

Improving listening Skills through comprehension by Activating Students

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Abstract:

The present study was conducted at university of Kordofan during the period; 2021-2022. The objectives of the study were to identify The improving listening skills by activating students purposive sample method was used. Sample size of 40 English language teachers were selected from 120 population size where questionnaire was distributed to teachers in shekan locality. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences SPSS version 16. The results showed that listening improves by activating students prior knowledge 87% then Listening is a skill that is highly related to speaking (75%) whereas Listening as a language skill can be developed through practice. many students find listening difficult. Teachers notes that Listening tasks can be very disheartening and demotivating, especially if students have had a previous negative experience (87%). Despite students having mastered the basic elements of English grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is often weak. Through systematic study of basic English teaching stages at university it has been recognized that while students' integrated skills in reading, writing, The study recommended. It is therefore important to give our students plenty of opportunities to practice the skill of listening in a supportive environment that helps them to learn. We need to design tasks that help them learn rather than merely testing their abilities.

Improving, Listening, skills , activating, practice

تفعيل مهارة السمع من خلال تفعيل استيعاب الطلاب

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المستخلص:

أجريت هذه الدراسة بجامعة كردفان في الفترة بين 2021- 2022 . مشكلة الدراسة إيجاد الإستراتيجيات المؤثرة فعليا في تعليم مهارات القراءة. هدفت الدراسة لتحديد الأثر الجيد لإستراتيجيات التعليم لتطوير مهارات القراءة لدى الطلاب. اتبعت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، جمعت البيانات عبر الاستبانة والمراجع ومصادر المكتبة الإلكترونية. تم اختيار 40 معلماً للغة الإنجليزية كعينة للدراسة بنظام عشوائي يتكون من 120 معلماً للغة الإنجليزية من المدارس الثانوية بالأبيض. خرجت الدراسة بالنتائج التالية: تحسين مهارة من خلال استيعاب الطلاب هذا ما زهّب اليه 87% من المبحوثين ، وعدد 75% من المبحوثين يرون ان عملية السمع لها علاقة كبيرة بعملية التحدث ، مهارة السمع يمكن تحسينها من خلال التمارين ، هالك اختلاف في عملية استيعاب السمع بين الطلاب خاصة اذا كان ليس هنالك خبرة ، بالرغم من ان الطلاب يحترفون اساسيات قواعد و معاني اللغة الانجليزية الا ان عملية السمع دائماً ضعيفة ومن خلال الدراسات الاستراتيجية لاساسيات تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في الجامعات لوحظ ان هنالك تجاهل لمهارة السمع ، اوصت الدراسة على اهمية اعطاء الطلاب قسط من الزمن كي يتمرنوا على السمع وذلك لغرض مساعدتهم في عملية التعلم ، و نحتاج لتصميم مناهج تساعد في عملية تعلم و تحسين مهارة السمع.

Background:

listening is a skill which involves receiving message in spoken form and therefore often referred to as receptive skill Eventhough it is assumed as a receptive skill, it needs an process to decode the message from the speaker. The listener must be active to process the information listened from the speaker. Listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. It became fashionable again in the 1980s when ideas about comprehensible input gained prominence. By stressing the role of comprehensible input, second language acquisition research has given a major boost to listening. As points out, of the four language skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing, listening is the most critical for language learning at the beginning stages. Therefore, nowadays listening is assuming greater and greater importance in foreign language classrooms. Lis-

tening is one of the receptive skills and as such it involves students in capturing and understanding the input of English. Reading, the other receptive skill, involves students in understanding and interpreting the written word. Listening is probably more difficult than reading because students often recognize the written word more easily than they recognise the spoken word. Furthermore when reading, students can go back and reread a phrase whereas with listening they only get one chance. With reading, it's the reader who sets the pace whereas with listening it's the speaker or recording that sets the pace. Richard (2008:2) one way to make listening easier is by applying what we know about activating prior knowledge, helping students organize their learning by thinking about their purposes for listening, and if speaking is also a goal of the classroom, using well-structured speaking tasks informed by research.

Statement of the Problem

Students have positive attitude toward listening comprehension. So the study is an attempt to find out solution to this problem.

Questions of the study

To what extend students have positive attitude towards listening comprehension and what are the solutions.

Objectives of the study

- 1- To identify the barriers facing students to improve their listening skills.
- 2- To investigate the role of activating students prior knowledge in improving the listening skills.

Method of the study

the study followed descriptive analytical method and the data was collected from references and questionnaire then analyzed to find out the result of the study.

Listening skills:

characterizes listening as a highly complex problem solving activity that can be broken down into a set a distinct sub-skills.

Gunes et al., (2013:21) defines listening as the process of making meaning out of the perceived audio input via various operations, is actively done for different purposes and motives all through the life beginning with the fetus period. broadly defines listening skill in, as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says; constructing and representing meaning; negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding; and, creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy. Listening is an active process of interpretation of what we are listening matched with what we already know.

Teaching listening comprehension

Aural comprehension is the skills of listening , understanding and responding in appropriate ways this skill provides the function for learning foreign language

Listening comprehension strategies

considerable attention has been given to the other three language skills (reading, writing and speaking), studies focusing on listening have only recently been made. Such neglect derived from the fact that listening has been viewed as a passive skill. Even though listening is now well recognized as a critical dimension in language learning, it is still one of the least understood processes. during the 1980's listening was included into new instructional frameworks, the functional language and communicative approaches. What researchers have been able to conclude is that in order to understand aural information, listeners must use effective listening strategies. Such strategies are particularly significant in second language learning; due to the lack of them, students' listening comprehension becomes problematic, challenging, and ineffective. As a result, since the 1980's studies based on strategies used by effective learners have been advising teachers that the main purpose in designing a listening lesson is to "instruct students how to go about listening, i.e. how to handle information that

is not 100% comprehensible” While learning listening comprehension, learners might encounter several difficulties, Underwood (1989:20) notes: learners might be unable to control the speed of the speaker; they can't ask for words to be repeated all the time; their limited knowledge of vocabulary makes listening comprehension difficult; they show some difficulties in recognizing discourse markers; they express difficulties in concentrating in a foreign language; they suffer from a desire to understand the meaning of every word; and they lack contextual knowledge.

Underwood (1989:16) Listeners can't control the speed of the speaker. “many language learners believe that the greatest difficulty with listening comprehension, as opposed to reading comprehension, is that listener cannot control how quickly a speaker speaks”. However, Hayati (2010) examines the effect of speech rate on listening comprehension by exposing students to slow speech rate and natural speech rate and notes that both can be beneficial to the listeners. But the degree of benefit learners gained in natural speech rate leads Hayati to indicate that, for now, naturalness counts more in listening comprehension, although slow speech rate did permit an improvement in listeners' comprehension. Listeners can't have words repeated all the time. According to Underwood (1989 :17) this constitutes a major problem for students. It is the teachers who decide whether or not to repeat information or if a section of recording needs to be replayed. It is “hard for the teacher to judge whether or not the students have understood any particular section of what they have heard”. Listeners' limited knowledge of vocabulary also makes listening comprehension difficult. When listeners encounter unknown words, they might stop to look up the meaning and therefore miss the listening information. Listeners may also have difficulty in recognizing discourse markers used by the speaker. According to Underwood (1989:22) discourse markers used in formal situations might be clear to listeners, but in informal

situations, signals such as gestures, loudness, or change of pitch are very confusing for second language learners. Listeners also face some difficulties in concentrating in a foreign language. Underwood (1989;22) explains that in listening, even a slight break in attention can interfere with comprehension. When the topic of the listening passage is interesting, it can be easier for listeners to concentrate and follow the passage; however, listeners sometimes feel that listening is very challenging even when they are interesting in the topic because it requires a lot of effort to figure out the meaning intended by the speaker. Learning habits emphasized in the classroom, such as a desire to understand the meaning of every word, also constitute a listening difficulty.

Five common listening comprehension problems

According to Goh (2000: 7) five common listening comprehension problems are identified by students: they quickly forget what they heard; don't recognize words they know; understand words but not the intended message; neglect the next part when thinking about meaning; and are unable to form a mental representation from words heard. Those factors were further divided into five categories: test, listener, speaker, task, and environment. Under the category of listener, was believed to be one of the factors influencing the learners' listening comprehension. Under the category of test, the factor most reported was related to insufficient time available for processing. When other tasks, such as the activity of note-taking, were involved in the process of listening, time available for processing on incoming message might be negatively influenced as a result. In attempting to investigate the listening problems of a group of first year English major students, Hamouda (2012;75), throughout questionnaires and interviews, found out that accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording were the major listening comprehension

sion problems encountered. Speech rate was also found a main factor that caused difficulties in listening comprehension. Haya-ti (2010), examining the effect of speech rate on listening comprehension, concluded that speech rate, whether natural or slow, could improve English learners' listening comprehension; natural speech rate could support greater improvements than slow speech rate in learners' listening comprehension. In order to overcome these listening comprehension problems, researchers suggest that learners need to develop techniques known as "listening strategies".

2.5 Top-down and bottom-up processing

Vandergrift, (2002:12). However, listening comprehension is neither top-down nor bottom-up processing, but an interactive, interpretive process where listeners use both prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge to understand the message. The frequency in which listeners use one process or the other will depend on their knowledge of the language, familiarity with the topic, or the purpose for listening. For instance, listening for gist involves primarily top-down processing, whereas listening for specific information, as in a weather broadcast, involves primarily bottom-up processing to comprehend all the desired details. Tyler (2001) suggests that developing bottom-up processes such as phoneme discrimination training should work well for long-term mastery of a language; meanwhile, top-down training can be more beneficial for learners who aim to acquire instant knowledge of a language. In this case, ELLs who aim to fulfill their academic goals need to develop both top-down and bottom-up listening processes.

Training in listening

There is a clear parallel between the spoken and the written language. On the one hand, listening and reading with understanding are receptive (but not passive) decoding skills; on the other, speaking and writing are productive, encoding skills. But the par-

allel goes beyond this. The concept of intensive reading (the close study and exploitation of a text for its meaning and the language used) and extensive reading (the more leisurely perusal of a longer text where the learning goes on in a less direct, more unconscious way). There is a similarly valuable and intensive listening. Indeed, listening is often harder than reading, since it is not often taught and practised, nor is it usually possible to go over again what one hears, whereas it is simple to read and re-read a difficult page in a book. Both extensive and intensive listening practice should be part of the armoury of a language teacher. Their use will differ in relation to the aim—for example, a French teacher of English may feel that his students are not producing satisfactorily the ‘th’ sounds in ‘this’ and ‘thin’, and confusing them with /z/ and /s/, so he would perhaps, as a first step towards imitation, then production of the sounds, get them to listen carefully for the sounds in a given passage (which he has chosen because of the high incidence of these phonemes). There are various books available which provide practice of this type, e.g. Combe Martin’s *Exercising Spoken English* (Macmillan, 1970). Trim’s *English Pronunciation Illustrated* gives similar practice in quite a different format, as the extract from p. 60 shows (reproduced by permission): practical distinction to be made between extensive and intensive listening. Indeed, listening is often harder than reading, since it is not often taught and practised, nor is it usually possible to go over again what one hears, whereas it is simple to read and re-read a difficult page in a book. Both extensive and intensive listening practice should be part of the armoury of a language teacher.

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encoding skills. But the parallel goes beyond this. The concept of intensive reading (the close study and exploitation of a text for its meaning and the language used) and extensive reading. There is a similarly valuable and practical distinction to be made between extensive and intensive listening. Indeed, listening is often harder than reading, since it is not often taught and practised, nor is it usually possible to go over again what one hears, whereas it is simple to read and re-read a difficult page in a book. Both extensive and intensive listening practice should be part of the armoury of a language teacher.

Extensive listening

Rishard (2008:68) Extensive listening can be used for two different purposes. A very basic use is the re-presentation of already known material in a new environment. This could be a recently taught structure or, say, a lexical set which was introduced months before and needs revision. The advantage of exposing the student to old material in this way is that he sees it in action in a genuine, natural environment rather than in the classroom context in which it was probably first presented. Psychologically, extensive listening to the 'real' as opposed to purpose-written English is very satisfying since it demonstrates that the student's efforts in the classroom will pay dividends in life in an English-speaking environment. One of the greatest and most common failures of language teaching is that what the student is taught is totally inadequate for dealing with the welter of aural stimuli coming at him from all sides when he first sets foot in England. Extensive listening of this type helps him considerably. The materials he hears need not of course be only a representation of what is already known. Extensive listening can serve the further function of letting the student hear vocabulary items and structures which are as yet unfamiliar to him, interposed in the flow of language which is within his capacity to handle. There might be unknown, rather technical words or an unfamiliar

verb form,—for instance, the passive for elementary students or the subjunctive for the advanced. In this way there is unconscious familiarisation with forms which will shortly become teaching points in a language lesson. Story-telling, especially appealing to younger age groups, is an example of extensive listening and often includes a considerable proportion of unknown lexis and some untaught structures. Comprehension is not normally seriously impeded since the compelling interest of the story holds the attention and the familiarity of the great body of the language is enough to provide a sufficiently explanatory setting for the unknown material. The teacher himself is the source of the model in story telling. As one of the aims of extensive listening is to represent old material in a new way, it is often best that this is done by means of authentic tapes of English people talking together (and so providing the model), where the teacher himself is not involved. Of course it is possible to write a script for recording which illustrates the particular points to be made, but this is a highly-skilled task and the student gets enough specially written material in his textbooks anyway. Much more effective and convincing are extracts of real, live English speech. It is surprisingly easy to build up a library of suitable tapes. An expensive way is to buy commercial tapes put out by the big publishing companies. The tapes that accompany Crystal and Davy's Advanced Conversational English, for instance, are invaluable at the most advanced levels..

intensive listening

(2008:71) Whereas extensive listening is concerned with the freer, more general listening to natural English, not necessarily under the teacher's direct guidance, intensive listening is concerned, in a much more controlled way, with just one or two specific points. There is one important division to be made—the listening can be primarily for language Richards items as part of the language teaching programme, or it can be principally for gen-

eral comprehension and understanding. Clearly in this second case the meaning of the language must already be generally familiar. The vocabulary of conversation is often radically different from the written language with which the student is probably more familiar. Hence listening to conversations is invaluable to him to accustom his ear to what he would hear if he visited England. It is very useful to make available passages with more familiar, colloquial lexical items and concentrate on Anglo-Saxon rather than Romance vocabulary. This is particularly important for speakers whose mother tongue is a Latin Language, as they have a tendency to sound pompous in speech through choosing words like enter and repeat instead of come in and say it again. Listening practice for phrasal verbs, fixed expressions such as idioms and generally more colloquial language is one effective means to cure this. It is easiest initially for the student to listen for phrasal verbs, say, in a given passage, then he is asked to put in more formal one-word alternatives. It is usually much harder for students to do this exercise the other way round and listen to a passage (e.g. a formal speech) with a high proportion of Romance vocabulary and then attempt to substitute more colloquial English. Listening can be for grammatical as well as lexical purposes.

Top-down listening activities

Do you ever get your students to predict the content of a listening activity beforehand, maybe using information about the topic or situation, pictures, or key words? If so, you are already helping them to develop their top-down processing skills, by encouraging them to use their knowledge of the topic to help them understand the content. This is an essential skill given that, in a real-life listening situation, even advanced learners are likely to come across some unknown vocabulary. By using their knowledge of context and co-text, they should either be able to guess the meaning of the unknown word, or understand the general idea without getting distracted by it. Other examples of common top-

down listening activities include putting a series of pictures or sequence of events in order, listening to conversations and identifying where they take place, reading information about a topic then listening to find whether or not the same points are mentioned, or inferring the relationships between the people involved.

Bottom-up listening activities

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/akam/11/pixel> The emphasis in EFL listening materials in recent years has been on developing top-down listening processes. There are good reasons

Top-down vs. bottom-up listening

Imagine the following situation *Over lunch, your friend tells you a story about a recent holiday, which was a disaster. You listen with interest and interject at appropriate moments, maybe to express surprise or sympathy.*

That evening, another friend calls to invite you to a party at her house the following Saturday. As you've never been to her house before, she gives you directions. You listen carefully and make notes.

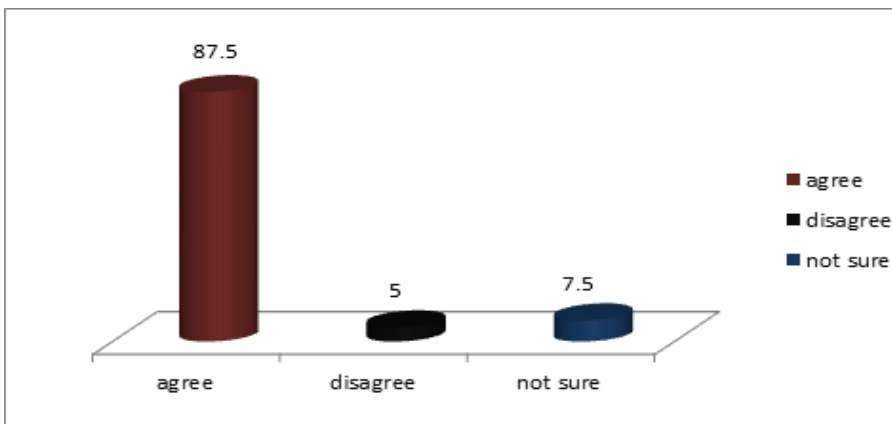
How do you listen in each case? Are there any differences? With the holiday anecdote, your main concern was probably understanding the general idea and knowing when some response was expected. In contrast, when listening to the directions to a party, understanding the exact words is likely to be more important – if you want to get there without incident, that is! The way you listened to the holiday anecdote could be characterised as top-down listening. This refers to the use of background knowledge in understanding the meaning of the message. Background knowledge consists of context, that is, the situation and topic, and co-text, in other words, what came before and after. The context of chatting to a friend in a casual environment itself narrows down the range of possible topics. Once the topic of a holiday has been established, our knowledge of the kind of things that can happen on holiday

comes into play and helps us to 'match' the incoming sound signal against our expectations of what we might hear and to fill out specific details. In contrast, when listening to directions to a friend's house, comprehension is achieved by dividing and decoding the sound signal bit by bit. The ability to separate the stream of speech into individual words becomes more important here, if we are to recognize, for example, the name of a street or an instruction to take a particular bus.

Data Analyses and Discussions

The students ability in listening can be improved by activating students prior knowledge

| Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Agree | 35 | 87.5 |
| Disagree | 2 | 5.0 |
| not sure | 3 | 7.5 |
| Total | 40 | 100.0 |

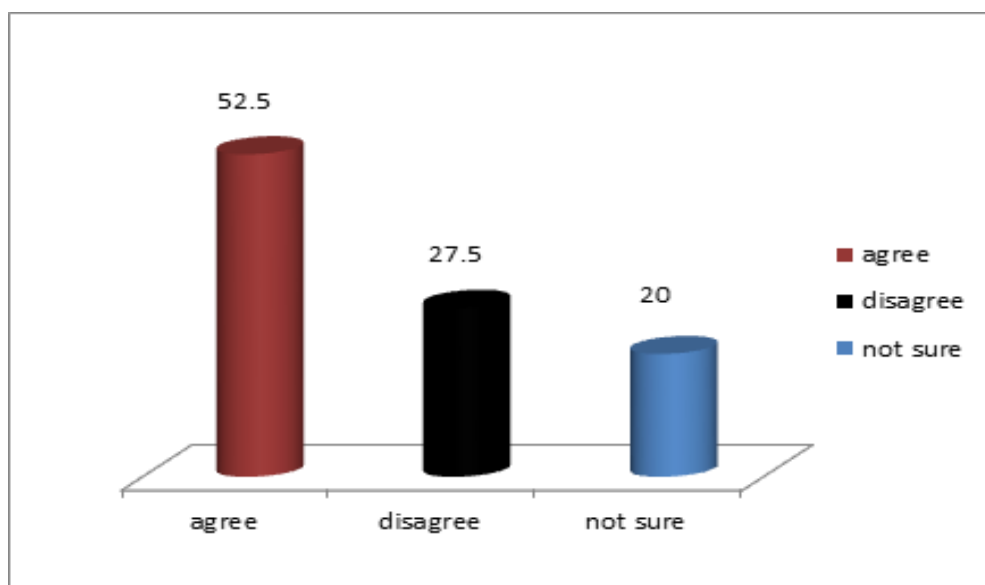


In table and figure The students ability in listening can be improved by activating students prior knowledge above the majority (35)87.5% of the respondents of the sample of the study agreed to The students ability in listening can be improved by activating students prior knowledge.

while the minority (2)5%disagreed and a number of (3)7.5% were not sure .

.Listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning

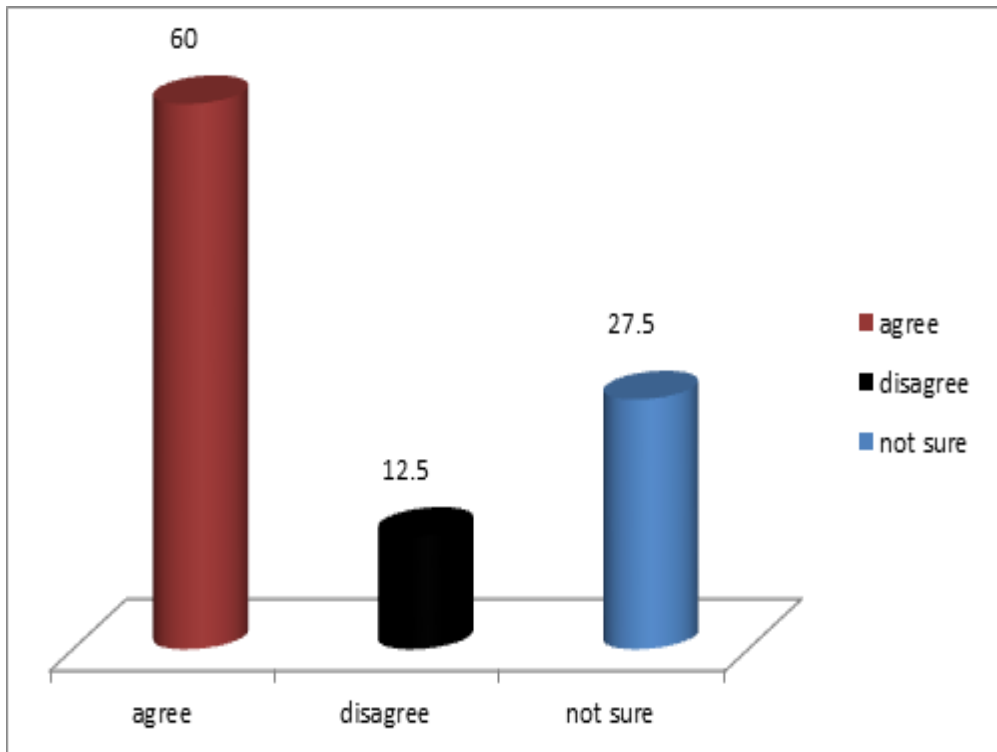
| Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Agree | 21 | 52.5 |
| Disagree | 11 | 27.5 |
| not sure | 8 | 20.0 |
| Total | 40 | 100.0 |



In table and figure above Listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning. the majority (21)52% of the respondent agreed, “” while the minority (11)27.5%disagreed and a number of (8)20% were not sure. So Listening is the Cinderella skill in second language learning.

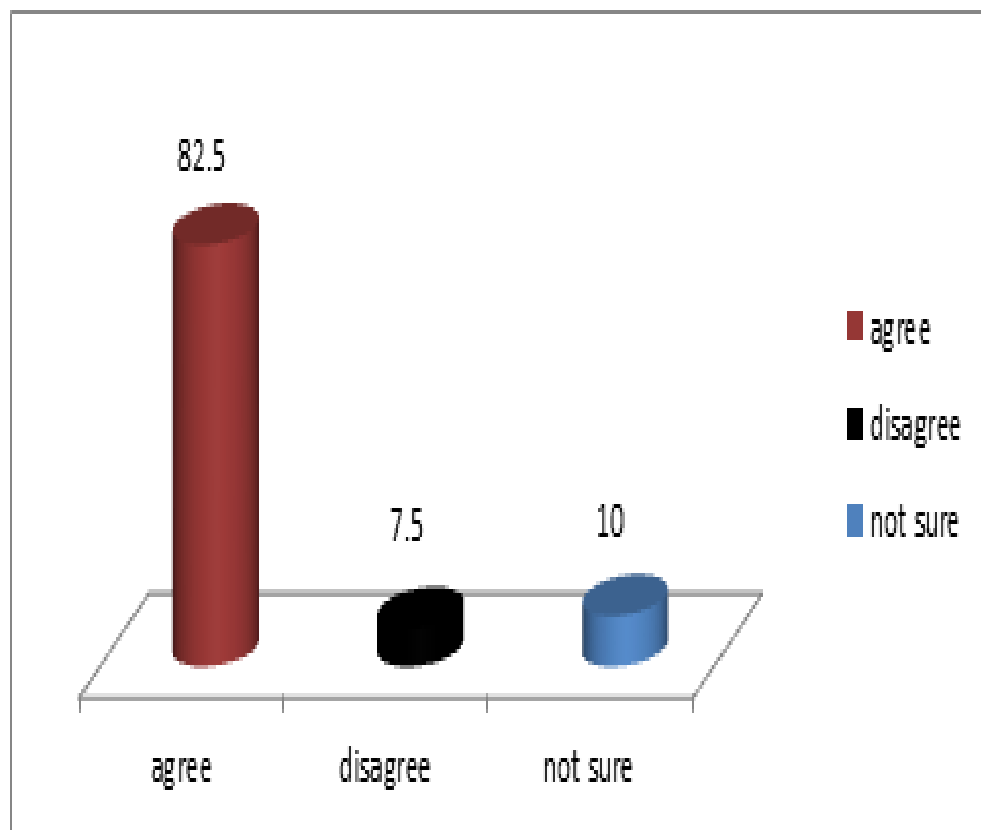
Listening task can be very disheartening and de motivating.

| Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Agree | 24 | 24 |
| Disagree | 5 | 12.5 |
| not sure | 11 | 27.5 |
| Total | 40 | 100 |



In table and figure Listening task can be very disheartening and de- motivating. above the majority (24)60% of the respondents of the sample of the study agree that Listening task can be very disheartening and de- motivating. (5)12.5%disagreed and a number of (11)27.5% are not sure. This means that Listening task can be very disheartening and de- motivating.

| Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Agree | 33 | 82.5 |
| Disagree | 3 | 7.5 |
| not sure | 4 | 10.0 |
| Total | 40 | 100.0 |

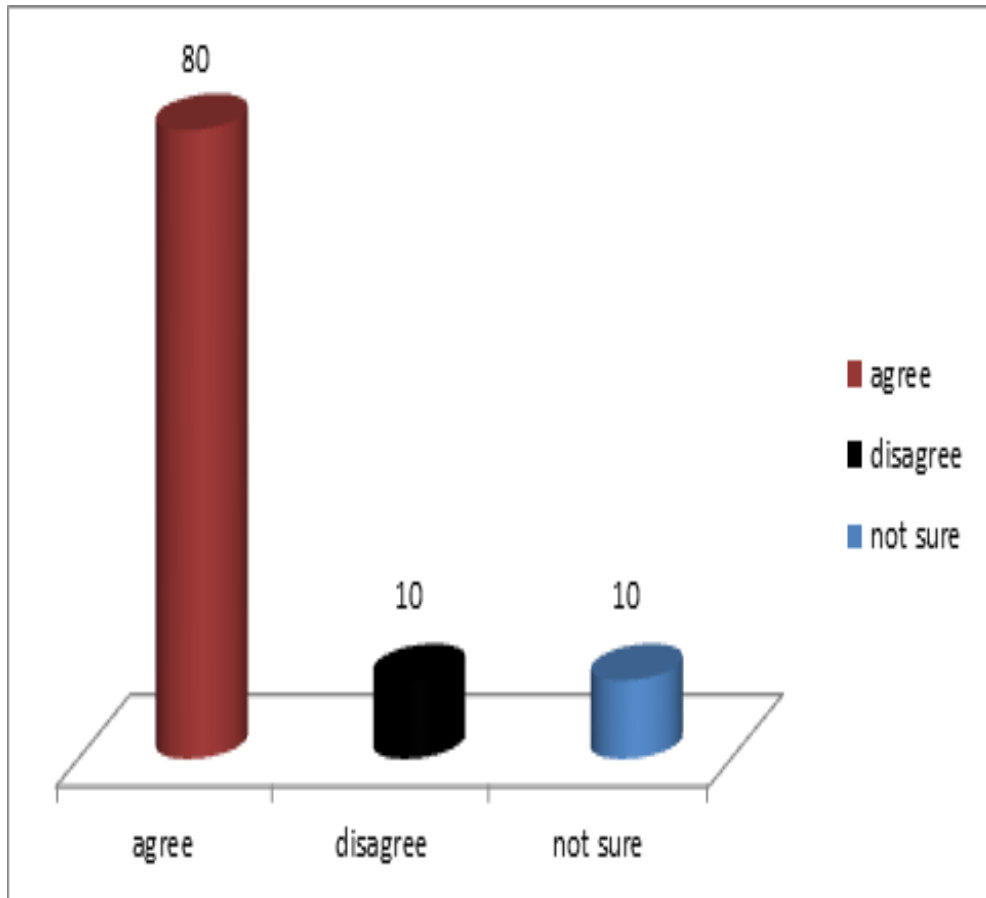


In table and figure The student need both bottom-up and top-down processing skills in listening above the majority (33)82.5% of the respondents of the sample of the study agree The student need both bottom-up and top-down processing skills in listening. (3)7.5%disagreed and a number of (4)10% were not sure. This means that The student need both bottom-up and

top-down processing skills in listening

The students improve listening skills through activation.

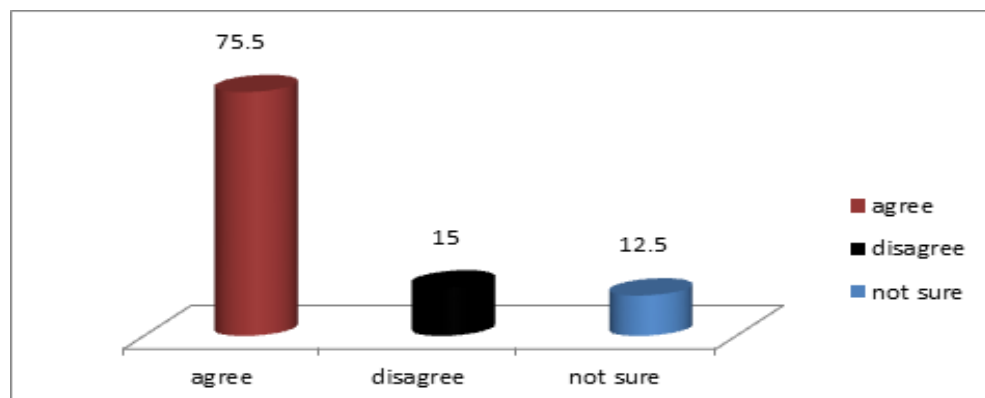
| Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| Agree | 32 | 80.0 |
| Disagree | 4 | 10.0 |
| not sure | 4 | 10.0 |
| Total | 40 | 100.0 |



In table and figure above the majority (32)80% of the respondents of the sample of the study agree Prior Listening uses both bottom-up and down process to comprehend. (4)10%disagreed and a number of (4)10% are not sure. This means that The students improve listening skills through activation.

Listening is an interactive interpretive process.

| Option | Frequency | Percentage |
|--------------|-----------|--------------|
| Agree | 29 | 72.5 |
| Disagree | 6 | 15.0 |
| not sure | 5 | 12.5 |
| Total | 40 | 100.0 |



In table and figure (4.14)) Listening is an interactive interpretive process above the majority (29)75% of the respondents of “while the minority (6)15%disagreed and a number of (5) 12.5% were not sure.) this means that Listening is an interactive interpretive process

Summary, Results and Recommendations

Summary:

This study has been carried out to identify Improving listing skills by activating student . Sample size of 40 English language teachers were selected from 120 population size where questionnaire was distributed to teachers in shekan locality. The data was analyzed using Statistical Package of Social Sciences SPSS version 16. The results showed that listening improves by activating students prior knowledge87% then Listening is a skill that is highly related to speaking(75%) whereas Listening as a language skill can be developed through practice. many students find listening difficult. Teachers notes that Listening tasks can be very disheartening and de motivating, especially if students have had a previous

negative experience (87%). Despite students having mastered the basic elements of English grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is often weak. Through systematic study of basic English teaching stages at university it has been recognized that while students' integrated skills in reading, writing, translating have been improving, their listening and speaking capabilities have been left behind.

Recommendations.

The study recommended. It is therefore important to give our students plenty of opportunities to practice the skill of listening in a supportive environment that helps them to learn. We need to design tasks that help them learn rather than merely testing their abilities.

Results:

1. The students ability in listening can be improved by activating students prior knowledge.
2. Listening as a language skill can be developed through practice
3. Listening is a skill that is highly related to speaking
4. The students ability in listening can be improved by activating students prior knowledge.
5. Listening task is very disheartening and de motivating.
6. Listening is an interactive interpretive process.

Results recommendations

The students and teachers must be aware about the above results

Recommendations.

The study recommended. It is therefore important to give our students plenty of opportunities to practice the skill of listening in a supportive environment that helps them to learn. We need to design tasks that help them learn rather than merely testing their abilities.

Suggestion for further studies

- 1-Suggested factors that can help students in improving their speaking skills

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