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Perceptions of ESL Learners of Teaching Listening Skill at Intermediate Level in the Context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Abstract:

The present research study investigates the problems in teaching English listening skill to the students of English as a second language at the Intermediate level in Tehsil Batkhela, District Malakand. The study was carried out in ten government degree colleges of District Malakand, Tehsil Batkhela. A quantitative approach was adopted to get reliable results for which two hundred students among the whole population of intermediate level were selected. Data was collected through an open-ended questionnaire. Findings of the study revealed that there were shortcomings in the teaching methods of the teachers for teaching English listening skill. Moreover, it was also observed that students were not satisfied with the methods used by their teachers. Furthermore, the lack of utilization of supplementary materials was also one of the problems in teaching English in the ESL context. The study recommends that ESL teachers should be properly and frequently trained in teaching listening skill.

Key Words:

ESL, Listening Skill, Proficiency, Supplementary Materials, Teaching Techniques, Methods

Introduction

Shortcomings have been observed in the teaching methods teachers usually use for teaching listening skill. These weaknesses result in poor proficiency of students, which thwart their creativity and critical thinking. Proper teaching techniques need to be incorporated in teaching methodologies at the intermediate level for teaching listening skill. In the context of second language learning, [Carrasquillo \(2013\)](#) believes that a child begins to learn a language with the help of the ear. When a child starts talking, they simply do it by hearing the sounds their parents utter. Normal children are excellent imitators of their parents and family members while undertaking conversation. By doing so, they produce the speech sound and develop a faculty to communicate in the society which lasts till their death. On the other hand, the congenitally deaf child cannot give attention to those sounds and thus, remains unable to speak.

A child learns any language until five years of age and grows in an environment where its mother tongue is spoken. Even the parent's age of the child and their linguistic background makes no difference. However, over time, the capability of imitating becomes lesser, and a lot of language difficulties are being felt by adults when they learn it after puberty. Some people are more intelligent than others, in the sense that they can easily learn a language without any difficulties, but it is a rare case. ESL learners encounter several problems in learning a foreign language. The major among them are; the influence of the mother tongue, the non-phonetic characters of English, ignorance of the correct acoustic quality of the English sounds, the substitution of the English sound of

the more or less corresponding sounds of mother tongue, ignorance of the proper usage of stress, length and intonation ([Carrasquillo, 2013](#)). However, this study attempts to look into the problems faced by English as second language (ESL) learners in developing their English listening skill.

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Literature Review

Language is one of the most important means of communication among people. It is difficult to think of a society without the use of language. It whets people thought and control the entire activities of one's life for what it is a carrier of culture and civilization (Bollinger, 1968). In the case of the mother tongue, the child easily learns it because of the appropriate setting and by the great amount of exposure to the language. Learning a second language has been important for achievement in career yet the exposure to the second language in most cases is limited (Bose, 2007).

In the Indo-Pak subcontinent, the English language was introduced for the first time in the 16th century by the British rulers (Mehboob, 2009). Similarly, the English language gained social, political, and the official status during British rule. Further, in this rule, it spreads for the first time due to the social as well as the economic mobility associated with this language (Mahboob, 2009; Rahman, 1996). At that time, people learned the English language with the help of formal education. Mahboob (2009) is of the view that since the creation of Pakistan in 1947, the English language plays an important role in the official, economic and educational spheres, although Urdu is the national language. Furthermore, English had got its high status in Pakistan when the founder of the nation, as well as the first governor-general of Pakistan, delivered his speech in English to the first constituent assembly at the time of independence (Mahboob, 2009).

Kirkpatrick (2007) describes that according to Kachru (1985), English is a traditional term for the speakers who are residents in countries including Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom where English has been spoken as a native language. The people speaking in the same environment are called English speakers. English as a Second Language (ESL) refers to as one of the special approaches which have been designed for the non-native learners of English instead of English as their second language. They include people belonging to different parts of the world that have different languages other than English as their native language. Some of the English as the second language (ESL) learners might have a short amount of schooling in their first languages. Others may be efficient in English speaking due to their exposure to English speaking countries for many years. This can also be possible that many learners may have started their higher education in foreign countries, and thus, they may be fluent in English speaking, but it does not guarantee their proficiency in English (Kirkpatrick 2007, p. 28).

Moreover, in order to teach English as a foreign (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL), it will be a great challenge for the instructor because the instructor wants to justify to the learners that all of them would be able to learn something in a classroom even though if they belong to different abilities while learning the English language. Some factors may affect the abilities of the learners so that they can learn or acquire a new language. They are; the attitudes of the learners about their studies, self-confidence, their home environment, knowledge, academic background and the country where they live. Nowadays, ESL teachers all over the world give preference to a communicative way of teaching (Peyyala, 2013).

In addition, speaking and writing are productive (encoding) skills of any language, whereas reading and listening are termed as receptive (decoding) skills. In Pakistani educational institutions, the focus is laid on writing and reading skill. The reason for this is the educational system of the country, which is centered on taking the examination. All the examinations are written ones where the abilities of the students are gauged on the yardstick of their written skill. Speaking and listening skills are almost ignored because it takes active involvement of the teachers and practice of the students. Owing to the neglected mentorship of the instructors, speaking and listening skills are neglected. However, this study investigates the methodologies used by teachers for teaching listening skill. Additionally, the study attempts to find out the perceptions of the students towards the way their teachers teach them English. This study has the following research questions to answer.

Research Objectives

- To find out which methodologies teachers utilize for teaching listening skill at the intermediate level

- To know students' perceptions of the teaching methodologies used for teaching them English listening skill

Research Questions

- Which methodologies do teachers utilize for teaching listening skill at the intermediate level?
- What are students' perceptions of the teaching methodologies used for teaching them English listening skill?

Methodology

The present study was conducted by following the quantitative research approach. Quantitative research serves for the quantity; that is, how much a problem is occurring in a set-up. It gives the statistical data, figures, charts, diagrams and percentage. Data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire from the respondents, who were students of the intermediate level. Further, the detail of the data is presented in tables through simple percentages.

Moreover, the present research study was carried out in ten government degree colleges of District Malakand, Tehsil Batkhela. Data were collected from ten public institutions. In these institutions, at the intermediate level, the numbers of students are two thousand three hundred and eighty-four (2384). In the said institutions, two hundred students were selected for the research study, which is 8.5 percent of the total population. The students were selected randomly through stratified random sampling by applying the following formula.

$$\text{Formula} = \frac{\text{Total Population} \times \text{Total Target Population}}{\text{Total population}}$$

The following table shows the selection of institutions by following the aforementioned formula.

Table 1. The stratum of Students (1st year)

Colleges	Total Population (First Year)	Target Population (First Year)
College 1	358	26
College 2	119	9
College 3	300	22
College 4	150	11
College 5	120	9
College 6	93	7
College 7	92	7
College 8	25	2
College 9	05	1
College 10	75	6
TC: 10	T.P: 1337	TP: 100

Table 2. The stratum of Students (2nd Year)

Colleges	Total population (Second year)	Target population (second year)
College 1	229	22
College 2	77	7
College 3	250	24
College 4	150	14
College 5	100	10
College 6	88	8

College 7	58	6
College 8	15	1
College 9	5	1
College 10	75	7
TC: 10	T.P: 1047	TTP: 100

Findings and Discussion

This study was conducted in Tehsil Batkhela with the purpose to identify the weak areas of teaching listening skill at the intermediate level. After going through the process of data collection, the researchers came up with major findings, which are presented in percentage in the tables below;

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of the Teaching Methodologies used for Teaching Listening Skill

S. No	Items				
1	What do you think about the methodology of teachers while teaching listening skill?	Interesting (14%)	Incomprehensible (21%)	Boring (65%)	
2	Which language is the medium of instruction in the classes?	English (24%)	Pashto (15%)	Mixed Language (61%)	
3	Is listening skill effective for successful communication in the classes?	More Effective (65%)	Effectiv (30%)	Less Effective (5%)	
4	How should English listening skill be incorporated into your classrooms?	Videos (27%)	Listening Activities (33%)	Speaking (40%)	
5	Is English listening skill practiced in the classroom environment?	Yes (11%)	No (82%)	Neutral (7%)	
6	What do you think, what is the effective way of teaching English listening skill?	Through Debates (51%)	Through Presentation (10%)	Through discussion (39%)	Pair
7	Are you satisfied with the teaching methods of your teachers?	Yes (50%)	No (40%)	Neutral (10%)	
8	Does listening have importance in language learning?	Yes (75%)	No (16%)	Neutral (9%)	
9	Can a teacher teach listening from books?	Yes (50%)	No (38%)	Neutral (12%)	
10	Is it appropriate to teach listening skill during the classes running session?	Yes (65%)	No (25%)	Neutral (10%)	
11	Does your course help you reach the goal of improving listening skill?	Yes (25%)	No (70%)	Neutral (5%)	
12	Have you been taught listening strategies during your course?	Yes (40%)	No (45%)	Neutral (15%)	
13	How effective were the listening explanations?	More Effective (55%)	Effective (25%)	Less Effective (20%)	
14	How effective were the listening activities?	More Effective (20%)	Effective (76%)	Less Effective (4%)	
15	How effective were the listening materials?	More Effective (5%)	Effective (30%)	Less Effective (65%)	

Analysis

In response to the first question posed, fourteen percent of the aggregate respondents shared their ideas that the teaching methodology of teaching listening skill is interesting. While twenty-one percent of the students responded negatively, they said that the method used by the teachers is incomprehensible. Lastly, the large

number of students, which encompasses sixty-five percent of them, responded that the method used for teaching listening skill by the teachers makes the students bore. The second question was meant to know about the teaching methodology of the teachers concerned. Twenty-four percent of the students answered that listening skill is taught through the English language. Fifteen percent of the students opined that it is taught through the Pashto language while sixty-one percent of the students suggested that listening skill is taught through mixed languages. In response to the third question, sixty-five percent of the students answered that English listening skill is more effective; thirty percent responded that it is effective, while five percent replied that it is less effective. In the fourth question, twenty-seven percent of the students were highly enthusiastic about the use of videos in the classes for the purpose of teaching listening skill, thirty-three percent of the students responded that listening activities be incorporated whereas, forty percent said that through speaking in the classroom English listening skill can be improved. In response to the fifth question, eleven percent of the students responded that listening activities are practiced in the classroom, eighty-two percent students answered in negative while seven percent students remained neutral to this question.

Further, replying to the sixth question, fifty-one percent of students were of the view that English listening skill could be taught through debates, ten percent of students opined that it should be taught through presentations, while thirty-nine percent students were of the view that English listening should be taught through pair discussion. In response to the seventh question, fifty percent of the students were satisfied with the teaching methods of their teachers; forty percent answered in negative while ten percent of students remained neutral. In response to the eighth question, seventy-five percent of students responded in affirmative, sixteen percent in negative, while nine percent of students remained neutral. In the ninth question, fifty percent of students answered in affirmative, thirty-eight percent remained negative, and twelve percent students responded in neutral. The tenth question was answered by sixty-five percent of students in affirmative, twenty-five percent responded in negative, and ten percent of students remained neutral to the question.

Moreover, in the eleventh question, the students were asked about the appropriateness of their English course for improving listening skill. In response to the question, twenty-five percent of students answered in affirmative, seventy percent students answered negatively, while five percent students remained neutral as they were not aware or did not want to comment on the question. In the twelfth question, the students were asked about the classes whether there is any implementation of listening activities during the course. In answer to the twelfth question, forty percent of the respondents replied 'yes', forty-five percent students said 'no' while fifteen percent students remained neutral. By replying to the thirteenth question, fifty-five percent of students said that the listening explanation was more effective; twenty-five percent of students opined that the explanation was effective, whereas twenty percent responded that it was less effective. In response to the fourteenth question, twenty percent said more effective, seventy-six percent believed that it was effective, and four percent said less effective. And finally, the answers to the last question were; five percent said more effective, thirty percent suggested it effective, and sixty-five percent said less effective.

Discussion

The collected data was categorized as dealing with listening skill at an intermediate level, which answers the research questions of the study. The research questions have been answered, and the researchers have achieved the purpose of it. The outcome of collecting information was analyzed at quantitative scales by applying a simple percentage method. The findings of this study revealed that there are loopholes in teaching methods while English teaching listening skill to students at an intermediate level. In the light of the data analyzed, it was observed that students were not satisfied with the teaching methods of their teachers. Students opined that they felt bored inside the classroom and that there was no interaction among the students during class.

Moreover, another issue that was brought into notice was neglecting the utilization of supplementary materials at the college level. This means the materials which are used in the classroom environment such as

charts, handouts, pictures or the use of a projector (multimedia) were avoided for teaching listening skill. This made the teaching and learning process a deficient one as the learners were not provided materials to concretize the abstract information about a topic. Similar findings appeared from [Pun \(2013\)](#), who investigated how the teachers and students of English are benefitted from using a multimedia projector in the classroom as the teaching of listening skill is not possible without using multimedia. He highlights that the quick expansion of modern technology as multimedia that refers to computer-based applications allows teachers and students to share their views and ideas. It is a combination of text, graphics, animation, video and sound. The utilization of multimedia technology has created a favorable situation in increasing interest in English language teaching and learning ([Pun, 2013](#)). It was also noticed that the least use of supplementary materials is made in colleges at an intermediate level. Besides, one of the basic elements of the course of intermediate level is to nurture students' competency in listening skill which is not attained in the classes. The reason for this is not utilizing secondary teaching materials, as mentioned earlier. The poor listening skill of the students badly affects the speaking skill of the students as well. Moreover, the pronunciation and intonation, which are to some extent dependent on the listening skill, are also not allowed to properly mature and improve.

So far, the researcher, through the analysis of the data collected, came to an understanding of the cardinal issues which impede students' learning. It is to mention here that this data was collected from the students of intermediate level. It reveals that the students were found disheartened about their English Subject and their course teachers. It was found that there is no or least concept of teaching listening skills at an intermediate level. The findings of the present study also resemble that of Memon (2000), who describes the scenario and real picture of Pakistani public school language classroom. In his view, "the teachers tend to see their role in terms of a narrow view of teaching as 'instructor' or 'director'. He further states, "Consequently, their students may adopt a 'surface approach to learning" (p.41). Several other pieces of evidences show that language is learned for the sake of passing examinations, not for developing skills such as listening. Teachers mostly practice traditional teaching methods which focus on reading and writing skills, but productive skills such as speaking are given no importance. As a result, this skill is neglected; as Hodson (2006) pointed out, "the explicit teaching of listening has been neglected" (p. 2).

Hence, English listening skill is not properly taught in these colleges. The teachers are not properly trained in teaching listening skill. Moreover, the students are provided opportunities to interact in the target language. Further, the students are not afforded opportunities to have access to native talk through the use of technology. YouTube could be one of the important tools to utilize in this regard. In addition to this, there is no use of other secondary teaching materials which could easily be accessed to like charts, diagrams and so on.

Conclusion

The present study was conducted to identify various loopholes in teaching methods of English as a second language at an intermediate level in District Malakand, Tehsil Batkhela. Likewise, it was also aimed to identify the factors which make hurdles in students' learning, especially of the listening skill. The data in the present study were collected from ten different degree colleges at an intermediate level in Tehsil Batkhela. The sampling technique was stratified random sampling for data collection. The total number of students in the selected colleges was two thousand three hundred and eighty-four. Two hundred students were selected through a proportionate formula which makes 8.5 per cent of the total population. The researchers came to the conclusion that listening skill is not taught properly at the intermediate level. Further, the researchers have come to know through the process of data collection and analysis that students are taught from various guides available in the markets; these guides and key books compel the students to mug up. The learners repeat the sentences parrot-fashion; hence, the creativity of the learners is not nurtured. The students develop just the skill of rote learning instead of creative learning.

In the present study, it was deduced from the data collected that the students are ambivalent regarding the listening skill in the classes at an intermediate level. The methods in vogue for teaching English listening

skill at the intermediate level do not fulfil the needs of the students. Besides creating knowledge and providing skilled manpower, teachers play a pivotal role in solving the pressing issues of the students. However, the availability of open-handed methods and instructions is the bottleneck for the successful learning of English listening skill for the students. It was discovered through the quest of present work that the classes are solely teacher-centred where the students do not get proper or no attention for participation in the classes, which hinders their creativity. Taking feedback from the students is equally important to teachers' mentorship. The purpose behind it is about the aspiration and goals of the students rather than creating a rat race in the classes. Thus, a moderate way of teaching is necessary, which provides opportunities to the students to participate in the classes. That is how students' competence will develop in terms of learning the know-how of English listening skill.

Moreover, it was investigated that the students were dispassionate during the classes. The reason for their impassive attitude was a monotonous routine of teaching in the classes. It is further explored that the students face a lack of opportunities for developing basic language skills. There are no-cost materials which the teachers can easily utilize in the classroom environment, and the students get benefitted from them. The teachers can easily initiate group work, pair work, and presentation and role-play activities to enhance the listening skill. Apart from that, the students were frowned upon for being part of the classes in which the contents are monotonous and boring for them. In fact, they are not interested in these contents; now, in such circumstances, the teachers ought to follow some essential tools for motivating students positively. The students demand contents for the classes that are easy to understand in which they do not have to sift out the useful information. The teachers need to motivate their learners and make the content enjoyable for them.

Finally, it was investigated that the students were not satisfied with the practice of English listening skill in the classes. They were not certain about the activities which enhance the listening skill. Their focus was only centered upon reading books and writing content(s). This type of multitasking proved to be a hurdle in the way of improving creative and critical skills. In their responses, they remained negative when they discussed the efficacy of listening activities in the classes. They asserted that the classes were completely devoid of activities that promote English listening skill.

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