

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Listening skills profile among business management students

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Accepted 10 October, 2011

**This study investigates the use of listening skills among business management students. It is a cross-sectional study involving selected higher institutions in Malaysia. The specific objectives are to identify; (a) the physical attention level toward the sound sources; (b) the concentration and absorption level; (c) the avoiding listening distraction level; (d) the level of non-dependence on textbooks. The research data are collected through a questionnaire. The respondents of the study are 257 business management students which were selected on random sampling technique basis. Generally, the results showed that the use of listening skills among business management students was moderate.**

**Key words:** Management students, business management course, listening skills, learning strategies.

## INTRODUCTION

Business management students should be train properly on listen skills, because they will use the listening skills in dealing with others to gather the related information in order to make a right decision. Misunderstanding due to the lack of listening skill will lead to improper decision making. This will affects a lot of parties in business. The previous study concerning the listening skills in Malaysia showed that the secondary school students were at the low level in listening skills (Mohamed, 2001). They will carry the low level of the listening skills to the higher institution (tertiary level) where they continue their studies in various specializations including business management studies. According to Wolff et al. (1983), listening skill should be trained effectively because it would generate the ability to gain knowledge and other communication skills. While Hyslop and Tone (1998) stated that listening skill is the foundation for the development of individual cognitive skills. The cognitive skills are a vital to business management students to select, organize and integrate the information.

Furthermore, listening is the most frequent activity used in life. A previous research carried out by Sperry Corporation (Martel, 1984) found that people used 80% of their conscious time to communicate, and out of that, 45% was used to listen, 30% to speak, 16% to read and 9% to write. Therefore, it was proven that listening plays the main role in gaining information. However, it was usually not properly taught as it should be. Burley-Allen (1995) found that time allocation given to listening practices was less than six months from 12 months of the official schooling time as compared to 12 months that were given to writing. Wolff (1983) considered listening as an orphan who was being ignored in the educational field. In addition, Hunsaker (1990) found that only a few educational institutions had put listening skills in their curriculum. Nunan (1999) also found that listening had been neglected in the teaching and learning processes, especially in second language, while more focus were given to develop speaking ability. Moreover, previous researchers had not put enough focus on listening as one of the learning skills. Mohamed (2001) revealed that many research were carried out internationally on listening, covering various fields such as education, learning, management, family, marriage, communication and counselling. Unfortunately, not many studies were

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carried out on listening in Malaysia, especially on the business management students.

In this research, four listening skills had been identified: (1) attention toward the sound sources; (2) mind concentration and information absorption; (3) avoiding listening distractions; and (4) non-dependence on textbooks. Previous studies carried out by Mohamed (2001) and, Habibah and Zaidatol (2001) investigated the first three skills which were attention toward the sound sources, concentration and absorption of the information and avoiding listening distractions. In this research, however, one additional strategy which was non-dependence of the textbooks was included. The textbooks might distract the listening process due to that students would relate what they heard to the textbooks content. Therefore, students would not give full attention to listening because they felt that they could gain similar information from the textbooks.

The first strategy is attention toward the sound sources. It associates with the listeners' physical position with the sound sources. The listeners should be in the most appropriate position with the sources, such as facing them in order to ensure that sound waves can be fully captured. For instance, if two students are listening to a radio, one of them with frontward position while the other has his back toward the source, the former is expected to experience more effective listening condition as compared to the latter. The second strategy is concentration; which is related to focusing on sound sources and avoiding thinking of other things. The human mind, indeed, is an active entity that can travel beyond the limits of the classroom. In such situations, students are not focusing on the teaching, although they seem to be listening. Therefore, students should be trained to focus on the information relayed during communicative sessions. The absorption of information means that the mind should be ready to receive information from the sources until the end of a communicative session. In some conditions, a person tends to evaluate information and form conclusions before a speaker completes his speech (Habibah and Zaidatol, 2001). Therefore, this situation will make him more preoccupied with evaluating incomplete information rather than focusing on the whole speech.

The third strategy which is avoiding listening distractions refers to a situation in which a listener should ensure that he is not distracted in a communication. Examples of distractions are telephone ringing, sounds of vehicles, other utterances and students' movements in the classrooms. All these things will distract listening process and cause inaccuracy in gaining information. Therefore, a good listener will successfully avoid these distractions.

The fourth strategy is non-dependence on textbooks. It means that students should not refer to textbooks in order to gain information, but instead, should listen attentively to the teachers' explanations. Students presumptively feel that if they cannot catch up with and

understand the teachers' explanations, they can refer to the textbooks. Therefore, unconsciously, they will not give complete attention to the lessons. If this perception persists, it will negatively affect their attention to teaching.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The general objective of this study is to identify the use of listening skills among business management students in Malaysia. The research questions for the study are: (1) To what extent business management students give attention toward the sound sources? (2) To what extent business management students concentrate and absorb information? (3) To what extent business management students avoid listening distractions? (4) To what extent business management students are not dependent on the textbooks?

This study was a cross-sectional study involving 257 respondents which were selected on random sampling technique basis from two higher institutions. The populations of the study were about 631 students. This study used a set of questionnaire regarding the listening skills. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first is business management students' demographic details while the second is to obtain listening skills used by business management students. In this part, there are 18 items, where: i) item 1, 2, 3 and 8 (please refer to Table 1 for items description) are meant to identify physical attention level toward the sound sources; ii) item 6, 7, 9, and 10 (please refer to Table 1 for items description) to identify the level of concentration and absorption information, iii) item 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 (please refer to Table 1 for items description) to identify avoiding listening distractions level; and iv) item 4, 5, 11 and 12 (please refer to Table 1 for items description) to identify non-dependence level on the textbooks. All these items are shown in Table 1. In order to analyse the data, this study categorizes means into three levels (Rudzi, 2003) which  $m = 1.00$  to  $2.33$  are considered low;  $m = 2.34$  to  $3.67$  are moderate; and  $m = 3.68$  to  $5.00$  are high.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study revealed that listening skills had been applied in learning as shown in Table 1. In the first strategy which is physical attention toward the sound sources, two items are moderate while other two items are high. Two moderate items are item number two and three which show that more respondents agreed that they felt uneasy if teachers spoke in their backward position during teaching as compared to those who disagreed. At the same time, more respondents disagreed that they could understand teaching if they could not see the teachers as compared to those who agreed. On the other hand, two high items are item number one and eight which indicate that majority of respondents agreed that they looked at the teachers during teaching. Meanwhile majority of respondents tried very hard to understand teachers' explanation. Generally, this study found that most of the respondents had paid their physical attention toward the sound sources.

Meanwhile, the second strategy which is mind concentration and absorption level, one item is moderate and three items are high. The moderate item is item number seven which indicates that more respondents agreed that they gave full attention on teaching until the end as

**Table 1.** Percentage and means of listening skills.

<b>Listening skills</b>	<b>1 (%)</b>	<b>2 (%)</b>	<b>3 (%)</b>	<b>4 (%)</b>	<b>5 (%)</b>	<b>Means</b>
I always look at teachers while they are teaching.	2.4	5.3	18.0	41.0	33.3	3.82
If teachers speak toward my back position, I feel uneasy.	10.1	17.7	17.6	37.0	17.6	3.29
I think that I can understand teaching even though I cannot see the teachers.	16.0	24.7	22.1	19.8	17.4	2.39
I can understand teaching even though without textbooks.	17.9	33.9	24.9	19.0	4.3	2.59
I like to look at textbooks while the teachers are teaching.	4.6	9.3	22.9	43.4	19.8	3.56
If I can understand teaching, I will nod my heads to show that I understand.	1.2	2.8	6.8	45.3	43.9	4.14
I can fully concentrate to teaching until the end.	1.3	9.4	35.9	34.1	19.3	3.53
While teachers give their explanations orally, I will try very hard to understand them.	1.0	1.8	6.3	46.5	44.4	4.18
I can note down important information from teaching.	0.9	2.8	13.6	54.5	28.2	4.00
I usually note down the important ideas.	1.9	4.8	21.1	45.4	26.8	3.79
I think that I can find out the important information in the textbooks if I cannot note it down.	5.0	17.8	27.9	36.3	13.0	3.32
Textbooks have more important information compared to teaching.	12.2	38.0	36.3	10.6	2.9	3.27
I feel distracted if there are students talking during teaching.	6.2	5.9	7.5	32.2	48.2	3.90
Usually, I advise students who make noise during teaching.	2.2	6.9	22.8	42.7	25.4	3.72
I feel distracted if somebody is walking during teaching.	4.5	8.0	19.6	39.7	28.2	3.70
I like to seat in the front of the class to avoid other distractions during the lessons.	3.3	4.2	14.1	24.0	54.4	4.20
I feel distracted if there are sounds from vehicles during the lessons.	3.6	4.4	9.2	34.1	48.7	4.20
I will try my best to avoid distractions that distract the teaching.	1.3	1.6	16.3	39.6	41.2	4.31
Overall means	3.64					

compared to those who disagreed. Items with high scores are item number six, nine, and ten which indicate that majority of respondents agreed that they would nod their heads if they understood teaching. While on the other hand, majority of respondents agreed that they could capture the main information from teaching. Majority of respondents also agreed that they usually noted down important information. These percentages directly revealed that most of the respondents who applied the listening skills, had given their full concentration and they were able to absorb information.

On the other hand, Table 1 showed that listening distractions avoiding strategy involves items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18 are at the high

level which indicate that majority of respondents agreed that they felt distracted if other business management students were talking in the classrooms. More respondents also agreed that they would advise students who made noise during teaching as well as many respondents agreed that they felt distracted if somebody was walking during teaching. Majority of respondents also agreed that they liked to seat in front of the classroom to avoid other distractions during teaching, while most respondents as well agreed that they felt distracted if there were sounds of vehicles during teaching. Many respondents also agreed that they would try their best to avoid things that distract teaching. In conclusion, this study revealed that most respondents tried to avoid

potential distractions that disturbed their listening.

For non-dependence level of the textbooks, which is referred by items 4, 5, 11 and 12, are at the moderate level. Nearly half of respondents claimed that they could not understand teaching without referring to the textbooks while more respondents claimed that they liked to look at the textbooks during teaching, as compared to those who did not look at the textbooks. It was also proven that more respondents thought that they could look for important information in the textbooks if they could not get them during teaching. More respondents also disagreed that the textbooks contained more important information than teaching. In general, this study showed that more respondents depended on the textbooks rather

than listened to teaching.

## DISCUSSION

This study revealed that the level of listening skills among business management students in Malaysia was moderate. According to Mohamed (2001), listening skills were used in all academic courses in order to note down main information during teaching. Jalongo (1995) also stated that without effective listening skills, students depended more on luck in learning. According to Mulvany (1998), good listening skills were vital in any communication to gain more information as well as classroom communication whereas teaching was happening and students listened to the teaching in order to gain information and facts. Smiths (1992) reported that students had spent 50 to 75% of time in the classrooms to listen from various parties such as teachers, classmates or other sound sources.

Therefore, students with good listening skills would gain more information and facts as compared to students without good listening skills. This study also found that business management students were not highly confident to understand classrooms teaching through listening. They preferred to refer to the textbooks in order to get more understanding about teaching rather than to ask teachers orally. More respondents agreed that they could not understand teaching without the textbooks while fewer business management students who could understand teaching without the textbooks. More respondents also agreed that they liked to look at the textbooks while teaching was taking place, as compared to those that did not look at the textbooks.

The finding indicated implicitly, that listening skills among business management students were not very encouraging, due to their dependency on the textbooks to understand teaching. Dependency on the textbooks habit will reduce their attention of listening skills as they know that they can get the information from the textbooks. On that basis, the attention of listening skills will drain out eventually. According to Brent and Anderson (1993), listeners with good listening skills were also good and be able to ask questions relevant to discussion matters. Mulvany (1998) stated that two way communications would only occur when someone had good listening skills. Therefore, business management students with this ability at the same time were also good in communication and they could response to their teachers verbally such as asking relevant questions to the subjects' matters or non-verbally such as nodding their heads to show their understanding to the topics. Listening has more advantages than reading whereas it is limited to what is written in writing forms and if further clarifications are needed, books cannot be doing so. However, in listening, whether in communication conference or in teaching and learning, students can ask for further clarifications from teachers if they need to do so.

Therefore, listening is very vital for students in which that if they have good listening skills, the communications between them and teachers will be more effective (Yusri et al 2011).

## IMPLICATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the findings, listening skills among business management students should be improved because they did not really master the listening skills. According to Jalongo (1995), learning without having good listening skills will depend more on luck. As long as the luck stays with them, students will get more information, but if not, they will not gain much information. Students should be trained to use listening skills in order to improve their listening skills. The lack of listening skills in learning is a habit that will affect business management students after they left the institutions as well as in their carrier. There are some listening models that had been tested based on effective skills and they can be used to improve listening. Among these models are: Lundsteen model (1979) which suggested five skills to improved listening comprehension which are listening, observation, meanings finding, feeling the meanings deeply and giving feedbacks; Levesque model (1989) which suggested five skills to improve listening comprehension skills including enthusiasm, listening, picturing, elaborating and enjoying; Grunkemeyer model (1992) which suggested skills to improved listening comprehension skills such as focusing, interpreting, evaluating and giving responses during listening. In order to make these skills effective in learning, they should be implemented together during listening. Other than that, Simms et al. model (1992) also suggested three forms of exercise which should be emphasized in order to improve listening skills including focusing on the matters that to be listened, listening with open minded and giving clarifications on what has been listened to.

## Conclusion

According to the listening comprehension models stated before, it can be concluded that there are some similarities between those skills even though the terms used are different. Skills to improve listening comprehension skills should fulfil these criteria which are to prepare listening devices to listen, to identify the purposes of listening, to interpret and to evaluate the information, to correlate the new information with prior information and to summarize the information.

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