

Enhancing Listening in Children for Effective Teaching and Learning in Primary Schools: An Empirical Report from a Nigerian Experience

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Abstract This study examined listening as a tool for effective teaching and learning for children in primary schools. Three research questions guided the study and a descriptive survey design was adopted. The population consisted of all the primary school teachers in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. From the population a sample size of 110 teachers was drawn. The data obtained was analysed using mean and standard deviations. The findings revealed that listening is essentially important for effective teaching and learning for children in primary schools. It also indicated factors that impede efficient listening as well as strategies for enhancing children's listening. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that a course in effective listening for children will be worthwhile.

Keywords Listening, Effective Teaching, Learning, Primary Schools, Teachers

1. Introduction

In recent years, discussions about listening abound (Abidin et al.,[1]; Verdugo, and Belmonte,[18]; Paris, and Stahl,[13]; Grabielatos,[6]; etc.). Scholars have explored the importance of listening in language acquisition in particular, and social interaction in general. If listening is an indispensable skill in human communication, therefore, there is the need to study how this important language skill can be tailored to meet the needs of children in primary schools, especially in Nigeria. Therefore, this study explores how teachers can enhance the abilities of pupils to listen better for effective teaching and learning. It not just enough for the teacher to concentrate on teaching, it is very important that the teacher pays attention to factors that could hamper pupil's listening abilities and tries to fashion ways to sharpen the listening skills of pupils.

Listening is an indispensable skill in human communication. Its indispensability lies in its being the pillar upon which other language skills are built. It is used far more than other language skill in normal daily life. For instance, people everywhere at all times, in all situations essentially engage in listening on a daily basis. They spend a greater percentage of their time in listening to radio, their friends, their family members, co-workers, colleagues, among others

than in speaking, reading, or writing. In addition, the hours students spend in the classroom listening can be approximated to be hundred per cent[12]. Listening is the process of focusing all attention on a source of sound in order to hear and to pick the information that the sound brings[11]. Discovery Education[3] defined listening as paying attention or making an effort to hear something. In the words of Azikiwe[2], listening means hearing with comprehension. Thus there is a difference between hearing and listening. When one recognises the sound of a moving car, running tap, breaking of fire wood or a baby's cry, we say that the person heard whatever happened. But when one is asked a question in his native or second language and he fails to give the correct answer he has not listened, even though he might have heard.

Listening is usually the first activity a child engages in. It provides a veritable foundation in the formation of speech habit of a child in later life. With the child's listening, rules and nuances of the language are acquired in a rather unconscious manner. In a similar vein, Sholes[15] notes that the more the skills a child gains during the early years in speaking and listening, the better he learns to read and write with ease in later life. In other words, early years are essential for teaching children how to listen in order to learn. FRN[5] considers it the key to success or failure of the entire education system. If children are taught to be active listeners: possessing requisite listening skills, this could enhance their performance in school. It makes teaching and learning process effective.

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The role of the teacher in enhancing the ability of pupils to listen better, especially at the primary stage of learning, needs to be studied in order to be able to situate it properly within the learning frame where it operates. Even though attention has been drawn significantly to the role of the voice of pupils in the learning process (Abidin et al.,[1]; Haddad and Jurich,[7]; Salaberry,[14]; Grabelatos,[6]; etc.), yet the role of the teacher is important and needs to be examined in order to demonstrate its important contributions to learning. Most recent studies on enhancing listening skills in children have concentrated on the inputs from children that enhance their listening skills. Such studies advocate a pupil-based approach to the teaching of learning. Arguably, their inputs are required in order to help them listen better. Although we do not seek to undermine their role and the need for their voices to be heard and explored, however, there is the need to further explore how teachers can help pupils to listen better. Listening provides the aural input that serves as a basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication[8]. Thus, effective teaching and learning is contingent upon pupils' ability to listen effectively. To listen, involve the ears, the eyes, whole-self, that is, undivided attention and heart. Listening is a process that consists of five elements: hearing, attending, understanding, responding, and remembering. Hearing is the physiological dimension of listening that occurs when sound waves strike the ear at a certain frequency and loudness is influenced by background noise. Attending is the process of filtering out some messages and focusing on others. Understanding occurs when we make sense of a message, responding consists of giving observable feedback to the speaker such as eye contact and appropriate facial expressions while remembering is the ability to recall information[11].

Listening is not a passive activity; pupils have to be active participants in teaching and learning process. Listening effectively requires the application of considerable listening skills and practice. It needs to be learned. Listening according to Stewart[16] requires 'listening with hearts' or 'hearing between the words'. Listening skills consists of non-verbal and symbolic communication. Non-verbal communication is also known as 'body language' and includes facial expressions, posture, hand gesture, tone of voice, smell and other communications perceived by one's senses. For instance, when one does not speak, his/her non-verbal communications convey a message. Symbolic communications are demonstrated by the house one lives in, the cloths one wears and especially the words one uses. However, the subject of contention is that because listening is not a school subject like reading and writing, or Mathematics, people think it comes naturally as long as they can hear or listen to directions or instructions on how to carry out a task. This appears to be true. Thus, listening is not recognized as a subject important to be taught. Azikiwe[2] states that listening is not as simple as people think and this serves to accentuate the need for teaching listening skills to enable the learners to comprehend spoken language with

ease in any situation. Tutoring and Academic Success Centres (TASC)[17] advocates that children should be taught listening so that they can learn to listen and learn better.

Some variables appear to be a constraint to efficient listening in teaching and learning process. For instance, a classroom that is too hot or too cold, or noisy for children to stay appears to hinder the children from listening to the teacher's lesson. Sometimes the attitude of the children influences their listening to the teacher. Some of the children appear to be naughty, some are indifferent, some are biased about their teacher, some have their minds closed and some do not pay attention when the lesson is going on. Lack of eye contact and use of language not understood by the children could hinder them from listening effectively. This is in line with the findings of Klein[10] which states that people do not listen when the mind is closed, and when the listener is biased about the speaker as well as when there is no eye contact. Adequate nutrition appears to be a problem to some families. Children who come to school hungry are less able to concentrate on schoolwork[9]. Such children may not be in a good mood to listen to the teacher's lesson. It is against this background that this work is conceived to determine the importance of listening, the factors that impede efficient listening and strategies to remediate the situation.

1.1. Aim and Objectives

In specific terms, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the essentials of listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools.
2. Identify the factors which generally impede listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools.
3. Explore the strategies that teachers can adopt for enhancing listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools.

1.2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Why is listening essential in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools?
2. What are the factors that generally impede listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools?
3. What are the strategies that teachers need to adopt for enhancing listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools?

2. Method

The design of the study is a descriptive survey aimed at examining the strategies for enhancing listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools. The area of study is Awka South Local Government Education Authority of Anambra State. It has 42 primary schools. The population of the study comprises all the forty-two (42) primary schools, seven hundred and eleven teachers (711).

Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting six (6) primary schools out of the forty-two (42). Then, through simple random sampling; one hundred and ten (110) teachers were selected.

The instrument for data collection was a 30-item questionnaire titled Enhancing Listening Questionnaire (ELQ). It was developed in accordance with the research questions and structured on a four point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). The instrument was organised in three sections. Section A-sought information on the importance of listening in teaching and learning process for children in primary school and section B-sought information on the factors that impede listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary school, while section C-sought information on the strategies for enhancing listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary school. The instrument was validated by two experts; one in Childhood Education and another in Special Education from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their inputs were used in modifying the questionnaire items. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was employed in calculating the internal consistency of the instrument and estimates of .76, 0.77 and 0.82 were obtained for sections A, B and C respectively. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents with the help of research assistants. An on-the-spot collection was made to ensure a high return. Data collated were analysed using weighted mean and standard deviation. The cut- off point was capped at 2.50 and above while below 2.50 indicate disagree.

3. Results

The results of the study are presented in line with the research questions as shown in Tables 1-3.

The result on Table 1 indicates that teachers sampled agreed with the 9 items that listening is essential in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools. Since they have mean ratings of 2.50 and above, it means that the score is significant for the argument that listening is essential for effective teaching and learning. The standard deviations range from 0.40 to 0.50. This indicates that the respondents were not far from the mean and not far from one another in their opinions.

The data on table 2 above showed that the 11 items were perceived as factors which impede listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary school since they have mean scores of 2.50 points and above. The standard deviation of the score generated in all the items are small indicating that the variations of the scores from the mean are not so much.

The result on Table 3 above indicates the 10 strategies that were attested to by teachers under study as effective measures for enhancing children for effective teaching and learning in primary school. This is evident in the mean scores which were above 2.50, the cut of point perceived as effective measures. The standard deviations generated from the mean scores on the items are small. This indicates that the score of the respondents are not very far from the mean and from one another's responses.

Table 1. Mean score ratings of teachers on the importance of listening in children for effective teaching and learning process in primary schools

S/N	Item statement	X	SD	Decision
1.	Listening is one of the four basic language skills	3.80	0.40	A
2.	Listening is the first and most important language skill.	3.71	0.45	A
3.	Listening enhances communication	3.56	0.49	A
4.	Listening helps to detect danger around.	3.46	0.50	*
5.	Listening provides the moral input that serves as the basis for language acquisition.	3.29	0.46	*
6.	Listening enables learners to interact in spoken communication.	3.60	0.49	*
7.	Listening enhances learning of languages.	3.43	0.50	*
8.	Listening is used far more than any other single language skill in normal daily life.	3.32	0.47	*
9.	Listening is one of the most important on-the-job communication skills.	3.39	0.49	*

Table 2. Mean ratings on the factors that impede listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary school

S/N	Item statement	X	SD	Decision
10.	Uncongenial classrooms; too hot or too cold, noisy for children.	3.80	0.40	A
11.	Teacher that has a speech defect and cannot articulate his/her words very well	3.52	0.50	A
12.	A listener that has hearing impairment	3.39	0.49	*
13.	If the children do not like the teacher	3.14	0.35	*
14.	When the mind is closed	3.29	0.45	*
15.	Prejudice or being biased about the speaker (teacher)	3.27	0.44	*
16.	Lack of concentration by the children	3.42	0.49	*
17.	Lack of eye contact	3.46	0.50	*
18.	Using a language that the children does not understand	3.36	0.48	*
19.	Unpleasant mood of the children	3.51	0.50	*
20.	Too much distraction, noise or some other discomfort	3.51	0.50	*

Table 3. Mean ratings of teachers on strategies for enhancing listening in children for effective teaching and learning in Primary Schools

S/N	Item statement	X	SD	Decision
1.	Deliberate training should begin as early as possible from the time a child can take orders.	3.75	0.44	A
2.	Children should be started with simple instructions, which will require sound discrimination.	3.48	0.50	A
3.	Teachers should train children's ears properly to distinguish between the similar sounds they hear.	3.27	0.45	A
4.	Provision of classroom environment that encourages good listening.	3.66	0.47	*
5.	Ensure that in classroom speaking-listening situation that the language is understood by both parties.	3.37	0.49	*
6.	Teachers should use appropriate tone, pitch, volume and speed in speaking.	3.45	0.50	*
7.	Teachers should provide practice in listening experiences through discussion.	3.48	0.50	*
8.	Teachers should provide reinforcement for pupils' listening experiences by asking them to listen to news, radio and television	3.55	0.50	*
9.	Teachers should make pupils understand or realize that they would do better in their class work/studies only if they have listened efficiently.	3.63	0.48	*
10.	Teachers should build a programme in which listening are consistently taught and practiced.	3.31	0.46	*

Key: * Agree = A
Disagree = D

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The data on the Table 1 showed the essentials of listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools. Listening is an indispensable tool for effective teaching and learning in primary schools. This corroborates the findings of Klein[10] that listening provides the moral input that serves as a basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact better in the spoken mode. If the teacher pays attention to helping the child to listen better, what he/she would be doing inadvertently would mean strengthening the ability of the child to learn better. The implication of the responses of teachers to the items captured on table 1 is that teachers sampled recognized the importance of listening to the success or other wise of pupil in the learning process. Their overall performance is almost dependent on their ability to listen well. When they are helped to listen well, they are being prepared to do well in learning. The respondents' submission that listening is cardinal to a child's success in school corroborates the positions of Grabelatos[6] and Abidin et al.[1] that listening plays a main role in second language teaching, especially with young learners. This important role it plays in second language teaching is particularly relevant to the situation of the area under study, since English, the medium of instruction in the schools surveyed, functions as a second language. This second language situation particularly underscores the important role teachers have to play to help the pupils listen better, especially at this early stage.

The data on Table 2 indicated the factors that were perceived as impediments to listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools. The responses showed that classrooms that are too hot or too cold or noisy are not conducive for children to listen attentively to teacher's lesson. Children, who do not like their teachers, may refuse to listen to the teacher's lesson and lack of eye contact by the listener, among others may also inhibit effective listening. This is in line with the findings of Klein[10] which states that people do not listen when the mind is closed, when they are biased about the teacher as well as when there is no eye contact. All these affect teaching

and learning in schools.

The teacher's willingness and readiness to interact with pupils would help them to relate well and to share personal issues that may have engaged their attention. The friendliness of the teacher would help the pupils to shift attention from personal issues to listening effectively in the class, which, of course, enhances teaching and learning. The result, as shown on table 3, showed that the teacher owes it a responsibility to be involved in the personal lives of his/her pupils in order to get maximum result. At this early stage, some kind of mentoring is needed to get maximum result. If the student is moody, for example, the teacher should be interested and should find out why. It is common knowledge that a student who is moody would not listen well. Effective listening is central to pupils' academic success; hence, teachers should give it whatever it would take to get pupils to listen effectively. In this regard, the teacher is not only a motivator, but also a facilitator.

An overview of the items in Table 3 indicated the strategies the teachers perceive would enhance listening in children for effective teaching and learning in primary schools. The findings agree with the NCLRC[12] which stated that listening exercises that are meant to train should be success-oriented and build up student's confidence in their listening ability. Also, Azikiwe[2], TASC[12] and Hart[8] posited that children should be taught listening so that they can learn to listen and listen to learn better. It is evident from the findings that the role of the teacher in enhancing the ability of pupils to listen effectively is emphasized. The position of the respondents strengthens the fact that the role of the teacher in enhancing the effective listening of pupils is ultimately important. At this early stage, the teacher is a key facilitator whose role in stimulating the pupil to listen better is primary. Even though the pupils' voice is significant; yet, their efforts would have to be harnessed and tailored towards achieving the desired results by the teacher. Just as teachers are making efforts to ensure that they listen better, their cooperation and active participation in the process is equally a necessary requirement for better results. The teacher's role is to stimulate and to nurture the pupil's innate ability to learn.

As shown in the responses of the respondents, since the pupils at this level are still tender, starting a programme that we help them discriminate between different sounds would aid their listening ability a great deal. Of course sound discrimination is very important in the learning process. Therefore, if a teacher begins from that point, it holds a great promise for the educational attainment of a child. It is necessary to bear in mind that those concerned here at the core of their formative stage in learning. If adequate attention is given here, that would greatly enhance the ability of the child to learn better in the course of his/her educational pursuit.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- Children should be trained to listen from the time a child can take orders.
- Children should be started with simple instructions which will require sound discrimination.
- Teachers should train children's ears properly to distinguish between the similar sounds they hear.
- The provision of classroom environment that encourages good listening is essential.
- Teachers should use appropriate tone, pitch, volume and speed in speaking to children.
- Teachers should provide reinforcement for pupils' listening experiences by asking them to listen to news, radio and television.
- Teachers should make pupils understand or realize that they would do better in their class work/studies only if they have listened efficiently.

To conclude therefore, it is important that it is foregrounded that listening is an essential ingredient in teaching and learning process. It enhances learning of language and all other school subjects. It is important that one takes a subject or course in listening so that pupils, students and in deed everybody would learn to listen, and listen to learn. It is essentially important to listen with one's eyes as well as ears. This could enhance effective teaching and learning in primary schools. Listening should be viewed as an important language skill that deserves to be given a special attention, especially with regards to primary school pupils.

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