



# **AN ASSESSMENT OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF PUPILS OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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## **Abstract**

The principal aim of listening comprehension practice is not to provide a model for oral production, but to strengthen the ability to understand spoken languages. Students can benefit from practice in reacting to what they hear, from participating in listening situations.

This study is divided into five sections:

Section one is an introduction. It makes a general survey of some of the major components which comprises with the aims of the study.

Section two is made to arrive at a full picture of listening comprehension through some previous studies which have a relationship with this study. Section three is the construction of the listening comprehension test, section four deals with demonstration and discussion of results. Finally, the last section, deals with the conclusions, recommendations and suggestions.



## 1. Introduction

The principal aim of listening practice is to strengthen the ability to understand spoken message. Students can benefit from practice in reacting to what they hear, from participating in listening situation rather than just overhearing what other people are saying on tape.

Listening, understanding, and responding in an appropriate way is an essential part of communication, and therefore, regular practice in aural comprehension is a vital part of teaching programme.

In order to find out the ability of the secondary school students, this study is conducted, which consist of five sections.

### 1.1. The Problem and Significance of the Study

Listening, is a complex operation integrating the distinct components of perception and linguistic knowledge in ways which are at present poorly understood. (Haycraft,1986:76)

It is 80% of our waking hours, (we spend communicating) about half of the time is spent in listening. Yet, looking at our school experience, education concentrates on reading, writing, speaking but neglect listening. (Steil, et al 1982:81)

Many educators fell that listening training should become a part of the educational system, and this training may improve significantly the ability to learn. Listening comprehension is regarded as a complex process which comprises several levels and subskills, and these work together to produce an ultimate goal meaning.

Essential to all interaction is the ability to understand what others are saying. Even in the native language many people are poor listener, whether through weak power of

concentration, egocentrism or short auditory memory. Yet it has been estimated that of time adults spend in communication activities 45 percent is devoted to listening, only 30 percent to speaking, 16 percent to reading, and a mere 9 percent to writing. (Rivers and Temperely, 1983:3). In many countries where English is learned as a foreign language, the responsible an element of listening into their programmes. Whilst it must be recognized that this has been an important driving force behind the development of listening work there is no doubt that over the same period teachers themselves have come to appreciate the value of developing their students' listening skills, not merely so that they can pass the examination but also for more general use when they wish to use their English in the outside world. (Underwood, 1989:1).

But despite the facts that listening comprehension is an essential language skill, which is of direct relevance to pupils, direct needs, pupils at the secondary school levels still face serious difficulties in listening



comprehension, and lack the ability to comprehend English lectures, and therefore unable to communicate with ease and confidence specific practice in listening comprehension is given, in the 4th and 5th year secondary school. The exercises comprise fifteen comprehension passages in book 6 and twelve comprehension passages in book 7.

The researcher believes that the time allocated and the material that used for teaching the skills are not sufficient to develop the learners' ability in listening comprehension. Thus the need arises to conduct an investigation on students' performance in listening comprehension of the pupils of the secondary school and the various types of problems encountered by both teachers and learners in teaching listening in English language teaching. Results of this study are expected to reveal strong and weak aspects of teaching listening comprehension, and determine pupils' level of achievement in the skill (with particular reference to its subskills). Hence this study will be of great benefit to practicing teachers textbook designers and material procedures, and will offer suggestion for making necessary changes or modifications.

The study is concerned with assessing two levels of listening comprehension, they are :

1-Literal level of listening comprehension which includes: (a) recognition of general meaning of words and sentences and, (b) the relationship between sentences and the larger text constituents, such as sequences and cause and effect.,

2-Inferential level which consists of the following:

a-inferring the main ideas.

b-inferring about figurative language.

## **1.2. Aims of the Study**

The study aims at:

1-assessing the sub skills of the levels of listening comprehension which are (literal and Inferential levels) acquired by 5th year secondary school students.

2-investigating the problems that impede efficient teaching and learning of listening.

3-making pedagogical recommendation for textbooks writers, practicing teachers as well as the learners themselves.

## **1.3. Delimitation of the Study**

1- The study is delimited to the 5th year students of secondary schools for boys in Baghdad during the academic year 2001/2002.

2-Literal and Inferential levels of comprehension will be tested.



## 1.4. Definitions of Basic Terms

*The Literal Level:* This is a simple, and first level of comprehension. It focuses on ideas and information that are clearly stated in a content.

*The Inferential Level:* This level probes for a greater depth than that of literal level, because it requires the reader and the listener to go beyond the material in content and to use his own experience and background.

*Assessment:* Giving a judgment of the students` ability while they are exposed to spoken English language , pointing out their weakness and strength in comprehending the English foreign language.

*Listening:* In guidance, the act of paying close attention to the conversation of another person (s) in order to obtain selectively verbal and nonverbal clues to behaviour pattern.(Good,1973:43).

*Comprehension :* Act of understanding the meaning of written or spoken language.(Page and Tomas , 1977:79).

*Secondary school :* It is a six-grade school beginning with the next grade following the elementary school. It is divided into two stages, intermediate and preparatory, each stage consist of three grades. (Good,1973).

## 2. Some of the Related Literature

This chapter surveys some of the previous studies relevant to this study. Papers and research-works concerning to the assessment of listening comprehension .Studies and researches in listening comprehension in Iraq are limited in number, especially in secondary school stage, in spite of its importance .The researcher concentrates on the following studies:.

### 2.1. McDonough, S. H.(1976) Listening Comprehension: The Effect of Test Question on Delayed Recognition of Content and Questions

The aim of the study is to investigate the hypothesis that questions may have different effect on delayed recognition of aural material according to whether they are given on paper during or after the passage and whether they test content or expressions.

The sample of the experiment consists of two groups (the experimental and the control).They are consisted of 17 students.



The results indicate that listening comprehension is an inefficient way of familiarizing subjects with expressions is of relevance to a decision on the aims of listening comprehension.

## **2.2. Taylor, John Cakeshott. (1979). Cloze Procedure and Foreign Languages Listening Skills**

The aim of the study is to report an investigation in which cloze test are administered to foreign learners in conjunction with listening materials.

The sample of an investigation is two groups 20 and 23 respectively. Both groups hear the passage from which the test has been constructed in same number of time –between

The two administrations, however they are given different instructions and engaged in different tasks.

The results of the test is tested by means and Standard Deviations of scores which is obtained by both groups on cloze 1 and 2, as well as means and Standard Deviations of score increments.

## **2.3. Emery, Peter G.(1980) Evaluation Spoken English : A new Approach to The Testing of Listening Comprehension**

The aim of the study is to test an assessment of skills or listening comprehension in many ways. The sample of the test is 168 Arabic-speaking employees/ trainees studying English at the company training centre-their educational knowledge is varied ranging from primary education to university degree.

The result of the test shows that the scores range from 5/30 to 27/30. The overall mean is 14.57 and the Standard Deviation is 4.93.

## **2.4. Boyle, Joseph P. (1984). Factors Affecting Listening Comprehension**

The aim of the study is to describe or to seek an answer to some questions as: Which factors, types of knowledge and skills are important to consider when we are attempting to improve listening comprehension.?

The sample consists of two types, they are 30 teachers and 60 students. The results indicate that some students whose competence in other aspects of the language is high score in tests of intention .



## **2.5. Sally, Ovaiza. (1985). Listening Comprehension on-a Lecture - Based Approach**

The aim of the study is to assess the ability of the undergraduate students in Sri Lanka at the university stage. Especially to engineering and medicine.

The sample of the study is 20 undergraduate students.

The result of the study indicates that the students have appeared to be more confident to undertake in English than the previous year.

## **2.6. Sabii, Khalid. (1988). Listening Comprehension**

The aim of the study is to find out answers to many questions as:

What is listening comprehension? How does the process of listening comprehension take place ? How is listening comprehension tested? E.t.c..

The sample of the study the second-year intermediate school pupils in Iraq.

The result shows that the students` achievement of the experimental group is significantly higher in average than the controlled group.

## **2.7. Al-Fatlawi, Adil Jawad. (1989). An Assessment of Listening Comprehension of Students of English Department, College of Education**

The aims of the study are:

1-Assessing the subskills of the levels of listening comprehension acquired by the 1st and 4th- year college students of English Department

2- Comparing the 1st to the 4th-year college students of English in acquiring the subskills of the listening comprehension.

The sample of the study consist of the population of the first and the fourth year male and female students of the English language department in the academic year 1988/1989.

The results indicate that there is no significant difference at (0.05) level between the first and the fourth year.

## **3. Critique of Previous Studies**

To conclude the above survey, the following points are relevant:

1-Some studies indicated that the students can follow the teacher who teach them, by speaking English language better than the native speaker of English like the Chinese students in Boyle Study can follow a



Chinese teacher speaking English. While the native speakers of English find Chinese speaking difficult to follow.

2- Both techniques, the multiple –choice and the cloze are widely used in measuring listening comprehension.

3-Both techniques are used for testing levels and skills of language.

4- Some of these studies using comparison between oral; reading, silent reading, and listening comprehension, which is assessed by Gate-Mac Ginitie Reading Test orally in typical third grade which is measured by the Gates-Mac Ginite comprehension test level.

5- Most of test studies which were used, recorded passages and answer sheet which consist of multiple choice, cloze, and True –False techniques.

6-The sample of the studies which were presented in this chapter ranges from (7 to 469) students. As regards the sample of the present study, it consists of 100 students drawn randomly from the 5th year Al-Adamiyah Secondary School, and College of Baghdad the Secondary School .

7- Both teachers and learners consider lack of practice the most important factors affecting listening comprehension as it seems clear in Boyle study in Hong Kong.

8- Some of the researchers divide listening compreh- ension skills into sub skills for example as in Al- Fatlawi Study. Subskills are used to measure listening comprehension skills.

#### **4.The Sample of the Study**

The whole population of 5th year students of Al-Adamiyah preparatory school for boys and Baghdad College The Secondary School for the Academic year 2001/2002 was the sample of this study. They were (436) students comprise (11) sections.

They all have studied English about seven year in primary and secondary schools. The reason for choosing 5th year secondary school level is based mainly on the presence fifteen passages of listening comprehension in each Teachers` Guide Book in 4th and 5th year ,that

students should be studied in each stage.." The teacher are free to teach them all ,or some of them depending on the time available and the amount of the mastery the pupils manifest in the other type of activities ." (Al-Hamash,1993:4).



The following table illustrates the population of the study.

Table (1)  
The Study Population

Total number of student	Absent	The number of pilot study	The reliability	Actual sample
436	28	30	30	100

## 5. Final Administration of the Test

The test was administrated on the 28th November, 2002. The sample consists of 100 students from Al-Adamiyah Preparatory School for boys, and Baghdad College the Secondary School students (50 students from each school). Each group was tested in the laboratory of their schools which is considered most suitable place to the listening comprehension test till now.

Students were listening to a passage in tape- recorder through the headphones, by this way there weren't interferences to the students during the test.

Before administration, the researcher gave the instruction of the testing Arabic to the students, in addition to the same to the same instructions which were written on the test papers.

The reason for choosing these two secondary schools only , due to the presence of laboratories in these schools, and this material considered a new technique used in the listening comprehension till now.

There were no students who failed in previous year and excluded in the pilot study in the final test.

Each group of students needed about half an hour to the test.

## 6. Statistical Means

The following statistics are used for the purposes of this study:

- 1- Percentage.
- 2-The Pearson Formula for correlation coefficient was used to measure reliability of the test .
- 3-test-retest.

## 7.The Procedures

The test consist of 13 items to this study. On the basis that each two items are designed to measure one subskill of listening comprehension except one, which "general meaning of sentence" composed of three items, each one receives one mark to correct answer, and zero to other wrong.





The thirteen items of the test are distributed on the basis that the first nine items are attempting to measure the Literal Level; while the other four items are attempting to measure subskill of Inferential Level.

## 8.The Results

The results indicate that the students reveal best performance on the Literal Level, which registers the highest value (53.11) whereas in the Inferential Level, registers a mean value of (40.75). Look at the following table, which indicates the results of the study

Table (2)  
The mean of the correct answer%, the rank of each subskill and the mean of each level

L E V E L	L I T E R A L	No Of item	No Of subskill	Kind of Subskill	orrect Answer %	Subskill %	Rank	Level %	Mean
		1	1	Recognition	68	50	4	53.11	4.71
2		Of general word	32						
3	2	Recognition	40	58	1				
4		Of general meaning	72						
5		sequence	63						
6	3		68	51.5	3				
7			35						
8	4	Cause and effect	44	50	4				
9			56						
I N F E R E N T I A L	5	The main idea	52	53.5					
			55						
	6	Figurative language	56	48	5	40.75	2.0		
11		40							
12									
		13							



Concerning the results, the reason for that attributed to the different factors. Some of these factors are :

1- The students deal with the subskills of the literal comprehension in their textbooks more than the subskills of the inferential level, such as ;the meaning of the words, sentences, and sequence of the events.

2- The textbooks of the students in the secondary schools emphasize on the general meaning of words and sentences, and the main idea more than the other subskills especially in reading and listening comprehension, which is present in the literal level.

3- Literal level demands less mental activity from listener than the inferential level.

4- The students` lack of training in listening comprehension which needs a high mental ability from the reader and other skills.

5- The figurative language subskill indicates the lowest rank in the test due to rare use of this stage, although it is important to improve the ability of the student`s mental comprehension.

6- Although the "main idea" subskill is present in the inferential level, this subskill indicates the second rank in the test which percentage of (53.5). This high achievement is due to the fact that the students used to answer like these questions in this stage.

The results show that the students are more capable of answering the literal level than the inferential level.

(Table 3)

The Mean , and the Standard Deviation ton the literal level , and inferential level, and the Mean with Standard Deviation of the test.

level					
Literal level				Inferential level	
Recognition Of general meaning Of word	Recognition of General meaning Of sentence	sequence	Cause and effect	Main idea	Figurative language
S.d 9.7	0.90	0.77	0.74	0.74	0.77
X 1.31	1.02 1.74		1.0	1.03	0.95
Mean of level	4.71			2.0	
Mean of the test		6.84			



To find out whether there is significant difference among these subskills, the researcher used One Way-Varian Analysis classification.

The following table indicates how the researcher calculates the way by using the One Way-Varian Analysis to obtain the results of the variance of the differences among the subskills.

(Table 4)

The process to calculate the way by using the One Way-Varian Analysis to obtain the result of the variance of the difference among the subskills of the Literal Level

Subskills	general meaning Of words	general meaning of sentences	sequence	C.E	
N	100	100	100	100	
Sum of Correct Answer(T)	99	173	103	99	N=400
Mean (x)	1.31	1,74	1.02	1.0	
Sum squares ( $\sum x^2$ )	149	376		162	
(T) ---	98.01	299.29	106.09	98.0	
n					
Sum of Squares (s.s)					
Between group	601.4-561.79=39.71				
Within group	843- 601.4 = 241.6				
Total	843 – 561.69 =281.31				

$$N=400$$

$$(T)/N=561.69$$

$$\sum x =843$$

$$(T)$$

$$----- = 601.4$$

$$n$$

This achievement leads the researcher to reveal that the students record a percentage of more than fifty in two levels, except one subskill



which is figurative language that registers a mean value of (48) of the inferential level

Concerning the subskills of the literal level, it reveals that there is a significant difference among the subskills with the percentage and statistical procedures.

Concerning the second aim of the study, which is "investigating the type of problem that impede efficient teaching and learning of listening." during the test of the study, the researcher found that a basic problems that impede efficient teaching and learning of listening are:

To improve aural comprehension is to spend sufficient time practicing listening, but the fifteen listening comprehension passage which are limited to the 4th year secondary school, and twelfth passage to the 5th year secondary school, which are limited in Teacher's Guide don't comprise new structure , and very few new vocabulary.

2. There is no motivation to the students to pleasure, interest , and growing confidence at being able to understand the spoken language without reference to the written form.

3. The listener can't control how quickly a speaker speaks, especially when the speaker is native speaker in English.

4. The technical problem of making good quality listening, to enable students to listen to native speaker .

## 9. Conclusions

In the light of the results of the test, it is necessary to mention the following conclusions :

1- The results indicate that the students have answer the literal level better than the inferential level.

2- The results show that the students at secondary schools are deficient in comprehending spoken English language.

3- T-test for dependent sample indicates that there are significant differences among the subskills of the literal level.

## 10. Recommendations

Regarding to the third aim of the study , and in light of the results ,it is essential to recommend the following :

1- The researcher recommends to consider listening comprehension study in secondary schools stage as areal lesson, not a neglected one.

2- Introducing realistic and enjoyable passage to give the students some realism lessons to listen, because they want to equip them with the cope with listening in real life, and to improve their ability to this skill.



3-The time for teaching listening comprehension passages , and the time to teach these passages , should be increased more than the present limitation in each year.

## 11.Suggestions

The researcher suggests that the listening comprehension skill must be consider as an original skill among the other activities in the textbooks to the secondary school students , nor neglected as it is now.

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