

Listening in the Wider Context: An Indication of Integrating Assessment into Listening Instruction



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ABSTRACT: For three main reasons, assessment is a crucial part of 'Language Teaching'. First and foremost, the assessment offers teachers reliable foundation and continuing points for planning and developing lessons. Next, the assessment delivers instant feedback to gauge learners' progress and enables students to establish their goals. Additionally, assessment contributes to program evaluation, ensuring the alignment of curriculum and teacher growth. Within the realm of listening, assessment holds significant significance as it fosters learner confidence by providing necessary feedback and facilitates the design of instruction that addresses both learners' apparent weaknesses and curriculum gaps. This paper provide direction on how to incorporate assessment into listening instruction. It addresses various aspects of issues, such as various listening assessment methods, elements that affect performance and difficulty, the use of oral interviews to evaluate effective listening, the use of descriptive scales to represent levels of listening proficiency and the implementation of portfolio-style listening assessments.

KEYWORD: Assessment, Listening instruction, Curriculum, Descriptive scales, Portfolio-style assessments

I. INTRODUCTION

All four skill sets i.e., Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing (LSRW), grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are included in most English as foreign language (EFL) and English as second language (ESL) instructions, most notably in general English classes, in varied patterns and ratios. 'Speak-listen-speak, speak-read-write-speak, read-vocabulary-speak, and grammar-grammar-grammar' are all possible class formats. Sometimes, a single skill or facet of the language may be the subject of the entire lesson. It might be appropriate to have learners write for a significant portion of the lesson, for instance, if teachers prepare their class for a written exam. In line with the former points, teaching listening is more effective when combined with other abilities and that having a balance of skills in any given lesson is desirable.

The most effective preparation for what teachers will encounter outside of the classroom comes from an integrated skills approach, which is the strongest argument and offers more variation in how language acquisition is approached. "You can't learn to write without reading, and you can't learn to speak without listening. If you want to take an exam in listening, you will almost certainly have to read some questions, write the answers, and maybe even speak about the passage you heard" (Wilson J.J, 2008).

The tasks the teacher assigns students to complete in the classroom ask for more than one skill, even in non-exam circumstances. Although listening is a vital component of any activity, some activities may place more of their attention on speaking or writing than listening. Only extended listening typically does not require the application of any other skills.

When considering integrating the skills, the distinction between a "listening lesson and listening in the lesson" must be considered. The first aims to improve only the students' listening abilities. Either explicitly or implicitly, it comprises teaching strategies and, most often, troubleshooting, which examines the problematic areas where listening is difficult. Any other benefits, such as improved grammar and vocabulary, are unintended.

In another means, the Listening ability, the only thing being stressed. The term "listening in the lesson" refers to "using a recording, listening to the teacher or other speakers explain a subject, or using the target grammar or vocabulary in context". It can also be used as a model for speaking. It will not, however, pay close attention to the art of listening. After outlining the distinctions between various lesson types, teachers should be conscious that these distinct boundaries are frequently crossed and that even non-listening sessions are bound to enhance students' listening. Learning new grammar and vocabulary helps students listen better because it expands the variety of input, they can understand. Readers learn abilities to expand their vocabulary and become more aware of discourse patterns as their inner voice "pronounces" the words as they read.

Pronunciation is likely the closest connection to all the other skills that contribute to listening. Every emphasis on pronunciation is equally an emphasis on listening. Students must understand how sounds change in connected speech—elision and assimilation to become better listeners and speakers. Listeners must be attentive to rhythm and stress patterns, typically considered

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to be pronunciation characteristics. The first syllable of over 80% of English words with multiple syllables is stressed. This understanding helps native listeners subconsciously recognise word boundaries or where words start and end. Non-native listeners might not be able to perceive this unless they have an intense passion for the English language's rhythms. The rhythms of a language are audible to humans and may even be felt even before they are born since they can perceive sound before birth. After then, it is inferred subliminally that this beat is universal. In English, stressed syllables can be up to three times longer than unstressed ones. However, in Italian and Spanish, the difference in length between stressed and unstressed syllables is only slightly noticeable. Because of this, emphasis on stress during early listening and pronunciation instruction is crucial for introducing students to the English language's rhythm. Many of the issues non-native English speakers have to comprehend native speakers have less to do with how they produce particular sounds and more to do with how they have not learned the rhythm of the language.

According to research, in order to comprehend the aural information, students must successfully employ their learning techniques and skills. Typically, these techniques are created to aid students in various academic disciplines. "By using instructional techniques as one of the most effective solutions for learners who are dealing with some learning difficulties, strategy instruction is a good answer and often vital to students' success" (Beckman, 2002; Reid & Lienemann, 2006). L2 learners are aware of the various listening aids that can enhance your ability to listen effectively. Teachers should motivate students to engage in utilising the powerful techniques described in this study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening is one of the four skills needed to learn a language, along with speaking, reading, and writing. There is no denying that listening is crucial in daily life. Despite receiving listening instruction in the classroom for many years, research has shown that students still have weak listening skills. Despite the fact that these four skills are the least addressed in the classroom, listening is the most crucial and fundamental of them all. Students generally developed these skills later than expected because of their poor attention spans and time constraints.

According to Goss (1982), Listening involves receiving what is heard, dividing it into spoken components, and attaching significance to those components. According to Thomlison and Hamouda (2013), Listening involves being able to comprehend and interpret what others are saying, which includes recognizing accents and pronunciation, understanding syntax and vocabulary, and grasping the intended meaning.

Anderson (2009) identified three stages of listening comprehension: perceptual, parsing, and utilization. During the perceptual stage, the spoken language is encoded. The parsing stage involves converting the encoded words into a mental image of their general meaning. In the final stage, utilization, the listener employs the mental image to respond correctly to the sentence heard.

"Listening comprehension is considered the heart of language learning but the most difficult skill to learn" (Farrell, 2011). Graham's research in 2006 revealed that learners feel least successful in their listening skills compared to other language-learning skills. Respondents reported needing help with the speaker's speed, picking out specific words, understanding words they had picked out or understood, their alleged lack of skill, and the challenge of listening activities. "In making students becoming a good listener, the responsibility lies on the teachers' shoulders" (Arya Doust, 2018). The minor focus resides on listening in class, according to the teachers. Yongbai (1992) outlined three causes for why this is taking place: Teachers believe teaching listening entails playing an audio file and assigning questions: Teachers contend that assessing students' progress in this area is challenging because while reading and writing skills can be observed, listening abilities are not visibly apparent; Educators think that listening abilities will follow naturally when students practise speaking. The beliefs of teachers are crucial as they shape their actions and practices in the classroom. Teaching beliefs, in the words of Basturkmen et al. (2004), are evaluations of what "should be done," "should be the case," and "is preferable" made by teachers concern on their concepts, ideas, and corpus of knowledge. To bring about positive change in the classroom, it is essential for teachers to be aware of their teaching methods, according to Utami (2016). Additionally, it can assist them in reevaluating their behaviour and choices in the classroom when they encounter student failure (Rose & Medway, 1981).

III. THE SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND FOR ASSESSMENT

The intricate listening skill includes receptive, productive, participatory, and transformative components. To evaluate listening comprehensively, we need a way to describe a person's skill that considers all these factors. The fact that listening is a mental process and cannot be easily observed by objective measurements makes it difficult to quantify.

However, these measures are always separated from the psycholinguistic processes that underlie them. "The primary means of assessing listening is therefore to observe the various language activities that the learner is engaged in while listening, and to create qualitative descriptors and quantitative measures that have an acceptable degree of validity" (O'Sullivan et al., 2002).

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Validity is an idea in which broad and specific phrases describe what is being evaluated. Creating a comprehensive, contextual model for the evaluated subject is a beginning point for considering validity. “When preparing forms of assessment and means of reporting, and making use of the results of assessment, it is important to understand the context in which the language is being learned, the goals of students in learning, and the potential social and political impact that any kind of high-stakes assessment will have on the students” (Hamp and Davies, 2006).

“The attempt to reconcile criterion-referenced assessment and construct-referenced assessment approaches has long been a source of concern in language assessment circles” (Weir, 2005; Fulchur and Davidson, 2008). A listener's general language proficiency and general comprehension skills will also be evaluated in some parts of the listening test, in addition to the listening ability. In the field of language testing, Buck et al. (1998) and Tatsuoka (2009) established the crucial overlap amid “top-level (generic) and bottom-level (skill-specific) attributes in listening”.

A. The top-level attributes (i.e., generalisable to all language skills) included:

- capability to determine what information is relevant to a given task
- the ability to use previous information to locate what you need
- the ability to identify important details even when they're not explicitly stated
- Additionally, it's important to make inferences and incorporate background knowledge into text processing, while also relying on your grammatical, lexical, and sociopragmatic knowledge

B. The bottom-level attributes (i.e., specific to listening) included:

- the ability to quickly scan through fast-spoken text in real-time
- processing information that is dense or complex
- understanding and using the emphasis placed on certain words or phrases
- recognizing and using repetition.

IV. ASSESSMENT FORMS

The assessment form encompasses the materials used in the assessment, such as audio, video, and text. It also includes the general procedures and rubric for taking the test or participating in the assessment, as well as the method used for scoring. Common types of assessment forms include the ones listed below:

- **Multiple-Choice Tests:** These assessments present students with a series of questions or statements, accompanied by audio recordings. Students choose the correct answer among several options, assessing their comprehension of main ideas, specific details, or inferential understanding.
- **Note-Taking Exercises:** In this assessment, students listen to a passage and take notes to capture key points or important details. Note-taking exercises assess listening and summarizing skills, as well as the ability to extract essential information from spoken discourse.
- **Dictation:** Dictation tests require students to transcribe a spoken passage accurately. This type of assessment assesses both listening and writing skills, as students must listen carefully and reproduce the spoken content with correct spelling and punctuation.
- **Role-Plays:** Role-playing assessments simulate real-life situations where students engage in interactive listening and speaking tasks. This type of assessment evaluates students' ability to understand and respond appropriately in communicative contexts, promoting authentic language use.
- **Information-Gap Activities:** Information-gap activities involve pairs or groups of students who possess different pieces of information. They must listen attentively to exchange information and complete a task, such as solving a problem or completing a dialogue. These activities assess interactive listening and communication skills.

V. FACTORS INFLUENCING LISTENING DIFFICULTY AND TEST PERFORMANCE

Several factors contribute to the complexity and challenge of listening tasks, ultimately influencing students' performance. These factors should be considered when designing assessments to ensure fairness and accuracy. Here are some key elements to consider:

- **Listening Context:** The context in which listening tasks are presented, such as academic lectures, conversations, or speeches, can vary greatly in terms of vocabulary, language register, and topic complexity. These contextual factors significantly impact students' understanding and performance.
- **Vocabulary and Grammar:** The level of vocabulary and grammatical structures used in the listening material can greatly affect comprehension. Unfamiliar vocabulary and complex sentence structures can pose challenges for students.
- **Pronunciation and Accents:** Different accents and pronunciation variations can make it challenging for learners to understand spoken language, particularly if they have limited exposure to diverse accents. However, unfamiliar accents can present challenges, requiring learners to develop adaptability and cross-cultural listening skills.

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- **Listening Speed:** The speed at which the audio recordings are played can pose challenges for students. Fast-paced speech may make it difficult for learners to process information in real-time, affecting their comprehension and accuracy.
- **Individual listening:** Several factors that are unique to each individual listener can negatively affect their test performance. These factors include memory, interest, background knowledge, motivation, and readiness to take the test.

VI. BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING ORAL INTERVIEWS TO EVALUATE LISTENING SKILLS

Assessing learners' proficiency in interactive situations when goal-oriented oral communication is necessary is crucial to determine how well they listen in a second language. In order to gauge a learner's oral and interpersonal skills, teachers frequently employ some oral interviews because these environments are frequently challenging to recreate for testing reasons. Oral interviews are helpful for testing students' interactive listening skills and capacity for genuine discussion. Students can exhibit their listening comprehension and capacity to reply appropriately and articulate their opinions by participating in a one-on-one or small group conversation.

During oral interviews, learners can engage in role-plays, discussions, or debates on specific themes. Teachers measure candidates' understanding, critical reasoning abilities, vocabulary use, fluency, and conversational coherence. Oral interviews are an invaluable resource for language teachers since they offer a thorough evaluation of students speaking and listening skills. "Oral interview as instances of cross-cultural interactions, often produce miscommunication due to misfits between politeness systems, which are deployed to assert or maintain face" (Kasper & Nakatushara, 2007).

Berwick and Ross (1996) have developed a descriptive system for the accommodation and control features observed in the oral interviews to raise awareness of discourse moves that contribute to perceptions of well-formed oral discourse.

A. Accommodation: The interviewer must be aware of several techniques to ensure effective communication during an interview:

- **Display question:** Avoid asking for information already known to the interviewer or that the interviewee should know.
- **Comprehension check:** Confirm the interviewee's understanding of the topic or the interviewer's preceding utterance.
- **Clarification request:** Request a restatement of the interviewee's immediately preceding utterance.
- **Or-question:** Ask a question and immediately provide options for the interviewee to choose an answer.
- **Fronting:** Provide one or more utterances to emphasize a topic and prepare the interviewee's response.
- **Grammatical modification:** Adjust an utterance's syntactic or simplification semantic structure to facilitate comprehension.
- **Slowdown:** Reduce the speed of an utterance.
- **Over-articulation:** Exaggerate the pronunciation of words and phrases.
- **Other-expansion:** Elaborate on words or phrases within the interviewee's utterance. - **Lexical simplification:** Choose a simpler form of a word or phrase that the interviewee cannot comprehend.

B. Control: When you're being interviewed, there are a few things you should keep in mind

- The interviewer might bring up a new topic by giving more details and asking a question.
- The interviewer might stop talking about a topic even if you still want to discuss it.
- The interviewer might change the direction of the conversation by talking more about something they mentioned earlier.
- The interviewer might go back to an earlier topic if they don't feel like they've fully understood your response yet.

VII. WAYS TO USE DESCRIPTIVE SCALES FOR MEASURING LISTENING SKILLS

Listening proficiency can be understood as a hierarchical scale that reflects an individual's ability to effectively comprehend, interpret, and respond to spoken language. Several descriptive scales have been developed to measure listening proficiency. Here are a few commonly used scales:

- **ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) Proficiency Scale:**

Scale is widely recognized for assessing language proficiency, including listening skills. It consists of different levels, including Novice, Intermediate, Advanced, Superior, and Distinguished. Each level is further divided into low, mid, and high sublevels, providing a detailed description of listening proficiency based on comprehension, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and overall understanding.

- **ILR (Interagency Language Roundtable) Listening Comprehension Scale:**

The ILR scale is utilized by various government agencies in the United States to evaluate language proficiency. It ranges from 0 (No Proficiency) to 5 (Native or Bilingual Proficiency) and provides detailed descriptions of the listener's ability to understand spoken language, including the ability to comprehend conversations, lectures, and interviews.

- **CAN-DO Descriptors:**

The CAN-DO descriptors were developed by the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) and provide a comprehensive framework to assess language skills, including listening proficiency. The scale consists of multiple

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levels, from A1 (Beginner) to C2 (Proficient), and offers detailed descriptors of what a listener can do at each level, such as understanding short announcements, following complex lectures, or comprehending multiple accents.

- IELTS (International English Language Testing System):

While primarily designed to evaluate overall English language proficiency, the IELTS exam also includes a listening component. The IELTS scale measures listening proficiency on a scale from 0 to 9, with 9 being the highest level of proficiency. The descriptors assess the listener's ability to comprehend spoken language in various contexts, including conversations, monologues, and presentations.

These scales provide structured frameworks for assessing listening proficiency, allowing educators, language learners, and employers to gauge an individual's abilities and track their progress over time. They offer specific criteria and descriptors to evaluate different aspects of listening comprehension, such as understanding vocabulary, grammar, context, and overall comprehension. It's important to note that these levels are not rigid boundaries, and individuals can move between different levels depending on the situation, their familiarity with the topic, and their level of engagement. Developing listening proficiency requires practice, exposure to diverse sources of spoken language, and conscious effort to improve active listening skills.

VIII. USES OF PORTFOLIO-STYLE ASSESSMENTS FOR LISTENING

Portfolio-style assessments involve the collection and analysis of students' work samples over a period of time. In the context of listening, portfolios can include recordings of students' oral presentations, conversations, or responses to listening tasks.

By compiling a portfolio, students can reflect on their own listening development, identify strengths and weaknesses, and set goals for improvement. Teachers can assess the portfolio to gain insights into the progression of listening skills and provide individualized feedback. Portfolio assessments encourage students to take ownership of their learning and foster metacognitive skills.

Incorporating diverse assessment methods into listening instruction promotes a comprehensive understanding of students' abilities and enables instructors to adapt their teaching strategies accordingly. By considering the various types of listening assessment, factors influencing difficulty and performance, the uses of oral interviews, descriptive scales, and portfolio-style assessments, educators can foster effective listening skills development and enhance overall language proficiency in their students.

IX. CONCLUSION

From the standpoint of providing students feedback on improving their listening skills, this study outlined the importance of assessment in teaching listening. It examines concepts of validity, objective tests of listening ability, interactive listening skills, and holistic approaches to describe listening proficiency. The assessment process always impacts the instructional goals and learner motivation due to the washback effect, so this research first looked at approaches to describe the social and educational settings in which it is utilised. Following that, this essay examined the idea of validity and how criteria reference and construct definition can be utilised to determine a reasonable level of validity. This essay also discussed listening evaluations and their numerous kinds, such as multiple-choice, gap-filling, dictation, note-taking, and retellings. Language, contextual, task, and individual characteristics can impact the difficulty and performance of listening examinations. An efficient way to evaluate interactive listening is through oral interviews. Compared to portfolio-style assessments, which provide a comprehensive evaluation by considering various listening samples, descriptive scales help to show various levels of listening skill. These evaluation techniques enable targeted feedback and skill improvement while advancing our understanding of an individual's listening capabilities.

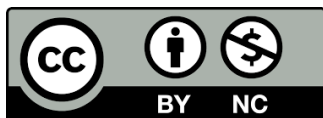
The primary objective of this paper is to demonstrate how challenging it is to assess listening in its entirety. At the very least, it is as challenging to describe as complete listening. Being aware that it frequently describes and evaluates only one component of this multifaceted ability, we should exercise caution when claiming that listening evaluations measure or characterise certain things. Portfolio-style listening assessments are advised because they demonstrate performance across a broader range of contexts. One way to assess listening skills is by integrating them with other abilities such as interviewing, collaborating, and giving interactive presentations. It can also be evaluated in more significant tasks and projects, especially those involving reading.

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