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### If Not Now, Then When? Balochistan's Case of English Language Comprehension Skills and A Way Forward

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#### KEY WORDS

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#### ABSTRACT

*Pakistan is striving to adopt teaching of English as a language instead of a subject since English is being treated as a subject with a focus on reading and writing skills only. This shift requires the development of English language teachers listening comprehension skills since better listening leads to better speaking and improved job performance (Kluger, 2015). However, on one hand, learning of listening comprehension is difficult and on the other hand, it is challenging to teach (Walker, 2014). Current article discusses the practical implementation of two listening comprehension skills' models for English Language Teachers (ELTs) and youth to overcome this challenge in Pakistan including Balochistan. Taking a step further, this article also presents two detailed activities for the practical implementation of the two models with appropriate justification, to ease the process. Though, this article basically focuses Balochistani context, still, with some modifications aligned with the contextual needs, it might be equally useful for any context.*

## **Background**

### **English Language Status and Pakistan.**

Pakistan is striving to adopt teaching of English as a language instead of a subject. Previously, Pakistan had decided to adopt English as a medium of instruction across the curriculum (Government of Pakistan, Ministry of education, 2006). Before this decision, English was being taught as a subject extending from Grade-I to Grade-XII. Accordingly, the development of reading and writing skills was the central focus of all the pre-service and in-service teacher education, teaching learning materials and routine classroom practices. Surely, English language adoption demanded the 180-degree change in the said areas. In this regard, Pakistan has successfully transformed the pre-service teacher education and English learning and teaching materials excluding the English language in-service teacher training and English assessment practices whose sole focus is the development of reading and writing skills. Traditional assessment English practices hinder the ELTs and learners to development their English language listening and speaking skills since only reading and writing skill are being assessed (Abeywickrama, 2012). In this situation, Pakistan including Balochistan needs not only a shift in the English language assessment practices but also to develop the English language listening and speaking skills of ELTs so as to translate the teaching objectives in daily classroom practices.

### **Balochistan and status of English Language.**

Balochistan, one of the provinces of Pakistan, makes the 44% of area and 6% of the entire population. It is a multilingual province where Balochi,

Brahvi, Pashto, Sindhi, Saraiki, Urdu, Persian and Punjabi languages are spoken (Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan, 2020). Balochistan had been followed the National Education Policies till 2010 when after 18<sup>th</sup> amendment education became a provincial matter (Govt. Of Pakistan, 2010, April). Balochistan has developed and implemented one education Sector Plan, named Balochistan Education Sector Plan (2013-2018) and now is in the process of dissemination of its' second education sector plan (2020-25) (DAWN, 2020, December). Balochistan is also trying to adopt English as a language instead of a subject from Grade-I to Grade-XII and seeks federal government engagement in language policy development for itself (Secondary Education Department, Government of Balochistan, 2020).

### **Listening skills development usefulness.**

Listening is a primary skill which enable us and ensures our communication not only with each other but with our environment as well since it leads to speaking of language. It is evident through the daily observation that a child begins to speak the language which s/he had listened. As an example, a child in a monolingual environment will be monolingual. In contrast, a child raised in a multilingual environment becomes multilingual. It articulates that listening, in reality, is an input, which yields speaking as an output (Kluger, 2015). Listening process is extremely complex since it engages ears and brain. The very first phase, in this process, is hearing, where Cochlea receives a sound and then auditory nerve sends it to the brain for processing. Brain, interprets and examines

the audio messages. Here, two different but collateral systems “top-down” and “bottom-up” are involved in the examination and interpretation of received audio messages. The “Top-down” supports the brain by placing the sound, heard, into the bigger culture sketch by utilizing the background and contextual information. Whereas facilitates the brain through “bottom-up” process as it comprehends and examines the heard sound to construct meanings by decoding (Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011; Walker, 2014). Based on the response of both the processes, the audio information, is, either rejected or assimilated into schema for response or remembrance.

Significant to mention that some factors also impact the listening accuracy. These include, language proficiency level of listener, listener's contextual knowledge and objectives of the listener (Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011). Alongside, it is also worth remembering that listening skills could be taught through various strategies and extensive listening (Renadya, 2011). Different strategies are applied by the listeners for better comprehension including information prediction “selective attention”, evaluation and monitoring of listening comprehension, inferencing and responding. In case of L2 listeners' various listening strategies' application as well as “Top-down” and “Bottom-up” processes' application varies from one individual to another. It is due to the difference in learners' learning style, listeners' background and cultural knowledge of the L2 and difference in learners' L2 proficiency level. It is also revealed through research that learners who possess

the sound background and cultural knowledge of L2, employ both the processes i.e., “Top-down” and “Bottom-up” and useful listening strategies. It helps the listener to better comprehension to obtain the listening's overall meaning since they ignore the irrelevant information and utilize L2 background and cultural knowledge. On the other hand, listeners' possessing L2 weak background knowledge, can only apply “Bottom-up” process excluding the experiential knowledge. In doing so, they do word to word translation of the listened text and cannot grasp the central idea. Moreover, effective listening includes quickness and grounded-ness of listening and speaking in everyday life activities (Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011). In short, listening comprehension is an active skill which involves metacognition (Solak, & Erdam, 2016).

In traditional listening comprehension three steps are involved which are “Pre-listening, during-listening and post-listening” (Renadya, 2011; Ling, Bernadette, Kettle & Margaret, 2011). In the first step, learners' recall their previous knowledge through designed activities regarding they are going to listen. In the second step, learners comprehend the listening text through activities. In doing so, they tend to identify the central idea, infer the meanings of the words and phrases and seek specific information. Sometimes, for better comprehension of the learners, the audio is played several times. Correct answers are also displayed by the teacher for learners' self-assessment purposes. While the third step involves, follow up activities of further listening comprehension activities. In the meantime, there are some challenges in developing

the listening skills of learners. For instance, effective transition from one listening comprehension strategy to another one during listening.

In pre-listening step, learners are engaged in activities to recall their prior knowledge about the listening topic. While, in during-listening learners are engaged in activities to comprehend the listening text through identifying main idea, inferring the meanings of words and phrases and looking for some specific information. To achieve this, audio text is played several times for learners' better comprehension. Teacher also displays the correct answers in front of learners for self-assessment. Post-listening consists of follow up tasks. These include further practice listening comprehension exercises. Although, listening comprehension skills are taught to the learners for effective listening comprehension. However, a flaw exists regarding enabling learners to effectively transfer one listening comprehension technique from one listening text to another. In the same way, listening text presented in textbooks is different from daily life listening text experiences. Unlike natural listening, textbooks listening tasks are written in sophisticated language which lead to confuse learners to comprehend listening in real life settings. Meanwhile, it would be necessary to mention that listening is difficult to learn and to teach (Walker, 2014). So, teachers and researchers need to pay attention to resolve these issues as well.

**Research Design.** This study utilizes the qualitative case study method to fulfill the purpose of the study which is the practical implementation of two listening comprehension skills' models for English Language Teachers (ELTs) and youth to

overcome this challenge in Pakistan including Balochistan. Taking a step further, to presents two detailed activities for the practical implementation of the two models with appropriate justification, to ease the process (Crowe, Cresswell, Robertson, Huby, Avery, & Sheikh, 2011). Data was collected using the Desk Research method (Goundar, 2019) which involved the utilization of available data in the form of two listening comprehension Models and utilizing the educational experiences of researcher as a teacher, teacher educator and as a research expert to contextualize implementation of these two Models with Justification (Goundar, 2019).

**Two models for listening comprehension An explicit approach to listening instruction.** This explicit model to listening comprehension, suggested by Mendelsohn (1995 as stated in Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011), stresses on clear instructions in classroom for listening comprehension. Hence, this model is not solely confined to clear instructions as it also emphasizes on training of strategies amalgamated with authentic text.

During the training of strategies listeners are provided opportunities to reflect to cognize the usage, appropriateness and objectives of applying listening strategies through demonstrating thinking aloud protocols, practicing listening activities and feedback from the teacher. Due to its' focus on listening strategies training, this approach is receiving acceptance from researchers. At the same time, this approach has implications for curriculum as it emphasizes on the usage of authentic listening activities instead of relying on textbooks listening tasks. Since textbooks

listening tasks sometimes fail to reflect authentic life experiences. In this regard, teachers have to consider three aspects to select a passage to administer in classroom. These aspects include learners' proficiency level, topic appropriateness and topic's relevancy with learners' everyday lives. Designed and graded passages should be utilized only for classroom listening practice. In the same way, teachers should design simple listening comprehension tasks for students' ease.

While explaining this listening model, it would be necessary to mention that a special attention is paid on need analysis to explore learners' listening areas of improvement, learners' favorite learning styles and strategy application. Utilizing need analysis findings, effective listening comprehension activities could not only be designed concerning strategies but paying attention on situations or settings as well. Even, some random listening comprehension activities could facilitate learners to apply learned listening strategies to the new activities.

Moreover, Mendelsohn (1995 as stated in Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011) in his model has also provided guidance for effective strategy-oriented tasks. In this regard, he proposes that strategy based listening comprehension activities must possess six characters. The pioneer character is to familiarize learners with the significance of strategy usage through thought-provoking activities. In addition, planning and implementation of diverse pre-listening engaging activities is the second important character to enable learners to develop their hypothesis to predict the listening task. In the same way, authentic activities should be used with

clear objectives. Simultaneously, to practice the usage of varied listening strategies directed exercises should be planned. In the same manner, natural recordings should be utilized to facilitate learners for general comprehension. Most importantly, teachers should develop post-listening activities to motivate learners for day to day listening activities.

To conclude, explicit approach to listening instruction emphasizes on teachers' explicit guidance regarding strategies training using authentic tasks.

#### **An eclectic approach to listening instruction.**

An eclectic model of listening comprehension was proposed by Field (2008 as stated in Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011) to satisfy diverse learning styles of individuals. Basically, it is a fusion of explicit and implicit models of listening comprehension. This multi-string model has four divisions of strategies and four approaches. The divisions of strategies are "achievement, repair, pro-activity and avoidance". Achievement strategies facilitate learners to better comprehend the decoded information. While, repair strategies assist learners to seek support from peers and teacher. Similarly, pro-active strategies help learners to identify and overcome challenges during listening comprehension and avoidance strategies guide learners to grasp listening without understanding all listening data. In this model teachers are supposed to provide short listening tasks to the learners with low L2 proficiency or vice versa. However, authentic listening activities should be introduced gradually.

As far as four approaches are concerned in this model, they are being explained now. The first approach familiarizes the learners

with the effective listening comprehension processes. Initially, decoding repeating vocabulary could be performed by the low proficiency level learners in L2 in listening tasks. It could be enhanced through regular exercises of dictation. Subsequently, which would lead to the meaning-based listening tasks. The second approach not only utilizes listening activities to familiarize learners with listening strategies but also to practice applying those activities in the listening activity. Fundamentally, this approach reflects Vandergriff's (2003a as stated in Ling, Bernadette, Kettle, & Margaret, 2011) metacognitive cycle. In this approach an authentic listening activity is chosen to express some problems which learners cognize during listening comprehension. In doing so, learners are engaged to comprehend during listening and answer the questions related to speakers' context and attitude. Learners also write down words and phrases encountered during listening comprehension. It is followed by a replay providing learners opportunity to add missing details. At this stage, learners also collaborate in small groups to discuss their cognizance. The replay facilitates learners to verify their acquaintance for classroom discussion. Similarly, playing the listening text for the third time assists learners to discuss and decide the most accurate acquaintance. At this moment, teacher provides feedback to the learners and explains the causes for diverse understandings.

The third approach is an analysis phase to identify the challenges faced by learners during listening comprehension. At the end, the fourth approach focuses on seeking peer and teacher assistance to not only identify the challenges faced during

listening comprehension and to explore the effective strategies to overcome them.

Although this is a good model which is designed to satisfy the learning needs of learners with diverse learning styles, but lesson plans developed in accordance to this model lack guidance with reference to usage of strategies.

### **Practical application of two models in listening comprehension**

Two activities have been designed to exhibit the implementation of the two listening comprehension models. The first activity reflects an explicit approach to listening instruction while the second activity reflects an elicit approach to listening instruction.

#### **Activity 1**

**Topic:** Watching videos with subtitles for listening comprehension

**Session objectives:** Participants would be able to comprehend the videos with subtitles listening comprehension technique, its significance and would be able to apply it to identify key words from the listening task and write down the definition of key terms given to them from the listening task.

**Age:** Young adults and above

**Language level:** C2 (CEFR Language policy program education policy division education department Council of Europe, 2018)

**Number of participants:** 20-25

**Session duration:** 30 minutes

**Motivation.** Basically, this is motivation through brainstorming and classroom discussion. This will be executed to engage participants in discussion to cognize them with "watching videos with subtitles" for listening comprehension in L2 along with its importance" as given under

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- ✓ Facilitator will ask the participants “do you watch English videos?”  
Expected Answer. Yes.
- ✓ Then facilitator will ask the participants “Why do you watch English videos?”  
Expected answer. To improve our English language listening skills, for entertainment, etc.
- ✓ Now facilitator will ask the participants “How does watching videos useful to develop listening comprehension?”  
Expected Answer. Watching videos provide us opportunities to develop listening comprehension through observation of the use of L2 in real life settings.
- ✓ At this moment facilitator will ask the participants “Do the videos with subtitles are more beneficial to develop listening comprehension in L2. If yes, why? If not, why?”  
Expected answer. Yes, they are more advantageous, as we not only listen and observe the language usage in everyday life settings, but we can also watch the words, phrases.
- ✓ Now facilitator would say “It means watching videos with subtitles helps to improve listening comprehension in L2 due to language in daily life observational activities along with the words and phrases. In this way, we do not miss any information. Do you agree or disagree?”  
Expected answer. We agree.
- ✓ Then facilitator will ask the participants “can we use videos with subtitles in classroom as a

technique to develop L2 listening comprehension skills of learners?”  
Expected answer. Yes.

- ✓ Facilitator will conclude this discussion by saying that “watching videos with subtitles is a listening comprehension technique in L2. It facilitates learners to observe language use in everyday life. Moreover, they also see what they have watched. So, it is useful in developing learners listening comprehension skills in L2”.

**Pre-listening activity.** Facilitator will inform the participants that now we will apply “watching videos with subtitles technique” to identify key words from the video and write down definitions of asked key words. In doing so, we will begin with pre-listening activity. Explanation of this pre-listening activity is given below.

- ✓ Facilitator will say “We will watch a video about “family discussion at dinner” (Learn/Practice English with Movies, 2015, November 13). Before watching the video, you are supposed to guess key words and write them in your notebooks.”
- ✓ Now facilitator will say “Once you have completed this, let me know and we will move to next activity.”

**Main-listening activity.** This will be the main component. A YouTube (See link in Appendix-A) video will be shown to the participants. It would be divided into three segments. Details is given as under,

- ✓ Facilitator will inform the participants that “It is the first component of listening activity.

You will watch a YouTube video regarding family discussion at dinner. You will also modify or add details to the key words which you have written, earlier. It is an individual task.”

- ✓ Now facilitator will play the video on multimedia for one Minute and then pause it.
- ✓ Now facilitator will say “it is second component of main-listening activity. Now, facilitator will play the same video with subtitles. During this listening, you will again, modify or add details in your key words.”
- ✓ After the video has been played till one minute and fifty-two seconds, facilitator will pause the video and say “Facilitator will distribute a work sheet containing a list of key words. You are supposed to write the definition of the key words in the given work sheet (Jayaraman, & Thakur, 2017).
- ✓ Now facilitator will show the definition of those key words by playing the video till two minutes and eighteen seconds and facilitator will say “Now you can tally the definition of the key words with your definitions.”
- ✓ At this stage, facilitator will say “It is the third segment of the main-listening activity. You have already matched the definition of key words. Here, facilitator will replay the video. Now you will carefully watch the video to comprehend it further.”
- ✓ Now facilitator will play the video till three minutes and seven seconds.

**Post-listening activity.** In this activity facilitator will sum up this listening comprehension by classroom discussion and distributing handouts (See Appendix-B for details) among participants for further listening comprehension applying ‘watching videos with subtitles’ technique.

- ✓ facilitator will generate the classroom discussion by asking the participants to share their view about the application and benefits of watching videos with subtitles for better listening comprehension.
- ✓ At the end facilitator will distribute a handout (See Appendix-C for details, Learn/Practice English with Movies, 2015, November 14) among participants for future listening comprehension exercises using this technique.

**Justification.** Normally, in audio listening, listener only hears without knowing the real-life settings. But watching video is useful to enable listener to observe language usage in daily life (listening, 2015). In the same way, sometime listener cannot listen a word or phrase due to elision and assimilation. Subtitles in videos facilitate listeners to see what they are hearing. Most significantly, technology has become essential component of our daily lives. Learners spend a lot of time in watching videos on YouTube for different purposes. Moreover, technology grabs learners’ attention. So, technology could also be used as a tool in listening comprehension. Altogether, watching videos with subtitles technique may facilitate significantly in learner’s listening comprehension. This was the reason that this technique was opted for activity 1.



## Activity 2

**Topic:** Global listening skills

**Session objectives:** Participants would be able to develop global listening skills through identifying main presented in audio text.

**Age:** Young adults and above

**Language level:** B2-C1 (CEFR Language policy program education policy division education department Council of Europe, 2018)

**Number of participants:** 20-25

**Session duration:** 30 minutes

**Pre-listening.** In pre-listening, facilitator will motivate participants to identify the main idea from an audio text along with the ways to identify main idea presented in an audio text.

- ✓ Facilitator will ask participants to listen carefully and try to identify the main idea from my narration. Facilitator will say “I studied in a public school. It had ten classrooms, one hall, one library and one computer lab. It also had a playground as well. There were twenty-one teachers in my school. It is a well renowned due to its education quality in the area.”
- ✓ Now facilitator will ask the participants “What I was talking about?”  
Expected reply: You were talking about (the features of) the school, you studied.
- ✓ Then facilitator will ask the participants “How do you know that I was talking about my school?”  
Expected answer. Every detail, you narrated was about your school.
- ✓ Now facilitator will endorse by saying “Yes, it was about my

school as all details were about my school. This is a technique used to identify the main idea presented in an audio text. It is also known as global listening. To get the main idea, we avoid unnecessary details and focus on relevant details to grasp the main idea.”

**Main-listening.** In main-listening activity, participants will be engaged to listen an audio text and identify the main idea. It will be executed in four steps. Details are as under,

- ✓ Facilitator will ask the participants “Now we will apply the same strategy to identify main idea. Facilitator will play an audio. You will listen it carefully. During listening you will take notes of the information you come across to identify the main idea. It is an individual task.”
- ✓ Now facilitator will play the audio (See link in Appendix-D for audio file and participants will take notes during listening.
- ✓ After first listening, facilitator will inform the participants by saying “Facilitator will replay the audio. At this time, you will have the opportunity to add details into your notes.”
- ✓ Once they have listened the replay, Facilitator will say “Now facilitator will divide you in small groups by giving them numbers 1 to 6. All ones will be in one group, all twos in second group and so on.”
- ✓ Then facilitator will ask them to share the information they gathered within their groups and discuss it to understand main idea presented in

the audio (Jayaraman, & Thakur, 2017).

- ✓ After this activity, Facilitator will inform them by saying “Facilitator will replay the audio for second time. You need to listen it carefully to verify the information you collected”. Now, facilitator will play the audio file.
- ✓ After this, facilitator will inform the participants that “Facilitator will replay the audio for the third time. You will again verify the information you collected. After listening you will discuss it as a class to identify the most appropriate main idea.”
- ✓ Facilitator will facilitate the class discussion to finalize the main idea presented in the audio. I Will also explain them the reason of having different main ideas about one audio file.

**Post-listening.** In post-listening, facilitator will engage participants to discuss the issues faced by them during the listening comprehension and facilitator will suggest different ways to overcome those challenges.

- ✓ Now, facilitator will ask participants to share the challenges which they had faced during listening comprehension.
- ✓ Once they share the challenges they came across, facilitator will provide my input to the participants to overcome these challenges. For example, if a participant shares that facilitator was unable to understand each and every word from the audio. Facilitator will guide him that it is unnecessary to understand each and every word. To get the

main idea, you may infer the meanings of the difficult words. In the same manner, facilitator will inform them the significance to ignore irrelevant information in audio to get the main idea. In this regard, facilitator will provide simple examples as well.

- ✓ Most significantly, facilitator will encourage participants to also seek peer-support to overcome listening comprehension challenges.
- ✓ At the end, facilitator would provide a handout to the participants for further practice of different accents in different speed (slowest, slower, medium, fast, Breaking news English, 2018) to identify main idea presented in audio (See Appendix-E for details).

**Justification.** Generally main ideas are presented explicitly in listening activities, but it is not always the case in every day spoken language. In everyday life speaker can change his/her mind during conversation. Similarly, there could be a possibility that a speaker may not communicate his/her main idea fluently rather s/he may communicate it in chunks. So, it becomes significant for a listener to develop listening comprehension skill to grasp the main idea presented in an audio or by a speaker conveniently, without wasting a lot of time in irrelevant information. This was the reason that chosen global listening was chosen.

### **Conclusion**

It is evident that listening has been neglected in English language teaching in Balochistan, Pakistani context as English language assessment only focuses reading and writing skills. Moreover, development of listening comprehension skills is

difficult to learn and challenging to teach (Walker, 2014). In this regard, it is the responsibility of ELTs to not learn it but to teach it effectively as well. So, it is right time to overcome this challenge by initiating the development of English language listening comprehension skills of English language teachers and youth. Since, better listening leads to better speaking and better job performances (Kluger, 2015, May 29).

In the meantime, the significance of real-life listening experiences could not be

denied connecting the learner with the language culture (Wagner, 2015). In this regard, the proposed listening comprehension models could not only be enormously useful to develop English language listening comprehension, both for English language teacher educators, English language teachers and youth but these could also be significantly beneficial to design effective in-service teacher training modules. This could be one of the ways to take full advantage of English language in Balochistan, Pakistani context.

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