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# Listening Anxiety among the Students from Bengali Medium to Understand Lectures that are in English Language – A Study at International Standard University

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explore listening anxiety among students who have a Bengali medium educational background and examine how they can overcome the anxiety. It also focuses on whether listening anxiety works as a positive indicator or it plays a negative role while comprehending a message. This research adopts the concept of 'listening anxiety' to investigate why some learners find it difficult to understand class lectures that are in English language. The study employs a range of quantitative tools for exploring the central question and the specific study objectives. The central question of this study is: How does listening anxiety affect the students from Bengali medium in terms of their ability to comprehend and engage with lessons in their respective classes? In order to fully explore the study central research question, this article emphasizes four specific objectives concerning listening anxiety: i) to find out learners' level of self-esteem that is affected by listening anxiety, ii) to examine how listening anxiety works as a potential barrier in terms of understanding lectures, iii) to investigate their level of perception to grasp the lecture thoroughly, and iv) to recommend a few evidence-based strategies for overcoming the challenges. By applying non-probability purposive sampling, the study selects 30 respondents, who are students from various departments of International Standard University, to get information for the central question and objectives of the study. The study intends to seek that listening anxiety works as a hindrance for the students to conceive class lectures (though some are not even aware they have listening anxiety). Finally, based on the study's findings, it is possible to offer some essential recommendations.*

## KEY WORDS

anxiety, barrier, effect of presupposing, English deficiency.

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## 1. Introduction

Learning a second language requires some skills and it has been a matter of great concern for a long time, and the existence of foreign language anxiety

has been acknowledged as well (Luo, 2013). It plays a pivotal role in learning and understanding a second language. The class lectures and books of every department at

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International Standard University (ISU) are in English. Not only for the students of ISU but also for those who want to pursue higher education, proficiency in the English language is highly required. But most of the students, who come from Bengali medium, face some obstacles while studying. Besides other skills, such as – reading, speaking and writing, they also have to acquire and master the skill of listening.

Most of the students from Bengali medium at ISU complain that they fail to understand lectures or classes. They are also worried about their academic achievements. The first thing they have to do is to pay close attention and listen to their teachers' lectures attentively. But still, some factors render discomfort and tension during the listening process - lack of attention, lack of vocabulary, different pronunciation, etc.

However, students from Bengali medium encounter more difficulties compared to the students from English medium. A significant number of students are unaware that they are experiencing listening anxiety and may not even realize the difficulties that stem from it, which is a contributing factor to making lectures appear particularly challenging. The main objective of my research paper is to explore the underlying causes of listening anxiety and determine this

anxiety hinders the process of English language learning.

Listening anxiety is one of the affective factors that can obstruct the learning process. It is associated with adverse emotions, including uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension (Fang, 2011). Some students believe that speaking is the most difficult aspect and they suffer from speaking anxiety. However, what often goes unnoticed is the emergence of listening anxiety as a significant hurdle for them. Consequently, they often find it challenging to achieve fluency in spoken English.

Krashen (1992) states that although speaking is commonly regarded as the most anxiety-inducing aspect, listening can also generate a high level of anxiety. In the context of effective communication, it is important to recognize that listening plays a pivotal role in achieving mutual understanding because one cannot uphold a conversation without comprehending what s/he is being said. To highlight the importance of properly addressing listening anxiety, Vogely (1998) states, "Listening anxiety can undermine speech production because, to interact verbally, the listener must first understand what is being said." So, to gain other skills, students have to concentrate and overcome anxiety in listening skill.

Wheless (1975) defines listening anxiety as “a receiver’s apprehension, fear of misinterpretation, inadequately processing or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others” (p.263). Furthermore, Elkhaifi (2005) believes that listening anxiety is the feeling of fear and nervousness when trying to perceive a foreign language. Multiple factors contribute to the emergence of listening anxiety. Young (1992) suggests that poor listening skill results from many factors, including insufficient emphasis on listening, immature teaching methodologies, ineffective listening strategies, and students’ lack of vocabulary. However, one increasingly significant factor is anxiety.

Anxiety can be of two types. Some research suggests that language anxiety can be “helpful” or “facilitating” in some ways, for example, by maintaining students’ attentiveness (Scovel 1978). However, “harmful” or “detrimental” anxiety can cause declination in motivation, the emergence of negative attitudes and beliefs, and difficulties in language performance. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) have stated that the strongest negative factor affecting language achievement is listening anxiety.

Vogely (1998) has attempted to find out the source of listening anxiety in

the language classroom and pointed out that listening anxiety in a foreign or second language is associated with the listening input the learners encounter and the listening process they undergo. Listening skill is problematic because of their transient nature. Students become anxious when they confront speedy speech, unfamiliar accents and topics. Bekleyen (2009), in his study, has explored another source of anxiety, which is the students’ failure to recognize the spoken form of familiar words, segments of sentences, or weak forms of words and he has found that these affect the listening process. Yan (2005), in his study, has also indicated that listening anxiety plays a negative role in the process of listening, and it can affect listening performance through various factors. To be a proficient listener, a learner must actively and strategically participate in the listening process within a low-anxiety classroom environment (Fang, 2011).

There is a lack of specialized courses in Bangladesh that may enhance language skills. Consequently, students from every medium may encounter challenges to develop their skills. However, as the environment of Bengali medium school is surrounded by Bengali language, students face more significant problems compared to students of English medium, where English is prevalent. I have tried to

investigate the factors contributing to this issue and to uncover the truth behind this view. Thus, the present research seeks to find out the following research question: How does listening anxiety affect the students from Bengali medium in terms of their ability to comprehend and engage with lessons in their respective classes?

To fully address the central research question, I have set the following specific objectives: i) to explore the current views of the students concerning low self-esteem, ii) to identify listening anxiety as a barrier, iii) to explore how the students think listening anxiety is causing low level of perception, and iv) whether listening anxiety can facilitate their learning.

## **2. The Conceptual Framework:**

### **“Listening Anxiety”**

Listening anxiety typically carries a negative role in language learning, a similar viewpoint of Yan (2005) who has also found different factors behind this. When a learner considers listening anxiety as a threat, s/he naturally stops performing well and makes it challenging to perceive even an easy concept.

However, when a learner struggles to comprehend an easy idea, the level of perception of the target language diminishes. Thus, Bekleyen (2009) has found out in his study that when a learner fails to understand a word or a sentence, s/he also fails to form

sentences to give an answer. As a result, learners end up with limited and vague knowledge of the target language.

Listening anxiety also creates low self-esteem. When a learner lacks confidence, it becomes hard for him or her to become proficient in the language, and listening anxiety often underlies this issue. So, overall, it can be stated that listening anxiety has a detrimental impact and causes low levels of perception and low self-esteem among language learners.

## **3. Methodology of the Study**

### **3.1 Data, Sampling Procedures, and Techniques**

The present study utilized a quantitative research method to analyze and present collected data. The research designed a questionnaire containing six different types of questions. Some of the questions were yes/no questions or direct questions. Some of the questions had some options and the participants were allowed to choose more than one option. The answers to these questions helped to find out the answer to the research question. The respondents, who had been from Bengali medium, were provided with the questionnaires. The respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires and to feel free to answer the questions. A total of 30 questionnaires were distributed, and

each one was returned as a completed sample.

For secondary research, some information was gathered from online resources. There were several websites relevant to listening skills. To collect information about the topic, it was necessary to browse the internet and utilize standard search engines, like – Google, Google Scholar were needed. Some videos related to listening anxiety on YouTube were also gone through. Information about listening skills, listening anxiety, and students facing this problem, was collected from different articles via online links.

The research utilized purposive sampling to select the study respondents. I considered the following factors for choosing the respondents: first, the respondents from a Bengali medium educational background and second, mediocre students who face some sort of challenges while comprehending lectures in English at the university level.

### **3.2 Data Analysis Tools**

To analyze and present the collected data, descriptive statistics were used. I used a pie chart, bar chart and pie chart to present the data.

### **3.3 Ethical Issues**

Before distributing the questionnaire, oral consent from the respondents was ensured. The respondents were

well-aware about the study and were comfortable in participating. Moreover, I made them understand the questions whenever needed so that vivid answers could be received. I also ensured them that the anonymity of the respondents would be strictly maintained.

### **4. Data Analysis and Findings**

To gather adequate data on listening anxiety among Bengali medium students at ISU, a survey was conducted on different questions related to the topic. Through this survey and collecting data, I was able to find a conclusion on my research topic. This survey was carried out by thirty students of ISU who had Bengali medium educational background, comprising eighteen females and twelve males. The data has been thoroughly analyzed and presented in the following paragraphs.

The first question of the questionnaire was whether they felt worried when someone spoke in English very fast and they could not watch the lips and facial expressions of that person. It was a direct question and it aimed to find out how many of them needed to see the speaker when they listened and were worried when they could not see the speaker. 43.33% of students responded yes as shown in figure no. 1 (appendix); they were worried. 33.33% of students said that they felt a little bit anxious and seven students

said that they were not worried at all. So, if the answers of the students who responded that they were a bit worried are considered as yes, then 76.6% of students were worried.

Students face listening anxiety for some reasons. The next question was intended to find out the reasons and areas that are responsible for listening anxiety. The question contained three options and participants were allowed to choose more than one option (Figure no. 2, appendix). Some participants considered low English proficiency as the reason for listening anxiety and this option got 40% responses. Some thought that lack of attention makes listening difficult and it got 36.6% responses as well. The last option was whether unknown words and information made them feel uneasy and this option got 23.33% responses.

The third question was related to the second question but this question was a direct one. Through the responses to this question, the study wanted to find out how the participants felt whenever unknown words appeared in the lectures or conversations. As shown in figure no. 3 (appendix), 70% of participants responded that they felt annoyed and 30% of participants said no, and unknown words did not bother them. This question was expected to find out whether the participants felt comfortable listening to English when

they were able to see written text. There were participants to whom written texts were helpful and that made listening easy for them. Some thought this was a distraction. Keeping this in mind, this question was asked whether written texts were helpful for them while listening or not, 70% of students responded yes; they needed written text to understand better and they thought it was helpful. 30% of participants thought they did not need any written text for better listening (Figure no. 4, appendix).

There is a trend among the students to presuppose and overthink. Sometimes they believe that they will not be able to understand English and this kind of thinking restrains them from learning English. This question wanted to know whether they had a similar thought. As shown in figure no. 5 (appendix), 36.66% of students agreed that they presupposed and it hampered their listening. 30% of participants responded no. 33.33% of participants said that not always but sometimes they felt they would not be able to understand and as a result they missed information.

The word anxiety has a negative vibe but it can also be helpful to students. The focus of the last question was to figure out whether anxiety played a positive or a negative role for participants. Two options presented anxiety as a positive factor and the

other two options presented anxiety as a negative factor. 40% of participants thought anxiety could be helpful and it helped them to remain attentive in the class (figure no. 6, appendix). Moreover, they could acquire English as well. 33.33% of participants said it hampered their study, and understanding and the remaining 26.66% of participants pointed out anxiety as a problem.

### **5. Discussion**

The six questions were selected because they were relevant to listening anxiety. The first question got twenty-three responses, which meant that participants were worried when they could not see the expression of the speaker and they failed to comprehend. So, a large percentage of participants faced difficulties. They also pointed out the reasons behind listening anxiety. All three options got responses. Some thought they were poor in English and this was the reason they failed to catch things through listening. Some thought lack of attention was the reason for difficulty in listening. They were optimistic and believed that proper attention could help them to understand the lectures. As a result, they might not face any difficulty in listening. Another group thought unknown words and information in English made students anxious and they failed to comprehend. The next question got twenty-one responses

which stated that when they listened to unknown words in lectures, it made them feel uneasy and they became annoyed. As a result, they could not understand any further. But nine respondents said that they were not annoyed but the percentage was very poor.

The last three questions in the research aimed to explore the strategy the students use to overcome anxiety and whether they perceive anxiety positively or negatively. Twenty-one respondents said that written text helped listen because it provided the information in letters and they could catch the information. Nine said that this was not necessary. However, it revealed that most participants could not concentrate on listening to English. Moreover, eleven respondents said that they presupposed that they would not be able to understand through listening and they failed to get information and ten participants said whenever they thought similar to this, they failed to get information and it hampered their further learning. But nine respondents confirmed that they did not think anything before and this helped them to understand their lectures. Lastly, eighteen students pointed out anxiety as a problem and a barrier in learning, and only twelve students accepted anxiety as helpful as it kept them attentive and they could learn a lot.

Through collecting and analyzing data, the results prove that students from Bengali medium, who are studying at ISU, face listening anxiety which they are not aware of. The respondents were given some options in survey questionnaires, and most of the students chose such options that indicated their difficulties and problems in listening and their answers reflected it.

However, Yan (2005) claims listening anxiety is a negative factor and this research also has found that a major number of students considered listening anxiety as a negative factor and they thought it worked as a barrier for them. As Vogely (1998) states, unfamiliar words can cause listening anxiety and stop the listeners from perceiving a message, this research has also found that unfamiliar words did annoy the listeners who were facing listening anxiety and as a result, they could not comprehend lectures. Lastly, according to Scovel (1978), anxiety can be of two types: either facilitating or detrimental. Through this research, it is found that in recent times, some do consider anxiety as a positive factor and some consider anxiety as a negative factor.

## **6. Conclusion and Recommendation**

Listening anxiety is a factor that could affect L2 or FL learners' listening performance. It is an important factor that affects the listening ability of

successful students. We should decrease listening anxiety by increasing self-confidence. Teachers can also play a significant role here. As the students from the Bengali medium suffer from anxiety and have low confidence and think that they are not capable enough, teachers can help to gain self-confidence and make them feel that they can be successful in listening. Teachers can motivate and imbue them with a feeling that by listening carefully, they can get the necessary information which will enhance their learning capacity and by following the instructions of their teacher, listening anxiety can be diminished, thereby making the students confident. They will not consider themselves inferior any more.

According to them, low English proficiency, lack of attention in the class and unknown words and information in English make them anxious. So, the students can practice English at home, in the classroom and with their peers. This will help them to regain their confidence, and they will get to know different vocabularies and proper pronunciations. They will no longer be annoyed with unknown words. Besides, if they are attentive in the classroom, they will be able to follow and comprehend better, no matter how hard the topic is. As some of them take anxiety as a negative vibe, they can turn this weakness into



strength which will be helpful for them.

### **7. Scopes for Further Research**

If any other researcher would like to research the same topic, s/he can make some changes to make this research broader and more genuine. The present study conducted quantitative research. Instead of quantitative research, qualitative research can be focused in future studies. The qualitative research will allow researchers to conduct fruitful interview sessions with the students from Bengali backgrounds to have all the information in detail. By doing this, some important insights regarding the topic will be explored. This study has surveyed 30 students from Bengali medium educational background. However, the researchers can conduct the research with more students through which the result may explore more in-depth information and the findings of the

study will facilitate policymakers to take appropriate measures.

Furthermore, a comparative study between English and Bengali medium students can be conducted to survey whether or not English medium students also face the same kind of difficulty in listening and gaining information as propounded in this study.

**Declaration of Interests:** I, the author of this research manuscript, declare that I have no financial interest. I have provided written consent to publish the research manuscript in this journal.

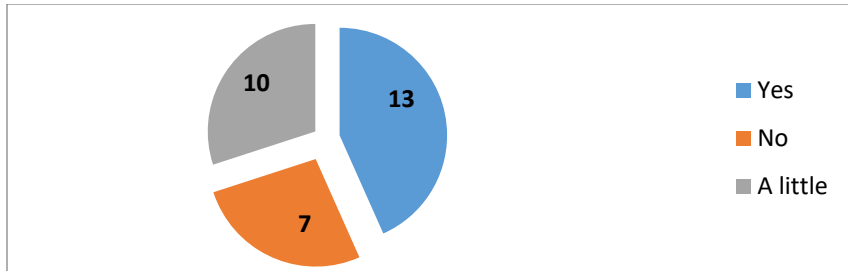
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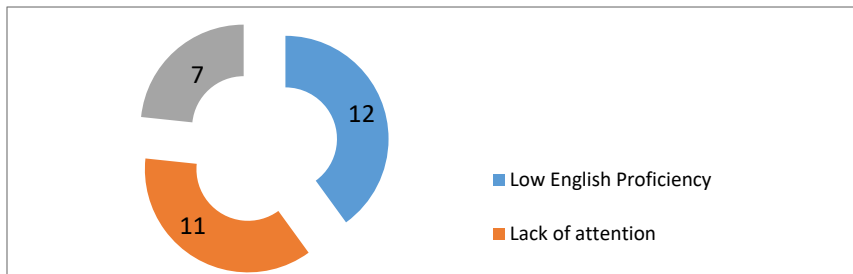
**Appendix**

**Figure 1: Worried or not when someone speak in English?**



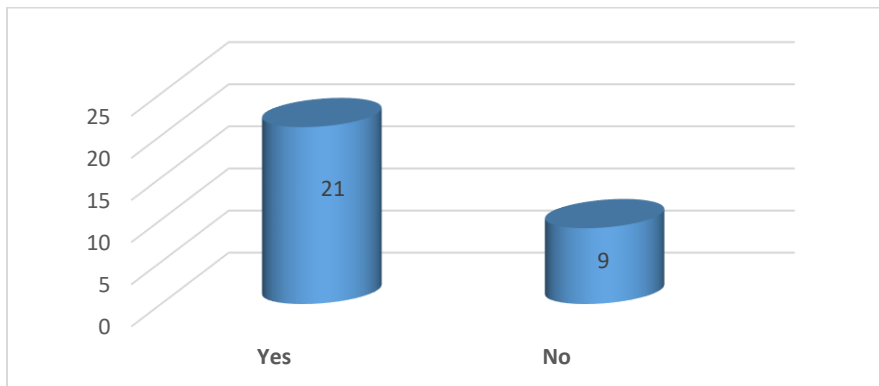
**(Source: Field Work, 2023)**

**Figure 2: Reasons behind listening anxiety**



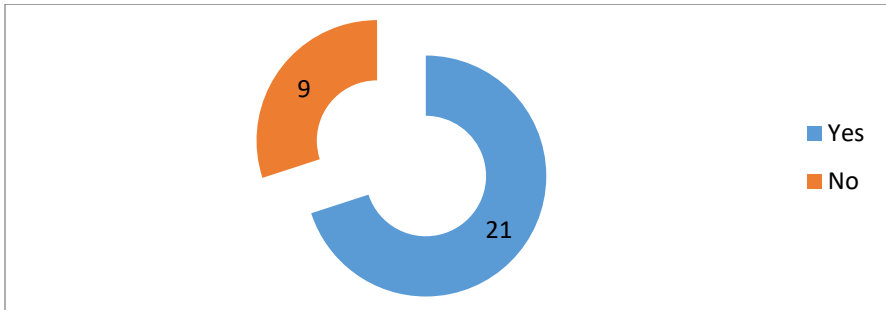
**(Source: Field Work, 2023)**

**Figure 3: Unknown words are annoying**



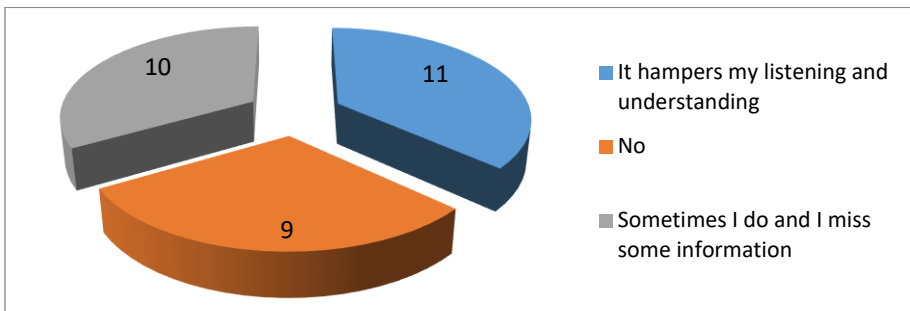
**(Source: Field Work, 2023)**

**Figure 4: Written text makes listening easy or not**



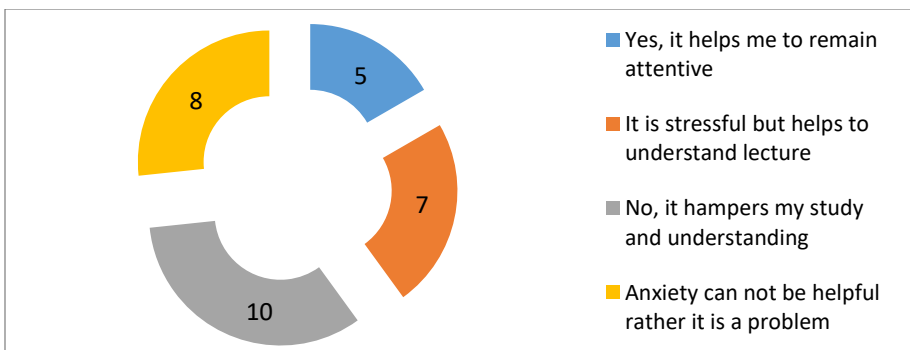
(Source: Field Work, 2023)

**Figure 5: Presupposing affects listening**



(Source: Field Work, 2023)

**Figure 6: Is anxiety helpful?**



(Source: Field Work, 2023)