

Research Article

## A Preparation for Listening Module in IELTS

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**Abstract:** This research paper is an attempt to improve the listening skill of the students. Listening is a receptive language skill which students usually find the most difficult. This research paper is aimed to improve student's exam performance in taking the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) and also to improve their listening skill in their academic life and in real life situation. In this paper, the listening skills tested in IELTS, types of questions and some of the strategies and approaches to answering the questions are described not only for teachers but also for students. Therefore, this research paper is hoped to be helpful to postgraduate or undergraduate students for achieving the high score in the International English Language Testing System.

**Keywords:** Approaches, Exam performance, Listening skill, Strategies.

### 1. Introduction

Listening is the one skill used the most in everyday life. Listening comprehension is the basic for speaking, reading and writing skills. To train the listening skill, it is important to listen actively. Listening is the active process of receiving and responding to spoken messages. Listening is important because it occupies a lot of time to communicate in the language. It is undeniable that listening is used more than any other language skill.

In other words, language learning depends on listening because most students spend more time in listening to the foreign language than in producing it themselves. In addition, students learn to speak, read and write by listening to others.

This research paper is prepared to support for the development of the students' listening skill in the International English Language Testing System. This research is intended for students who want to study in the medium of English either at university or college.

In this research paper, question types in the IELTS listening module are described. For each question type there is an explanation. The purpose of this explanation is to help the students understand the purpose of the question type and learn the appropriate skill for answering the questions. In order to help students listen actively, they need to know the strategies of the tasks. They also need to know the listening skills tested in IELTS. By knowing these strategies and skills, students will improve in their listening skill and can tackle the IELTS exam tasks.

This research paper has been prepared with the aim of developing the listening skill of the students by providing them with more listening strategies. Therefore, it is hoped that this research report will provide some help for the students in developing their listening skill not only in the classroom but also in the IELTS exam.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction to IELTS

IELTS stands for International English Language Testing System. It is a test of English Language skills designed for students who want to study in the medium of English either at university, college or secondary school. There are two versions of the tests. They are the Academic Module and General Training Module. Students wishing to study at postgraduate or undergraduate level should take the Academic Module. The General Training Module is designed for those candidates who plan to undertake training or secondary school education.

### 2.2. About the IELTS Listening Test

The IELTS Listening test takes about 30 minutes, with 10 minutes allocated for the students to transfer their answer from the question booklet to the answer sheet.

This module consists of four recorded sections. The four sections become progressively more difficult and each recording is played once only. There are pauses to divide the recording into small parts. For each part the students need to answer a series of questions of one type.

Section 1 is a conversation, generally between two speakers. It is usually divided into two parts. First, the students are given a little time to look at the questions for Section 1. Then, the students will hear an example. After the example, the students will hear the correct answer. The students will then have a little more time to look at the questions for the first part of Section 1. Section 2 is a monologue; that is, there is only one speaker. It is often in two parts. The students are given time to look at the questions. The students will not hear a spoken example, but there may be a written example in a shaded box in the booklet. The topic is one of general interest to any member of the community.

Section 3 is a conversation between two or more speakers. It is usually in two parts. The students are given time to look at the questions. There is no example on the recording. The topic is often related to student life.

Section 4 is a monologue. It is usually not divided into parts, although there may be short pauses. There is often written example in the question booklet, but there is not a separate spoken example. The questions to this section are often in the form of notes or a summary to be completed. However, there is sometimes a mixture of question types as in Listening test Section 3. It is usually a short talk or lecture similar to what the students might hear at the beginning of a course, but the students do not need specialist knowledge to understand the ideas presented.

### 2.3. The IELTS Listening Test Format

The test is to hear a recording. The recording is played once only. First, the voice on the recording reads the instructions on the front of the question booklet. These instructions are read as the students listen to the recording to become accustomed to the speed and accent of the speech. The students can ask the administrator to adjust the volume, if necessary. The students do not open their booklet until they are told to do so. During the test the students are given time to read the questions and to check back over their answers. It is very important that the students read these questions during this time. The questions must be answered while the students are listening. There are between 38 and 42 questions. The questions mostly follow the same sequence as the information contained in the recording. Answers to the questions must be written directly into the question booklet. At the end of each section some

time will give to go back and make sure the answers are clear. At the end of the test the students have 10 minutes to transfer all the answers to the answer sheet.

## **2.4. Question Types in the Listening Module**

There is a variety of possible question types in the Listening Module. They are notes, summary, diagram, flow chart, table or sentences completion, short answer questions, various kinds of multiple choice questions, matching lists and classification.

### **2.4.1. Note completion**

Completing gapped notes is a common activity in IELTS listening. The headings and layout of the notes give the students information about what the conversation is about and the type of information required. The students have to look at the information in the notes to help them to identify the information they need.

### **2.4.2. Summary Completion**

In summary completion tasks, the students have to fill in gaps in a short paragraph which summarises the main ideas of one part of the talk. The sentences will not be exactly the same as what the students hear—they need to listen for parallel expressions. The students have to use the words from the recording to complete the gaps.

### **2.4.3. Table Completion**

In table completion tasks, the students have to fill in gaps in a table which will have several columns. Each column will have a heading. The students have to read the main heading, if there is one, and they have to look at the column headings to get an idea of what to listen for. The students have to check the number of words they are allowed to write. The information is usually in note form, so the students do not generally need to include words like articles or verbs. The students need to think about what sort of information like a number, a noun or an adjective is needed for each gap.

### **2.4.4. Sentence Completion**

In sentence completion tasks, the sentences summarise the main ideas, so this is similar to a summary completion task. The sentences will have the same meaning as the information in the recording but will use parallel expressions. The students have to check their answers make sense in the sentence. The completed sentences must be grammatically correct.

### **2.4.5. Flow chart completion**

In completing flow chart, the students have to study the language used in the chart and decide what its purpose is to ask questions or to state facts. This may give the students clues to the type of answers needed. The students should remember the arrows showed how the text is organised. The completed flow chart is checked to reflect to overall sense of the recording.

### **2.4.6. Short Answer Questions**

In this task the students have to answer questions, which usually focus on factual information. The students should not write their answers in sentence form. Often the best answer will just be one or two words.

### **2.4.7. Multiple-choice Questions**

For one type of listening multiple-choice question, the students have to choose one answer from a choice of three or they have to choose several answers from a list. The students have to read the sentence opening or question carefully and underline key words and listen for

similar words or parallel expressions. All the options will probably be mentioned, but they will not all be correct answers to the questions.

#### **2.4.8. Matching Lists**

In matching tasks, the students have to match two sets of information: a list in a box, and numbered items. The students have to remember that they will hear information about the numbered items in order. They have to look at the box as they listen and consider each of items.

#### **2.4.9. Classification**

In a classification task, the students have to match points from the listening to a set of groups or classes. As with all IELTS listening tasks, the numbered points will be heard in order.

### **2.5. Skill to be Developed in Dealing with the IELTS Listening Module**

Listening skills are described in order to be able to take the IELTS test efficiently, especially Listening Module. The IELTS examination tests the students' ability to understand spoken language in a variety of social and academic contexts. The test consists of four graded recorded sections each with 10 questions and it takes about 30 minutes to complete. As the students hear the recording once only, success will depend on knowing what information to listen for. The students are not expected to have any specialist knowledge but they should be able to deal with a range of topics and a number of different voices. There are the listening skills tested in IELTS. They are listening for specific information, listening for main ideas and supporting information, and understanding the speakers' opinions. Each of the four sections in the listening test may have up to three different types of question testing a range of skills.

#### **2.5.1. Listening for specific information**

When the students listen for specific information, they are listening for key details to help them make a decision or complete a task. Specific information is often factual in nature. When the students listen for specific information, they need to have some idea of what they are listening for before they listen and while they are listening.

#### **2.5.2. Listening for main ideas and supporting information**

The main idea is usually the topic of the lecture or conversation. All the supporting information will make the main idea stronger. The main idea will be stated generally in the beginning and emphasized at the end. Sometimes the main idea will be explicitly stated, sometimes it will be the overall message. If the main idea is not stated, the students can listen to what the supporting information has in common and imply the main idea.

#### **2.5.3. Understanding the speaker's opinion**

An opinion is a point of view; it differs from a fact in that it cannot be proved true. Some people make their opinions sound like facts, but usually when people give a verbal opinion, they use phrases such as 'I believe, I think, In my opinion.'

### **3. Data Analysis**

Regarding the listening skill required in attempting IELTS, questionnaires are used in order to get the opinions of the students and language teachers from the Technological University, Mawlamyine. Questionnaires give data about the general characteristics and preferences of teachers and learners as well as eliciting their responses to specific factors in their teaching learning situation about the listening skill.

#### **4. Findings**

According to the survey, the students responded that the IELTS test is important for their achievement in academic study. Generally, they think it is important to improve their listening skill. They also believe that they can speak and write if they have a good listening comprehension. It is found that the majority of the students are weak in listening skill. The students find it difficult to listen to the speakers' unfamiliar accents. It is agreed that they find it difficult to understand the meaning of words when the speakers are speaking. Moreover, they think listening is difficult because they are lack of ability to deal with unfamiliar words. Most of the students think listening is difficult but very interesting. However, some of the students think listening is very difficult and boring because they cannot concentrate on interpreting unfamiliar words and accents.

Concerning the opinions of language teachers, it is said that there is not enough time for preparing the listening test in the class because they have to spend a big chunk of time to teach the grammatical structure, vocabulary and reading comprehension. The teachers feel that the students need more practice and training to be competent in their listening skill.

#### **5. Discussions and Recommendations**

It can be seen that the students need to know listening strategies and the way to develop their listening skill. Moreover, they need more practice, and to be trained so as to be active listeners for academic and professional needs. It is observed that the students need to pay attention to the various stages of listening strategies to improve their listening skill. It is found that there is not enough time to practise the listening skill in the class. They should practise to improve their listening skill outside the classroom. They can improve their listening skill through English songs, movies, comedy shows or talk shows and YouTube videos for dialogues and conversations in many different accents of English. It may be useful to listen to talk shows, interview and news magazines in order to practise the skills necessary for listening to a dialogue. The teachers should also provide the students with more effective and interesting activities in order to practise the listening tasks.

#### **6. Conclusion**

The purpose of this research paper is to help the development of students' listening skill. In the International English Language Testing System, the listening skill is very important for them. The information about developing the listening skill is mentioned in this paper. In order to fulfil the students' needs, this paper focuses on specific listening skill: listening for specific information, listening for main ideas and supporting information and understanding the speakers' opinions. These strategies can be applied in their academic study and in taking the IELTS examination.

The teachers who are teaching English language also need to understand what the listening skill is, in order to train their students to improve their listening skill and to take the IELTS tests. In conclusion, it is hoped that the skills and strategies presented in this research paper will help the students in dealing with the IELTS listening module.

#### **Conflicts of interest**

There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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