Students' Listening Skills and Psychology Awareness in a Pandemic: An ESL Perspective

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Abstract

Whether or not listening skills can be used to measure grammatical ability has been a hot topic of controversy in the language learning community. However, existing study results aren't satisfactory in and of themselves. As a result, considering the current research gap, this study was carried out to solve the issue. To begin, the researchers used a mean listening score to assess the listening skills of 50 ESL first-year students at a public institution. Second, frequency and sentence analysis were used to identify the students' most frequent mistakes and difficulty in listening for grammatical differences. When hearing comprehension outcomes were being evaluated, a written composition activity was used to verify them. There was a strong correlation between the degree of skill of the respondents in listening for grammatical differences between the single and plural forms of subjects and predicates, as well as in the ability to distinguish between the present and past tense verbs. However, more complicated syntactic formulations were discovered to have specific issues. According to the results, the listeners get disoriented and disturbed when the test sentence contains intermediate words, phrases, or subordinate sentences. These difficulties in remembering what they learned at school may result from socio-psychological issues—the intervening words impaired their ability to concentrate and recall information when they were not in a classroom. As a result of the COVID 19 epidemic, instructors and students alike have been compelled to adapt to a new learning environment: the virtual classroom. Online testing and results processing was done under this, considering that electronic platforms are a moderating factor. EFL and ESL specialists like (Shao et al., 2019) and (Walsh & Rsquez 2020) have recognized that this alteration in the modality of teaching influences methods of learning that have not necessarily been delineated previously. While not the primary focus of the research, this work still underlines the new socio-technological component as an essential mediator of listening evaluation for greater grammatical competence.

Keywords: ESL Students, Online Learning in a Pandemic, Listening Skills, Grammatical Competence, Inflectional Patterns, Psychology Awareness

Introduction

As one of the five core language abilities, listening is one of the most important (Shao et al., 2019). Every necessary skill is linked and interwoven with the others in a scaffolding continuum (Walsh & Rsquez 2020). It is crucial in language learning, acquisition, and total communicative competence. Due to the time and dynamic interchange in a primarily oral society, hearing is employed the most often of the five language skills, which has evolved into virtual online conversations and zoom teleconference. Learning a new language has never been more complicated than now, with the worldwide epidemic adding a layer of complexity to an already difficult situation. Listening is defined as "to provide attention with the ear; to attend intently to hear; to give ear" (Han 2021). As much as 90 percent of the knowledge kids absorb in school comes from listening to their teachers and peers, according to research by (Pérez et al., 2019). Language learners overlook the work required to improve their listening capacity. Listening is a spontaneous and natural part of everyday life, which explains why students generally behave this way (Shao et al., 2019).

According to (Yan et al., 2018), acquiring a language requires active listening that incorporates sound-identification procedures and inferring meaning from those sounds. CLTA concepts have transformed language teaching and

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learning (Vatty 2020), (Shao et al., 2019) and (Walsh & Rísquez, 2020). Recognizing the strength of the senses, particularly the hearing sense, may help ESL instructors and students better understand language structure and design lessons appropriately.

In addition to writing, listening has long been recognized as assessing language skills, especially grammar. According to (Shao et al., 2019), "listening must be understood as a communication method that fosters open and candid exploration of ideas and emotions and helps trainers to create trust and rapport with participants." (Michel et al., 2019) 50 ESL college students were evaluated on their ability to distinguish grammatical elements that contribute to the overall communicative meaning of a speech.

However, the use of listening as a method of language assessment has been met with a great deal of skepticism. Listening has been consigned to the "marginal area" in foreign language courses "for a long time," according to Fauzi 2019. One of the author's most substantial arguments against listening has been provided (Chen & Hsu 2020). He sees it as limited use in assessing a learner's language competency. He believes hearing alone cannot capture any component of a language's structure or use. According to the authors (Chen & Hsu 2020), it is only spelling and aural abilities test. There is a belief that listening sessions do not serve a teaching purpose, as reported by (Jiang 2018) and (Li and colleagues, 2019). However, they say they can only assist students in improving their oral/auditory comprehension skills. (Li et al., 2019) When students are skilled in other parts of language acquisition, (Ding et al., 2019) consider listening as a technique for both assessment and learning.

Other proponents argue that the ability to listen is an excellent way to gauge one's competency in a foreign language. The (Han 2021) definition of "listening intently" is very illuminating. Its third definition is "to wait intently for a sound" or "to wait attentively for a language." (Wise & Hsiao, 2019), and (Pérez et al., 2019) agree that listening exams may provide ESL instructors with important information about their students' overall language competency because they activate the learners' internalized expectations of grammar. Pedagogical priority should be given to listening as a learning skill and a way of scaffolding communication abilities, according to Li and Flowerdew (2020). (Li & Flowerdew 2020).

Good listening skills have been shown in studies to assist students in enhancing their language fluency in many ways. Students' accuracy in hearing and writing improves due to using listening as a method and as a learning activity, according to both (Lou & Noels 2019) and (Hartshorne et al., 2018). Shao et al. (2019) believe that listening abilities directly influence full language proficiency since both micro and macro skills for listening contribute to general communicative competence. While listening to a discussion using chunking and micro selection enhances a student's grammatical correctness and discourse competency. ESL students in high school studied by Fabella (2016) performed better on grammar tests after they were taught a variety of listening skills for dealing with distinct discourses. In ELT, experts have repeatedly advocated for the explicit teaching of listening skills to build greater levels of listening literacy for more successful communication in all sorts of language learning situations. For any listening program or curriculum to be relevant and responsive to students' changing listening needs and abilities, especially with the rise of online learning and its latest advances, listening proficiency tests must also be designed by the tenets and principles of CLTA.

Learning to listen is critical in all aspects of human communication, and as a result, it must be taught and assessed in schools and other educational settings. That's why we need to do more research on how learners' listening abilities are considered and the challenges they face when learning as a formative method. A study like this one is an effort to find a solution to this problem.

Statement of the Problem

First-year college students were the focus of this research, which intended to establish their degree of skill and typical mistakes in listening for grammatical differences, especially inflectional patterns. They utilized Google Meet specifically. The coronavirus epidemic necessitated an online exam. Several issues had to be addressed to minimize the influence of these technical disparities (e.g., bandwidth, quality of audio from headphones and laptops) on the experiment's outcomes. In addition, the other interfering circumstances, such as the absence of a dedicated study

space, internet diversions, and noise, were taken into account. As a part of the study process, students were asked to submit written work using Google Forms to evaluate the validity and dependability of the new online format.

The questions on the online exam were as follows:

1. listening for grammatical differences among the 50 first-year college students in terms of:
   a.   What are the inflectional patterns for subject and predicate single and plural forms?
   b.   Is there a pattern to inflecting verb tenses in the present and past?
2. What are some typical grammatical faults done by research participants in terms of listening?
   a.   What are the inflectional patterns for subject and predicate single and plural forms?
   b.   How do you inflect verbs in the present and past tense?

Methodology

This study used a descriptive-exploratory research design. Therefore, a more comprehensive picture of listening skills and grammatical competence among a representative sample of the target group was obtained. It was decided to use the mean score to measure the respondents' ability and frequency in listening for grammatical distinctions in the inflectional patterns. The study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks drove the interpretive analysis, which focused on the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA) advocated by (Shao et al., 2019); (Walsh & Risquez, 2020); (Li & Flowerdew, 2020). CLTA principles see ELT or English Language Teaching as holistic and communicative, with the five language skills intertwined and supporting one another in the learning continuum. Integration of the many aspects of language acquisition is made more accessible by using communicative ways of listening, speaking, reading, writing, watching, and listening.

Communicative instructional tools further the holistic acquisition of a second language like communicative grammar examinations that consider students' current abilities, challenges, requirements, and sociocultural backgrounds. In a study by Gentrup and colleagues (2020), In any CLTA framework, the SLA Hypotheses (or Five Hypotheses) are critical. To direct the course of the descriptive-exploratory analysis, his Affective Filter Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis, Monitor Model, and acquisition-learning dichotomies were examined. This research was broken down into the following steps, as shown in the flowchart:
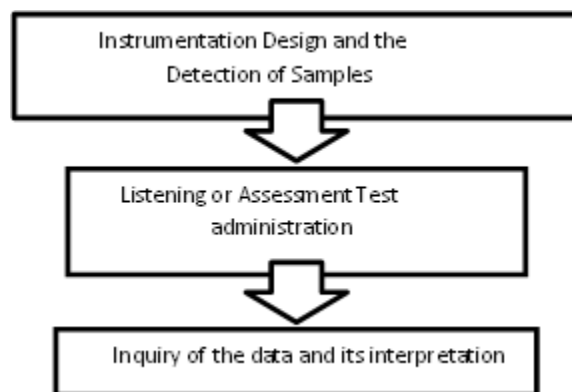
Figure 1. Diagram of the Flow Chart Showing the Stages of the Research Flow.

To begin with, it was a tinker with a version of a communicative listening device. With the support of language specialists and practitioners, this evaluation tool was thoroughly analyzed for its reliability and validity. Subjects and predicates had inflectional patterns for single and plural forms, while verbs had designs for present and past tense, both of which had twenty elements each. There were a total of 50 questions on the listening assessment. ELT students' grammatical competency is tested using these grammatical units since they are essential to using fundamental linguistic structures. The exam has to be conducted online again because of the coronavirus epidemic. Even if there are significant discrepancies in the respondents' actual surroundings, administering the exam online

may be seen as a tremendous equalizer. All participants were made aware of the testing time and test direction by going through the appropriate testing methodology.

Purposive sampling was used to identify the study participants from the research population. To be eligible for the research, participants had to have an average or low I.Q. and English grade, be between 16 and 20 years old, come from homes where English was not spoken, have a middle-class SES, and be enrolled in a university course on Purposive Communication without hearing issues. We used an exploratory, descriptive approach, which resulted in a diverse group of participants with differing levels of intelligence and proficiency in the English language. Twenty of our participants were repeaters, while the other twenty were ordinary students.

Respondents to the listening test were instructed to pay close attention to the inflectional markers in each sentence and shade the circle beneath the letter of their answer on a google form to indicate whether the features suggested singular or plural forms of subjects or predicates or the present or past tense of the verb. About 25 to 40 minutes were allotted for the listening exam. The teacher-researcher gave the clarity in the presentation of the listening exam utmost attention. To avoid interfering with the examination outcome, the accent was toned down. The testing procedure was regulated by the three intelligibility, interpretability, and acceptability criterion. All test-takers or responders were given a thorough explanation of the study's goals and objectives before taking the exam. The materials and audio texts listened to a total of two times. This qualitative scale was intended to gauge the listener's ability to understand what was being spoken.

Actual Score Range	Qualitative Description	Meaning
16 to 20	Very Good	Singular or plural, present or past tense and inflectional signals in each of the aural texts may be recognized and identified.
11 to 15	Good	Some inflectional indicators may be recognized, albeit it is unclear whether they signify the number (S/P) tense of the noun verbs in the present or the past.
6 to 10	Fair	Despite identifying various inflectional indicators, I cannot discern if these markers reflect the number of the tense of the nouns or the verbs.
0 to 5	Poor	There were no or a few inflectional signs to be found.

As a way to verify the results of the listening test, a descriptive composition writing test was administered; however, since this investigation was limited only to the assessment of the respondents' skills in listening for grammatical distinctions, the written output of the study participants served only as secondary data used to extrapolate on their listening proficiency. This secondary data were analyzed qualitatively, and a conclusion was drawn.

The mean score was used to evaluate the respondents' competence level to answer the particular questions of this research. Frequency and sentence analysis were also used to determine the most frequent mistakes made by the survey participants.

Result and Discussion

Problem No.1.

A. Singular/plural subject and predicate inflectional patterns?

b.   How do you inflect verbs in the present and past tense? Regarding listening for grammatical differences, how proficient are first-year college students?

Listening for inflectional patterns in terms of single and plural forms of subjects or predicates, the following table shows the competency level of the respondents:

Table 1. Inflectional Patterns for Singular and Plural Forms of Subjects or Predicates of the Respondents

Range	Qualitative Description	Frequency	Percentage
16 to 20	Very Good	23	56
11 to 15	Good	16	38.6
6 to 10	Fair	4	8.6
0 to 5	Poor	0	0

Mean Score: 16.2 =Very Good

According to the above table, more than half of the respondents (56%) received ratings between 16 and 20, with a "very excellent" qualitative description. Sixty-six respondents (38%), who scored between 11 and 15, said their quality was "good." Four (8.6%) had a score of 6-10, which is considered "fair," while none (0%) scored "poor" on the scale. Respondents could correctly identify the inflectional markers in each of the supplied sentences. They distinguished between single and plural forms of subjects and predicates based on the calculated mean or score of 16.3, which is classified as "very excellent" in this research.

Findings from this study might indicate that the respondents have excellent listening skills, particularly when distinguishing between single and plural subject and inflectional predicate patterns. A listening exam may help students internalize their grammar expectations, as proposed by (Pérez et al., 2019). On the other hand, it runs counter to (Jiang, 2018) assertion that listening has been woefully neglected. (Jiang 2018) points out that although children can read and write at a certain level, their listening abilities are not as developed. "We learn 50% of language competency through hearing, 25% from speaking, 10% from reading, and 15% from writing," says (Michel et al., 2019). The findings of this study support the concept that listening proficiency serves as a scaffold for grammatical competence (Shao et al., 2019; Li & Flowerdew, 2020; Walsh & Rsquez, 2020).

According to Table 2, respondents' ability to discern grammatical differences between the present and past tense verbs.

Table 2. Inflectional patterns of verbs in the present and past tenses of the respondents' listening proficiency in English

Range	Qualitative Description	Frequency	Percentage
16 to 20	Very Good	15	25
11 to 15	Good	25	65
6 to 10	Fair	5	10
1 to 5	Poor	0	0

Mean Score: 15.02=Good

Respondents scored 16.05, characterized as "excellent," which suggests they could identify specific inflectional markers but could not discern which ones signified the present or past tense of the verbs, as seen in Table 2.

Qualitative scale scores ranged from 16 to 20 for 15% of the respondents; 65 (65%) had a "good" level of proficiency, and 5 (10%) had a "fair" proficiency level.

Participants in this research displayed a high degree of expertise in listening for inflectional patterns of verbal competence for both the present and past tense. An efficient scaffold for grammatical competence may be found in the study's concept that listening proficiency influences grammatical correctness. Additionally, CLTA concepts in the creation and administration of listening exams may help students improve their communicative listening skills while also improving their overall language competency (Shao et al., 2019). The creation of interactive listening exams that include bottom-up and top-down listening abilities contribute to postering general micro and macro communication skills.

Lou and Noels (2019) state that grammatical structures are significantly more exposed in extensive listening sessions, mainly when the aims are explicit and accepted. Similarly, (Lou & Noels 2019) note that hearing is an active process rather than a passive one. Listening is "not a simple receipt of auditory signals," as they put it, and thus they define the listening mechanism as a participatory activity.

This study's important conclusion disproves the notion that listening is the least valued of the five macro communication abilities: reading, speaking, writing, and watching. Evidence suggests that English as a Second Language (ESL) students may understand how critical practical listening skills are to their progress as linguists. The 50 freshmen may have gained metacognitive listening abilities to check their listening performance as self-directed learners of a second language. A linguistic skill is simpler to master when it becomes a habit of communicating (Shao et al., 2019).

In terms of listening for grammatical differences, what are the most typical mistakes made by first-year college students:

a.   Which morphological patterns are used to express single and plural nouns and verbs, respectively?

b.   Present and past tense verbs are inflected according to the same pattern.

For subjects and predicates with single and plural inflectional patterns, the frequency distribution of respondents' grammatical listening mistakes is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Inflectional Patterns for Singular and Plural Subjects and Predicates in Listening for Grammatical Distinctions by Respondents

ITEM NUMBER	"KEY ANSWERS"	CORRECTION FACTOR (Frequency)
1	A	10
2	A	7
3	B	3
4	A	2
5	A	5
6	B	0
7	B	0
8	A	3
9	B	25

10	A	8
11	B	5
12	A	25
13	B	3
14	A	4
15	A	4
16	A	17
17	B	11
18	B	6
19	A	11
20	B	9

Part A, a test for inflectional patterns for subjects and predicates, was found incorrect in Table 3, with 25 out of 50 respondents incorrectly answering questions 9 through 16.

Respondents were confused and distracted when intervening phrases or subordinate sentences surrounded a statement. Respondents were disorganized and forgetful. As stated in (Michel et al., 2019) (Hartshorne et al., 2018), as mentioned in (Michel et al., 2018), two of the four difficulties in listening may have influenced the respondents: "difficulty in concentration and the physical surroundings." It's possible that the fact that the exam was online contributed to the first two issues: "speed of delivery" and "new vocabulary and idea." Socio-psycholinguistic aspects in language acquisition, including culture and discourse structures as variables in the cognition and understanding of grammatical structures or syntax and the total sum of semantics, might also account for the test result's results. Complicated language exams in a second language take into account the word order of the first language or mother tongue. However, excellent bilingual education may overcome these challenges, affecting listening pedagogy and the design of teaching materials. ESL student's ability to understand spoken language in the target language may be influenced by their ability to read. For this study's findings, students must be exposed to various discourses and reading materials, including those that challenge them in terms of sentence dynamics and construction.

Twenty-five people out of the 50 people who responded to item 9 felt the noun phrase "the speakers suggest that there is corruption" was the primary verb instead of "imply" and the word "speakers" as the subject. Items 12 and 13 are similar in that they may have piqued the interest of the 25 respondents, causing them to choose b (plural) as their response rather than a (singular) since "a tray" is the subject and "makes" is the verb of the phrase. These inaccuracies support the previous discussion's assertions.

Items 6 and 7, on the other hand, were correctly answered by every responder. Because of the inflectional marker (es) or the /-Is/ sound that is likely dominant, the subject "differences" clearly indicate that it is in the plural form, and the verb "are" follows the subject directly without the intervention of phrases or sentences between them. This finding reaffirms the idea that for ESL students who are already familiar with the structure of the language and have built a foundation of proficiency in other language skills such as reading and writing, the simple syntax is not a significant intervening variable in listening comprehension for grammatical accuracy (Shao et al., 2019).

Table 4 shows the most prevalent hearing mistakes in terms of inflectional patterns for the present and past tense of verbs, based on the participants' responses.

Table 4. Respondents often make the following mistakes while listening for grammatical distinctions between the present and past tense of verbs:

ITEM NUMBER	KEY ANSWERS	NUMBER OF ERRORS (f)
1	B	13
2	B	9
3	A	23
4	A	9
5	B	9
6	A	17
7	B	1
8	A	13
9	B	0
10	B	10
11	A	32
12	A	11
13	B	0
14	A	7
15	B	9
16	A	15
17	B	5
18	B	0
19	A	0
20	A	20

It's time for the second part of the test, which is about changing the tense of verbs. As shown in table 4, items 11, 3, and 20 have the most mistakes people make. Each of the 32, 23, and 20 wrong answers has a number.

This part of the test has the most people who answer incorrectly. Regarding item number 11, 32 out of 50 people who took the test answered it wrong. More than 75% of the people who took the test had trouble focusing on the agreement between the subject and the predicate and how to deal with the phrases and clauses in the sentences they heard. This is similar to what the people said in a class interview after the test. Even if ESL students' first language

is different from the one, they want to learn, practical error analysis and strategies like washback and backwash can help them overcome these differences. CLTA can also teach grammar, listening, and other language skills (Gentrup et al., 2020).

in "Our visitor, who comes from the city, is welcomed by a municipal official," the use of "who comes from the city" or "welcomed" could have made it hard for people to figure out the tense of "welcome." There is another example of this in the sentence, "The regulations do not allow absences without permission from the president." The verb "forbid" was thought to be in the past tense because it ends with a /-d/sound words. Overgeneralization can be a problem here. "Regulations" and "absences" could be words that surround the verb and make it hard for people to figure out which tense of the verb it is.

Items 9, 13, 18, and 19 were correct answers for none of the people who took the test. The sentence "Those days were called pretty" was easy for the respondents because it was simple and did not have any words or clauses that might confuse them. "Were" is a way of saying "a lot." "My aunt cleaned my room early this morning." "Cleaned" is in the past tense because it ends with an inflectional marker (-ed) or sound. This means that the verb is in the past. Besides, the adverb phrase "early this morning" shows that the action was done before the speaker said it.

Meanwhile, there is a problem with some of the respondents' skills at noticing correct inflectional patterns in composition writing. After the listening test results were tallied, a composition writing test was given to ensure the results were accurate and to see how well the people who took the test did with grammar. The difference between competence and performance significantly impacts this study because both have criteria for measuring language proficiency. Learning about language can be shown by how well people speak and understand social situations. (Mellom et al., 2018)

The following sentences were copied verbatim from the writing outputs of the people who took the survey:

"People can see the word "big fish" in the middle of the story, and with the top of the branch is" "the word "big fish," which means "big fish is the branch.""

"shows us that there are many things we have to deal with in life... It also shows us that there are many things we need to deal with."

"picture shows a man who has been through a lot and has come out on top. This shows that he" "has achieved what he wants in life: to be above the trees."

"One more thing to think about is the cloud."

"Big Fish is the hardest to understand because of the event or chapter in the story."

"full of signs."

Based on these examples, respondents may be familiar with the fundamental principles governing inflectional patterns, but their application of those rules is lacking. These errors or blunders might be linked to performance issues, such as a lack of English language practice or attention, rather than a lack of knowledge of the fundamental principles of English grammar. Alternatively, the research participants may be monitored by users who know the correct forms but are too sluggish or careless to double-check their outputs in the target language.

Conclusion

Singular and plural subject or inflectional predicate patterns and present and past tense inflectional patterns are well-understood by the responders, who have a high degree of competency in listening for these grammatical differences. However, the frequency distribution of mistakes in Tables 3 and 4 reveals that the first three questions with the most often erroneous response are the most problematic for the listeners.

Following the results and conclusions, English as a Second Language instructor should include interactive listening in their classrooms. Furthermore, students must learn listening as a skill for learning because it can improve their sensitivity to the structure of the language, which impacts their overall language proficiency as communicative skills are built on top of one another and overlap throughout the learning process. Many different sorts of sentences, lengths, and discourses must be taught to students. They should be careful and discriminating when dealing with words like modifiers and intensifiers that surround a subject and a verb in a phrase." As a result, pupils may find it distracting when words or phrases are included in the basic form. Modifiers that help pupils understand the verb tense are also beneficial. ESL instructors should bring out the following context cues to their pupils during a listening exercise. Transformational Grammar (T.G.) activities, as proposed by Noam Chomsky (Vattty 2020), are essential for students' grammatical development. The four T.G. concepts of addition, subtraction, substitution, and permutation should be taught to students in sentence formation, together with embedding and modifiers.

Students' listening and grammar abilities should also be reinforced via writing tasks. While writing is the highest and most complex form of discourse, CLTA proponents stress that the other four language skills are just as critical. Writing for various objectives allows ESL students to build a wide range of micro and macro communication abilities, many of which rely on their grammar knowledge or competency. This research asserts that the distinction between competence and performance has been employed more to complement language acquisition rather than a detriment. That is why this research proposes an evaluation of one's teaching methods in light of eclectic CLTA practice and an assessment of listening skills. However, explicit and direct strategy training in the five macro skills, notably listening, should be given to ESL learners since 100% of their everyday communication in the orality of their culture takes place via listening. Activities like role-playing, asking for and providing directions, character analysis, and community language learning may all be done online as practical and genuine listening activities. As a result, well-formed pupils with functional communication abilities are produced through an overall comprehensive, holistic strategy that uses all five core language skills.

According to this research, ESL instructors should also routinely monitor and analyze their students' competency levels in the other four language skills. A periodic evaluation of ESL teaching and learning would indicate the areas where greater attention is required, leading to a more responsive and relevant English language education.

A three-pronged approach to studying the listening skills of ESL students participating in this research is advised for a more thorough inquiry. To fully confirm this study's findings, it may be helpful to administer a listening comprehension exam to the same group.

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