**Teaching Listening**

**1. What is listening comprehension?**

Listening is defined as the process of receiving, understanding, interpreting, and responding to the verbal and non-verbal messages of the speaker while relying on a set of complex cognitive processes and making use of various types of knowledge (linguistic and non-linguistic). In other words, listening is a complex mental process that relies on the use of different types of knowledge to decode spoken messages.

**2. Why do we teach listening?**

A major reason for getting students to listen to English is to acquaint them with the different accents and varieties- rather than the voice of their teacher and its idiosyncrasies. Students need to be exposed to such varieties as British English, American English, Australian English, etc. since people of different nationalities may get to communicate with each other. Furthermore, within the same variety-British English- there are many dialects and accents, and students need to know some of them depending on their level and the place where classes are taking place.

Listening is also taught because it helps students acquire the language subconsciously even when the teacher does not draw attention to its features. Listening provides exposure to the language, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, rhythm, pitch and stress.

Language learners should be exposed to authentic language material that includes examples of how language is used in real contexts.

Learners need to be trained on how to understand the overall message of specific auditory segments, and hence on how to develop comprehension as an essential component of the listening activity.

**3. Myths about Listening:**

3.1. **Myth 1: Listening Equals Hearing**

Usually, listening and hearing are used by most people interchangeably, but the two
terms are not synonymous. While “*listening*” entails careful attention, “*hearing*” is related to the perception of sounds. Hearing is the first step of listening, however; listening goes beyond hearing. It is a process that requires awareness of, attention to, and analysis and interpretation of aural stimuli to construct meaning.

**3.2. Myth 2: Listening is a Passive Skill**

Because reading and listening are receptive skills, many people tend to think of listening as a passive process. Buck (1995) stated that the “the assumption that listeners simply decode messages is mistaken, “Meaning is not in the **text** (text = whatever is being listened to)-but is something that is constructed by listeners based on a number of different knowledge sources”.

Vandergrift (1999) emphasized that Listening comprehension is anything but a passive activity. It is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger socio cultural context of the utterance.

**2.3. Myth 3: Listening is the same as reading:**

The differences between speech and writing emphasise the assumption that listening
and reading are not the same. Holding the same view, Brown (2011) pointed out that both
listening and reading can be defined as ‘comprehension plus decoding’; they have
comprehension in common, but different decoding processes. That is, the way they follow to
comprehend a text is different. In brief, listening is a unique skill that develops differently from
reading.

**3.** **The Listening Comprehension Process**

To explain the process of listening, researchers suggested different models:

**3.1.The Bottom up Process**

According to this model, meaning is constructed by accretion, gradually combining larger units of meaning from the phoneme level up to the discourse level (Vandergrift, 2005, Flowerdew & Miller, 2010). Listeners build their comprehension by assembling the message piece by piece, starting with the minimal units (phonemes) which are then combined into words,which in their turn form together phrases and sentences. These sentences are then linked together to create meanings. This comprehension process is, therefore, based on one’s ability to recognise the linguistic features of the target language, and the ability to use that knowledge to process incoming data. This means that failure to understnad language is due to linguistic
deficiency (lack of knowledge in vocabulary, grammar or phononology).

**3.2.** **The Top down Process**

Top down processing, on the other hand, stresses the use of previous knowledge and
context to comprehend a message rather than the decoding of individual sounds and words. Approaching a text from a top down model entails the use of knowledge about the context
or topic of conversation in order to understand the message. Indeed, listeners can use many
sources of knowledge: experiential knowledge (knowledge about the world), pragmatic
knowledge, cultural knowledge, and discourse knowledge.

**3.3.The Interactive Process**

The interactive model was mainly developed by Rumelhart (1975) within the reading
comprehension context and is used for listening as well. According to his theory, language is
processed in a parallel way at different levels, though it is not yet clear how . Thus, linguistic information (syntax, phonemes, etc.) interact with prior knowledge (pragmatic, semantic) simultaneously. Whether listeners will use one process more than the other is dependent on their purpose of listening. A listener who wants to check specific information will use the bottom up process while a listener who is only interested in a general overview will resort to the top down process.

**4**. **Types of Listening**
**4. 1. Intensive listening:**

Listening for perception of the components (phonemes, words, intonation, discourse markers, etc) of language. It refers to**" the process of listening for precise sounds, words, phrases, grammatical units and pragmatic units"(**Rost, 2002, 138)

**4.2. Extensive listening**:

Listening to develop a top down, global understanding of spoken language. Listening for gist, main idea, and making inference are all part of extensive listening. It occurs in a situation where the teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they listen to, using their own materials for the purpose of pleasure and language improvement (Harmer, 1998). It usually takes place outside the classroom and it is done for its own sake.

**5. What kind of listening should students do?**

Listening depends on students’ level and the types of activities that go with the audio/video. Since listening allows the teacher to bring different kinds of speaking to the classroom, various genres can be used like conversations, lectures, plays, poems, news broadcasts, interviews, and short stories.

**6. What is special about listening?**

There are different ways in which listening differs from other activities. Unlike reading, where students can read at their own pace, the spoken language occurs in real-time; there is no second chance to go back. In everyday use, listeners have only one chance of comprehension; a speech is heard only once and though listeners can ask for repetition, they usually do not do, and even when speakers repeat what they said, they would not use the same words. This means that listeners should process speech at a speed that is determined by the speaker, and all that a listener retains from a spoken message is memory-most often an imperfect one. Considering the ephemeral nature of the written text, readers have full control over the input; when tired or confronted with comprehension difficulties, a reader can stop, check a word, dwell upon some parts of the text, skip others, or backtrack (Brown, 1990; Buck, 2001).

Second, unlike in written language where readers deal with printed input, the external
input listeners have to process is an acoustic signal; the sounds of language or phonemes. This
signal is generally indistinct because of the sounds speakers modify while speaking. In normal
speed speech, speakers phonologically modify phonemes; they change some sounds under the
influence of their surrounding phonemes (assimilation), drop others (elision), and link others
together (linking) in complicated ways. Function words can also be pronounced in two ways,
in their weak or strong form. Stress and intonation are also important features of the English
language (Buck, 2001; Osada, 2004).

Listening is also special because spoken language-mainly the informal one- has specific features including the use of incomplete utterances, repetition, hesitation, etc.

**6. The principles behind the teaching of listening:**

1- Teachers should pay attention to the quality of their audio/video file.

2- **Preparation:**

Teachers should listen to the audio file before they take it into class. That way, they will be prepared for any problems-noise, accents- that may come up. Students should also be made ready to listen. This can happen by making them look at pictures, discuss the topic, or read the questions first so that they can predict what they will listen to.

3- **Once will not be enough**:

Listening once is not enough; the first listening is often used to give students an idea of what the audio sounds like so that subsequent listenings will be easier for students

4- **Students should be encouraged to respond to the content of a listening, not just to the language**:

As with reading, the most important part of listening is to draw out the meaning of the spoken input.

**5- Different listening stages may demand different listening tasks:**

Since there are different things we want to do with a listening input, we need to set different tasks for different listening stages. This means that for a first listening, the task needs to be general and straightforward. Later listenings may focus on more details, language use, pronunciation, etc.

**6- Good teachers exploit listening inputs to the full**