

## Techniques For Developing Listening Skills of Higher Secondary School Teachers of Virudunagar District

**S.M.Kanmani**

Part Time Ph.D Scholar in English  
MK University  
Madurai -21

### **Abstract:**

Listening is the first skill a learner develops in any language learning. It is the utterance first followed by a repetition of what is heard before finally learning the language. Effective Listening in English language can help teachers and thus students overcome oral communication problems. Any effective teacher is not only a knowledgeable and skilled, but also a good active listener. Good listening skills are needed to develop empathy and understanding with the students and to assess their demands. Listening skills also help in negotiating students and defusing probable classroom conflicts. Thus, the aim of this study is to provide English language teachers at Higher Secondary schools with innovative strategies for improving their listening skills. For this purpose, data was collected from English Language teachers of Higher Secondary schools for assessing their listening skills and applying innovative strategies for improving their listening skills. The results proved a positive impact on the subjects taken in the study.

### **Introduction:**

Students spend a lot of time listening to teachers in a class. Listening is a two-way process, but most teachers make it one way in a class. In spite of this continuous listening than speaking, reading or writing, most students remember relatively a little of what they hear, approximately 20% after a few days. Research shows that improved listening skills can be learned or trained.

*"One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to sa."*

*-Bryant H. McGill*

TESOL is a field that keeps changing with changing phases of time (Eli Hinkel, 2006). It is a field that is concerned with how English as a language is taught. The Phonological part of language learning is breaking up the oral part into understandable fragments where words are broken into syllables, and syllables create sounds. Previous studies have shown that better listeners focus on important information in a top down approach. Effective listeners rely on bottom-up approaches or word by word decoding (Malley and Chamot, 1990).

Better listeners activate their previous knowledge of the language and relate contexts, conventions and discourses to their store of background information. Their previous knowledge helps them in deciphering a message even if not heard in entirety (Peterson, 2001).

*"Everything in writing begins with language. Language begins with listening."*

*-Jeanette Winterson*

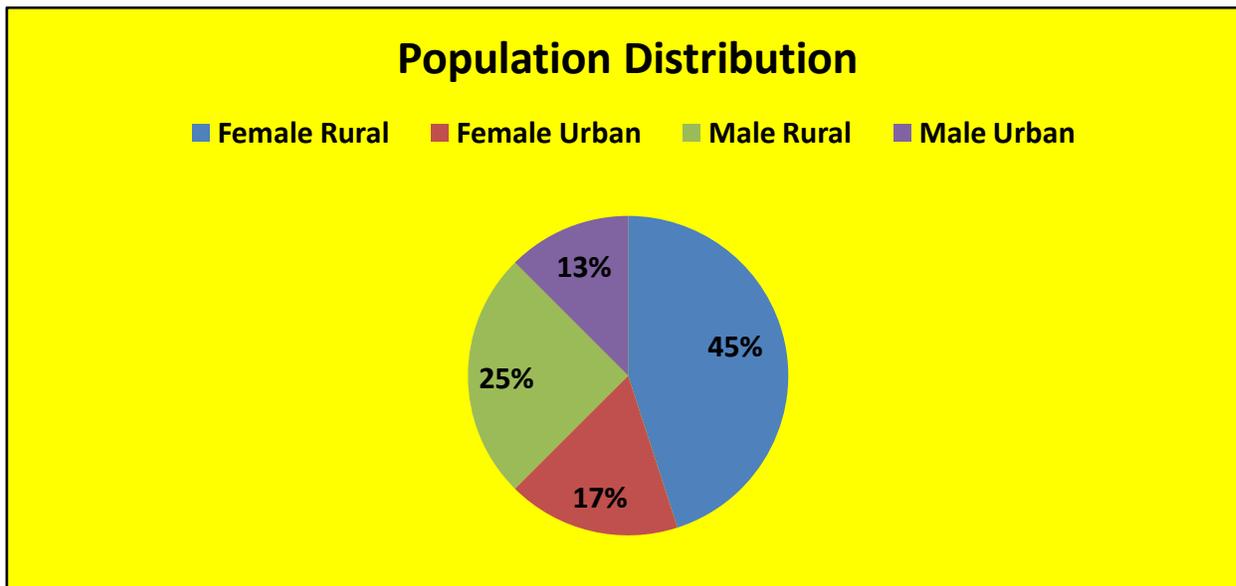
The stored knowledge also helps them in their inferences and predictions and bypass bottom-up approach aspects (Chaudron and Richards, 1986). The listeners spontaneously fill in the gaps and arrive at interpretations or meanings which do not depend on comprehension of the message. They more often comprehend just from the context and their knowledge of key words without paying any attention to the grammatical form.

The Bottom-up approach is a lower level process that constructs meaning from sounds which fit into larger phrasal units which are then matched to previously stored knowledge in long term memory (Peterson, 2001). For most users of the English Language, what matters is the overall ability to communicate effectively in the language rather than mastering a distinct skill (Donald E Powers , 2010).

In listening, a student has to receive, process, and interact with relevant linguistics which requires the listener to have a high discerning ability in pronunciation and its connection with meanings. Teachers lack of proper educational background also hurdles their teaching. Thus, the aim of this paper is to suggest techniques which can improve the listening skills of Higher Secondaryschool teachers and in turn effectively produce better listeners of the English language. This paper discusses the strategies that can improve listening skills of Higher Secondaryschool teachers of Virudunagar District.

## Parameters used for Assessment

The design adopted in this study was an experimental design or a study in which teachers were placed in random groups (Leedy and Ormrod , 2010). The most commonly used experimental design is the pre-test and post-test design (Campbell & Stanley, 1963 as qtd in Yair Levy and Timothy J. Ellis, 2011). Eighty teachers from Higher Secondaryschools of virudunagar district of tamilnadu (N=80) where 50 teachers were females and 30 teachers were males. Further, 70% of the Teachers were from rural areas ( N=56) while the rest were from urban areas (N=24). The participants were divided into two groups randomly on the bases of pre-test. One group was taught listening skills traditionally, while the other group were treated to one month of specific strategies as suggested by Joan Morley (2002) and Miller (2003). The following figure Figure 1 depicts the population distribution taken for the study.



**Fig. 1 – Distribution of the Polulation in the Study**

The groups were re-examined with post-tests and researched quantitatively. A specific questionnaire was developed by the researcher under the supervision of language experts. It consisted of items related to listening skills using a Likert scale of 1-5 for the pilot study. The main tool however was the data from Pre and post tests given to the teachers. The idea of the entire research revolved around the basic question on

innovative strategies which could play a significant role in improving listening skills of English language teachers in Higher Secondary schools of Virudunagar District.

## Pre-test questionnaire

- Do you read aloud a paragraph or two before explanation
- Do you listen to English News at home
- Do you watch English movies at home
- Do you give instructions in English to students
- Do you make use of electronic media like radio, TV in English class to improve listening skills

## Activities undertaken

The teachers were trained on strategies that could improve their listening skills as detailed below.

- **Listen and Act:** A listener is made responsive. For example listening to a keyword and drawing a picture or locating routes on a map or operating equipment etc.
- **Listen and Transfer:** The participant listens to a topic and transfers information to other in a written form (Spoken-to-written) or speaks about the topic (Spoken-to-spoken). Example, listening to somebody and taking a message (in telephone), a gapped story game for completion, summarizing a story etc.
- **Listen and Solve:** word game answers derived from verbal clues was used. Example, “animal, “Vegetable” etc.
- **Listen, Assess and Manipulate:** This activity is to challenge the intellect of the listener where the listener evaluates the information received. For example making predictions from information received.
- **Interactive Listen and Speak:** The focus is both to transmitting information as well as negotiating meanings in an interactive exchange. The activity was started in small groups, containing five to ten teachers. A personal story or topic is announced where each listener has to ask at least one question in a question/answer mode. Examples of the question from listener are: “Could you repeat?” “Could you give us an example of?”, “Could you explain more?”
- **Listen and Enjoyment or Socialize:** Activities include listening to songs, stories, plays, poems, jokes and discourses. Personal topics like hobbies, future plans, and global issues are encouraged to break dull schedules or learning.

## Analysis

Unfortunately listening skill is not given any attention by Higher Secondaryschool teachers at virudunagar district. Generally, various techniques of listening instruction that have withstood the test of time are considered very essential like listening intensively and making inferences (Eli Hinkel, 2006). The above detailed strategies adopted in listening instruction resulted in positive outcomes. Effective listeners use many and varied range of strategies and show greater flexibility in their approaches (Murphy, 1985). Weaker listeners, concentrate too much on either the text or on their own world knowledge. More than the strategies employed, the manner in which they were employed results in better outcomes (Suzana Graham-2003). Table 1 details the Pre-test Scores of English Teachers of Higher Secondaryschools from Virudunagar

**Table 1 - Teachers Pretest Score of Listening**

Classification	Rural		Urban		Total	Percentage
	Female	Male	Female	Male		
Excellent	3	3	8	6	20	25
Good	2	2	6	9	19	23.75
Fair	1	1	2	2	6	7.5
Poor	9	12	5	5	31	38.75
Very Poor	1	1	1	1	4	5

It is evident from the table that more than 50% of the teachers did not belong to the good or excellent category. Female teachers from rural areas fared better than males in the excellent category, while most urban males were good. The main problem was with the teachers in the rural areas as majority of them were poor in their listening skills.

Table 2 lists the post-test scores after training while figure 2 depicts the comparison between pre-test and post-test scores.

**Table 2 - Teachers Post-test Score of Listening**

Classification	Rural		Urban		Total	Percentage
	Female	Male	Female	Male		
Excellent	4	4	9	9	26	25
Good	3	3	9	9	24	23.75

Fair	1	1	4	4	10	7.5
Poor	6	6	3	3	18	38.75
Very Poor	1	1	0	0	2	5



Fig. 3 – Comparative scores of teachers after the application of strategies

It can be seen clearly from the above figures that listening skills of the teachers improve after the application of the aforesaid strategies.

**Conclusion:** Many teachers of Higher Secondaryschools are not in a position to communicate satisfactorily in the English language. The main aim of the study was to assess and improve teacher’s competence in listening skill. It was evident that no systematic strategies were applied by them. Very few teachers followed the technique of reading aloud a paragraph or two or focussed on improving their listening skills. Some of the

teachers listened to English news and watched English movies, but majority of the teachers did not do so. Almost all the teachers felt that the time utilized inside the classroom was not sufficient to bring improvement in their listening skills, due to the pressure of completing portions as per the prescribed textbooks and schedules. In order to improve the situation, an experimental study was conducted and the results showed that a significant change in the listening skills of the teachers when innovative strategies are applied for their improvements..

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