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A Synchronous Study of Listening Awareness of Students of Tertiary Institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study examined listening awareness of students of higher institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. Since the impression that listening is acquired naturally has been found to be erroneous particularly in English as a Second Language (ESL) environment, the study tries to situate listening awareness movement on the Nigeria context. This becomes imperative considering a near entirely aural knowledge delivery context through ESL in the country's higher education system. To determine required pedagogical students' needs, enhance critical thinking, ESL learning, academic performance and impactful education, the study inquest into the listening awareness of students with 207 participants drawn from 8 tertiary institutions. Questionnaire was used to collate data and the reliability of the instrument was determined in a split half pilot testing on two institutions not involved in the study yielded an index of 0.82 when analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation, which showed its reliability. Data analyzed reveal that students generally have awareness of listening, but disagree that listening topics are uninteresting and that listening do not need to be taught. The study, however found no significance difference in the listening awareness of students based on gender, courses of study and differences in the institutions they attend. It is therefore recommended that teachers of the Use of English should be retrained on current strategies of teaching listening and curriculum agencies should introduce and emphasize listening teaching from the lower school level to make education the means of national development.

Key words: Listening awareness, Critical thinking, Language learning, Academic performance, Functional education

Introduction

How much of listening do you know?

Listening, the Cinderella skill that is constantly overlooked among its siblings (other language skills) goes beyond just hearing words. It is an active procedure through which individual receives and constructs meaning from, and reacts to spoken and non-verbal information. Generally, the neglect listening has suffered in terms of research, teaching and in discourse has made the global attention on the naturally first language skill note worthy because we listen twice the time used in speaking (Morley, 1991), or more than 40% of our communication is devoted to listening (Gilman & Mordy 1984; Miller, 2003; Vandergrift, 2002). There has been the erroneous perception that listening naturally comes up in every child, which has been proved otherwise by experiences as a teacher, especially, of English as a Second Language (henceforth referred to as L2).

The thrust of this study therefore is to investigate listening awareness profile among students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. This is carried out with a view to determine what background instructional knowledge students have of listening; their impression on listening teaching; students' mental disposition while listening; and relatedness of listening to L2 learning and critical thinking among others.

Spivey and Cuthbert (2006) view listening as a major learning skill which is central to successful studentship. This view seems to be informed by the fact that students in school settings receive majority of their knowledge through lectures and discussions. A careful observation of the activity that constitutes listening has shown that although listening is a receptive skill, it demands considerable activity to scoop the right meaning of tone, pitches and patterns in which words have been strung together in oral communication on one hand; on the other hand, of acts like facial expression, appearance and such non-verbal acts which go with oral input. Holden (2004) emphasizes that making meaning from oral source is an active process in which the listener has to discriminate among sounds, grasp words and grammar, decipher intonation and other supra-segmental clues, and retains the basis of

information obtained for a long time to interpret it in the milieu where the exchange takes place.

Rost (1990) hinges his discourse of listening on cognitive science that one constructs rather than receives meaning. He draws from the relevance theory of Sperber and Wilson (1986) that verbal communication is essentially a combined process that includes **ostension** (articulation of signals by a speaker) and **inference** (situating those signals in context by a listener). Pearson and Fielding (1983) describing listening comprehension, submit that it is impossible to make sense out of auditory messages in a language until there is a reasonable command over key components of that language. Olaofe (1997) likens listening comprehension to a form of meaning scooping that does not lead to 'minimal or partial understanding, complete misunderstanding, misinterpretation, misquotation or ambiguity, communicative ineffectiveness, confusion and message abandonment.'(p.14).

In second language, learning listening as a receptive skill demands extra pedagogical efforts to make it effective due to its peculiar nature. These peculiarities arise from varied listening texts, learners' interest, speed and accent of speaker, background knowledge, and text familiarity or otherwise among others.

Kwara State is one of the 36 federating States and the Federal capital territory (FCT) located in the North central region of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Kwara State was created in 1967 and as constituted presently, there are seventeen tertiary institutions in the State made up of five Universities, three Polytechnics, five Colleges of Education, and four Nursing/ Health Technology institutions

Critical thinking entails a reasonable mental process focused on determining the worth of information gathered from observation, experience, or communication as basis to form an opinion, or take action (Hashemi & Zabihi, 2012). Attaining listening comprehension involves active application of critical thinking that undoubtedly includes the following:

- raising fundamental questions, formulating them clearly and specifically;
- gathering and assessing relevant information using abstract idea to interpret it effectively;
- coming to well-reasoned conclusion and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standard;
- thinking open-mindedly within alternative systems, recognising and assessing, as might be necessary, their hypotheses, inferences and consequences; and
- effectively communicating with others in finding solution to emerging problems (www.criticalthinking.org).

Critical thinking offers an effective listener the ability to listen discriminatorily rather than gullibly. Critical thinking equips the listener with the skills to discern what is meant by the words used, determine the objective of the speech, and what has been left out in the speech. As Chafee (1988) submits, critical thinking captures "our active, purposeful, and organized efforts to make sense of our world by carefully examining our thinking, and the thinking of others, in order to clarify and improve our understanding" (p. 29). Critical thinking also includes such fundamental preoccupations as interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation (Facione, 2006). From an educational consideration, a general feeling subsists that it is of importance to raise students with critical awareness in schools and through classroom instructions that has proven notable links between critical thinking and academic performance (e.g., Frisby, 1992; Giancarlo & Facione, 2001; Yeh & Wu, 1992). Leeser (2004) reports that calculated pauses in text on familiar topics did not positively affect listening comprehension, while Kiany and Shiraniry (2002) experimented with dictation as a device for improving listening comprehension of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners and their finding showed that the strategy (dictation) has limited advantage in inculcating basic bottom-up awareness in beginner-learners.

On learning English as Nigeria's official language, which requires a combination of social, political and survival instinct, the

obligation of inculcating critical thinking among learners is more compelling, and has to be emphasized by all stakeholders from curriculum planners to the English teachers.

The theoretical framework for this study is metacognition theory, which describes the mental perception of one's thinking (Paris & Winograd, 1990). They posit that metacognition is the knowledge about cognitive states and processes and control of major aspects of metacognition. To Paris and Winograd (1990), the term involves an impression of the mind which align with information-processing summation of 'declarative and procedural knowledge that captures two essential features of metacognition: self appraisal and self management of cognition' (P.17). Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghadtari (2006) describe self appraisal, also called static judgment as the procedure that makes the individual to evaluate her understanding or potential in imagined contexts. On the other hand, cognitive self-management empowers students to evolve varied mental reaction when solving problem.

This study used the Vandergrift et al.(2006) metacognitive knowledge, which enables the students to deplore their varied world experiences to confront knowledge appraisal tasks based on their intrinsic goals, action and experience on the task. The study's framework makes the students to respond to the items of the instrument (questionnaire) based on person knowledge (self), task knowledge and strategy knowledge. A conceptual framework guiding the study is presented thus:

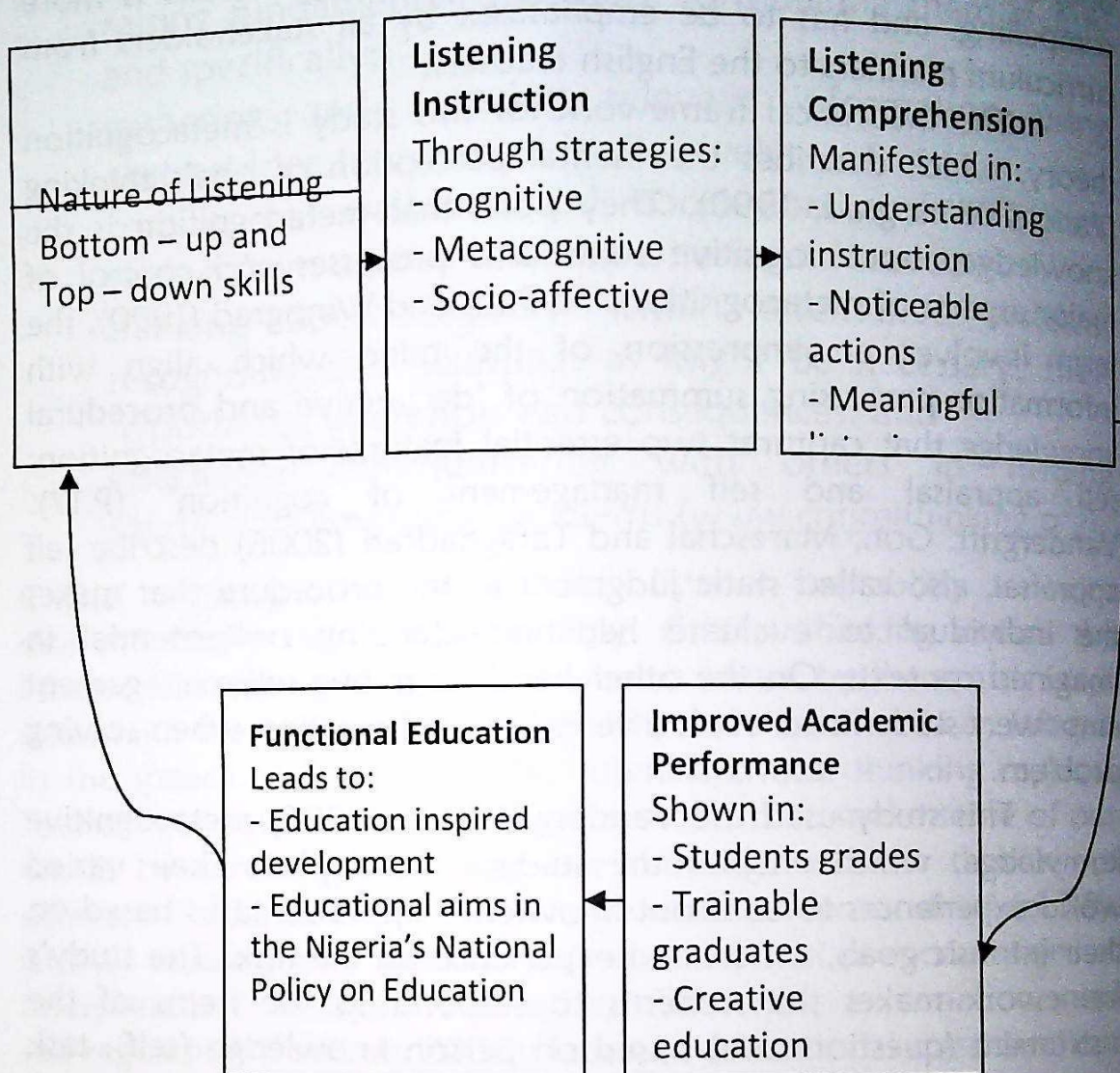


Figure 1: Researchers designed conceptual framework guiding the study.

The key segments that listening revolves around as a concept, topic of pedagogy, benefits from its mastery and out-of-school utility are succinctly captured in the boxes in Figure 1. Where dotted lines divide the main heading from the sub-headings, it imply variation in the extent of their attainment among students and when deficiency persist, the more reason the nation's education has not been able to stimulate genuine development, or resulting in a lacuna between education and development.

Research Questions

The study found answer to the research question:

1. What is the general awareness of tertiary institutions students about listening?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study:

- H₀₁: Significance difference does not exist in the general listening awareness of students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.
- H₀₂: There is no significance difference in the listening awareness of students of tertiary institutions on the basis of gender as male or female in Kwara State, Nigeria.
- H₀₃: Different courses of study of Arts and Humanities, Sciences and Technology, and Management, Business and Social Sciences have no significance difference in the listening awareness of students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.
- H₀₄: Significance difference does not exist in the listening awareness of students based on the differences in the tertiary institutions they attend in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Procedures

The study is a survey type, which examined in harmonized pattern the listening awareness of students of different tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria. Population for the study consisted of all students in their 200 level of study on admission in the tertiary institutions in the State. 6 tertiary institutions were chosen for the study: 2 Universities; 2 Polytechnics; 2 Colleges of Education; and 1 School of Nursing and 1 College of Health Technology. Quota sampling technique was used in selecting 207 participants for the study spread across all the different courses broadly grouped into three as Sciences and Technology, Arts and Humanities, Management, Business and Social Sciences.

Instrument for the study was a researcher designed questionnaire structured in likert scale 4-1 rating to generate response from the participants. The instrument was trial tested in a split-half pilot at Al-Hikmah University and College of Education, both in Ilorin. The two institutions were not involved in the main study and the data obtained was subjected to Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient with 0.82 index, which showed the

instrument was reliable. Collated data was analyzed using standard deviation, Mean, t-test and ANOVA statistical instruments.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the general awareness of tertiary institution students about listening?

Table 1: Mean ($\bar{x}$) and Standard deviation (SD) ratings on the general awareness of students about listening

S/N	Items	$\bar{x}$	SD	Decision
1.	Generally, I am aware of what listening entails.	3.4	0.79	Okay
2.	Specifically, I was taught listening at the primary school level.	2.98	0.83	Okay
3.	I was taught topics on listening at the secondary school level.	2.92	0.93	Okay
4.	Topics on listening are quite uninteresting in the class.	2.44	1.05	Not okay
5.	My English teacher at the secondary school skipped listening in the understanding that every normal student can listen.	2.69	0.98	Okay
6	I do not believe there is any need to teach me listening.	2.22	0.99	Not okay
7.	Listening is only very needful during lessons on sounds of English.	2.54	1.09	Okay
8.	Listening problem occur when the topic of the lesson is not interesting.	2.91	0.98	Okay
9.	In most cases, I am thinking of my reply when I am listening.	3.14	0.81	Okay
10.	When I listen well, it enables me to anticipate what next the speaker would say.	3.44	0.67	Okay
11.	Listening well has helped on my learning of the English language.	3.33	0.78	Okay
12.	Listening well stimulates critical thinking in me during and after lesson.	3.31	0.91	Okay
13.	I listen very well when a task is tied to my listening like having to take notes, write summary, or answer questions from the talk.	3.14	0.91	Okay
14.	Each time I listen well, it enables me to reflect on the various possible interpretations and applications of what I listened to.	3.43	0.63	Okay

15.	I believe listening helps ability to speak good English.	3.44	0.73	Okay
16.	Listening well can positively influence writing and reading very effectively.	3.47	0.68	Okay
17.	I really wish to experience special instructions on listening.	3.20	0.78	Okay
18.	Students' successes in academic endeavours depend very much on extent of listening competence.	3.21	0.83	Okay
19.	I strongly call for the teaching of listening at every level of education just as being done for speaking, writing and reading.	3.39	0.70	Okay

Criterion Mean ($\bar{x}$) 2.50

Table 1 shows that students' listening awareness was quite impressive as individual item's Mean scores were greater than the criterion Mean of 2.50, except the Mean scores for items 4 and 6 which were 2.44 and 2.22 respectively. The implication is that general awareness of tertiary institutions' students about listening is quite okay.

Research Hypothesis 1: There is no significance difference in the listening awareness of students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State on the basis of gender as male and female.

Table 2: t-test analysis on male and female students' listening awareness

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	SD Error	t	Sig. t	**Sig.	Decision
Female	103	58.70	554	0.54	0.15	0.88	0.05	H ₀₁ Accepted
Male	104	58.58	6/04	0.59				

df = 205

Results in Table 2 indicate that the calculated the calculated significant value 0.88 is greater than alpha level 0.05 ($P > 0.05$). The hypothesis is therefore accepted. This means that male and female students do not differ in their listening awareness.

Research Hypothesis 2: Differences in courses of study have no significance difference in listening awareness of students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 3: ANOVA analysis on influence of different courses of study on students' listening awareness

Gender	Df	SS	MS	F	Sig.F	**Sig.	Decision
Between groups	2	133.95	66.97	2.02	0.13	0.05	H ₀₂ Accepted
Within groups	204	6757.87	33.12				
Total	206	6891.82					

The result in Table 3 show that the calculated significant level (sig F) is 0.13 which is greater than the alpha level 0.05, therefore the null hypothesis two is accepted. This indicates that students' listening awareness is not affected by their different courses of study.

Research Hypothesis 3: Significance difference does not exist in the listening awareness of students based on the differences in the tertiary institution they attend in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Table 4: ANOVA analysis on institution types' influence on students' listening awareness

Gender	df	SS	MS	F	Sig.F	**Sig.	Decision
Between groups	3	104.06	34.68	1.037	0.377	0.05	H ₀₃ Accepted
Within groups	203	6787.75	33.43				
Total	206	6891.82					

The results in Table 4 show that the calculated significant level is 0.377, which is greater than the alpha level 0.05 ($P > 0.05$), therefore hypothesis three is accepted. It thus implies that differences in the tertiary institution students attend do not affect their listening awareness across tertiary institutions in Kwara State.

It has been pointed out that listening re-awakening is like a new movement globally (Vandergrift, 2007; Vandergrift et al, 2006, Passmore, 2011; Iliyas, 2014), which is just gaining attention with regards to its teaching and research, the agencies regulating quality in the academic activities of tertiary institutions in Nigeria (National Universities Commission, NUC; National Board for Technical Education, NBTE; and the National Commission for Colleges of Education, NCCE) have introduced in their latest editions of minimum academic requirements listening teaching in their General Studies' (Use of English) contents. This familiarity of students with different aspects of listening as just been taught in the compulsory Use of English programme of all the institutions justifies the outcome of this study as reflected in the hypothesis tested. The answers to the research question as shown in Table 1 support the view that listening has been attracting inadequate pedagogical attention (Iliyas, 2014), and that students in ESL listen inappropriately (Kline, 1996). Also, the finding of this study further re-affirms the views of Rost (1994) and Vandergrift (1999) that learning to listen is a core aspect of learning the language (English). However, this study found that students take listening as more useful in learning the sounds of English and the participants are agreed listening greatly stimulate critical thinking. Thus, they hold effective listening and critical thinking as very instrumental to academic performance and attainment of adaptable functional education.

Recommendations and Conclusion

From the outcome of the data analyzed for this study and the implications so derived from it, the following recommendations are thus suggested:

Special on-the-job training should be periodically organised for teachers of the Use of English especially and all the other academic staff to update them on the very best approach to make students better understand the listening for its importance to the purpose of education as a whole.

Students should be made to cultivate the appropriate listening habit to guide against prevalent inadequacies in their listening.

The Nigeria Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) responsible for drawing curriculum for the Primary and Secondary school level should urgently include listening and emphasize it is taught at those levels to adequately prepare the students to further learn and use listening at the tertiary level for educational accomplishment.

Efforts should be made to tie meaningful tasks like note-taking, performance and gradable activities to listening teaching so that the extent of success of the learning can be determined within a short while.

It is suggested however, that a follow-up study be carried out on the same subjects involved in this study to practically evaluate the degree of their mastery of listening as a tool for learning.

This study has investigated the listening awareness of students of tertiary institutions in Kwara State, Nigeria and it has found prevalence of inappropriate listening habits, lack of adequate background teaching of listening at the lower schools' level as some of the constraints to effective listening. Although students were found to be very well aware of listening, suggestions are offered on the possible remedy to the identified constraints so that the very essence of education for better academic performance and translatable knowledge for national development can be attained. Mention is as well made of possible way of making the research a continuum for its benefits to the educational system.

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