# An Investigation Of Factors Of Listening Comprehension Difficulties Encountered By L2 Learners In Tertiary Level Classrooms Of A Private University

**Shagufta Kanwal[1] , Shagufta Yasmeen[2] , Hina Manzoor[3] , Ufaq Binte Jamal[4] , Muhammad Mazhar Khan[5]**

[1]Student Bahria University Karachi Campus, Karachi, Pakistan, Email: kanwalmehar111@gmail.com
[2]Senior Lecturer, Bahria University Karachi Campus, Karachi, Pakistan, Email: shagufta.bukc@bahria.edu.pk
[3]Assistant Professor NEDUET Karachi, Pakistan, hinam@neduet.edu.pk
[4] Visiting Faculty, Szabist Karachi Karachi, Pakistan, Ufaq_jamal@yahoo.com
[5]Senior lecturer, Salim Habib University, Karachi, Pakistan, muhammad.mazharkhan@shu.edu.pk

## Abstract

Listening plays an important role in our daily lives. It is one of the most important aspects of successful communication since it allows us to comprehend the world around us. Students face many challenges when it comes to the listening such as, accent of the speaker, speed of the speech and pronunciation. Other challenges include, limited and unfamiliar vocabulary, sound quality of speaker or audio. This study aims to investigate the factors of listening comprehension difficulties faced by L2 learners in tertiary level classrooms of a private university in Karachi Pakistan. Hopefully, highlighting the obstacles that students face while listening will create awareness among teachers as well as students. A quantitative research method is used for this research. Sample size of this study was 78 undergraduate students of three departments ( BS-English, BS-Computer Science, and BBA) of a private university. A close-ended questionnaire was administered through Google forms to explore the reasons of listening comprehension difficulties. Finally, the descriptive analysis technique was applied to analyze the obtained data. The analysis of the data revealed that second language learners face many listening comprehension difficulties in classrooms. Therefore, better strategies and techniques should be implemented in classrooms to deal with the listening comprehension challenges.

**Keywords** L2 listening, listening comprehension, listening difficulties.

## INTRODUCTION

Listening plays an important role in our daily lives. People listen for a variety of reasons every day, including entertainment, academic goals, and obtaining required information. Listening consumes more time in our daily life than other forms of linguistic features like speaking, reading and writing (Mirza, Pathan et al. 2021).

Where, Listening is using our previous knowledge and the environment in which we are listening to make meaning of spoken language, which is often accompanied by other auditory and visual information. Listening is a crucial part of communication; it is estimated that listening contributes 40-50 percent of overall communication time, whereas speaking accounts for 25-30 percent, reading accounts for 11-16 percent, and

writing accounts for roughly 9 percent (Gilakjani and Ahmadi 2011).

According to Pourhosein Gilakjani and Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi (2011), listening comprehension is the process of understanding speech that emphasis the role of linguistic components such as;

**i.   Phoneme:**

a phoneme is a unit of sound in phonology and linguistics that distinguishes one word from another in a given language.

**ii.   Word**:

a single distinct significant piece of speech or writing, often displayed with a space on either side when written or printed, and combined with others (or sometimes alone) to construct a sentence

**iii.   Grammatical structure:**

the arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence is known as sentence structure in english grammar. this structural arrangement, also known as syntax or syntactic structure, determines the grammatical function or meaning of a sentence.

**iv.   Listener's expectations**

the listener always knows something about what will be said in advance the basic topic, which is related to his or her purpose we expect to hear something relevant to our purpose. in academic setting , learners should have an idea about ehat they are going to listen.

**v.   Situation and context:**

situation and context refer to the particular setting in which listening takes place. the more someone is aware of situation and context , the more it is easier for him/her to interpret the meaning of speaker's words.

**vi.   Prior knowledge:**

prior knowledge is the previous or background knowledge of a subject that exist in listener's mind. having some background knowledge of a subject can help learner to comprehend the speaker's words easily.

**vii.   Subject:**

Subject is the topic ,which is crucial for listening.

Despite significant differences, all of these definitions define listening comprehension as an activity in which listeners engage a variety of mental processes to absorb information from spoken texts. They focus on specific aural input components, extract meaning from passages, and apply what they've adapted to new situations.

One of the most crucial language skills is listening comprehension, which has a substantial impact on daily communication language competency and the ability to maintain effective communication. In language learning, listening is the most basic skill. After listening to a speaker's speech, the first thing that comes to mind for ESL students learning English as a second language in school is to absorb everything that is spoken. The ability to listen as much as possible is an important part of a student's ability to speak.

Listening comprehension, according to Hasan (2000) and Hamouda (2013), establishes the optimum setting for the acquisition and development of additional language capabilities. The development of listening abilities is linked to the growth of speaking skills, according to Rost (2002). He continued, "The most important skill in language learning is listening as it is the language skill that is used the most in daily life."

The process of listening comprehension gives useful intuitions for teaching listening. Learners may find it challenging to master the skill of listening comprehension, which can present teachers an opportunity to improve their listening practices. Developing listening comprehension skills help language learners in achieving success in language acquisition by increasing the amount of intelligible material. learners will be more eager to have experience of spoken English, such as conversations with native speakers,

since their self-confidence in listening comprehension will improve (Kurita, 2012).

Listening is a process of actively interpreting and building meaning from both verbal and nonverbal signals (Nunan, 1998).As a result, it is evident that listening is not as "passive" as previously believed, as it necessitates numerous complex processes on the part of the learners. The two types of cognitive processes are bottom-up (data-driven) and top-down cognitive processes (conceptually-driven). Bottom-up process requires building meaning in a linear pattern, starting with the simplest of spoken speech and progressing to the largest (Nunan, 1998). As a result, the students seek to decode a series of sounds into words in order to grasp a spoken conversation. After that, a series of words is linked to make phrases, which are then combined to form sentences . These phrases combine to form a full text, whose meaning is subsequently deduced by the listeners. Suprasegmental phonemes like stress, rhythm, and intonation, in addition to grammatical links, play a significant role in this data-driven processing (van Duzer, 1997).

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To investigate the factors of listening comprehension difficulties faced by L2 learners in tertiary level classroom of private university.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the factors of listening comprehension difficulties encountered by L2 learners in tertiary level classroom of private university?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening is one of the four abilities in language learning, along with speaking, reading, and writing. Listening is undoubtedly important. We have to listen to a lot of spoken words in our daily lives as discussions can only take place if we can understand what our conversation partner is saying. Developing listening skills in second language acquisition (SLA) is typically seen as a difficult and time-consuming process for non-native speakers. Furthermore, while understanding the literal meaning of the words, learners are usually unable to grasp the intended meaning of the delivered message. All of this is linked to the learner's capacity to understand the message's intended meaning. For this reason, there is a need to investigate the factors of listening comprehension difficulties faced by second language learners.

Recent research was conducted by Habibullah Pathan (2021) to investigate listening comprehension difficulties faced by L2 learners in Mehran University of Engineering and Technology Sindh, Pakistan. The findings of the research showed that students
frequently faced difficulties in listening to aurally-presented text due to insufficient vocabulary, speed of speech delivery, different accents, unfamiliar topics, long listening text, complex grammatical sentences, colloquial words,
and physical setting that is noisy and listening equipment that have problem with volume or the quality of sound.
Listening comprehension necessitates a higher level of concentration as well as speedy comprehension. Many elements must be taken into consideration when listening. It is setting, facial expressions, and body language that are crucial for listeners to understand what is being communicated by speakers (Ziane, 2011). According to numerous research, effective listening skills are much more significant than reading skills. According to Rost (1994) and Ziane (2011), listening comprehension is fundamental since it is a

mechanism by which we receive input, and learning is impossible without it. Listening has a substantial effect on developing speaking, according to Doff (1995) and Ziane (2011). That is, we cannot improve our speaking skills without improving our listening skills. It will be quite easy for a learner to listen to the radio, study, watch movies, or speak with foreigners if he has a high listening skills in English.contributing to academic performance (Gilakjani, 2016).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study aims to use quantitative research method in order to investigate the listening comprehension difficulties encountered by L2 learners at tertiary level.

Sample for the current research was taken from the students of a private university in Karachi. Students were of three departments i.e BS (English), BS (computer science), and Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) . Sample size was containing 78 undergraduate students of three departments who learn English as a second language.

Close-ended questionnaire had been administered on students for data collection to ascertain the factors of listening comprehension difficulties encountered by L2 learners.

The questionnaire used in this study was adopted from Hien (2015)research work'Difficulties and Strategies in Listening Comprehension' at Lac Hong University, Viet Naam. Questionnaire was given nearly at the end of the semester so that learners could mention their difficulties, needs, achievements and failures related to listening activities. The scale was ranging from never to always. Questionnaire was developed through Google forms. Finally, descriptive statistics analysis technique was used to analyze the collected data.

**Research Findings**

**Findings of section 1 of questionnaire**
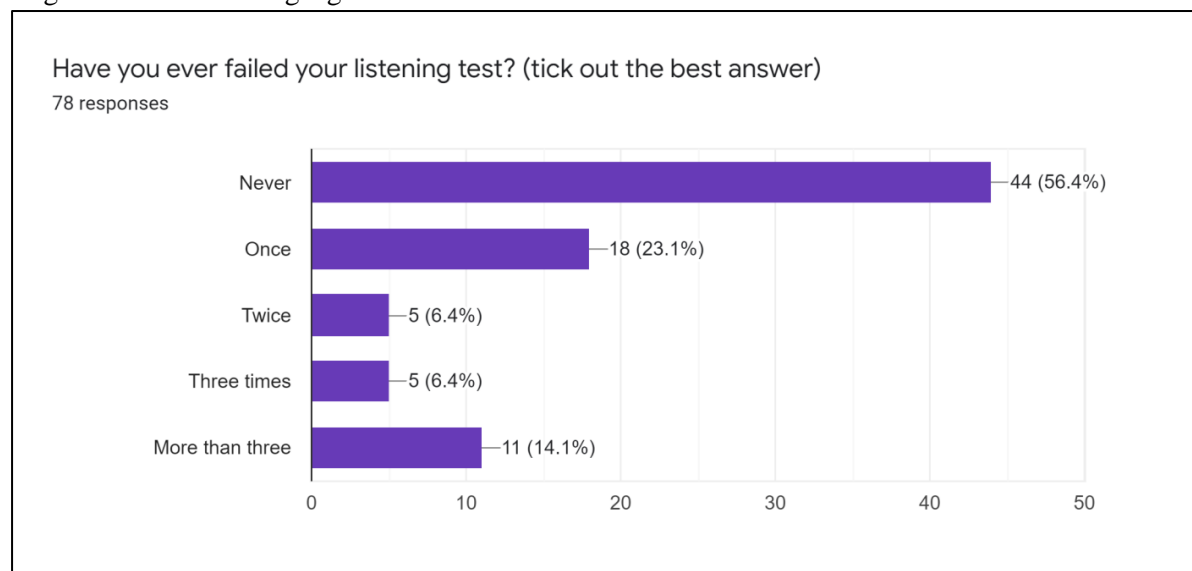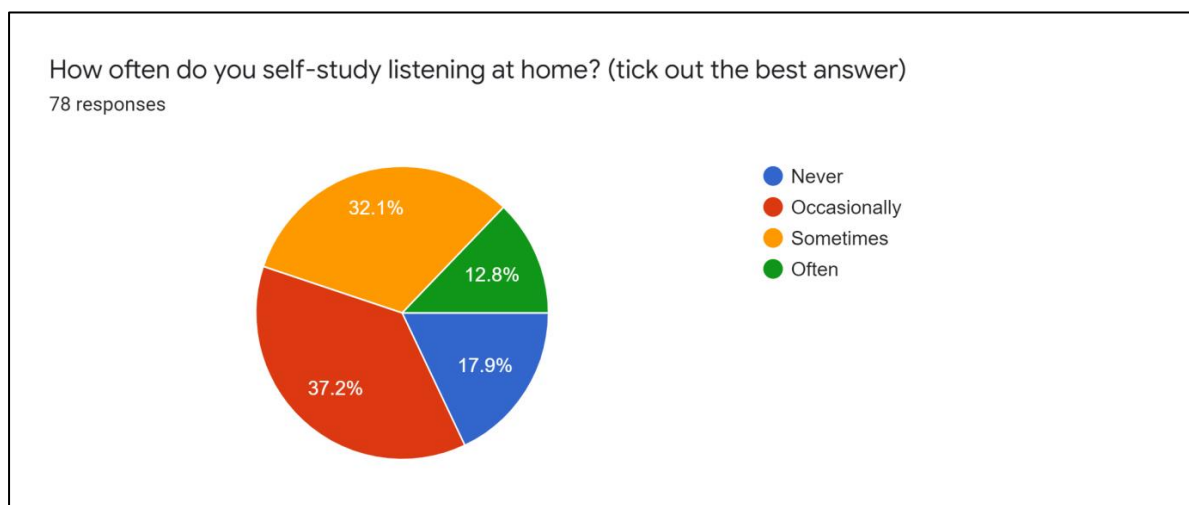
**1. Students who failed in listening test**



Table shows that about 50% of students failed their listening test once, twice, thrice, or more than three times. This demonstrates that listening is a complex task therefore it

requires more attention. It is observed that students who never failed their listening test also face listening comprehension difficulties to some extent.
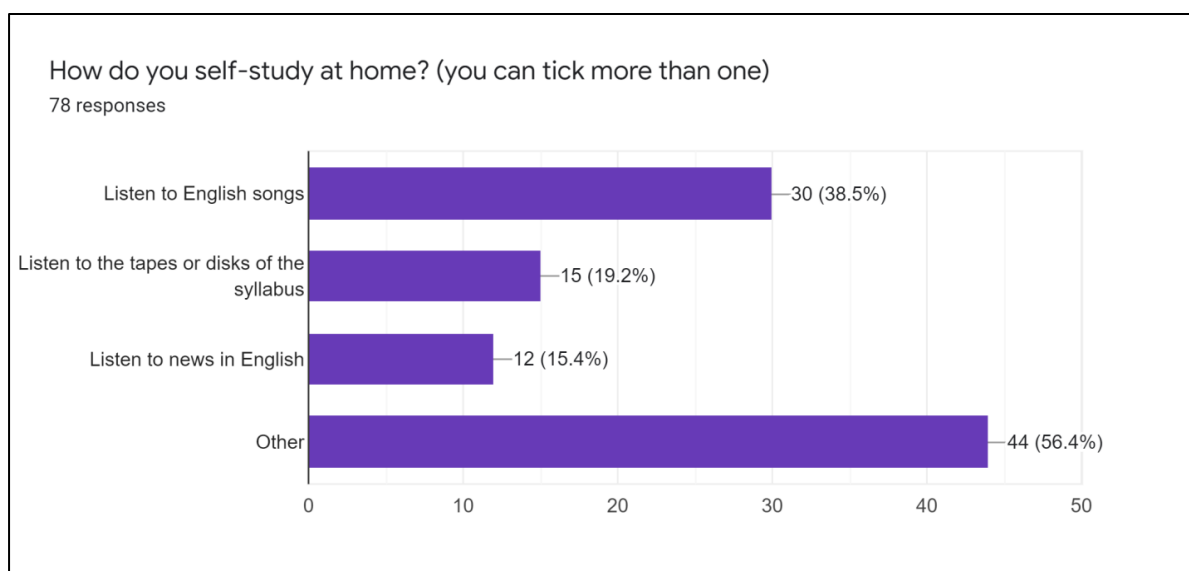
## 2.  Students who self-study L2 listening exercises at home

How often do you self-study listening at home? (tick out the best answer)
78 responses

- Never
- Occasionally
- Sometimes
- Often

32.1%
12.8%
17.9%
37.2%

Students were asked how often do they practice L2 listening at home. Results shows that only 12.8 % students often practice L2 listening and 32.1% students self-study L2 listening exercises at home.

Students who never and occasionally practice L2 listening are 55.1%, which means they spend limited time to practice listening.

## 3.  Students use different sources to practice L2 listening

How do you self-study at home? (you can tick more than one)
78 responses

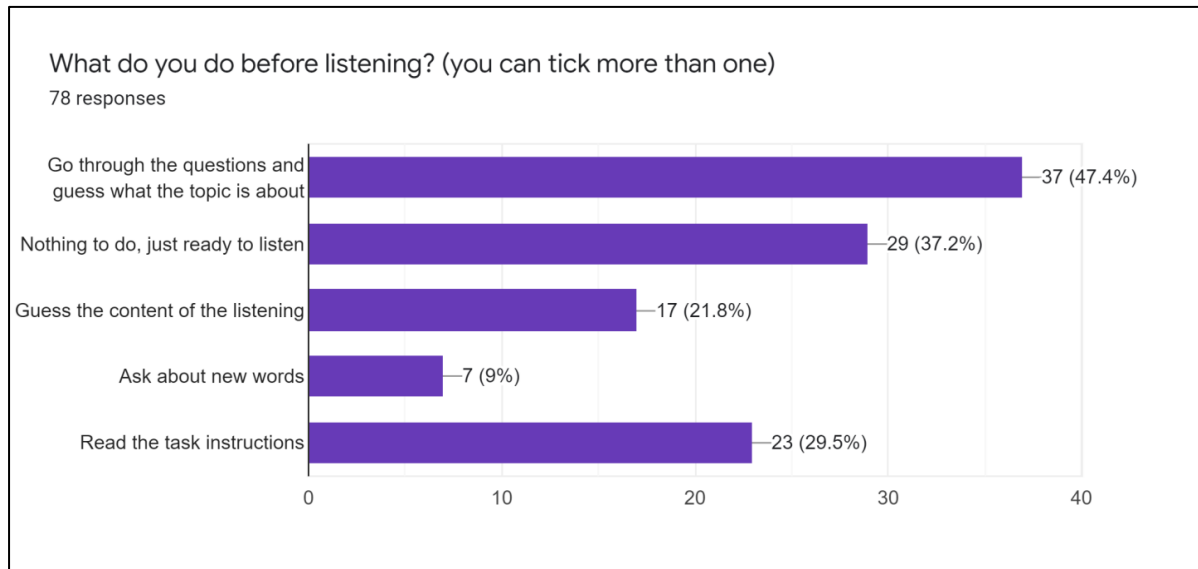| | |
|---|---|
| Listen to English songs | 30 (38.5%) |
| Listen to the tapes or disks of the syllabus | 15 (19.2%) |
| Listen to news in English | 12 (15.4%) |
| Other | 44 (56.4%) |

0    10    20    30    40    50

Students were asked to tell the sources through which they self-study L2 listening at home. Results showed that students use different sources to practice their L2 listening skill. 38.5% students enhance their L2 listening skill by listening to English songs which is not considered as a

good source as it will not improve their comprehension skills, 19.2% use tapes or disks of the syllabus which is a good source because students will pay attention to comprehend everything which will improve their listening as well as comprehension skill, 15.4% students listen

to news in English which is also an authentic source , 56.4% students say they use other sources such as   newspapers'

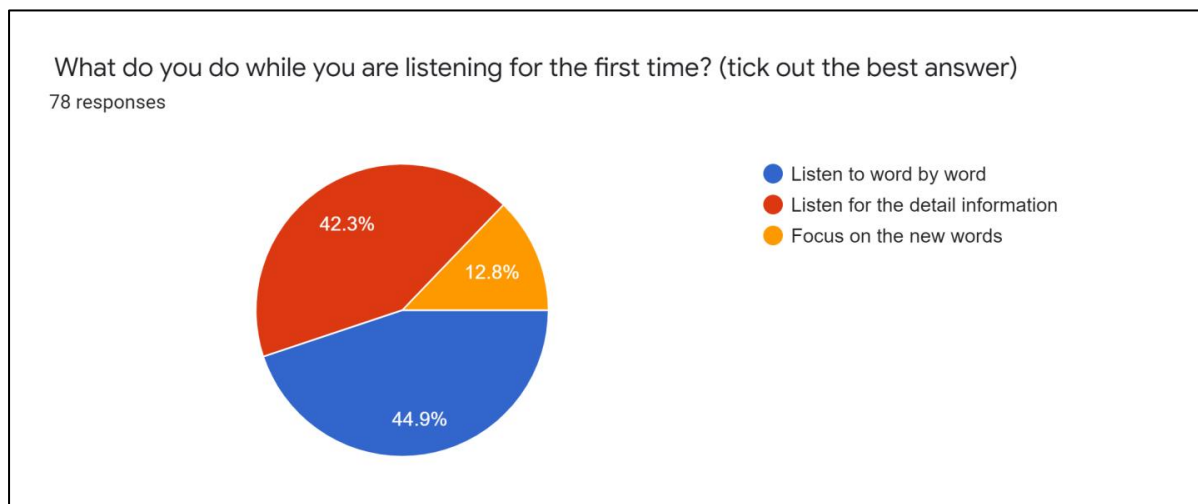TED talks, documentaries, cricket commentaries etc.

**4.   They try to do before listening activities**

What do you do before listening? (you can tick more than one)
78 responses

| Option | Count |
|---|---|
| Go through the questions and guess what the topic is about | 37 (47.4%) |
| Nothing to do, just ready to listen | 29 (37.2%) |
| Guess the content of the listening | 17 (21.8%) |
| Ask about new words | 7 (9%) |
| Read the task instructions | 23 (29.5%) |

Results showed that 69.2.4% students go through the questions and guess the topic and content of the listening. 9% students ask about the new words . 37.2% students do nothing before listening which is why they face listening comprehension

difficulties.However, reading the task instruction should be the first step before listening as it help them to understand what they are expected to do and how to deal with it, and only 29.5% students read the instruction first.

**5.   Students try to do while listening first time**

What do you do while you are listening for the first time? (tick out the best answer)
78 responses

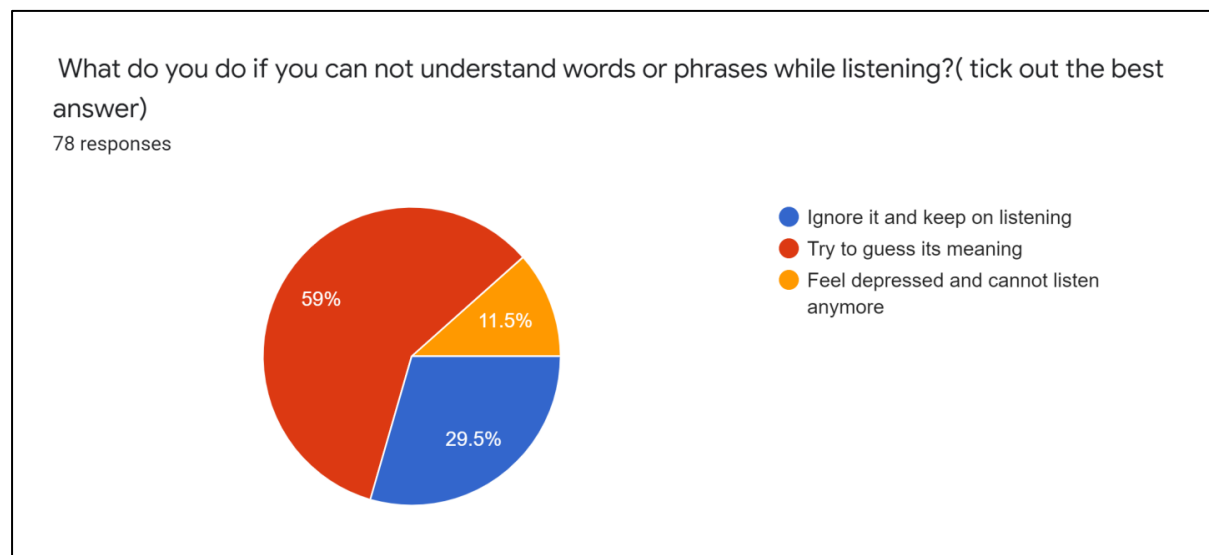| Option | Percentage |
|---|---|
| Listen to word by word | 44.9% |
| Listen for the detail information | 42.3% |
| Focus on the new words | 12.8% |

44.9% students listen to word by word while listening for the first time, 42.3% listen for the detailed information,and 12.8% students focus on the new words.Effective

listeners do not generally analyze all words of a speech in real-life settings; instead, they skim sections of the message that are unrelated to their objectives and focus on

relevant elements. Students, unlike effective listeners, do not carefully focus their attention on the message. They pay close attention to every detail in order to grasp the primary meaning of the spoken text. (Hassan,2000).

**6.  If they do not understand words or phrases while listening**



What do you do if you can not understand words or phrases while listening?( tick out the best answer)

78 responses

- Ignore it and keep on listening
- Try to guess its meaning
- Feel depressed and cannot listen anymore

29.5 percent of students ignore words or phrases they don't understand, while 59 percent try to infer what those words or phrases imply based on their prior knowledge and experience. During the listening stage, it is preferable for students to avoid such difficult words. If the speaker is physically present in the classroom, they can apply kinesic knowledge. His body language, hand motions, and eye contact aid comprehension of the listening text. 11.5 percent of students feel depressed and lose motivation to listen more when then encounter difficult words. When they focus on new words and try to guess the meaning of it, they will miss the other information of text. Therefore, they should ignore such words for a moment and listen to the rest of text.
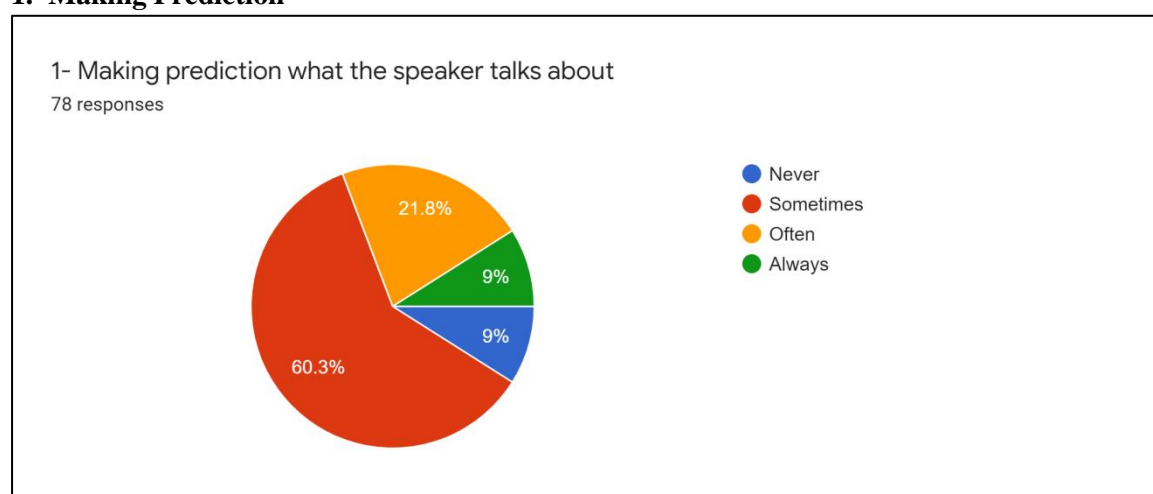
**Listening Problems Related to Listeners' Performance :**

Table 1 Listening Problems Related to Listeners' Performance

| Problems | Never | Some times | often | always |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Making prediction what the speaker talks about | 9% | 60.3% | 21.8% | 9% |
| Guessing unknown words while listening | 3.8% | 56.4% | 26.9% | 12.8% |
| Unfamiliar topics | 10.3% | 59% | 25.6% | 5.1% |
| Lacking of background knowledge | 5.1% | 60.3% | 30.8% | 3.8% |
| Speed of speech | 14.1% | 55.1% | 24.4% | 6.4% |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Recognizing main points | 16.7% | 47.4% | 15.4% | 20.5% |
| Linking words | 19.2% | 50% | 17.9% | 12.8% |
| Authentic material | 7.7% | 50% | 25.6% | 16.7% |
| Ungrammatical sentences | 23.1% | 53.8% | 21.8% | 1.3% |
| Different accents | 14.1% | 47.4% | 29.5% | 9% |
| Colloquial words | 11.5% | 60.3% | 25.6% | 2.6 |
| Hesitation | 20.5% | 52.6% | 20.5% | 6.4% |
| Long listening text | 16.7% | 51.3% | 23.1% | 9% |
| Noises | 14.1% | 50% | 24.4% | 11.5% |
| Poor tape quality | 20.5% | 57.7% | 14.1% | 7.7% |
| The poor equipment | 20.5% | 56.4% | 16.7% | 6.4% |

## 1. Making Prediction



1- Making prediction what the speaker talks about
78 responses

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

21.8%
9%
9%
60.3%

Students were asked if they find it difficult to predict what speaker talks about while listening, and the results showed that majority of the students (91.2%) face this difficulty. Only 9% students do not find it difficult to predict the content. Prediction is a learning practise in which students predict what they will hear before listening to a text. This provides individuals a motive to listen, so teachers should conduct more activities and bring more material related to listening text.

## 2. Guessing Unknown Words

## 2- Guessing unknown words while listening
78 responses

Never
Sometimes
Often
Always

26.9%

12.8%

56.4%
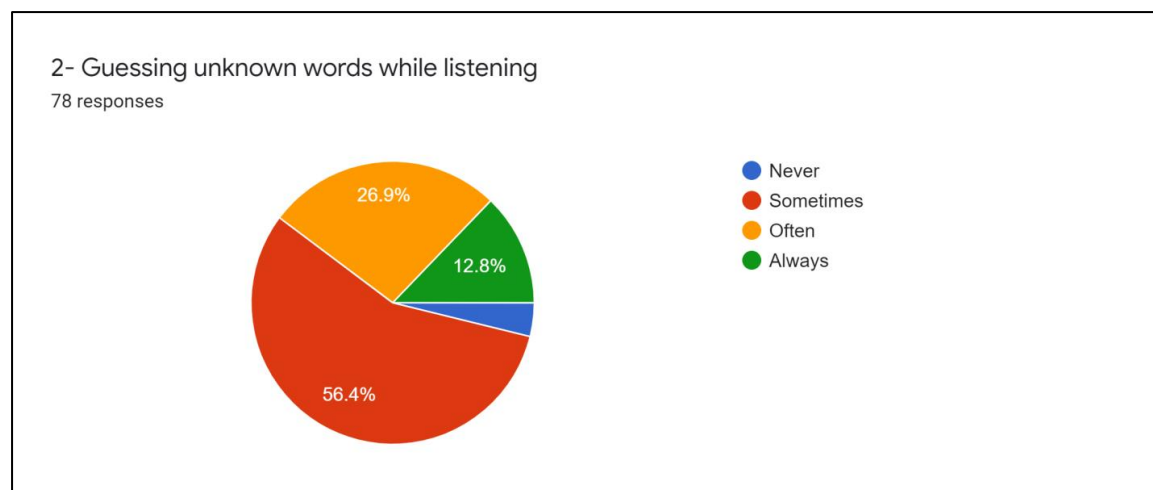
In the while listening phase, majority of the students (96.1%) try to predict the meaning of unknown words. When learners attempt to infer the meanings of unfamiliar words in the stream of speech, the unknown words cause difficulty in properly grasping the listening text. As a result, their attention is diverted and they miss the next section of the text. Learners should ignore such words and try to grasp the overall meaning or idea

of the text.. In addition, learners need to use cognitive strategies and top-down approaches in case of limited vocabulary knowledge. Such as hear contextualization ( refers to attempts to connect new knowledge to a larger context or scenario in order to come up with an acceptable general interpretation)

## 3. Unfamiliar Topics

## 3- Unfamiliar topics
78 responses

Never
Sometimes
Often
Always

25.6%

10.3%

59%
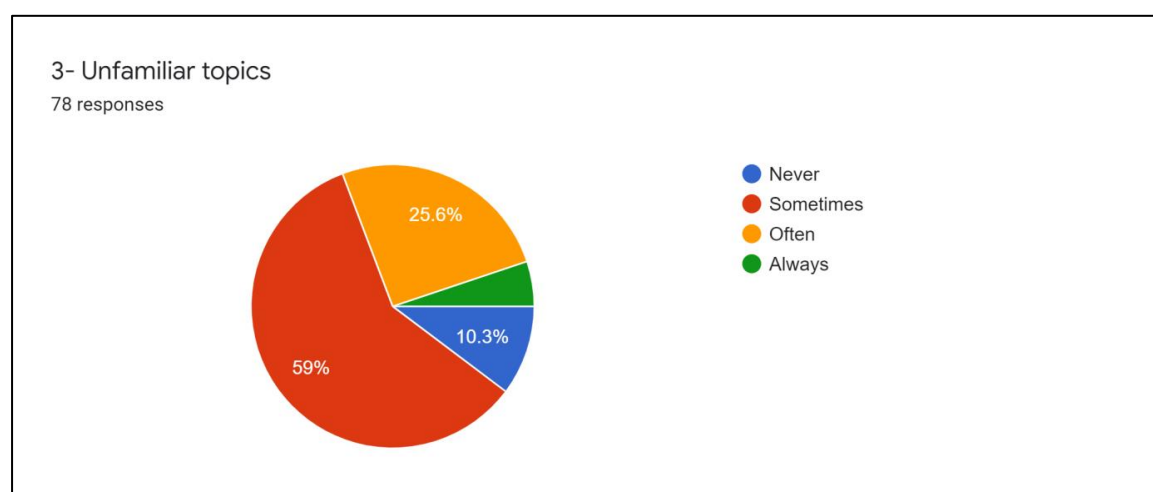
Majority of the students (89.7%) find it difficult to comprehend the listening text when the topic is not familiar to them. Only 10.3% students do not feel stressed when unfamiliar topic comes. The listening material could cover a wide range of topics in life or society. For example, it's possible that the listener is confused by a business

report, a daily chat, or a political topic. Listeners may be unfamiliar with some of the words, phrases, or terms used in these discussions. They are completely unfamiliar with them, so it is really difficult for them to listen when the message is full of jargon. The approach is to have learners practise as much as possible with these

varied materials. As a result, students will have no trouble becoming used to listening to a wide range of topics.

## 4. Lacking Background Knowledge



4- Lacking of background knowledge
78 responses

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

30.8%
60.3%
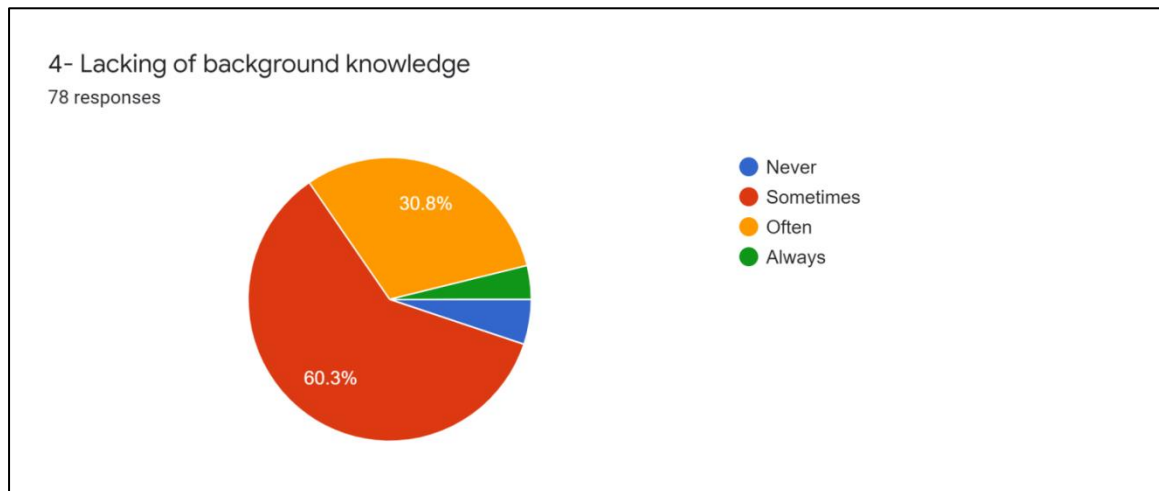
Findings shows that many students (94.9%) face this difficulty in listening activity.Without prior knowledge and language experience, learners find it challenging to interpret the listening contents in the stream of speech. Even if learners grasp the text's main idea, it may be difficult for them to comprehend the

entire meaning of the text. Nonverbal indicators such as facial expressions, gestures, and voice tone might be misinterpreted by listeners from various cultural backgrounds.

## 5. Speed of Speech



5- Speed of speech
78 responses

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

24.4%
55.1%
14.1%
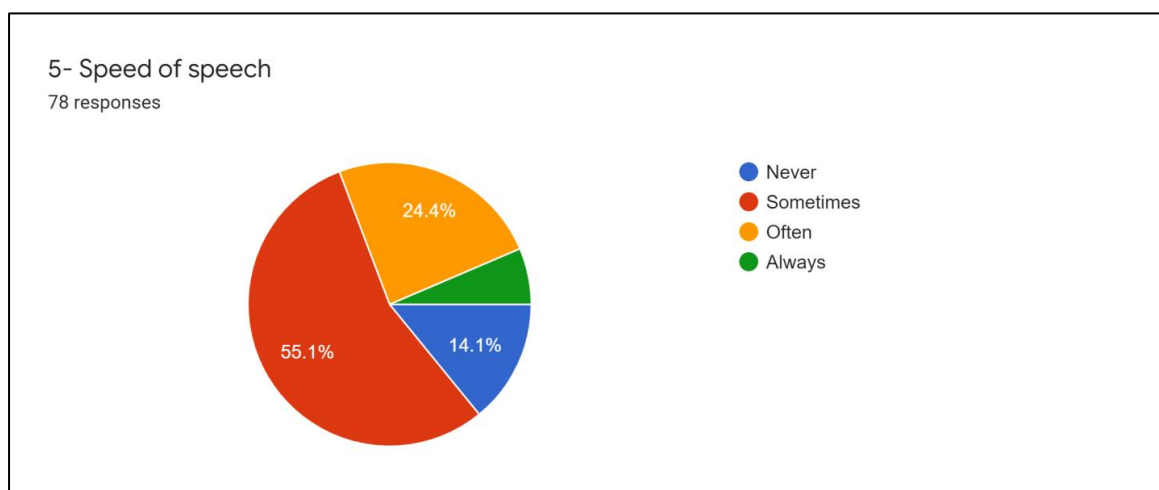
Speed of speaker's speech affect majority of the student's listening comprehension skill.Due to the high speed of speech delivery, learners (55.1 percent sometimes, 24.4 percent often, and 6.4percent always) find it difficult to comprehend the meaning

of the listening text. However, listeners cannot adjust the speed of speech or have it replayed more than once while listening. In such cases, they should employ listening tactics such as note taking, which

eliminates the need for learners to write down each word.

6. **Recognizing the Main Points**
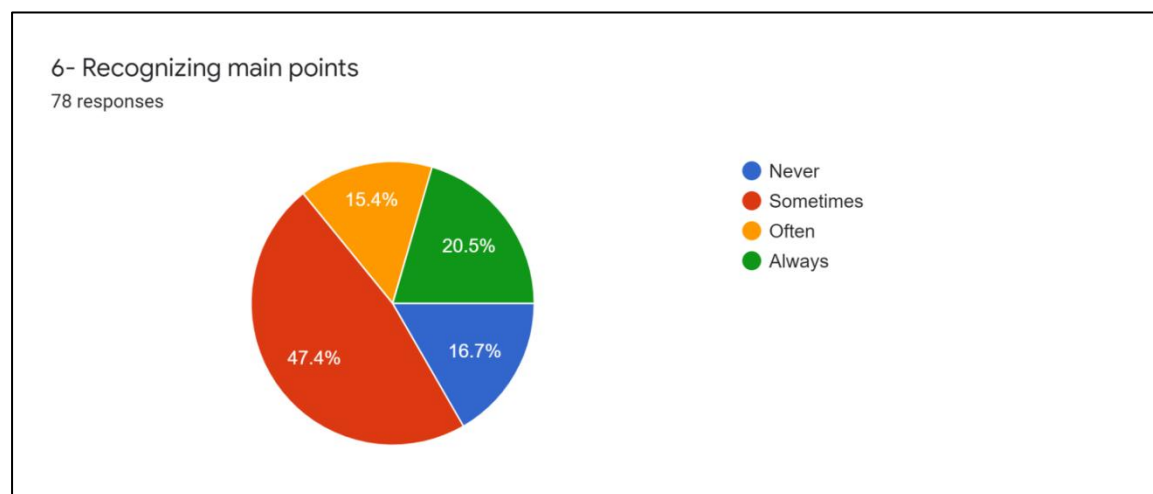


Results shows that 83.3% learners find it difficult in recognizing the main points in stream of speech. A text always have some main points or ideas, but when students pay more attention to unknown words ,they get distracted. Therefore, they find it difficult to identify the main points in while listening stage. 16.7% learners said that they do not find it difficult to recognize the main points.

Berman (2000), on the other hand, suggests several pointers for identifying the main points in listening. The discourse marker is thought to be the link that connects the points. Speakers frequently use discourse markers to signal the major points. A modifier or addition to an idea is announced by a marker of addition (in addition, additionally, moreover, etc), whereas a cause and sequence marker (because, as a result, consequently) tells us of the reason and effect of a fact or action. Another signal of main points is repetition. When a word or phrase is repeated numerous times, it is possible that it will encompass all of the important points.
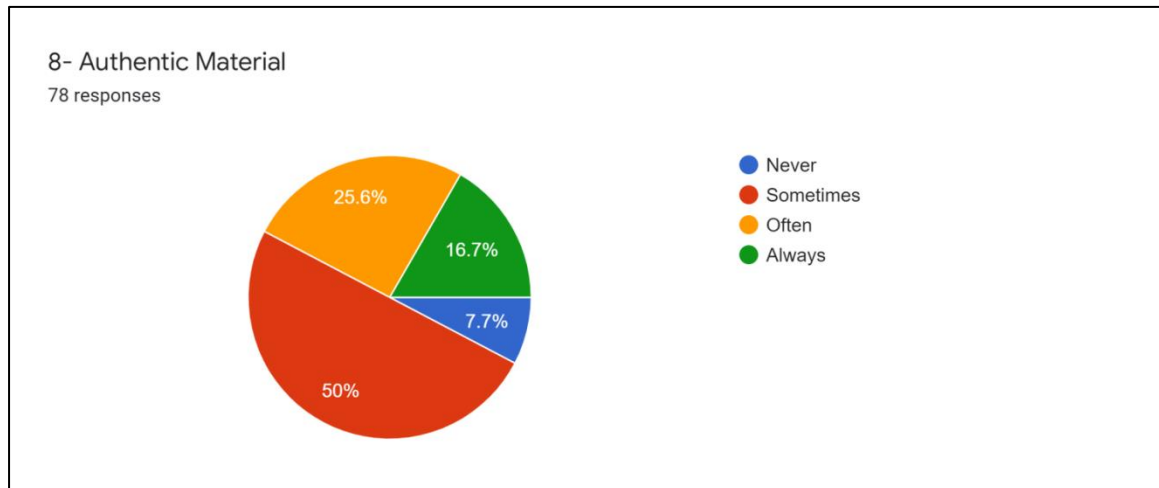
## 7. Linking words
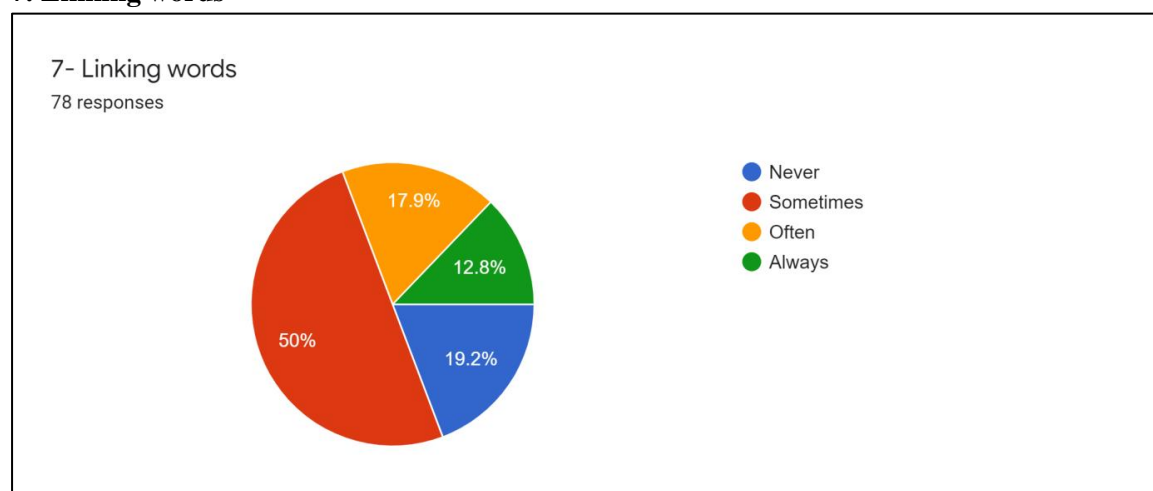


80.7 percent of students believe that the linkage of the initial word and the word coming straight after that begins with a vowel, is the most common barrier in

listening. As a result, they misunderstand the linking words or are unaware of the meaning conveyed.

## 8. Authentic material



According to the results, students (50% sometimes, 25.6 percent often, and 16.7percent always) have difficulty understanding authentic materials in listening activities. The content writers and providers of recorded material are native English speakers. Listening materials should be practised in a British or American accent. Furthermore, authentic material is created to bridge the gap between the classroom and real-life events.

## 9. Ungrammatical sentences and hesitation
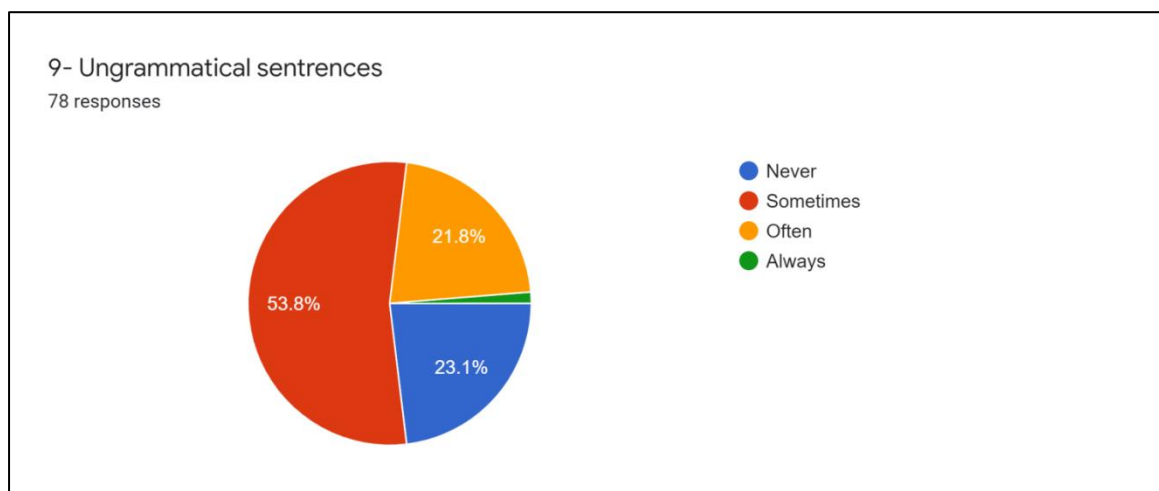


Ungrammatical or complex grammatical sentences are also a barriar to learner's listening comprehension. Results shows that Majority of the students (53.8% sometimes. 21.8% often, 1.3% always) find ungrammatical sentences as a difficulty. Furthermore, many learners(79.5%) believe that informal conversation with full of hesitation is also a difficulty for them.

whether it is a habit or not, the students appear to be confused by the addition or reduction of something to a sentence. ungrammatical structure is used as a result of the speakers' uneasiness and hesitancy.

As a result, speakers may leave out sections of a statement or add something that is unnecessary. As a result, the listeners' comprehension is restricted.
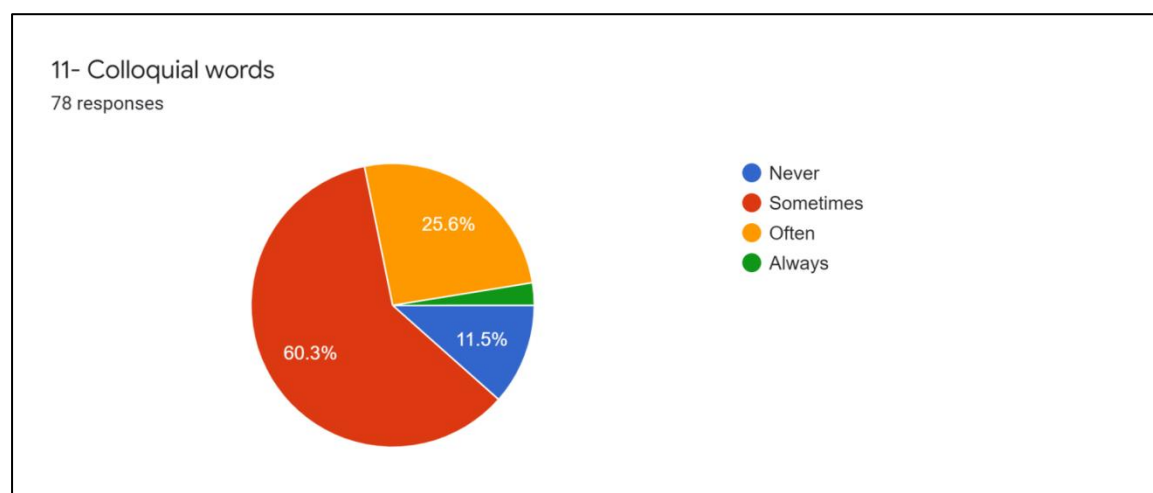
## 10. Different accents
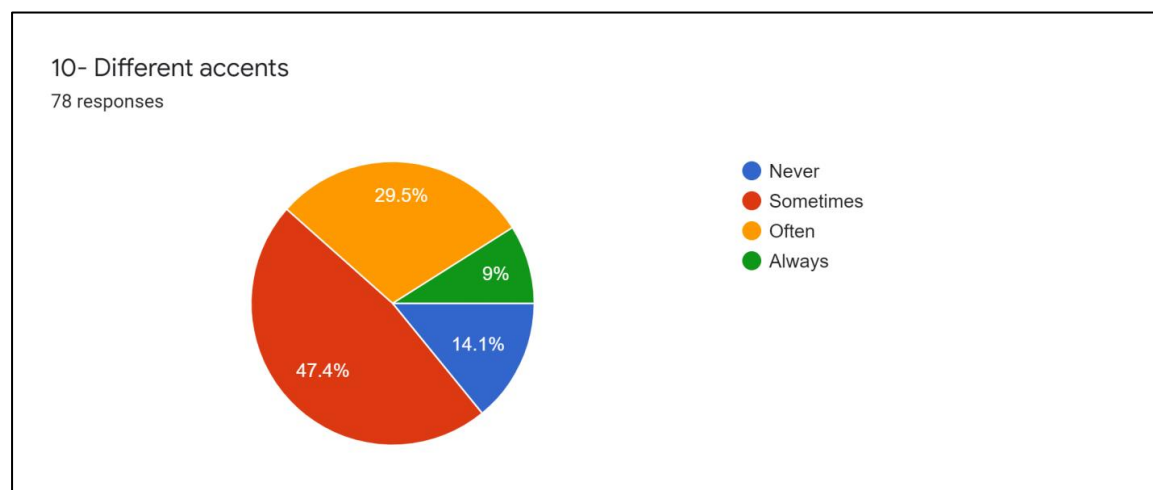


Because students are not exposed to a wide range of accents, they have difficulty understanding what they are listening. Results shows that 85.9 percent of learners

had this difficulty. For example, speaker with Sindhi language background might have different English accent than others.
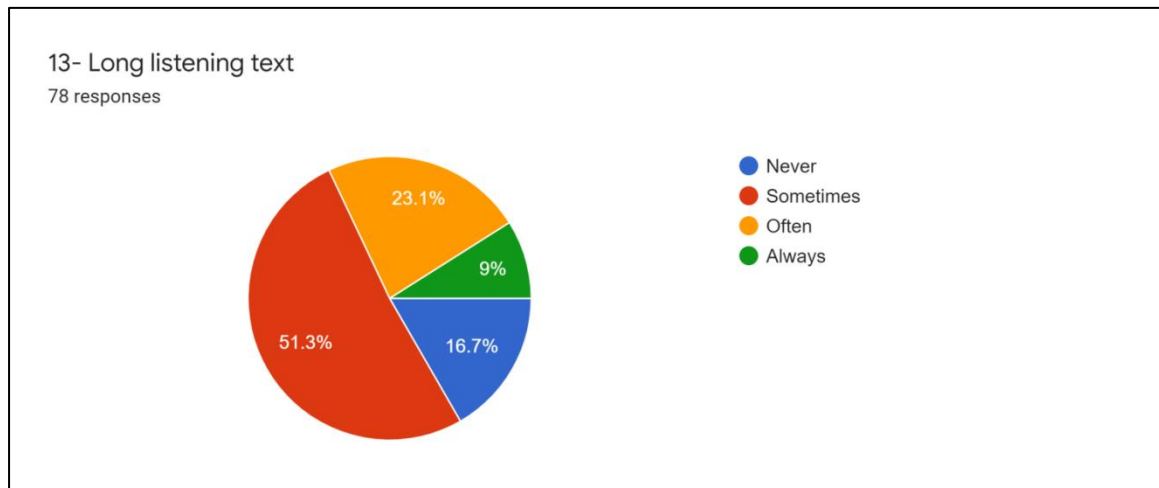
## 11. Colloquial Words



Results demonstrates that students (60 percent sometimes, 25.4 percent often, and 2.7 percent always) had difficulty

## 12. Long Listening Text

understanding the listening material due to colloquial phrases (informal phrases).

13- Long listening text
78 responses

Never
Sometimes
Often
Always

23.1%
9%
51.3%
16.7%

Due to the long listening text, students (51.3percent sometimes, 23.1 percent often, and 9 percent always) find it difficult to understand the spoken content.

Due to the speed of speech and the length of the text, long hearing texts may create exhaustion and stress, causing them to forget the main points. For example, if a listening exercise is excessively long, it is better to split it up into short chunks by pausing or changing speakers, according to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011).

**13. Noises**



14- Noises
78 responses

Never
Sometimes
Often
Always

24.4%
11.5%
50%
14.1%
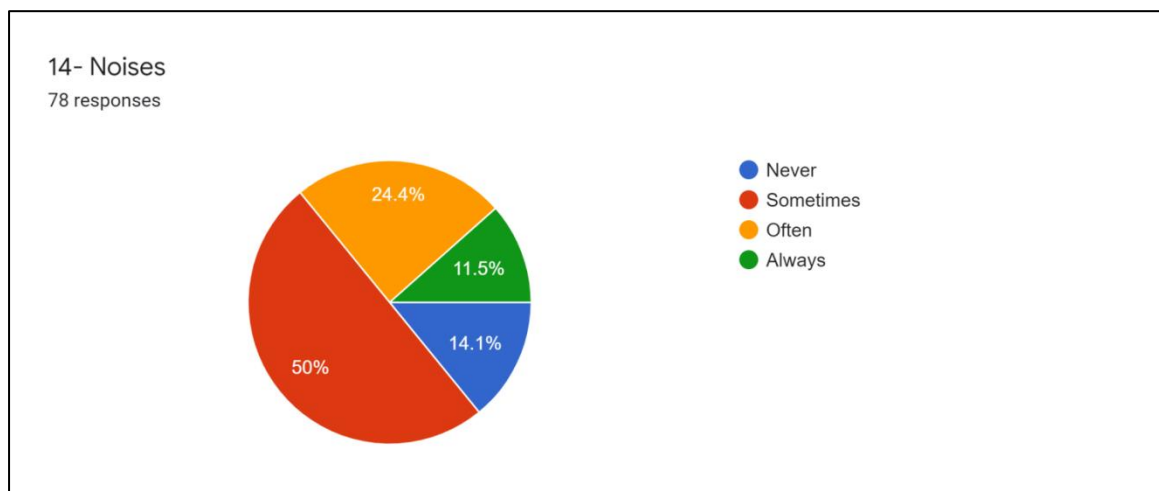
Results demonstrates that 85.9 percent of students had to deal with noise problems. If they are asked to perform a listening activity while there are distracting noises surrounding them, they will almost certainly fail. Regardless of how hard they attempt to concentrate on the activity, they are distracted by the noise.

14. **Poor Tape Quality**

**15- Poor tape quality**
78 responses

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

14.1%
7.7%
57.7%
20.5%
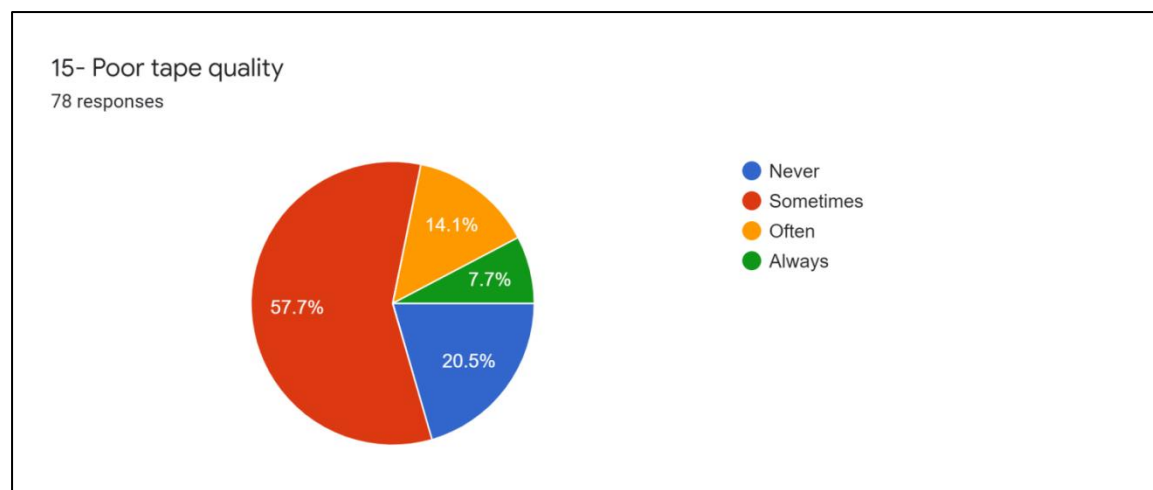
When cassettes or CDs are used for such a long time, the tape quality wears away, and the majority of students (57.7 percent sometimes, 14.1 percent often, and 7.7 percent always,)find it difficult to understand the recorded discussions. Teachers can replace old support materials with new ones.

15. **The Poor Equipment**

**16- The poor equipments**
78 responses

- Never
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

16.7%
56.4%
20.5%
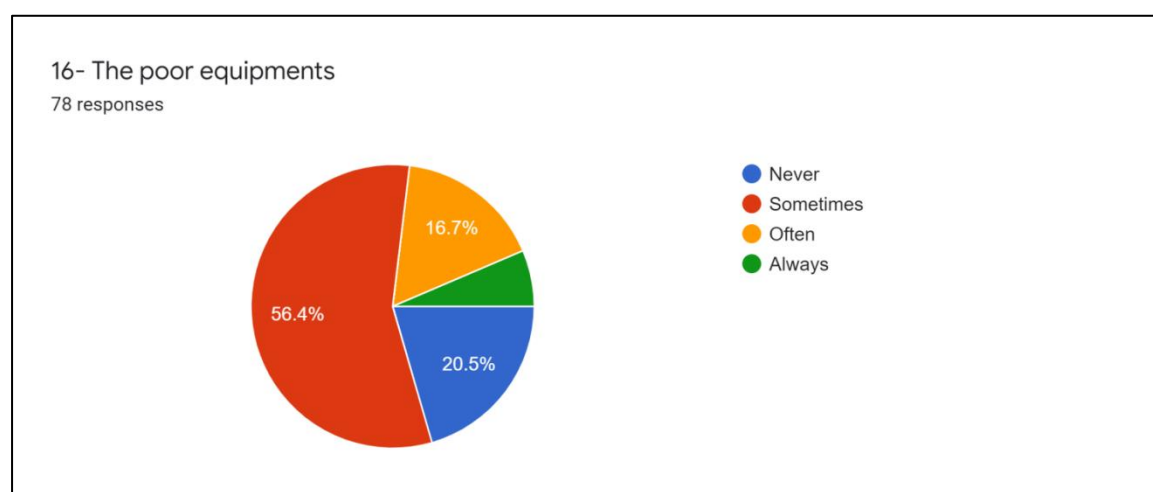
Students find it difficult when sounds in recordings are unclear (56.4percent sometimes, 16.7percent often, and 6.4 percent always). Poor-quality equipment is to blame for the dull recorded sounds. Learners may have difficulty understanding the listening text as a result of such issues.

**Discussion of findings**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the problems of listening comprehension at a Pakistani private university's undergraduate level. A questionnaire was used to collect the informationIn terms of their educational backgrounds, university students may come from a variety of places. Some individuals, for example, may have studied from Sindh board, while others may have done O/A level. Such influences are likely to have an impact on their language learning practices. For non-native speakers, mastering L2 listening is a difficult endeavour. According to Jermy Harmer (2000), reported in Hamouda

(2013), some of his students lose interest in listening courses and even abandon them. Teachers can be able to solve the issue. They can keep students' attention and help them work on their weaknesses. They can create lesson plans that are customized for the student's needs

The researcher reviewed some key concerns in English language teaching related to listening comprehension in this study. Listening is crucial in language learning because it gives learners input, and they cannot learn anything if they do not comprehend the input. However, Listening comprehension is a difficult skill to develop and should be approached consciously. Through data analysis, it is observed that second language learners face alot of listenig comprehension difficulties such as noises, lacking of background knowledge, poor equipment, ungrammatical sentences and speed of speech. This research revealed that many Pakistani students struggle with listening comprehension and have insufficient exposure to the English language outside of the classroom. They invest very limited time to self study listening comprehension skill at homes. Many students said that they use English songs as a source to improve their listening comprehension skill which means they are not using an effective source. According to Al-Harrasi (2014), a less stressed classroom setting is required, and learners require more engaged listening exercises.

These problems can be sorted out if teachers and authorities pay more attention to listening skill along with reading and writing skills.

## Recommendations

There are several recommendations that can help learners overcome some of their difficulties with listening comprehension. Such as
1. Listening activities should be centered around the learner's needs and teachers should give real listening resources to help students better grasp native speakers' natural speech.
2. Teachers should provide listening assignments that engage students' interest while also assisting them in the acquisition of listening skills and methods. These activities not only assess students' listening comprehension, but also encourage them to employ a variety of listening tactics to get the most out of their activities.
3. Seminars, news broadcasts, videos, TV plays, announcements, ordinary conversation, and interviews are all examples of different sorts of input that teachers should deliver to learners.
4. Teachers should teach their students how to pronounce words correctly so that they can hear different types of rapid natural speech and replicate native speakers' pronunciation.
5. Teachers should assist their learners in becoming comfortable with various native-speakers accents. Due to the fact that native speakers have distinct accents, learners must be able to distinguish between American and British accents.
6. Listening practices should be provided according to their level of difficulty; that is, beginning with very simple texts for lower level students and progressing to more complex authentic materials for advanced students.
7. While listening to various listening materials, instructors should impart background knowledge and linguistic knowledge to their learners.
8. Teachers should provide their learners with the necessary feedback on their performance since it can assist them improve their error correction, enthusiasm, and confidence in listening activities.

## Conclusion

Developing listening skills in SLA is a difficult task. In Pakistan, listening skills are still undervalued in research and

education. All of the learners struggled with listening exercises due to a lack of practise and a lack of understanding of how to apply language learning tools effectively. Due to the social and cultural background, most people believe that students studying in Pakistan's urban areas have fewer challenges with listening comprehension. However, English is used as a second language in Pakistan. As a result, English language students at the university level experience difficulty with listening comprehension. In an auditory-presented text course, they usually experienced a variety of issues. According to the findings of the study, they should employ proper listening practises. To become a good listener, learners should comprehend the material as they listen to it, remember the information, connect it with what comes next, and alter their comprehension of what they hear based on previous knowledge and subsequent information. The focus of this research is to come up with some recommendations and solutions for listening comprehension issues. The study's findings revealed that using listening strategies in listening activities always improves listening performance and streamlines the listening process.

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