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English Language Listening Anxiety among the EFL Bengali Medium Students at the University Level in Bangladesh

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Abstract: The current study aims to investigate the level of English Language Listening Anxiety for Bengali medium students at the university level in Bangladesh. Listening anxiety is said to have a direct effect on listeners' abilities to comprehend what has been said. This is often because listeners think that the message is so complex that they will not be able to understand what they are listening to. In relevance to listening tests, students' listening anxiety may prove to be a variable that could affect their listening to any English texts and attending any test. This study investigates if Bengali medium students experience listening anxiety in English language classes or any English test. Here, to understand the anxiety level of the students in any listening situation, a survey form is used as the main data collection instrument. The survey comprised 20 questions, which were tested for reliability in this study. 104 undergraduate and postgraduate students from two private universities in Bangladesh participated in the survey. There is also a listening test conducted in two sessions to find out what environment can be helpful to improve the Bengali Medium students' listening skills. The findings indicated that the students have high level of listening anxiety.

Keywords: Learners' anxiety, Bengali medium, teachers' support, learning environment

Introduction

Listening is a fundamental language skill essential for effective communication and required for acquiring a second or foreign language. Morley and Lawrence (1972) considered that during the communication process, messages may be misunderstood or misinterpreted, which reduces their effectiveness and subsequently results in misunderstandings when people are unable to listen well. Compared to more active language skills, listening might also seem basic or even secondary, maybe because it is assumed that listening is done automatically or in reaction to something. However, Goh and Taib (2006) pondered that when it comes to learning a foreign language, students find that listening can be challenging and even frustrating at times because they frequently cannot grasp exactly what they are hearing. In the EFL context of Bangladesh, the learners with a Bengali medium background entering the English medium education policy in universities often show a very poor command of English listening skills. Although English has long been taught as a compulsory subject at primary and tertiary levels, poor listening skills remain the same, which is reflected mostly when they enter university. The aim of this paper was to find out the barriers to listening for Bengali medium students and the ways to overcome this anxiety. The primary objective of the study was to identify the problems and anxiety encountered by the students in the process of listening to any English lecture. The study follows certain theories of the Foreign Language Listening Anxieties as to reach to the resolutions of the current issue of English Language Listening Anxiety among the Bangladeshi EFL Learners. The Foreign Language Listening Anxiety as Preiss et al (1990)

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determined five kinds of effects of receiver apprehension: listening effectiveness, processing anxiety, information processing effectiveness, cognitive complexity, and education level. The possibility of getting a poor mark, fast speech, mind drifting away while listening, and being evaluated were identified by participants as being the most common anxiety-provoking factors.

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) mentioned that listening anxiety occurs when students feel they are faced with a task that is too difficult or unfamiliar to them. This anxiety is brought about by listeners‟ negative listening self-concept", which is a low level of self-confidence in the area of listening (Joiner, 1986). Wheeless and Scott (1976) explain the source of listening anxiety as it relates to three factors. The first one of them is about a situational fear of encountering new information. The second factor is related to the fear of information processing or psychologically adjusting to messages. The third factor creating listening anxiety is based on the use of interpretive schemes or strategic repertoires to respond to incoming information. Therefore, the learners who lack the appropriate schemata to strategically process messages tend to feel anxious over a variety of situations.

Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety and Related Studies

Anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried, thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure. People with anxiety disorders usually have recurring intrusive thoughts or concerns. They may avoid certain situations out of worry. The physiological symptoms of anxiety included heart palpitations, nausea, disturbances in respiration, sweating, muscular tension, tremor and vertigo (Sarason, 1975). Foreign Language Anxiety is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced in learning or using any foreign language.

According to Osada (2004), listening is now recognized as critical dimension in language learning, it still remains one of the least understood processes. Morley (2001) narrated that during the 1980s special attention to listening was incorporated into new instructional framework, that is, functional language and communicative approaches. As the author goes on, throughout the1990s, attention to listening in language teaching has increased dramatically. Vandergrift (2003) examined the strategies of skilled and less-skilled listeners of French using a think-aloud procedure. O'Malley et al. (1989) found that skilled listeners use more repair strategies to redirect their attention back to the task when there is a comprehension breakdown, whereas less skilled listeners give up and stop listening.

According to Chastain (1971), listening comprehension is the ability to understand native speech at normal speed in unstructured situations. Morley and Lawrence (1972) defined listening comprehension as the ability not only to discriminate auditory grammar but also to reauditorize, extract essential information, remember it, and relate it, everything that entails processing sound and construction of meaning. Neisser (1976) views listening comprehension as a temporally constant process in which the listener anticipates what will come next. Goss (1982) defined listening comprehension as a mental process in which the listeners attempt to construct a meaning out of the information received from the speakers.

Therefore, despite the negative role of anxiety in English language classes, there has not been enough previously published researches examining which areas English language learners are most anxious about while listening, and only few researches have reported implications on the teaching of listening specifically listening comprehension on Foreign language learners. Spielberger (1972) proposes the Trait-State Theory to illustrate the anxiety phenomenon. This theory does not explain language anxiety in details but it provides some ideas on anxiety which can be applied. Anxiety is an affective factor that widely obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension.

There is not enough information about the reason of English language listening Anxiety. Previous research in the field of second language acquisition has investigated all the listening strategies: cognitive, metacognitive, and socio affective. However, there is hardly any study

conducted in this paradigm have explored all of those strategies together. Some studies have focused on metacognitive strategies (Vandergrift, 2003; Goh & Taib, 2006). Other studies have investigated the strategies learners rely on while taking a listening test (Cohen, 2000). Furthermore, in most studies conducted in this area, the participants were native speakers of languages that were cognates of English such as French and Spanish.

Methodology

The study followed a mixed-method approach. A total of 104 students from two private universities participated in the study. The participants completed the survey of 20 questionnaires which is quantitative in nature. This quantitative survey is taken to answer the first research question which looks for the level of anxiety the EFL learners face. All the participants spoke Bengali as their first language. In addition, fifteen students participated in two listening assessments that provides qualitative data. All participants were informed of the study's objectives, methodology, and data confidentiality policy. The age range of the participants was 19 to 32.

In the study, respondents were asked about their anxiety levels in different situations, what they want to learn, how they want to listen, and what teacher accents they like. Current researchers value questionnaires because they directly address study questions and objectives. Since the study is largely quantitative, motivation, anxiety, and data are collected by questionnaire.

A listening assessment was also used to detect students' listening anxieties and determine what will help them improve and lessen anxiety. Fifteen advanced and intermediate language learners participated. The listening test also gave participants hearing input to consider their mental processes to answer questions. This study examined academic students' listening methods, therefore the listening test consisted of two lectures to identify what environment can help them improve. Both lectures ran separate times and addressed distinct topics. One lecture lasts five minutes. They had 15 minutes to answer 10 questions. The room was not quiet and there was ambient sound. The lecturer also introduced himself before the presentation. Students were nervous and scared before the test. Despite the simple material, they failed to achieve their goal. Cambridge 16 listening exam 2 IELTS practice book was used for the second test. Four themes were covered in the 40-minute listening test. Participants had to answer 40 listening questions. Bengali-speaking freshman struggled to answer. The atmosphere was calm. Quiet environments existed. Students listen and respond the text well. Despite their low result, they were glad they took the test.

Analysis and Findings

The findings address listening anxiety's theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects. The discussion was guided by two main queries: what types of anxiety do students experience during listening to any English text, and what kind of environment can enhance their listening skills.

Anxieties Students Face during Listening any English Text

Table 1 depicts that for the listening barriers in English language learning, the items in which participants showed a high level of anxiety were item 11 (78%), followed by item 7 (61%) and item 16 (56). There are some of the items where the participants portrayed a moderate level of anxiety: item 5 (45%), item 19 (44%), item 18 (40%), item 10 (35%), item 14 (34%), item 3 (33%), Item 4 (33%). These results suggest that the participants agree that having the appropriate background knowledge was essential to listening. For few items, the participants showed a low level of anxiety: item 20 (16%), item 17 (20%), item 12 (20%).

Therefore, it could be assumed that before any listening comprehension task is given to learners, teachers must focus on activating students' background knowledge on unfamiliar topics and provide more pre-listening activities to contribute to their listening comprehension process. Students face problems in listening because of their poor background knowledge. Sometimes, background noise also becomes a great problem when listening.

Table 1. Students' Response about the Anxieties during Listening any English Texts

SL	Items	Always	Sometimes	Usually	Not at all
		Percentages (%)			
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am listening any English comprehension text.	29%	22%	30%	19%
2	I try to think in English.	31%	42%	19%	8%
3	I guess the meaning of unfamiliar words using known words in the surrounding context.	33%	43%	20%	4%
4	It is difficult for me to listen to English when there is even a little bit of background noise.	33%	43%	18%	6%
5	I feel nervous when listening to an English speaker on the phone.	45%	27%	17%	11%
6	I keep thinking that everyone else except me understands very well what an English speaker is saying.	23%	36%	20%	21%
7	I am worried when I have less time to think of what I hear in English.	61%	13%	9%	17%
8	I feel confident in my listening skills.	30%	33%	25%	12%
9	While listening, I write down some ideas and keywords.	30%	36%	12%	22%
10	After listening, I look up dictionary to check my comprehension to overcome my anxiety.	35%	45%	20%	0%
11	I fear, I have insufficient background knowledge of some topics when listening in English.	78%	7%	8%	7%
12	It is easy to guess the parts I miss while listening to English.	20%	37%	24%	19%
13	While listening, I pause the listening text to understand any unknown word.	28%	42%	21%	9%
14	I always look forward to the subtitle of English movies to understand the dialogue properly.	34%	38%	20%	8%
15	I listen to a text for minimum 2/3 times for better understanding.	29%	44%	14%	13%
16	It is hard for me to understand any native speaker's speech.	56%	5%	24%	15%
17	When I see others easily understanding any listening text, I feel like I'm not capable enough.	20%	10%	50%	20%
18	It takes me a long time to fix any answer after listening any text.	40%	11%	34%	15%
19	I think that I'll be nervous and I'll forget everything.	44%	19%	23%	14%
20	When someone pronounce any word differently from the way I pronounce the word, I find it difficult to understand.	16%	50%	15%	19%

Impact of Environment on Listening Skill

The data collected from the listening test which have taken between 15 students. And were grouped into three themes, which were: Surroundings, nature of listening text and listeners' characteristics. Table 2 demonstrates the results from the themes.

Table 2. Classroom Environment, Test Type and Result

Test	Surroundings	Test	Listener's Characteristics	Result
Test 1	Not good	Easy	Nervous	Not Satisfactory
Test 2	Perfect	Hard	Calm	Satisfactory

The listening test-1 was easy and the topic was about natural beauty. There were 10 questions and time was 15 minutes. Questions were easy but, for the background sound and students' mental instability they cannot give their best. However, in the listening test-2, questions were difficult for general students but, they were confident in the exam. As a result, they achieve a good mark. To answer the first research question about the types of anxiety the students face when they are listening any English lecture in Bangladesh, the findings revealed that the participants have high level of listening anxiety. The two listening tests were held in two different environmental set up. However, the percentage of the learners' obtained marks varies- overall, 58% in the 1st Test and 65% in the

second test on average. So, this percentage show that creating a positive learning environment can help learners perform better in listening.

Discussion

The results revealed that the participants experienced a high level of anxiety when listening to English texts. The background medium made the students most anxious were getting stuck with unfamiliar words, worrying over missing important ideas, having difficulty with unfamiliar topics, getting nervous and confused for not understanding every word and getting annoyed when coming across new words while listening to any English texts. Because, they were in a different background. Though they learn English with grammar and rules and they know the structure of the sentences but, they are not used to listen English regularly. The English language teachers of Bengali medium do not give the proper guidance to develop the English language properly.

What made the students most anxious during a listening comprehension task were listening to the passage only once, fast speeches, different pronunciation of words from the way the listener pronounced, not being able to differentiate the words from one another while listening and understanding the words but not quite sure of the speaker's purpose. If they miss any word and try to notice what they missed, then they miss a lot of words. Sometimes, the students try to write down what they listen but, they cannot be as fast as the speaker. So, they become nervous and can't concentrate properly. As a result, the students get the lowest marks. The findings of this study support Kimura's (2008) findings that found two types of listening anxiety which are self-focused and task-focused apprehension (Shamsi & Bozorgian, 2024) as the two main factors affecting listening comprehension process. The first one referred to the students' confidence and the latter to the listening input characteristics. Thus, the findings of this study add that lack of enough background knowledge and peaceful surroundings can be main anxiety of any listeners.

Recommendation

Although students' level of anxiety is categorized into moderate level of anxiety, several suggestions were addressed to English teachers. The study recommends teachers to change their views to develop the student's listening skills-

a. To have a positive regard on the subject they teach, the materials they apply and their students' ability to capture them.
b. To follow student-centered, democratic, communicative, participatory, and constructive views.
c. To view language errors as natural part of learning a language and to emphasize the formative assessment with constructive feedback. This will enable them to apply effective ways of teaching:
d. To create positive learning atmosphere and establish authoritative relationships with students;
e. To apply effective classroom management, based on pair and group work;
f. To plan more interactive tasks and teach students effective listening strategies with digital equipment;
g. To share with student's examples of successfully overcoming the difficulties of learning English or another foreign language.
h. Khan et al (2024) emphasized on teachers' digital literacy to adopt innovative pedagogy. If the teachers change the teaching strategies, students will benefit in various ways. Technology uses can increase students' self-confidence and thus reducing anxiety levels.

Conclusion

English listening anxiety is an important factor in decreasing students' ability to communicate in the target language. However, researchers tend to overlook this type of anxiousness. This leads the study to the conclusion that further extensive and in-depth research is necessary to demonstrate that listening anxiety is a serious issue. Additionally, recommendations must be offered for overcoming the crippling consequences of listening in a foreign language. This indicates improved listening

skills development results from the recommended teaching actions and the pupils' reduced anxiety levels. Further research can be conducted on the ELT materials for facilitating English language listening, with a focus on how multimodal resources, such as interactive digital platforms and audio-visual content, can enhance comprehension and engagement among diverse learner groups.

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