

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24297/jssr.v16i.8863>

## Listening skill among socially disadvantaged students in relation to academic performance at higher education in West Bengal

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### Abstract

Listening is the key to all effective communication. Good listening ability helps a person to make ideas, processing information, making pertinent comments, and ask relevant questions. This study aimed to understand existing listening skills among the socially disadvantaged students based on different demographic indicators and check whether listening skill and academic performance are somehow related when both the category of students are considered in higher education in West Bengal. Undergraduate freshman students of college and universities at West Bengal consisted of the population for the study where 225 students who regularly attended the course after successful completion of the higher secondary level selected as sample. Major findings revealed that the gender, stream, and medium of instruction has a significant contribution in a variation of listening skill ( $p < 0.05$ ); also, listening skill and academic performance is positively correlated with high statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ).

**Keywords** – Listening skill, Socially Disadvantaged Student, Academic Performance, Higher Education

### Introduction

Listening is conterminal with hearing, but hearing is merely a component of listening process. It is way more complex process than hearing. Listening is the ability to understand words contained in a dialogue and make use of the knowledge for personal growth and development (Dadzie, 2008). For effective teaching-learning, listening is a key element which takes place between listener and speaker. Good listening ability helps a person to make ideas, processing information, making pertinent comments, and ask relevant questions.

Listening as a skill, involves receiving, attending, organizing, understanding, interpreting and evaluating messages from the classroom environment (Friedman, 1986). A listener is actively engaging in the listening process as well as decodes the speakers' message actively. 'The Vedas', the Hindu scripture showed that the listening or 'shruti' was the proved source of knowledge and 'shruti' was also synonymous of 'Vedas' and a receptive skill (Harmer, 1991). Discriminating between sounds, recognizing words and understanding their meaning, using prior knowledge to predict and confirm meaning, recalling important words and ideas are some key component of listening. Many researchers mentioned that the process of listening occurs in most probably in five stages-

- **Hearing** – Hearing is perception of sound waves; hearing is necessary for listening. Hearing with full attention is an important requirement of effective listening.
- **Understanding** – What person have been heard if he/she understand the meaning of that thing, which involves in listening.
- **Remembering** – Remembering is also a part of listening process because it indicates that an individual is has received and interpreted a message, also had added it into schemata.
- **Evaluating** – Active listeners can evaluate the message properly. He/ She can understand that proper message through evaluating, and it is essential for the KISS communication.
- **Responding** – It is the last stage of the process and after hearing, understanding, remembering and evaluating the message, the receiver must give feedback because the speaker has no other way to determine if a message has been received or not.

According to Rost (2011), Listening is a crucial component of spoken language processing, language cannot be communicated without listening, and listening is also an area that is interconnected with numerous areas of inquiry and development. Whether it be learning of language by a child or be an adult obtaining education, human interaction always instills a remarkable contribution through the process of listening and speaking; therefore considered as one of the most notable process in individual's development.

Human attention span has been dramatically reduced to 8.25 seconds from 12 seconds in only a decade from 2000 to 2010 (Microsoft Research, 2015). Therefore, time and attention are very limited resource in contrast to excess flow of information and data. In order to succeed in this fast growing and competitive world, learners especially in higher education, need to equip themselves with a series of soft skills that may help them get access to quality education. Listening skill is one of the required soft skill for every individual and more importantly for students engaged in the process of being human as it connects two or more people and create the ambience for something meaningful to take place.

Comparing to the overall higher education students, those from socially disadvantaged segment, finds themselves less capable in terms of communication, social extraversion and easy-goingness partly due to their long history of segregation from the mainstream and partly due to inadequacy of acquired communication skills which has great impact on education and learning. This study intended to identify listening skills as a major component of any type of communication among the socially disadvantaged students viz. scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and find out factors associated with that.

### **Literature Review**

A research was conducted by Shali (2017) aimed to assess the listening habits of students and how it affects their academic performance. Results revealed that most of the respondents had the view that academic performance was affected by their reading habits and there was a direct positive relationship. The same result showed in another research that reading habits had influence on academic performance and the study recommended that teachers had to encourage the students to go in the library and read books (Acheaw & Larson, 2014). Powers, D. E. (1986) conducted a research aimed to - a) obtain faculty perceptions of the importance to academic success of various listening skills and activities, b) assess the degree to which both native and non-native speakers experience difficulties with these skills or activities, c) determine faculty views of alternative means of evaluating these skills. Results revealed that some listening skills are more important than others for academic success and non- native students faced more difficulty than native students with all listening activities, and that non-native students had considerably greater difficulty with some activities, such as lectures given at different speeds and comprehending or deducing the meaning of important vocabulary according to faculty perception.

An experimental research conducted, aimed to observe the effects of listening ability on speaking, writing and reading skills of children who was suspected of auditory processing difficulty (APD) and Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills were evaluated by Observational Rating Scale (ORS) and analyzed in two groups of children, results indicated that listening value in APD group was significantly lower; and, speaking, reading and writing values in APD group were significantly higher than control group (Yalcincaya, Muluk, & Sachin, 2009) was supported by the findings that listening strategy instruction was more effective and had a positive impact on students' academic achievement in listening than the conventional approach (Gebre & Tadesse, 2015).

Umuzdas, S. (2015) studied on 481 students of different ages to examine the relation between the study type and the listening music. The study yielded that Turkish music was mostly listened to music genre and while students studying social courses tend to listen music mostly. Odabas, et al. (2008) argued that listening music while reading inhibits the students' focus on text and external factors should be controlled and avoided while trying to comprehend, thinking and interpreting. Self-efficacy as one's ability was eventual for development of effective listening skills and listening strategy instruction has the potential to boost self-efficacy (Graham, 2011). Another study aimed to find whether the students' ability in listening could improve by activating students' prior knowledge. Analysis rejected all the null hypotheses and showed significant result that means activating students' prior knowledge can improve students' listening skills (Nurphami, 2015).

## Problem Statement

After reviewing related studies on importance of listening skills in higher education, the researcher found its significant contribution in improvement of vocabulary (Bulut & Karasakaloğlu, 2017), initial interactions (Weger, Castle Bell, Minei, & Robinson, 2014) language comprehension (Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016), metacognitive awareness (Zeng & Goh, 2018), teacher-learner communication (Yavuz & Celik, 2017), classroom dynamics which inevitably leads to successful adjustment in learning environment and also helps to cope with stressful situations. But, inadequacy of systematic studies relating to its relation to academic performance as well as underlying factors associated with variation in listening skills let the researcher reflect upon and identify the need to study the same on students of disadvantaged social groups at higher education in West Bengal. The following problem statement has been noted in order to specify the purpose of this study as well as to guide future directions – "**Listening skill among socially disadvantaged students in relation to academic performance at higher education in West Bengal**".

## Objectives

Pertaining to the purpose of the study, following objectives have been identified –

1. To understand existing listening skills among the socially disadvantaged students based on different demographic indicators i.e. gender and habitat.
2. To find out any variation in existing listening skills between Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students.
3. To understand existing listening skills among the socially disadvantaged students based on different academic indicators i.e. stream of study and medium of instruction.
4. To check whether listening skill and academic performance are somehow related when both the category of students are considered in higher education in West Bengal.

## Delimitations

Time constraint, lack of physical resources and funding restricted the present study in so many ways that the researchers willingly described their shortfalls to undertake all the aspects of the problem and delimited to following ground –

1. The Population of the study was delimited to socially disadvantaged students of West Bengal.
2. The samples were collected from students those who regularly attended higher education institutions at Hooghly, Kolkata and South 24 Parganas Districts.
3. Only 225 freshman students studying undergraduate courses were selected for the study.
4. The study mainly focused on Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe students who were engaged in undergraduate courses at different colleges and universities.
5. Independent variables were the factors i.e. *gender, habitat, stream, medium of instruction* and academic score in last qualifying examination i.e. Higher Secondary examination as indicator of *academic performance* of the students and dependent variable was *listening skill* they already have.

## Hypotheses

Keeping the objectives on mind, the following hypotheses were formulated –

**H<sub>0</sub>1** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when gender is concerned.

**H<sub>0</sub>2** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when stream of study is concerned.

**H<sub>0</sub>3** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when medium of study is concerned.

**H<sub>0</sub>4** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when habitat is concerned.

**H<sub>0</sub>5** Listening skill mean score of Scheduled Caste students is equal to listening skill mean score of Scheduled Tribe.

**H<sub>06</sub>** Listening skill and academic performance are not significantly correlated to each other.

### Study Design

A cross-sectional survey design implemented for the present study and samples were drawn randomly from the higher institutions situated at Hooghly, Kolkata and South 24 Parganas districts at West Bengal. Undergraduate freshman students of higher education institutions at West Bengal considered as total population of the study and 225 students who regularly attended college and university after successful completion of higher secondary level selected as sample of this study. Listening Skill was considered as dependent variable in this present study which was supposed to have related to different demographic and academic independent variables i.e. gender, stream, habitat, medium of instruction and belonging caste.

### Results

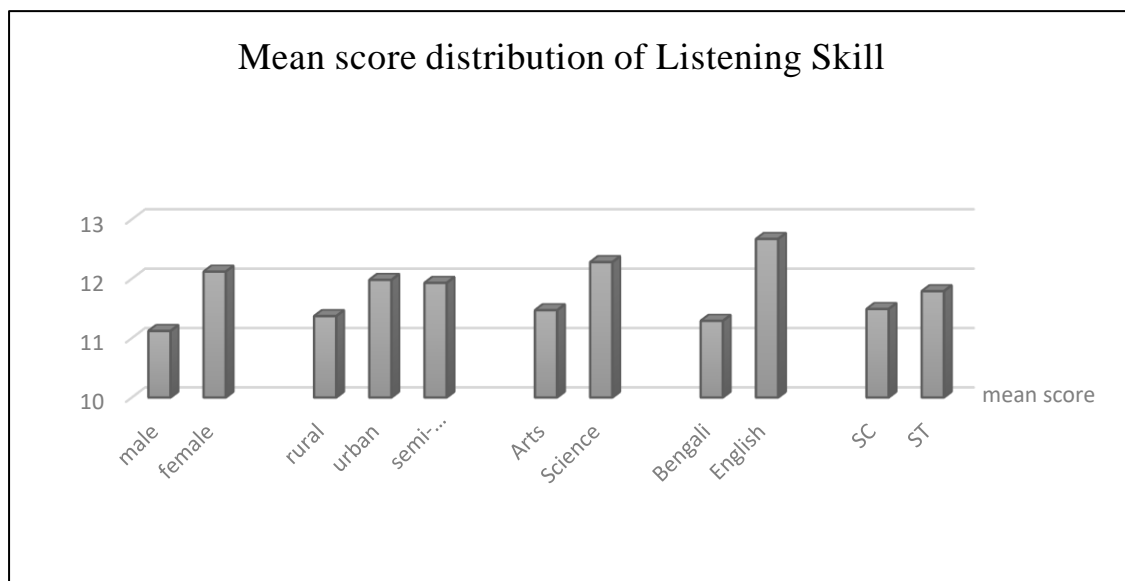
Raw data were collected individually by the researcher and tabulated in excel spreadsheet. Data set were drawn systematically and sequentially to draw inference on the basis of present objectives. Tables and graphical representations were used to clarify the analyses and pictorial representation of the data distributions. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0 was used to reduce the chances of error.

**Table 1: Mean score distribution of listening skills among socially disadvantaged students at Higher Education.**

Indicators	Category	Number of students	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Gender</b>	Male	115	11.12	2.272
	Female	110	12.12	2.115
<b>Habitat</b>	Rural	133	11.37	2.234
	Urban	47	11.98	1.763
	Semi- Urban	45	11.93	2.658
<b>Stream</b>	Arts	186	11.47	2.262
	Science	39	12.28	2.077
<b>Medium of Instruction</b>	Bengali	173	11.29	2.207
	English	52	12.67	2.065
<b>Caste</b>	SC	136	11.49	2.177
	ST	89	11.79	2.352

Female students (n=110) found to have better (mean=12.12, SD=2.115) listening skills compared to their male counterpart (n=115, mean=11.12, SD=2.272). Urban students (n=47) were better (mean=11.98, SD=1.763) than semi-urban (n=45, mean=11.93, SD=2.658) and rural (n=133, mean=11.37, SD=2.234) students. 186 out of 250 students studying arts found to have lower listening skill (mean=11.47, SD=2.262) than students studying science (mean=12.28, SD=2.077). Students whose medium of instruction is English were reported with better

listening skill (mean=12.67, SD=2.065) than that of Bengali (mean=11.29, SD=2.207). Among the participants in this study, students belonging to scheduled tribe shown better listening skill (n=89, mean=11.79, SD=2.352) than students belonging to scheduled caste category (n=136, mean=11.49, SD=2.177).



**Figure 1: Mean score distribution of listening skills among socially disadvantaged students at Higher Education.**

### Hypothesis Testing

**H<sub>01</sub>** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when gender is concerned.

**Table 2: Showing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H<sub>01</sub>.**

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
<b>Gender</b>	Male	115	11.12	2.272	3.402	223	.996	.001	.293	S*
	Female	110	12.12	2.115						P<0.05

Table 2 showed that the computed value of independent sample t-test comparing the mean scores of Listening Skills of male and female students found a statistically significant difference between two groups [ $t = 3.402$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ]. The mean score of female students was found significantly higher than male students therefore the null hypothesis 1 is rejected.

**H<sub>02</sub>** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when stream of study is concerned.

**Table 3: Showing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H<sub>02</sub>.**

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
<b>Stream</b>	Arts	186	11.47	2.262	2.072	223	.996	.039	.393	S*
	Science	139	12.28	2.077						P<0.05

Table 3 showed that the computed value of independent sample t-test comparing the mean scores of Listening Skills of arts and science streamed students found statistically significant difference between two groups [ $t = 2.072$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ]. The mean score of students studying science stream was found to be significantly higher than students studying arts stream. Hence, the null hypothesis 2 is rejected.

**H<sub>03</sub>** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when medium of study is concerned.

**Table 4: Showing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H<sub>03</sub>.**

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
<b>Medium of Instruction</b>	Bengali	173	11.29	2.207	4.024	223	1.384	.000	.344	S*
	English	52	12.67	2.065						P<0.05

Table 4 showed that the computed value of independent sample t-test comparing the mean scores of Listening Skills of Bengali medium and English medium students found statistically significant difference between two groups [ $t = 4.024$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ]. The mean score of English medium students was found significantly higher than Bengali medium students and therefore the null hypothesis 3 is also rejected.

**H<sub>04</sub>** Mean score of Listening Skill do not significantly differ among socially disadvantaged students when habitat is concerned.

**Table 5: Showing the One-way ANOVA based on H<sub>04</sub>.**

ANOVA						
Listening Skill Score						
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remarks
Between Groups	18.856	2	9.428	1.881	0.155	*NS
Within Groups	1112.726	222	5.012			P>0.05
Total	1131.582	224				

Table 5 showed that the computed value of one-way ANOVA comparing the mean scores of Listening Skills in relation to their habitat students found no statistically significant difference among three groups [ $F = 1.8814$ ,  $P > 0.05$ ]. Hence, the null hypothesis 4 is retained, and the found differences can be attributed to any chance factor.

**H<sub>05</sub>** Listening skill mean score of Scheduled Caste students is equal to listening skill mean score of Scheduled Tribe.

**Table 6: Showing the Independent Sample T-Test based on H<sub>05</sub>.**

Independent sample T-Test										
Variable	category	N	Mean	SD	t	df	MD	p-value	Std. error	Remarks
Caste	SC	136	11.49	2.177	0.959	223	0.294	0.339	0.306	NS*
	ST	89	11.79	2.352						P>0.05

Table 6 showed that the computed value of independent sample t-test comparing the mean scores of Listening Skills of Scheduled Caste and scheduled Tribe students found no statistically significant difference between two groups [ $t = 0.959$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ]. The null hypothesis 5 is retained and found difference in mean scores can be attributed to any chance factor.

**H<sub>06</sub>** Listening skill and academic performance are not significantly correlated to each other.

**Table 7: Showing the Pearson Correlation based on H<sub>06</sub>.**

Correlations			
		% in H.S. Examination	LS Score
% in H.S. Examination	Pearson Correlation	1	.240**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	225	225
LS Score	Pearson Correlation	.240**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	225	225
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 7 showed the Pearson correlation test results with coefficient value  $r = 0.240$  ( $p < 0.01$ ) that indicates existence of a positive correlation between Listening skill score and Academic Performance score which is statistically significant at 0.01 level.

### Major Findings

- Female students found to have better listening skills compared to their male counterpart.
- Urban students were better listener than semi-urban and rural students.
- Students studying arts found to have lower listening skill than students studying science.
- Students with English as medium of instruction were reported with better listening skill than students with Bengali as medium of instruction.
- Students belonging to scheduled tribe possessed better listening skills than students belonging to scheduled caste category.
- Listening skill score and academic performance is positively correlated with high statistical significance.

### Discussion and Conclusion

India, where caste identity by birth went on suppressing people in all spheres of life like nowhere else in the world, now needs to empower and enable the lower caste people i.e. scheduled caste and scheduled tribes

rather than simply providing them entitlement in terms of opportunities. In order to establish true equality of opportunity among all its citizen, the education system must play a crucial role by initiating capability development programs of which communication skill is a major one. Therefore, identification of existing communication skills is utmost necessary in order to plan intervention programs for the same.

Major finding emerged in the study helps us to understand the existing listening skills, an integral part of communication skills (Hamidi & Barati, 2011), among the disadvantaged students based on different demographic and academic indicators at higher education level in West Bengal. Good Listening skills as well as good listeners have some benefits (Browning & Waite, 2010) than others as they communicate well in most of the time and therefore see themselves more confidently in any situation including academics.

In this study, the researchers purported to locate any difference among scheduled caste and scheduled tribe students at higher education institutions in light of some demographic and academic indicators coupled with finding correlation between listening skill and academic performance. Although statistically significant differences found in between male and female students, rural, urban and semi-urban students and also science and arts students, but category of backwardness did not exhibit any. On support of the present finding it can be pointed to the 1998 Saskatchewan learning assessment of students' speech communication skills in a social context that yielded many significant gender differences in individual listening skills and also in latter studies female groups were found to exhibit better communication skills especially in listening tasks (Hunter, Gambell, & Randhawa, 2005). In this study, place of residence found to be a factor in varying listening skills which contradicts the results of a similar study conducted on one hundred and eighty one students of different educational settings (Wood, Buckhalt, & Tomlin, 1988). Although no studies found on effect of medium of instruction upon students' listening skill, the present study found a statistically significant difference between listening skills of students whose medium of instruction is Bengali (vernacular language) and students whose medium of instruction is English (though their native language is Bengali). Students studying in Arts needs to focus on the words, dialects, accent and inner meaning of a said phrase in order to better comprehend the essence of a text or content, where students studying Science need to pay attention on logical presentation, sequence, syllogisms and reasoning more than verbal expressions. Therefore, listening skills are thought to be more important for students whose major is Arts than students whose major is Science. Findings of the present study seemed to be inconsistent with the mentioned reality and contradicts findings of so many studies especially of the study on two thousand undergraduate Chinese students enrolled in American universities (Huang, 2004). Although reading skills found to have greater importance than listening skills in affecting academic performance (Dias, Montiel, & Seabra, 2015), current study revealed a positive correlation between listening skills and academic performance that indicates, if listening skill improves there may be possibility of exhibiting improved academic performance.

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