motivated and have positive attitude towards learning English.	4.26	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Regular exposure to English through media, conversations, and formal education.	4.15	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Supportive and resource-rich learning environment that facilitates better listening practice improvement.	4.14	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Understanding the sounds of English and how they combine especially in distinguishing similar-sounding words.	4.10	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Active and consistent practice, such as listening to English podcasts, watching English TV shows or movies, and engaging in conversations.	4.06	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Effective teaching methods that include interactive listening activities and the use of diverse audio materials.	4.06	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation	4.00	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL
Cognitive abilities like memory, attention, and processing speed.	3.79	VERY INFLUENTIAL
Anxiety and Confidence Levels	3.78	VERY INFLUENTIAL

Familiarity with cultural context of English-speaking countries	3.77	VERY INFLUENTIAL
General Weighted Average	4.01	HIGHLY INFLUENTIAL

2.1 Narrative Discussion

Overall, a general weighted mean of 4.01 was generated from the results of the survey questionnaire gathered which indicates that the factors reported were highly influential affecting the listening skills of the non-native English speakers. This is a promising indication that majority of the identified factors were impactful to our respondents. The top three (3) factors affecting the listening skills of our respondents were provided.

2.1.1 Motivated and have positive attitude towards learning English

Motivation and positive attitude towards learning English is the number one factor that affects the Listening skills of non- native English speakers, which garnered 4.26 generated mean. It is crucial for developing strong listening skills for our respondents. Motivated learners are more likely to practice frequently, connect deeply with the content, and actively seek for opportunities to utilize the language. Higher levels of ease and fluency in the language may result from this. The students are more likely to retain knowledge and use it in practical contexts when you have a sincere interest in studying.

According to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014), when listening texts contain known words it would be very easy for students to them. If students know the meaning of words this can arouse their interest and motivation and can have a positive impact on the students' listening comprehension ability. A lot of words have more than one meaning and if they are not used appropriately in their appropriate contexts students will get confused.

Hasan (2000) indicated that unfamiliar words, difficult grammatical structures, and the length of the spoken passages are the most important factors that cause problems for learners' listening comprehension. He continued that clarity, lack of interest, and the demand for complete answers to listening comprehension questions are the serious difficulties of students' listening comprehension

2.1.2 Regular exposure to English through media, conversations, and formal education.

Regular exposure to English through media, conversations, and formal education helps listeners become accustomed to different ways of speaking, resulting to 4.15 generated mean. This improves their ability to understand spoken English in different contexts and by different speakers.

According to Huang's (2004) study "many foreign learners have difficulties in understanding different accents, because they have got used to the accent of their own teachers and they are usually 'surprised and dismayed when they find they have difficulty understanding someone else.'" Huang's (2004) study focuses on Chinese students' difficulty in lecture comprehension at an American University. Huang (2004) noted that the students perceived their American professors' speech to be rapid as they were unaccustomed to the natural speed of English of a native English speaker. Although this particular study focuses on Chinese students, I'm certain that Japanese students also experience similar listening comprehension problems, speaking from first hand classroom experience

Hayati and Momed's research (2011) of analyzing listening comprehension results from participants

who watched short video episodes using English subtitles, Persian subtitles and no subtitles is one that is worth replicating and exploring further. The participants watching the episodes with English subtitles had the highest scores on the listening comprehension, which supported their hypothesis that videos with English subtitles would lead to improved listening comprehension.

Some researchers Hulstijn, Field and Vandergrift (cited in Ching et al 2014) believe that the most beneficial form of listening is without subtitles as this allows students to notice various features of spoken language such as reduced forms and elisions mentioned earlier in this research paper.

In a recent study, Emerick (2019) explored the beliefs of language teachers regarding explicit teaching and use of authentic materials in L2 listening instruction. The participants were L2 teachers of eight universities in the United States. To collect the data, both a questionnaire and semi -structured interviews were conducted. The results revealed that teachers considered explicit listening instruction necessary for L2 learning. Moreover, the majority of teachers found authentic listening materials as essential and effective for L2 learners.

2.1.3 Supportive and resource-rich learning environment that facilitates better listening practice improvement.

A supportive and resource-rich environment is important in developing listening skills which garnered 4.14 generated mean because it creates the right conditions for effective learning and comprehension like the quality of sound system can impact the comprehending of learners' listening (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, 2014).

2.2 Conclusion

A listener's interest in the topic and motivation to listen has the highest weighted mean in this study, the higher motivation often leads to more active engagement, better concentration, and improved comprehension followed by Media exposure, which often introduces listeners to a wide range of vocabulary that helps listeners become more familiar with everyday language and understand spoken English more naturally and finally, A resource rich environment provides diverse listening materials, catering to different learning styles and levels. This helps learners practice and improve their listening skills in engaging ways.

2.3 Recommendation

Incorporate diverse, interesting, and relevant listening materials into curriculum that cater to student's interests and real world. Invest in or upgrade multimedia language labs where students can regularly engage with English media in a focused setting. Equip these labs with complete materials. Ensure that resources are regularly updated to keep content relevant and engaging.

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