

The significance of this research originates from the following learning idea and experience:

**Time wasted in class will never come back. Taking
listening for granted while in class is
congruent to time forfeited in a
learning session.**

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**IMPROVING FIRST YEAR TECHNIKON
STUDENTS' LISTENING PRACTICES
TO PROMOTE ACADEMIC
SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY**

by

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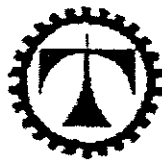
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MASTERS IN TECHNOLOGY: EDUCATION

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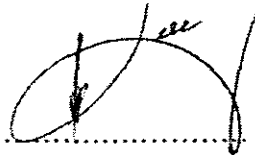


Date of submission: November 2003

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that '*Improving first year technikon students' listening practices to promote academic success: a case study*' is a true reflection of the research work authentically generated by me in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Masters degree in Technology: Education Management. This has not been submitted or published in full or in part at any tertiary institution for a qualification.

SIGNED:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'J. Wright', written over a horizontal dotted line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

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ABSTRACT

Using a case study approach, this thesis describes the listening practices of first year students at a technikon in the Western Cape. The research was conducted over a period of two years, from 2002 – 2003. Research data are gleaned from an analysis and interpretation of responses from several ethnographic tools: questionnaires (completed by lecturers and students), notes on class observations, oral interviews and audio-visual samples of students' gestures and actions in class. Oral and written lecture recall assessments are analysed and interpreted with a view to describing students' listening practices.

Six first year students, whose home languages are Xhosa and Afrikaans, are selected for research. The impact of their listening and learning through the medium of English is considered, as well as the influence of change in a learning culture, socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. Their life stories are analysed in depth to consider how factors in their lives influence their listening in class.

Pairs of selected students are compared to try to identify the qualities of effective listeners. The impact of listening on these students' academic performance is examined and the role of educators as facilitators is considered.

It is concluded that both students and staff have a role to play in improving students' listening and English proficiency in order to promote academic success.

GUIDE TO MOST COMMONLY USED ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

Abbreviation / Acronym	-	Explanation
• ABET	-	Adult Basic Education and Training
• BEDGEN	-	Bachelor of Education: General
• EMS	-	Economic and Management Sciences
• ESL		English Second Language
• L1	-	First Language
• ND:ABET	-	National Diploma: Adult Basic Education and Training
• ND: BEDGEN	-	National Diploma: Bachelor of Education - General

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Foreground

There is generally a need for educational evaluation in South Africa. Looking at learning practices of tertiary students at entry level, institutions need to go through a period of intensive transformation which will be an invaluable challenge to key participants in the current transition of education, learners, educators on foundation programmes and other stakeholders.

Gardener and Jewler (1992) note that tertiary students often under-interpret learning as entailing mainly reading course books and writing copious notes from lectures; and that lecturing is information-laden, teacher-dominated and can lead students into taking a passive role in the classroom. In this regard, there is a significant need to gain new insights, classroom activities and mechanisms for encouraging active listening in the classroom.

In this study, effective academic listening as a social practice will be viewed. Gee (1990) perceives listening as both a literacy skill and a social practice and that its development is dependent on variables of social, economic, political, and historical contexts. Gardener and Jewler (1992) also note that listening is a social practice that can result in increased on-spot-learning and better retention when

developed. They further state that effective academic listening encourages improved note-taking strategies in lectures.

Because listening is a natural ability, its development is generally taken for granted and it is often poorly developed. Sutcliffe (1993) views listening as an interpersonal skill that can be developed. There is little or no emphasis on the teaching of listening in schools in South Africa, yet listening skills are vital because they help determine how people relate to others in order to learn (Van der Merwe, 1991). At tertiary level, where the language of learning is often English, effective listening skills are possibly even more important than at school because of the expectation that tertiary students will be independent learners. Among students who fail their examinations, deficient listening skills have a stronger influence on students' achievement than reading or academic aptitude (Wolvin, 1984).

My thesis title refers to listening practices. By this I mean a skill that has been internalised. When we learn a new skill, it needs to be developed in a supportive context before it is internalised. For this reason, there is a need to develop first year students' listening practices in order to empower them academically. The term 'academic success' means different things to different people. By 'academic success' I mean being able to fulfil one's potential in an academic context. It is through this fulfilment that one can gain a sense of mastery, accomplishment in relation to performance standards and academic growth. For some, 'academic

success' means academic excellence, for others, it may mean personal realisation of the relevance of their studies.

1.2 Problem statement

Understanding the impact of listening practices of first year technikon students on their academic success.

1.3 Rationale

Makoni (2000) points out that entry-level students frequently fail to meet the demands of higher education because they employ rote learning approaches that have served them at school but which are inadequate at tertiary level. At school, learners depend a lot on note-taking and memorisation of texts while at tertiary level they are expected to rely on lectures that require intensive listening. If listening is central to learning, then the rote learning approach does not prepare students for a tertiary learning environment where they are expected to be independent and critical learners (Feyten, 1991).

Snarski (1995) claims that the rote learning teaching method does not adequately encourage listening. Learning takes place in a teacher-controlled classroom where learners are not encouraged to express themselves on knowledge gained from listening to a lesson. She mentions that demonstration of knowledge happens at the end of the term in the form of tests, examinations or assignments. There is no

point where learners are credited or receive recognition or appreciation for recall of presented lessons.

For many first year students, there is an enormous gap between the way they were taught in high school and the new experience of attending long hours of lectures (Makoni, 2000). Unfortunately, with South Africa's eleven official languages, it is impossible to give lectures to all tertiary students in their home language. This adds another challenge as these students have to listen to lectures delivered in the medium of English which is often their second, third or even fourth language. This English may be highly technical and academic, requiring them to listen in a more critical way to comprehend the content of their subjects of learning (Marais, 1995).

The motivation to do this research emanates from my experience as a student Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) teacher and a lecturer of English Communication teaching at a technikon in the Western Cape.

As a student in 1995, my classmates were extremely motivated to learn and also proud about doing the ABET course. They showed commitment in their studies and seemed to be paying attention in class. This could have been because they were well informed about the course and it was their first choice of tertiary study as well. In addition, they were mature and had sound practice in different spheres that were related to the field of Adult Education, Training and Development.

My experiences and observations as a lecturer regarding students' classroom conduct and attitudes about the course were different. As a lecturer in 2000, I often observed that more than half of the National Diploma:ABET (ND:ABET)1 class struggled to maintain eye contact with me and even with one another during Teaching Practice and English Communication Teaching lectures. They were withdrawn and did not use their oral and aural capabilities.

Concerning the latter, they appeared to have difficulty in listening effectively to one another during student oral presentations (the purpose of which was to boost their oral communication skills for the benefit of every presenter and listener). Students generally neglected the importance of listening in class and instead spent time during the lecture and in their homes attempting to read and comprehend study manuals.

1.4 Research questions

- 1.4.1 What is the nature of first year students' listening practices?
- 1.4.2 To what extent are first year students aware of their listening practices?
- 1.4.3 How can the hindrances to effective listening be overcome by students?
- 1.4.4 What methods could be used by lecturers to encourage first year students to listen effectively so as to improve their chances of academic success?

1.5 Research objectives

- .5.1 To understand first year technikon students' listening practices;**
- 1.5.2 To understand appropriate methods of improving students' listening practices;**
- 1.5.3 To encourage listening in lectures in order to promote academic success.**

1.6 Assumptions

- 1.6.1 Listening practices during tertiary studies can be observed and described.**
- 1.6.2 Students' listening practices can be improved if students are actively involved in a variety of both individual and co-operative classroom activities designed to encourage listening skills.**

1.7 Beneficiaries of this research

Findings from this research could be beneficial to the following stakeholders:

- Practitioners and organisations responsible for matric students in terms of bridging the gap between high school and tertiary level;**
- Students in foundation programmes;**
- First year students at tertiary level;**
- Lecturers of first year students at tertiary institutions, irrespective of the discipline of study;**
- Teacher educators;**
- Researchers in the field of education (teaching and learning);**
- Lecturers of content subjects who use English as medium of instruction**

- Students for whom English is a second or even third language.

1.8 A brief overview of the chapters of this thesis

1.8.1 Delimitation

There are various factors that contribute to promoting academic success. This study attempts to understand the extent to which effective listening in lectures impacts on the academic success of first year technikon students.

The study then analyses and interprets the listening gestures and actions of first year technikon students in class in order to describe their listening practices and relate these to their academic performance.

1.8.2 Overview of the chapters

Each chapter is then trying to link what has been assumed with the reality of the problem.

In Chapter 1 I have given an overview of the problem, provided an analysis of the problem and given the reason for my embarking on this research. I have also stated my assumptions and considered who could benefit from the research findings.

Chapter 2 encompasses a literature review in relation to listening as a concept. A clear distinction is made between hearing and listening and the steps involved in

the listening process. In addition, factors influencing poor listening and types of listening styles are explained. This chapter also deals with the importance of listening training and the benefits of active listening. Lastly, I consider the role of educators in promoting students' effective listening in lectures.

The focus of **Chapter 3** is the process undertaken regarding data collection. This includes the ethics of the research, steps followed in data gathering, instruments used in data generation and, mainly, the research paradigm used.

In **Chapter 4**, I analyse and interpret the gathered data. This is where cases of six first year technikon students are related to their conduct in the classroom.

Examples of aspects covered in the cases are family background, schooling background, socio-cultural factors, socio-economic issues, students' scores in lecture recall assessments, students' gestures and actions in class and their general academic performance.

The examination of these aspects helps to build an understanding of how students' social and other factors influence their listening practices. The general performance of these students is compared, taking into consideration aspects such as those mentioned above. In this way, the underlying reasons for differences in their listening levels can be understood. Furthermore, factors which influence listening levels of the compared students are considered in depth. This chapter then looks at the views of students and lecturers on ways of promoting effective

lecture listening.

Chapter 5 encompasses conclusions and recommendations of the research.

Conclusions are based on the reasons for and consequences of poor listening; and recommendations are made regarding the improvement of lecture listening. In this chapter I also discuss the role of the most influential stakeholders of this research which include first year technikon students, their lecturers and sites of higher learning, such as technikons.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

A major mode of tertiary education remains the lecture (Benson, 1989).

Academic listening is thus an essential component of communicative competence in a tertiary setting (Flowerdue, 1997).

When research was done to contrast academic performance of English native speakers and English Second Language (ESL) speakers in lectures delivered in the medium of English, it was found that students who are second language speakers are at a disadvantage compared to native speakers (Dunkel & Davis, 1994). Even though limited English proficiency put second language speakers at a disadvantage, effective listening is, to a great extent, discouraged by the way speakers organise and structure their wording (Burton & Dimbley, 1995). In this regard, Flowerdue (1997) suggests that lecturers should structure their discourse so as to guide students. To elaborate, Flowerdue (1997) explains how oral input from a lecture can be made more meaningful. He believes that the use of signalling cues by a lecturer can promote attention by English second language students. He stresses that speakers should make use of signalling cues like, “Now getting back to our main point...” while speaking. This would enable the listener to understand the interrelated threads of meaning in a lecture. Furthermore, the lecture would be more of a point-driven method to facilitating learning.

In this study, listening as a social practice is explored. Pedagogic applications are looked at, particularly the requirements of effective listening. In addition, barriers to effective listening, ways of practising active listening and rewards of effective listening are considered.

2.1.1 Gender in pronouns

In the literature review, when referring to the 'listener', the pronoun 'she' is used rather than using both he/she; and the pronoun 'he' is used when referring to the speaker. However, in the case studies, gender appropriate pronouns are used.

2.2 Distinction between hearing and listening

Bone (1988) perceives hearing as natural and listening as a capability. Hearing is the beginning of the listening process. Luke and Lynott (1999) also view hearing to be the first stage of listening. One can passively hear any sound but not necessarily engage in the listening process which requires both hearing and active functioning of the mind. Bone (1988) further states that hearing is non-selective and involuntary while one chooses to listen. For instance, while listening, the mind can actively try to comprehend what key point the speaker is making and how that relates to one's own previous knowledge.

Burton and Dimbley (1995) make a distinction between hearing and listening by stating that hearing is a physical process involving the ears only, while listening

includes the physical (hearing), emotional (feeling) and the intellectual (thoughts).

2.2.1 The listening process

Luke and Lynott (1999) define listening as a communication process which needs to be active in order to be successful. Meaning and evaluation of a message must take place before the listener can respond to the speaker. This implies that the listener is actively working while the speaker is talking.

To listen effectively, we must hear and select information from the speaker, give it meaning, decide how we feel about it, and respond in a matter of seconds (Bone, 1988). This is clearly a challenging task.

Tubbs and Moss (1987) claim that the listening process involves the following steps:

- Hearing information;
- Paying attention to the information;
- Understanding the message; and
- Remembering the information.

Bone (1988) explains that the steps involved in the listening process occur in this sequence:

- Hear the message: listen to both verbal and non-verbal information.

- **Interpret the message:** accurate interpretation is a match-up of meaning between the speaker and the listener.
- **Evaluate the message:** the listener's opinion should be based on all available information; ask questions.
- **Respond to the message:** effective listening means giving the speaker an appropriate response, verbally and/or non-verbally.

Guirdham (1995) describes the listening process as involving the following steps:

- **Receiving:** receiving, getting, or acquiring information.
- **Selecting:** listening selectively e.g. concentrating very hard to select just those cues needed or wanted.
- **Organising:** this includes identifying, registering and analysing information and assigning meaning to what has been perceived.
- **Interpreting:** relating the information received, selected and organised to past experiences or future expectations.

Comparing the three above-mentioned sequencing styles of the listening process by the different authors, it is clear that there is some overlap. For instance, Bone (1988) perceives 'interpreting' information as the second phase of the listening process, while Guirdham, (1995) argues that 'interpreting' information is the last of the four steps of the listening process. However, there is undoubtedly a similarity in that all three authors perceive hearing or receiving information as the first of the four steps of the listening process.

2.3 Requirements of effective listening

Effective listening is an active, integrated communication skill that requires energy and know-how. It is purposeful, powerful and productive (Bone, 1988). It takes determination on the part of the listener in order to be a productive and effective listener, whether it be for social or academic purposes. Rewarding listening requires a series of skills, namely:

- The ability to concentrate for a long time;
- A desire to understand the speaker's point of view;
- An ability to read between the lines and grasp what is meant; and
- Emotional and intellectual commitment

(Guirdham,1995).

From the above discussion regarding the listening process and requirements of effective listening, one may thus say, listening can only be effective and rewarding if it is active.

2.4 Barriers to effective listening

There are various factors that lead to poor listening among students and which are thus detrimental to their learning progress. These entail pedagogical, emotional and language barriers to effective academic listening:

2.4. Pedagogical barriers

Improper note-taking strategies

An improper note-taking strategy is a factor that leads to ineffective listening and thus miscomprehension of the lecture (Rowntree, 1990) claims that students should spend more lecture time listening rather than note-taking. He also suggests that a good idea to make occasional notetaking in whatever creative way students might find it, e.g. spray diagrams, idea maps, list points worth thinking about. He further states that trying to take notes of everything said in the classroom hinders effective listening.

Gardner and Fowler (1992) hold similar views with Rowntree (1990) by pointing out that improper note-taking encourages intellectual laziness in the classroom and thus the way of active listening and learning. They further claim that poor note-taking skills often characterize poor grades.

Lack of punctuality

Rowntree (1990) sees late-coming as a factor that shows a lack of commitment on the part of students. Vela (1994) spells out that a student has to be responsible and accountable to herself. No lecturer can learn for a student.

Lack of listening training

Vela (1994) claims that people learn better when they are involved in the learning, doing what they are learning. He says, for instance, learn a musical

thinking by doing critical thinking. Thus, to listen effectively by practising effective listening. If students are not trained effectively, their chances of bettering their academic results diminish and they might consequently achieve less than the role they are motivated to be effective lecture listeners.

Inadequately trained staff

Deming (1999) remarks that, when students fail, educators should carry the blame. He further blames tertiary institutions for appointing lecturers with little training in lecturing. They may be nervous, uneducated, tedious, even dishonest. Others may be press-ganged into lecturing subjects which they do not prefer.

2. Emotional barriers

Socio-economic problems

Students, especially entry-level earners, use computers in the lecture room because being distracted by thinking about personal problems that never seem to get solved (Burley-Allen, 1998).

In his argument, Burley-Allen (1998) articulates that personal problem-laden students tend to be bad listeners and thus miss the important part of the lecture. This can be deduced that problems like love affairs, financial problems, and lack of accommodation distract young adults from listening to lectures.

Students generally need life skills guidance on personal development and on how to conduct their lives at tertiary level.

In summary, some students may show a lack of engagement due to socio-economic problems. Students then do not attend to the meaning of what is said by the lecturer, or have an inadequate understanding of the topic.

Vella (1994) asserts that if there is a lack of student engagement, there will be no true learning. If learners are not committed to the learning process, real learning is impaired.

- **Emotional words**

According to Rowntree (1990), “hot buttons”, “buzz words” or “red flag” words and “green flag” words can provoke emotional thoughts of listeners in class when they are used by the speaker:

Hot buttons

These are words, phrases or topics we do not want to talk about, discuss or hear because they raise certain unpleasant emotional feelings that result in the listener wanting to tune out.

Buzz words or red flag words

These are emotion-laden words that evoke strong feelings and negative thoughts
had experience

In Social Psychology lecture for instance, topic about divorce might affect
student who has experienced divorce. The subject matter (divorce) would then
be related to the fact that would evoke negative thoughts related to the
severe inner scars of divorce due to past experiences.

Seemingly these words (hot buttons and buzz words) are very similar

Give flags

These words which elicit an emotional response thus they interfere
with our listening. For instance, too much praising or praising certain
student by the teacher could lead to the student being thus responding
positively to the complimentary statements made about her that she does not
to what is next

Poor listening styles

Robert B. Strotz (1990) mentions four different types of poor listeners: the
interrupter, the self-conscious listener and the intellectual logical listener:

Fake

In many instances, speakers are misled by listeners who pretend to be paying full attention but are far away from the speaker's thoughts. An example would be a listener who nods all the time but does not understand what the speaker is saying while she is really thinking of something else, e.g. wondering about making a phone call that is important to her.

Interrupter

An interrupter is a listener who distracts both listeners and the speaker through doodling and other unacceptable behavior while the speech is in progress. These distractions include playing with hair, tapping hands, foot play, fiddling with fingers, biting lips, etc.

Self-centered

They are less concerned about their fellow listeners and distract others by their unreasonable demands for special attention. She can, for example, ask questions unnecessarily about concepts that she fully understands.

Intellectual dogmatist

This refers to someone who anticipates what is to be said next by the speaker and then chooses what to listen to and what to ignore if he is less interested.

2.4.3 Language barriers

The presentation of information, how it is received and retained is the essence of the teaching and learning process. Lecturers should therefore take note of their pace when speaking, intonation and use of questions (Curzon, 1993). This implies that, in an academic context, inappropriate presentation styles can be a barrier to proper reception of the lecture by the listener.

It is generally accepted that the vocabulary choices available to proficient English speakers are wide and can be confusing to an ESL student. To create a space for appropriate listening practices to take place, speakers need to be aware of the language proficiency levels of their audiences and the relationships between speakers and their audiences should be clearly defined (Halliday, 1991). For instance, when dealing with a class of not-quite fluent ESL listeners, lecturers may need to select their vocabularies by introducing duplicate words or technical terms sufficiently in order to avoid confusion to ESL students. Also confusing to ESL students are L1 speakers' use of idioms or jargon which can be confusing.

2.5 Ways to improve listening practices

In order to improve listening skills, it is vital for the listeners to be aware of their listening practices. They then need to be determined to improve their own level of listening and thus interpret the conveyed message correctly. Luke and Lynott (1999) suggest the following strategies in order to improve listening skills:

- Treat listening as a challenging mental task. Listening in an academic lecture is not a passive act: you need to concentrate on what is said, then you process information into your notes.
- Maintain eye contact with the instructor.
- Focus on content rather than the speaker's delivery. This means that the listener should develop a positive attitude by ignoring negative things in the form of the speaker's quality of voice, eye contact and gestures.
- Avoid distraction i.e. don't let your mind be troubled about other things or be distracted by a person shuffling papers near you.
- Avoid emotional involvement. For instance, don't be over-excited, angry or anxious about views being expressed.

Guirdham (1995) further points out that the following are ways to improve listening ability:

- Maintain a relaxed posture; but you should be alert.
- Avoid discomfort because it distracts.
- Don't be afraid to interrupt to ask questions when losing the thread of the message. This can keep you alert and therefore you avoid daydreaming, especially during long lectures or speeches.

Bone (1988) points out that personal mannerisms and behaviour of listeners can distract or confuse the speaker. Among others, he mentions:

- Fidgeting

- **Blinking**
- **Biting lips**
- **Frowning deeply**
- **Playing with hair**
- **Checking the time**

As a result, the speaker may forget what he wants to say next. This could then result in the listener losing the essence of the content of the message.

In summary, listeners need to listen empathetically. Empathic listening occurs when the listener tries to demonstrate empathy for the speaker, shows a heightened interpersonal sensitivity and willingness not to judge or criticise but rather accept the person's message (Tubbs & Moss, 1987). This implies that the listener needs to put herself in the speaker's shoes and vice versa. She needs to think how she would feel if someone practised distracting gestures that convey a lack of interest while she is busy talking. Listeners therefore need to take the above list of possible distractions into cognisance, be aware of their listening practices and then modify their behaviour.

2.6 Benefits of active listening

- It keeps one on one's toes. One stays active because one is busy asking mental questions while talk is in progress (Luke & Lynott, 1998).
- It encourages speakers to say more.

- It prevents misunderstandings. People have to confirm that they really understand what another person has said (Newton 1990).

Newton (1990) further says that active listening is essential for academic purposes. It helps students when they are asking questions in class. Newton (ibid) also explains that active listening aids in taking notes in an appropriate fashion as well as in identifying problem areas that deserve further study.

2.7 The importance of listening training

According to Simoncelli (1994), listening actively is not a natural or inborn skill. It requires thorough practice in order to be effective. Rooth (1996) also points out that active listening is not natural but an ability that can be developed. The activities involved in listening training are designed to help one to be more objective and to ignore negative aspects regarding the speaker's delivery.

Newton (1990) supports this idea of listening training by saying that listening exercises can be used by instructors in a wide variety of academic fields. He further states that these exercises can help students and instructors improve their listening skills. Proper listening exercises establish and maintain excellent contact between the speaker and the listener. They create the opportunity for all learners to experience the role of both listener and speaker.

Through effective listening, one gets a more stimulating and meaningful message. In addition, more than 50% of the information heard can be recalled rather than forgotten (Newton, 1990).

Having learnt that listening is an ability that can be harnessed, students need to be conscientised about the importance of effective listening in lectures. They need to treat listening as a challenging mental assignment with a view to adding value to their studies. However, the role of taking listening seriously in an academic atmosphere does not only rest with students. Lecturers also have a role to play.

2.8 The role of educators

Vella (1994) stresses that a major role of educators is to sustain the energy levels in a group of adult learners. He explains that learning takes energy and it also makes energy. Vella (1994) also suggests that educators/lecturers should be aware of the energy level of their group and it is their responsibility to keep it high. He elaborates by saying that energy levels can be high while the group is listening or otherwise doing some reflective work quietly, as well as when they are actively involved in more physical work.

Rowntree (1990) mentions that students being taught in English which is not their first language might often notice that the language genre used in lecture theatres sounds sophisticated and academic, which then makes them struggle in getting

meaning from lectures. Lecturers would then assist ESL first year students in these aspects:

- According to Makoni (2000) students need help in adapting to the transition between high school and tertiary level so that they can meet the demands of higher education which include having to listen to academic English.

- Snarski (1995) suggests that students need assistance regarding:
 - Acquiring correct English through listening to the lecturer repeating information or rephrasing questions; and
 - Drilling regarding vocabulary and grammar. In order to establish adequate listening skills among students, the principle of repetition can be practised. Repetition is the key to retention and therefore can help students in acquiring correct English usage.

- In Evans's (1985) view, students need help in the following:
 - Development of familiarity with speech behaviour of first language speakers of English;
 - Development of familiarity with the language register, conventions and jargon used in lecture theatres for the different learning areas; and
 - Development of an 'ear' for English.

Evans (1985) also recommends that workshops could be held on a number of topics, for example, organised grammar and pronunciation, structuring instructions, and on rephrasing questions; or extra English classes could be offered for support and for non-degree/diploma purposes.

2.9 Conclusion

From the above literature review, it is evident that it takes preparedness to listen and determination on the side of students in order to improve listening. In addition, active listening is essential if students are to maximise their listening ability and thus improve their academic performance.

Lecturers too, need to play a role in improving students' listening capability by being sensitive to students' needs in class. If their delivery is articulate, relevant to the subject and non-confusing, lecturers can proudly say they are working towards accountable education.

In the next chapter, the methodology of this research will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY OF THIS RESEARCH

3.1 Research approach

This research used a case study approach which falls within a qualitative paradigm. Ethnographic methods were used to conduct the research. These terms will be explained below:

3.1.1 Qualitative paradigm

Baile (1990) states that researchers adopting a qualitative perspective are concerned to understand individual's perceptions of the world. They seek insight rather than statistical analysis: "Qualitative studies have a variety of narrative structures – descriptive analytical interpretations, realistic reporting, abstract theoretical discussions and rendering of personal accounts."

My choice of a qualitative research paradigm enabled me to describe, analyse and *interpret classroom practice, academic documents by students and the narration of students' experiences.*

A qualitative research paradigm is an appropriate choice: adopting a mainly qualitative perspective implies that I can describe what influences students' listening practices, why their listening levels are at the level they are and the methods applicable to improving their listening practices.

3.1.2 Case study

According to Baile (1990), a case study approach to research is principally concerned with the interaction of factors. It is sometimes only by taking a practical instance that we can obtain a full picture of this interaction.

Though observation and interviews are most frequently used in a case study, no method is excluded. Baile (1990) further endorses Bassey's (1981) view that case studies should be carried out systematically and critically. If they are aimed at improvement of education, are relatable and extend boundaries of existing knowledge by publication of findings, then they are valid forms of educational research.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) define a case study as a study of an instance that provides a unique example of real people in real situations. This was then of value to this research because I chose to interact with students and lecturers (real people) and observe classroom practice at a technikon (real situation) in the Western Cape.

Selection of cases

The case study focused on a group of first year technikon students studying towards a ND: ABET.

Among the six students who were selected for case study purposes, four of them were chosen in 2002 while two of them were selected in 2003. This means that even the periods of class recordings of these two different groups of students were different.

A random selection of students was made regardless of their levels of academic performance, with a view to having a diverse competency group. This implies that students were not chosen because they were weak, average nor strong, but were selected indiscriminately. After the narration of their social experiences, comparisons were made in trying to explain the students' strengths and difficulties in listening effectively. This then helped in describing individual student's listening practices and in understanding relevant methods applicable in improving students' listening practices.

All of the students were learning through the medium of English, their second language. They were Xhosa and Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers from previously disadvantaged so-called 'Black' and 'Coloured' communities. They studied matric in public schools.

Explanation of terms

The terms 'Black' and 'Coloured' are not used to discriminate nor are any racist connotations attached. They are used to show precisely the blend of students, as well as the cultural and social backgrounds of students involved in this research.

3.1.3 Ethnographic research

Kaschula and Anthonissen (2001) define ethnography as a study of life and culture of a society, especially by personal observation. Ethnography is a method of viewing the instances being studied from an ethnographic perspective. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) state that ethnography features description, understanding and explanation of a specific situation. They further explain that it is characterised by portrayal of events in the subject's terms. We can thus say that ethnography refers to the study of human living patterns which include their language, food type, moral rules, values, rituals, etc. This incorporates observations regarding the behaviour of people within a specific context.

3.2 Research design

This is an educational enquiry into first year students' listening practices. The research process has been formulated through an intensive study of literature related to the concept of listening and the needs of ESL speakers in order to develop a sound theoretical framework on listening.

Another phase of this design is data collection from classroom contexts and from student narratives which form part of empirical research. The classroom research was done through observation of first year technikon students' listening practices in language, content and practical subjects. During observation of classroom practice, stimulated recall sessions were used. This was where a non-participant observer method fits in.

The motive for following a non-participant observer approach to class observation was that I wanted to try and prevent students from being agitated by my presence which might cause fake behaviour and practices in class. Being a non-participant observer aided in my getting a clear picture of the classroom situation without students faking their practices to impress me.

Videotapes of some of the observed language, content and practical subject classes were taken. To triangulate classroom research, questionnaires were given to all first year students. Then a follow-up on these completed questionnaires was done in the form of organised interviews held with selected (six) students to narrate their experiences.

Oral probing took place in Xhosa for the home language speakers of the language with a view to encouraging a relaxed atmosphere and thus a flow of responses when these students were narrating their experiences. This was done in the hope of finding out how students' current listening experiences are affected by their past life experiences.

Views of lecturers were gained through completion of questionnaires and later oral interviews in order to be able to probe responses from questionnaires.

3.3 Data collection methods

Sources of data were:

- Audio-tapes recorded in lecture theatres.
- Videotapes showing student practices in class and the results of their recall assessments in lectures.
- Transcripts of students' oral lecture recall assessments.
- Responses to questionnaires by first year technikon students.
- Responses to questionnaires by technikon lecturers.
- Individual and group interviews with selected students.
- Individual interviews with technikon lecturers.
- Written observations.
- Documents in the form of students' cue 'yes/no' one-word answer written assessments done immediately after the lecture; a few samples of responses to questionnaires; and answers to open-ended questions designed to check recall of a lecture.

3.4 Data analysis methods

Ethnographic tools such as questionnaires, videotapes, students' documents and transcriptions from class observation were analysed in depth. Even though the research was mainly of a qualitative nature, a quantitative approach could not be completely ignored: however, the latter was used to a limited extent only.

Quantitative data included analysis of students' scores on performance from class recall assessments.

Critical analysis of data was substantiated with reference to literature reviewed and reflection on findings was done through the lens of the theoretical framework. Findings from this research were validated by adopting a triangulation method. Triangulation refers to finding ways of getting alternative and divergent viewpoints on research findings (Winberg, 1997). She further explains that triangulation enables the researcher to check his or her findings against the perceptions of others. In other words, it involves checking consistency of the interpretation of data. Such a variety of viewpoints improves the validity of the analysis.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) share the same lens as Winberg (1997). According to them, triangulation in the social sciences attempts to map out or explain more fully the object of study by examining it from more than one standpoint. It is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research.

3.5 Ethics of research

Permission was obtained from the Department of Education within the Science Faculty with regards to undertaking the research in the department (see Appendix A). Consent was obtained from participating students pertaining to the use of real names. However, I decided to use pseudonyms for all the participating students.

Students and lecturers who were actively involved in this research were given an opportunity to view the research report and comment on the findings before these were passed on to external readers.

In the next chapter, I will describe and analyse the findings of my research.

CHAPTER 4

STUDENTS' LISTENING PRACTICES IN LECTURES: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

There are various reasons why students in one class perform differently academically. As discussed in the literature, Burley-Allen (1982) views effective listening as one of the possible contributors to improved academic performance. Thus it is vital to describe and analyse students' actions in class, including their listening practices, in order to be able to understand the likely meaning of such practices.

In this chapter, I discuss the cases of six first year technikon students. In the discussion, pseudonyms were given to the students with a view to protecting their identities. Four of these students were interviewed in 2002 and their cases followed up in 2003, while two were first years in the ABET Unit in 2003.

Responses to questionnaires from 60 students and nine lecturers were analysed (see Appendices D1 & F1). In addition to these questionnaires, responses to interviews by six selected students and nine lecturers were also analysed (see Appendix F2). Further analysis and discussion was based on written observations during lectures, videotaped lectures, and students' written and oral lecture recall assessments.

4.2 Case studies of six selected students

Names of 2002 first year technikon students participating in the cases are:

Asanda, Yanga, Andrew and Mongezi while names of 2003 first year technikon students participating in the cases are: Nonkululo and Sandiso.

Case 1

Yanga is a registered 2002 ABET student, repeating his first year in 2003. His first language is Xhosa and he comes from a family with limited education.

Yanga was born in Alice, a rural area in the Eastern Cape where he started and completed his schooling. He was never exposed to an urban environment nor to an English speaking community until he got to a technikon in the Western Cape where he is currently registered.

When he got to this technikon, he experienced a new atmosphere with students from other parts of the country. The lectures were delivered in English by lecturers with different accents who are non-Xhosa speakers. He was distracted by seeing stylishly dressed girls and all these new experiences impacted on the way he listened in class. His mind was busy trying to adapt to his new life in the Western Cape. In addition, he was faced with a problem of accommodation which made him homesick. He did not enjoy squatting in Khayelitsha, especially during the first semester of his study. His accommodation problem was

eventually resolved when he got a loan which enabled him to get access to a campus hostel.

He is a person who likes to please his parents, for example, he seriously considers their wishes and opinions: "I listen to my family well because I don't want to make them angry. I try to do everything they tell me." However, he did not take listening in class seriously, perhaps because listening skills were never taught at school and that he never failed during his schooling. By contrast, listening skills are vital at a tertiary learning environment where students are expected to be analytical learners (Makoni, 2000). Yanga then failed quite a number of subjects in his first year at tertiary level due to neglecting the importance of listening in class. This confirms Makoni's (2000) view that, for many students, there is an enormous gap between the way they learnt in high school and the new experience of attending lectures. It seems as if Yanga's early pattern of taking listening in class for granted did not work for him at tertiary level and that using a rote learning approach has negatively impacted on the level of his academic achievement at the technikon. Feyten (1991) also stresses that rote learning approaches that often serve many students at school are not adequate at tertiary level where intensive listening is required. In fact, Snarski (1995) asserts that rote learning does not encourage effective classroom listening.

Furthermore, Yanga's written work and the lecture recall assessments in short essay form show the difficulty that he had in trying to express himself in English

(see Appendix B). His limited English proficiency then put him at a disadvantage compared to his classmates who were more proficient in English.

One identified gap between the way Yanga was taught in high school and at tertiary level is that all of his teachers throughout his schooling were speakers of his home language. All the content subjects were taught in Xhosa but translations were done and class notes were given in English. Prescribed textbooks were also printed in English.

Yanga's prior learning environment was one where teachers were shown great respect. This was one other transition that he was busy trying to adapt to as, in his prior learning environment, a learner was either too scared to ask a question in class or he or she feared that others were going to perceive him as someone who wants to "shine".

At first he thought that the reason why he failed in his first year was that most of the subjects such as Teaching Practice, Technology, Computer Literacy, Adult Education and Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) were new to him. Later he realised that the gap between high school and tertiary level lay in different teaching and learning practices. This made him start paying serious attention in class and he became bold enough to ask when confused or when he did not understand.

He took the step of joining a study group and he realised that this was an important part and means of learning. This step included listening, analysing and questioning what group members said when they were doing a group assignment. He now realises how listening can contribute to his academic success.

He says he enjoys Social Science because the lecturer gives many clear examples which give him a better understanding of the content of the subject. He says that the subject he enjoys least is Technology because they changed lecturers for this subject thrice in one semester. Another reason for not enjoying this subject is that the current lecturer has been asking the students to do the same task for many consecutive lectures which made him suspect that the lecturer either had an inadequate understanding of the content of the subject he was teaching or else he came to class unprepared. Yanga is currently a determined lecture listener and his academic performance has started to improve. In spite of this, being less proficient in English still has a hindering effect on the effectiveness of his listening practice. He believes that his academic performance could be even better if he was more proficient in English.

Even though he is determined to listen effectively to lectures, he feels that lecturers should examine the way they present their lectures. His suggestion corresponds with what Vella (1994) points out: that educators should raise and sustain energy levels in class in order to keep students' attention and thus encourage active listening by students.

Yanga is currently bored with one of the classes because they frequently changed lecturers – students have had three lecturers in one semester. Furthermore, the new lecturer has been repeating the same content in class over and over again. Students have been drawing boxes for an unreasonable number of lectures. One lecture period was spent drawing a box for jewellery; in the next lecture period it was a stationery box and in the next, a fruit box, and so on. It seems as if this unnecessary repetition of lecture content made Yanga lose interest in the lecture and thus negatively influenced his listening to this lecture.

As Rowntree (1990) suggests, appointing incompetent staff or press-ganging lecturers to teach subjects in which they are not competent impacts negatively on the students' interest in, and attitude to, listening in class because they have already perceived that the lecturer is incompetent or not well prepared for the class.

In summary, in Yanga' case, improving his listening practices has impacted positively on his academic success; however, Yanga needs help in developing his English oral and aural skills.

Case 2

Asanda is a female student who registered for ND:ABET in 2002 at a technikon in the Western Cape. Before coming to study at this technikon, she studied at a teacher training college in Worcester but failed in 2001. She then did a course at

the technikon on teacher education for adults and failed in 2002. At the time of this study, she was repeating first year in a different sphere of teacher education called BEDGEN (Bachelor of Education: General) at the same technikon.

Asanda claims that she listens well at home when conversing with her sisters because she is interested in their views. She sometimes gets bored listening to friends if the topic does not interest her or else they repeat something they have said before. In class, she gets bored when the topic does not interest her. Then she starts to play with a pen or make some little drawings on her note book which are irrelevant to what is being said in class. This implies that her concentration gradually lapses.

She says that she likes the 5 – 10 minute intervals between long lectures so that she can stretch her legs. This is probably because students need a break from listening, with diverse classroom activities that ensure their active participation, unlike in most schools where learners sit passively in class for unreasonably long periods, only relying on rote learning teaching methods of chalk and talk.

Boughey (1993) points out that rote learning ways of teaching are synonymous with student passivity and in such situations, there is little room for learners to develop the skills necessary to construct their own knowledge.

The subject that Asanda enjoys most is Social Science Teaching as it deals with issues that are relevant and directly affect society. The subject that she enjoys

least is Technology. She confirmed what Yanga mentioned - that the way it was taught was not interesting: "I am tired of drawing boxes! We've been doing the same thing over and over again. As a result if I go to class and the same class task is given to us, I just march out of the lecture room. This unnecessary repetition encourages me to bunk Technology classes!" exclaims Asanda. It seems that changes are needed to ensure that the appointed staff do their jobs professionally.

Although I have observed Asanda to be an extremely inattentive listener, she views herself to be an average listener in class. She spends a lot of time reading the course books. According to Feyten (1991), listening is central to learning and therefore reading course books alone is not enough. Asanda, perhaps because she took listening for granted, consequently failed the ABET course in 2002. This confirms what Wolvin (1984) says regarding listening and academic achievement. He asserts that among students who fail examinations, deficient listening practices have a stronger influence on students' achievement than reading.

Asanda then left the ABET course for the BEDGEN (Bachelor of Education: General) and she is now repeating first year. She claims (just as Yanga first thought) that the reason why she failed was that all the subjects were new to her except for Numeracy Teaching and the languages.

While Asanda clearly needs to become a better listener, I have observed that even though students might not be as committed to their studies as they ought to be,

they are good at noting lecturers who are not doing their work well. In this regard, it is worth recalling Deming's (1991) remarks that, when students fail, the educators and the tertiary institutions that employ them, should also be held responsible.

Case 3

Andrew is a 22 year old male student who was born and bred in a "Coloured" township in Cape Town. His home language is Afrikaans. He started schooling at the age of five in an Afrikaans class at a primary school in Belhar. During his schooling years, his parents were supportive and encouraged him to do school work daily. He participated in other extra-curricular activities, e.g. scholar-patrol.

Andrew completed secondary education at a high school in Belhar. When he changed from primary to high school, he had to walk quite a distance from home and this is when he met undesirable friends. He tried to fit in with them by adopting their bad habits like smoking, taking alcohol and missing classes. The latter meant that he had missed the opportunity of listening to the lessons in class. He then failed major tests during the course of the learning period. Failing led him to frustration as it was his ambition to pass matric at the end of the year. He then decided to cut down on the time he spent with his friends. He also realised the pain he had caused his parents and told himself that he had to change his behaviour and stop missing classes. He then started to progress and his performance improved gradually. He put great effort into his studies and he

passed matric, despite the fact that he was depressed during exam time due to the loss of a classmate in a gang fight.

After matric, Andrew found a job where he worked for four years. This is where he gained a lot of experience in speaking English. In 2002 he registered at a technikon in the Western Cape as an ABET student.

What inspired him to listen to lectures at tertiary level is that, after the experience of failing classes at high school, he found it imperative to attend lectures regularly and listen to what the educators say. He said that students who do not take listening in class seriously are depriving themselves of the opportunity to learn. He further said that students need to remember that they pay tuition fees to receive information in lectures and if they do not listen effectively, they waste not only the lecturer's time but their own time and money. He adds that if students listened in class, they would see a significant improvement in their academic performance. He believes that students should give lecturers the necessary respect they deserve. They need to choose to be self-disciplined learners and then things will run more smoothly.

Andrew has a strong command of the English language which he acquired during the four year period of work experience. He also tries to speak as much English as possible, for example, with friends and relatives.

In the lecture recall assessments done in April 2002 in an Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) class, Andrew performed well compared to the rest of the class. He obtained 100% in the written one-word answer assessment and 80% in the oral open-ended type of assessment (see Appendices B and C).

Andrew likes to occupy the front seat because he does not want to be distracted by seeing other people in front of him while the lecturer is talking. He sits upright and nods when the lecturer speaks. He shows respect to the lecturer and an interest in what is being said. His listening practices link with Guirdham's (1995) views pertaining to what rewarding listening requires. Guirdham (1995) notes that rewarding listening ought to entail the ability to concentrate (paying attention for a long time), a determination to understand the speaker's point of view and emotional and intellectual commitment. He further points out that listeners can improve their listening capability by maintaining a relaxed posture whilst being alert, and by asking questions when getting confused, especially during long lectures or speeches.

Comparing Andrew with Asanda (*case 2*), one notices a vast difference in their classroom conduct. Asanda occupies the middle seat whether in a small or large classes. She arrives late for classes, waves and smiles at friends, looks around frequently (as does Mongezi, *case 5*) and sometimes lies on top of the desk, showing no respect for, nor interest in, what the lecturer is saying in class (see

videotape 1: English class). She has constantly shown a lack of commitment in the subjects taught in class.

As Tubbs and Moss (1987) suggest, the learner should put herself in the shoes of the speaker by showing an interest in what is said. Andrew is an example of an empathic listener. He is quick to follow instructions given by the lecturer.

He is co-operative, participates actively in class and takes the lead in groups. He even sacrifices his spare time to help other students like Yanga and Mongezi who at that time seemed to be struggling with some of their studies.

In conclusion, Andrew is not faced with serious social problems and has adequate family support with his studies. It is also clear that he is an active lecture listener who is proficient in English which is the medium of instruction, and as a result, his academic performance is above average.

Case 4

Mongezi is a 24 year-old male student at a technikon in the Western Cape. His home language is Xhosa. He was born and bred in a rural environment before his family came to stay in Delft in the Western Cape. He matriculated in 2000. He has had limited exposure to the English language and therefore needs help with developing his English. He first registered at this technikon in 2001 but unfortunately failed first year dismally, except for Xhosa and Teaching Practice. He had to repeat his first year in 2002.

At high school, Mongezi was very weak in Biology, Geography and English, average in History and Biblical Studies and excellent in Xhosa. He says he struggled in the above-mentioned subjects because they were taught by the so-called “Coloured” teachers which made it difficult for him to interpret information delivered in class due to unfamiliar speech patterns of these teachers which included pronunciation, accent and pace.

He says that the reason why his performance was satisfactory in Biblical Studies and History was that these subjects were taught by teachers with whom he shared the same home language, namely Xhosa speakers. Even though the notes and textbooks were in English, he had the advantage of getting them translated into Xhosa. This confirms what Dunkel and Davis (1994) say regarding contrasting the academic performance of ESL learners with that of (L1) learners. He notes that L1 students are at an advantage over ESL students in learning environments where English is used as the only medium of instruction.

At tertiary level, Mongezi proved to be a dedicated and hardworking student who attended classes regularly. When I observed him in an Adult Education class, noticed that his listening practices were not satisfactory. In a revision lecture where students were working in groups, each group leader had to present a summary of the information that each group was to offer in preparation for the final assessment. The group tasks included topics like National Qualifications

Framework (NQF), Outcomes-based Education (OBE) and the learning cycle.

The lecturer supervised their presentations and gave input where necessary.

When Mongezi's turn came to present on behalf of his group, he stepped in front and began his presentation. He was eager to talk; however, what he was saying about the phases of the learning cycle continually showed a misunderstanding of what his group had said. Eventually, Andrew, a fellow student, having listened to the lecturer's explanation of the content, explained it to Mongezi, who seemed to understand Andrew better than he understood the lecturer. This gave the impression that students of the same age group may understand each other better perhaps because they are of the same status level. They therefore have no fear of superiority and are not threatened by the status of the fellow student. In addition, they are comfortable listening to each other because they have a special way of communicating, using the language of their level which makes communication simple to both the speaker and the listener. From this it seems that lecturers need to be sensitive to students who struggle to listen in class and they should select students like Andrew to act as tutors. They could be remunerated at the student rate for coaching services. However, while this is a good idea, it needs the approval of the institution.

In an Economic and Management Sciences (EMS) class, where the lecturer was writing copious notes using full sentences which some students copied, I have observed Mongezi to be very passive, with his chin resting on his palm. This was

in contrast to his energy and confident bearing in the previously observed class where he was working with groups.

When I assessed his recall for the lecture in this class, using a worksheet designed to stimulate recall, he scored 55% which was the lowest mark of the 9 students (see Appendix B). I think most students scored high marks because of the nature of the questions. They were cue questions needing only one-word answers or short definitions. Another reason could be the fact that questions were based on a revision lecture.

During the next lecture, Mongezi presented an oral lecture recall assessment, with questions that were designed to elicit elaborate answers. He scored 15% which was better than the scores of some of his classmates but was obviously still very low. The mode for the scores in this assessment was 5% which implies that most students cope better with cue questions designed to give one-word answers than with essay-type questions.

After his mother died in the year of his first registration at the technikon, Mongezi experienced severe financial constraints as his mother has been the sole breadwinner. He then had to walk a long distance from his home in Delft to the technikon and back due to a lack of taxi or train fare.

Although his mother's death worried and disturbed him, and he was struggling financially, he made a decision to persevere and not drop out. I was fortunate to observe him in class several times. I found him to be a respectful student, willing to participate in class activities and arriving on time for lectures. Despite all these good characteristics and his dedication to his studies, he struggled to say even a single English sentence in a correct grammatical form. In addition, I found out that in class presentations he repeated the words of a book word-for-word and sometimes struggled to pronounce other memorised words. This shows that memorising words from a book did not help him put a message across correctly. Perhaps this is because it is difficult to understand someone who uses words that hold no meaning for them. It is possible that memorising texts is a learning skill that he used successfully at school but which is not adequate at tertiary level where he is expected to analyse information and read or listen with understanding.

Feyten (1991), Snarski (1995) and Makoni (2000), all note that the rote learning approach followed at many schools does not prepare students adequately for a tertiary learning environment where they are expected to be independent and critical learners.

In conclusion, Mongezi is a hard working student that seriously needs help in developing his English communication skills. Even though he tries hard to listen in class, his limited proficiency in ESL prevents him from listening effectively.

Case 5

Sandiso was born in 1964 in Bizane, a small rural area near Umtata in the former Transkei. His father died many years ago and his mother lives on a pension grant. He is the second born of three. His elder brother is unemployed and his younger sister died of an HIV Aids-related illness. When he made a decision to study further, there was no one to back him from his family; however, he left the Eastern Cape rural area for the Western Cape.

When he first came to Cape Town this year (2003), he first applied to read a BA (English) at a university but unfortunately had to look for accommodation somewhere else as he did not meet their admission requirements. He struggled with accommodation until he found a place in an informal settlement in Samora Machel, Philippi. Sandiso then opted to apply to study at a technikon in the Western Cape and he was accepted.

He forfeited a chance to obtain a bursary from a special fund. The reason he was turned down is that the interview panel asked him to comment on the course he intended doing and he struggled to explain this as he had not received prior explanation or guidance about the ABET course. He also could not understand some of the questions that were posed by the people who were interviewing him. He then asked for a translator and one person from the panel said that this was not possible.

He is currently paying his fees in instalments from a disability grant that he earns from the Government. He also gets meals and travel allowance from this money. He applied for a single room after being placed in a double room that he had to share with a much younger student. He has recently been allocated a single room as he emphasised his need for privacy.

He attends lectures regularly. I have observed him to be trying very hard to succeed academically but it seems to be in vain. He encountered problems working with groups in class and he mentioned that he became irritated by his classmates' childish class conduct.

Sandiso often looks blankly around the classroom while the lecturer is busy talking or giving instructions. Instead of taking down notes while listening, he prefers to copy the notes that the student sitting next to him has written in her notebook. This is evident in videotape 3 which was taken in an English class in July 2003. He is seated in the first row in the lecture hall (next to a female student). He frequently changes seats in class and generally does not have a regular seat.

A written lecture recall assessment in an English class was used to check effective listening of the lecture and Sandiso scored 25% (see Appendix D2 and Figure 4.2 for further reference).

It is a concern that Sandiso intends to leave the ABET course and change to Business Administration while his performance is extremely weak in Computer Literacy and in English for which he scored 7% in the June exam. In fact, he did not pass even a single assessment in either of these subjects which are major requirements for the course he intends studying next year.

Quite surprisingly, he still displays a strong zeal to learn despite the hardships and the low marks that he scored in the mid-year assessments. He is maintaining good attendance, doing his academic assignments and meeting deadlines for submission.

He goes to the library in search of information but that alone does not make him pass his assignments. I found out that, in most cases, he has failed assignments due to misunderstanding the instructions given by the lecturer. For this reason, I believe that there is a strong need for him to capture oral information delivered in the lecture. It is possible that he struggles to a lesser extent with understanding written work as he has time to use a dictionary while reading, unlike in the case of listening which requires instant and rapid mental activity.

Sandiso's limited English proficiency causes him to struggle academically.

I have viewed the responses to the questionnaire that I gave him and other first year students in his class. Most of his responses are not linked to what is being asked. I have also noticed that he mentioned his need to improve English

communication skills in order to improve his capability to listen to lectures. His looking around in class and copying down notes from students reveals a lack of confidence in understanding what is being said by the lecturer. He perhaps thinks that his classmate understands better than he, hence he opts to copy his classmates' notes.

Later in the second semester, I learned that he needs to pass at least five subjects in order to retain ownership of his single room, because academic progress is looked at before a room is re-allocated to a student in the next study period. Furthermore, passing these five subjects will guarantee him permission to get a transfer to the course he wants to change to in 2004.

In conclusion, Sandiso appears to be a hard-working student who displays commitment and enthusiasm in his studies but all of these fine qualities do not make him succeed in his assignments and in the major assessments. This frustrates him.

Deductions from the above information are that Sandiso lacks effective listening skills to supplement all other learning efforts like reading textbooks and searching for information in the library. However, even if his listening skills were effective, Sandiso strongly needs to improve his general English proficiency in order to be able to listen effectively and improve academically.

Case 6

Nonkululo is a 22 year old female student whose mother-tongue is Xhosa. She comes from a large middle-class family and her mother and father are the bread-winners of the family.

Despite the fact that her parents missed the opportunity to upgrade their studies beyond Grade 10 which was then known as J.C level, they have made strides to generate income to maintain the family.

Nonkululo comes from a family background where discipline was taught and emphasised to the children. With such a background, Nonkululo has learnt to respect not only her family members but colleagues and friends as well. Listening to others is a practice that she learned at home which has automatically been transferred to a classroom situation. Her home culture has taught her to manage herself, cope with a variety of pressures and to meet deadlines.

She attended a "Model C" school. At first, it was difficult for her to cope with the transition of mingling with English speakers and Xhosa speakers as she was already 10 years old when she started Grade 1 at this school. In Grade 8, she enrolled for English (EFL). Since then, she has been speaking English with friends and at home most of the time. She is now more competent in English than in Xhosa. She matriculated at Rustenberg Girls' High School in Rondebosch.

She compliments the staff of the school and she says she would like to take her children there.

At the technikon, she views herself as being a step ahead in the English class as she says that the things that are taught there she learnt in primary school. She feels that she made the wrong decision to do the ABET course because of the discouragement that she receives from her classmates. She does not enjoy working with students who do not show commitment in their studies and this makes group activities less challenging for her in class. Another point that adds to her discouragement is that most of her classmates intend to change the course next year, e.g. to Business Administration and BEDGEN. She plans to change to Graphic Design next year at the same institution: "Really, something is lacking somewhere! Most of my classmates do not cope and think of changing to Bachelor of Education: General (BEDGEN) in 2004," comments Nonkululo. What she has observed is that most of the students do not demonstrate the learning skills that they ought to have and that their energy levels in class are not as high as they are supposed to be. They feel more comfortable speaking, listening, understanding and thus participating in the classes of the two Xhosa-speaking lecturers. They feel insecure with the rest of the lecturing staff as they are strictly English speaking.

Nonkululo scored 100% on a lecture recall assessment written on 29 July 2003 in an English class. She values the importance of listening in lectures. She believes

that students should listen empathetically. She comments: “We as humans, have to listen to others as we would want them to listen to us.” Tubbs and Moss (1987) suggest that listeners should try and demonstrate empathy for the speaker, show interpersonal sensitivity and willingness not to judge or criticise but rather accept the person’s message. He adds that the listener needs to show an interest in the speaker by putting herself in the speaker’s shoes and vice-versa.

Even though Nonkululo has a series of social problems, she does not let these interfere with her dedication in class. She is vibrant, involved in social activities, (e.g. she plays soccer), possesses a positive attitude and has ambitious dreams.

4.3 Comparison between first year students’ listening practices

In this section, some pairs of students are compared to highlight critical factors affecting listening. Through the comparisons, I shall attempt to highlight factors that contribute to successful academic achievement. I shall consider differences between an effective and an ineffective listener as well as similarities between effective listeners.

4.3.1 Differences in the listening practices of first year students

When observing Asanda to Andrew, I compared their listening practices by observing their gestures and actions in class. When I observed Asanda in several lectures, I found that she did the following (see Appendix E):

- constantly checked time on her wrist watch;
- yawned;
- rested her head on her hand;
- stretched her arms straight while her mouth was wide open;
- fidgeted, then stretched her arms and leaned against the back of the chair;
- looked blank, i.e. her facial expression suggested she was not listening;
- copied notes from the board;
- looked around the class room frequently (see videotape 1 in an English class);
- waved and smiled at friends in class, especially when in bigger groups;
- bent, hunching over, with her upper body flat on the desk and with her chin pillowed on her hand;
- put her elbow on the desk and her hand on her chin;
- slept on the desk;
- pulled her artificial hair extension;
- played with her earrings;
- bit her thumbs; and
- ‘doodled’ – wrote graphics in a playful manner.

In one instance (02 September 2002), she was selected by her lecturer to answer a question on something that had been clearly explained to the class more than once. She could not give the correct answer to the question. To explain further, her lecturer gave her a second example, and it was only then that she got the answer right.

I have also observed her to be less active in class compared to Andrew.

I observed that Andrew did the following in class:

- sat upright;
- nodded at the lecturer he while was talking;
- rarely asked questions in class;
- responded to the questions posed by the lecturer and gave correct answers to the questions;
- showed an interest in what fellow students were saying and even commented when appropriate;
- showed a willingness to participate (and he was, in fact, an active participant in class);
- occupied the front seat in bigger groups and, if seated in a semi-circle with smaller groups, he occupied the first side seat so that he could have an undisturbed view of the lecturer and the board.

By comparing Asanda to Andrew, it is clear that Asanda lacks commitment in class and that seriously affects the way she listens to lectures.

Another difference between the two students is that, Asanda studied ABET in 2002 and left the course at the end of 2002. She is currently a first year BEDGEN student in the same Department of Teacher Education. By contrast, Andrew registered for ABET in 2002 and continued with the ABET course. He is currently doing his second year in the ABET course, and talks fondly about it and how he is going to make a contribution to social transformation. To prove this, he is already doing volunteer work in this field.

When one compares Sandiso to Nonkululo, there is a vast contrast in their schooling history, social background and academic performance. In the June exam, Nonkululo passed with distinction and Sandiso failed dismally. For instance, he obtained 7% in the English Communication Teaching exam which is a very low mark. In an English lecture recall assessment, Nonkululo scored 100% and Sandiso scored 25% (see Table 1). Comparing Nonkululo and Sandiso's responses to the same questionnaire, one notices a significant difference in terms of the standard of response to the questions and understanding shown.

Table 1 displays the contrast in lecture recall capabilities of a pair of students (Nonkululo and Sandiso), who attended the same lecture at the same time.

Questions were designed based only on information that was said in class by both the lecturer and some groups of students as students were later required to do oral presentations based on group activities (refer to Appendix D2).

Table 1:

Lecture Recall Assessment: Language - English class

Name of student	Percentage (%) score
Nonkululo	100
Sandiso	25

4.3.2 Similar trends arising from academic issues related to selected students and their classmates

Nonkululo and Andrew are both academically successful students.

When comparing the two of them, there are some similarities worth noting. They both:

- are self-disciplined;
- practice empathic listening in class in the sense that they show an interest in what is being said and show respect for the lecturer;
- attach value to listening as a means of learning;
- participate actively in class;
- have achieved high marks in assignments and mid-year exams;

- have family support in whatever positive activities they are engaged in, e.g. their studies and extra-mural activities. Their parents have constantly shown a genuine interest in their academic performance;
- do not have accommodation nor financial problems;
- do not have problems in expressing themselves in English (they are proficient English speakers); and
- are engaged in extra-mural activities, e.g. playing soccer and church youth involvement;

All the above similarities are points that are vital in enabling students to achieve high marks. Adopting Andrew and Nonkululo's listening practices can vitalise other students' dedication and concentration on their studies and can also encourage them to be effective lecture listeners.

In addition to these findings, the views of other students and technikon lecturers gleaned from questionnaires (see Appendices D1, F1 & F2) will now be discussed.

4.4 Students' perceptions regarding the importance of effective listening in class (see Appendix D1)

Some students indicated that they are aware of the fact that listening is an important learning skill that needs to be acquired. However, they mentioned that it is not possible to listen effectively whilst they are struggling with ESL. This is

in line with Dunkel & Davis's (1994) view that ESL students are at a disadvantage as their limited English proficiency hampers the effective use of fundamental learning skills. This then makes students struggle in gaining academic knowledge. While this is the case, students who are L1 speakers of English are at an advantage over ESL in utilising learning skills that would enable them gain knowledge in class. According to Rowntree (1990), the effectiveness of learning in class depends, to large extent, on how effectively the person can listen. The students stressed the need to improve their English communication skills so that they can understand the content of the lectures and thus be engaged in active learning.

Another common point that arose from student feedback is the need for venues that are conducive to learning. For instance, bigger venues should be used for bigger audiences.

4.5 Lecturers' views of first year students' listening practices (see Appendices F1 & F2)

4.5.1 Factors influencing poor listening of first year students

Nine lecturers with experience of teaching first years (particularly in the ABET field) completed questionnaires and were later interviewed orally. The most common response from questionnaires was that poor listening practices are influenced by the following factors:

- Unfamiliarity with tertiary education style;
- Lack of student engagement;
- Lack of understanding of the topic; and
- Students' incompetence / limited proficiency in the medium of instruction (English).

However, the following points were also rated as having a negative impact on the effectiveness of students' listening practices:

- Ineffective vocal aspects e.g. monotonous tone of voice and poor audibility of the lecturer;
- Boring presentation by the lecturer; and
- Students' socio-economic and socio-cultural factors e.g. severe financial constraints resulting in worries about accommodation.

The following aspects were rated as least important in influencing listening practices:

- Posture of students; and
- Gestures of both lecturers (talkers) and students (listeners).

4.5.2 The role of educators in ensuring effective listening in lectures

Divergent views arose from the nine lecturers regarding capturing students' full attention in class. In response to the question: "*How do we get students to listen*"? the following pedagogical applications were suggested:

- **Silence or a short pause**

This is ideal for big groups. The lecturer should pause after talking and look straight at the students. Maintaining eye contact was viewed to be effective in encouraging listening for smaller groups as well.

- **Repetition**

Repeating instructions or certain important phrases linked to the topic enables the listener to practise active listening by allowing time for students to glean meaning from what has been said and then to formulate questions in the mind.

- **Use of key words by the educator**

When lecturers make use of key words in their lecture presentation, students are then able to see interrelated threads in the lecture. In addition, students are then able to summarise the lecture or related sections of the lecture using these key words.

- **Reflection by students**

The educator should ask the students to reflect on what has been said. Then the lecturer should give students a chance to formulate questions. He should ask students if they agree or disagree. This will keep the students on their toes as listeners as they will then be engaged in active mental tasks related to the topic.

- **Reflection by lecturers**

Lecturers should reflect on their own teaching practice. This they could do by video-taping lectures. They should observe how they present the content of the lecture and how they sound. Alternatively, lecturers can tape-record themselves and develop sensitivity to their students' responses. In other words, they should learn to be good listeners too.

- Use of audio-tapes and video clips

Use of these teaching and learning aids will help to encourage active listening. This can be done by asking students to summarise and analyse heard information, make judgements, suggestions, and so on.

- Formative assessment

The educator should get students to do short individual or group tasks based on what has been said in a lecture. Marks should then be used towards the final year assessment or continuous evaluation. This will also encourage listening, good attendance and punctuality for lectures.

4.6 The role of the department in encouraging effective listening in lectures

100% of the interviewed lecturers indicated that the students in the ABET Unit need to be taken through a foundation phase for learning techniques which should include listening. Furthermore, they all indicated that listening can only be effective if students have enough English proficiency to follow the lectures. The

following suggestions were raised in 2002 and 2003 by the lecturers who teach in the ABET Unit at the technikon in the Western Cape:

- **Facilitation skills courses for lecturers:** Through such workshops, educators may better understand students' difficulties with listening and understanding. In addition, the institution should ensure that classrooms are equipped with resources that are in good working condition e.g. overhead projectors should have larger screens and microphones are needed in big lecture rooms; alternatively, the number of students per educator should be decreased.
- **Time off:** Staff should be relieved during the day to prepare interactive learning material.
- **Listening and language:** Language programmes should include listening skills.
- **Bridging courses:** Academic staff should present bridging courses in their subjects.

4.7 General remarks on my class observation

4.7.1 General comments

- In all the first period lecture classes, about 50% of the students arrive in class as a group about 40 minutes after the lecture has commenced. Coming late

then makes it difficult for these students to get settled as they try to calculate what the lecturer said whilst they were not yet in class. According to Rowntree (1994), late coming suggests a lack of commitment on the part of students. They also miss the critical introduction to the lecture. I agree with Rowntree; but these students are faced with a problem of a lack of proximity to the technikon. They travel by train which is the most convenient and cheapest mode of transport for them. In addition, trains are not reliable. Also in winter, it is dangerous for them to catch the early morning train in the dark as the rate of crime in the Western Cape is highest then.

- I have also observed that the classrooms are not big enough to accommodate the large number of students in class. It was even difficult to move freely between groups to monitor progress for group activities.
- Another general observation worth noting is that external noises hamper effective listening. The noise in the corridors by both departmental workers and students with free time has a distracting effect on listening in lectures.
- Students seemed to be uncomfortable with doing individual oral presentations in class. This could be due to their limited English proficiency as they may fear being embarrassed when they struggle with expression.

- I have also noted that when students have an unclear understanding of a concept under discussion, they become withdrawn and less active in class. When I was assessing a lecture recall in a certain subject class, students could not rephrase the instructions given by the lecturer. They were also unable to remember the contributions from groups. I later found out that they were not clear on the topic and thus lacked engagement in the class activities.

4.7.2 Specific language issues

First year technikon ESL students' language issues were analysed based on oral presentations from observed classes and students' documents which include transcripts, their responses to questionnaires and written assignments.

The following language issues were noted:

- **Difficulties in phrasing questions**

Students phrase questions as similar to statements but with a change of voice (high pitch) at the end which is substituted by a question mark in their written texts. This type of language error was commonly picked up in the Teaching Practice 1 class when students had to draw up lesson plans in preparation for micro-teaching sessions. This is a language error most common among the Xhosa speaking students. This could probably be because of the difference in verbal structures of the Xhosa language to that of the English language. The Afrikaans speaking students seemed to struggle less with the phrasing of

questions, perhaps because of some similarities in the ordering or structuring of words in sentences between the English language and Afrikaans. For instance, both languages start a question with an auxiliary/helping verb or else a modal verb when phrasing a question while the pattern is different in Xhosa. e.g. *Is jy klaar?* (Are you done?)

Examples of errors and corrections are:

Student: "He is coming?" instead of asking:

Is he coming?

"You enjoyed the lesson?" instead of asking:

Did you enjoy the lesson?

"You can read the second paragraph, please?" instead of:

Can you read the second paragraph, please?

"You can see from the back?" rather than asking:

Can you see from the back?

"You will help me with carrying the books?" instead of saying:

Will you help me with carrying the books? or else:

You will help me with carrying the books. Will you?

- **Confusion related to tenses of modal verbs and difficulty with the appropriate use of modal verbs**

These include the following confusions:

Shall – should

Will – would

Can – could

May – might

Must – ought

Despite these confusions, students have indicated to struggle in using modal verbs relevantly. For instance, they would say:

“I was supposed to go...” whilst they mean to say: I could have gone...

- **Use of pronouns used as the subject of a verb and syntax-related difficulties**

By “syntax” I mean rules of grammar which are used for arranging or connecting words in the right order.

Students, both Afrikaans and Xhosa speaking, seemed to struggle with using pronouns as the subject of a verb (see Appendix D2, - 2.1: Sandiso’s lecture recall assignment).

The clinic in Pentech who is responsible students.”

One may note that this sentence may sound as if it was written in a poetic form of using a personification (personifying the clinic). Secondly, in the very same sentence, there is a syntax-related problem of not connecting words with a preposition. In this example, a preposition “for” is missing from the sentence. This omission of “for” might make the sentence being interpreted as if a group of responsible students organised a campus clinic at Pentech.

Using “is” instead of “are” for the plural noun - “people”.

e.g. In this sweeping statement: “People is cruel.” instead of saying:

People are cruel.

This is common among Afrikaans speaking students. This is probably because in Afrikaans, they say: “Mense is, hence they say “People is while referring to a plural noun.

Expressing a wish

For instance,

“I wish I was a millionaire.” instead of saying:

I wish I were a millionaire.

Usage of prepositions: “in” and “at”

e.g. “I stay at Khayelitsha.” instead of saying:

stay in Khayelitsha.

One may note that this sentence may sound as if it was written in a poetic form of using a personification (personifying the clinic). Secondly, in the very same sentence, there is a syntax-related problem of not connecting words with a preposition. In this example, a preposition “for” is missing from the sentence. This omission of “for” might make the sentence being interpreted as if a group of responsible students organised a campus clinic at Pentech.

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Expressing a wish

For instance,

“I wish I was a millionaire.” instead of saying:

I wish I were a millionaire.

Usage of prepositions: “in” and “at”

e.g. “I stay at Khayelitsha.” instead of saying:

stay in Khayelitsha.

“Mandela was born at Umtata.” instead of saying:

Mandela was born in Umata.

This difficulty is experienced by both Afrikaans and Xhosa speaking students.

Error of not adding an “s” to indicate plural for 1 hour and some minutes.

e.g. “The lecture period took 1½ hour.” rather than saying:

The lecture period took 1½ hours.

Confusing the phrases “so much”, “very much” and “too much”

e.g. “I enjoyed the lecture too much.” instead of saying:

I enjoyed the lecture very much.

Both Afrikaans and Xhosa speaking students often do not understand that “too” refers to more than necessary and usually has a negative connotation.

Improper gender connotations in speeches

For instance, when speaking, both Xhosa and Afrikaans mother-tongue students would use the word “man” even if referring to a female.

e.g. “She was elected as chairman of the school committee.” instead of saying:

She was elected chairperson of the school committee. or rather:

She was elected chairwoman of the school committee.

The same problem is evident in the use of other nouns like policeman, postman, sportsman and salesman.

- **Semantic and phonetic problems**

By “semantic” I refer to meanings of words and other modes of language usage. By “phonetic” I mean sounds of speech or pronunciation.

- **Confusing the words “their”, “they” and “there”**

I have found this error to be common among the Afrikaans speaking students

- **Confusing the words “lecture” with “lecturer”**

I have found the problem of using these two words interchangeably among the Xhosa speaking students.

- **Problems with understanding the discourse / jargon used in their studies**

e.g. Outcomes, objectives, specific outcomes, critical outcomes, evaluation, assessment, learning context, conducive learning environment, etc.

In this regard, the Afrikaans speaking students seemed to have less problems than the Xhosa speaking students. This is probably because some jargon used carry some similar phonetics/speech sounds with the Afrikaans ones.

e.g. objectives - *objektiewe*

specific – *spesifiek*

In the next chapter, I will present a summary of conclusions and recommendations of this thesis.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Listening is a natural ability and an interpersonal skill that cannot be enforced but students can and should learn to be active listeners (Van der Merwe, 1991; Sutcliffe, 1993). While listening is a natural ability, it needs to be developed so that it can be active and effective through intensive training (Newton, 1990; Simoncelli, 1994; Rooth, 1996).

Effective academic listening is a social practice that is dependent on a range of socio-economic factors, and not just a matter of cognitive ability (Gee, 1990; Gardener & Jewler, 1992). It is therefore important that students identify their levels of listening and then recognise the need to improve their listening practices. Because effective academic listening correlates with better grades, (Burley-Allen, 1982; Wolvin, 1984; Gardener & Jewler, 1992), students should therefore take a leading role to improve their listening practices. However, listening is not the responsibility of the students only: educators also need to apply pedagogical techniques that will encourage active listening in class. Furthermore, educators themselves need to be active listeners and thus become able to teach students how to listen effectively. There is undoubtedly a general need for listening training.

Research findings also indicate that some students:

- Arrive late for classes and therefore miss the critical introduction of a lecture.
When they arrive in class, they waste time trying to establish what the lecture is about so as to get meaning from the lecture. This disrupts listening as the student is concentrating on something else while the lecture is in progress.
- Get distracted by noise made in the corridors whether by machines used by workers or by other occupants of the building.
This noise might capture their interest. Paying attention to external noises would then interrupt the listening process in class.
- Have a strong and serious need to improve their English communication skills, especially at first year level.
- Lack commitment in their studies which has a negative impact on their willingness to listen. The lack of commitment is probably due to the fact these students were not oriented to the ABET course; and they later discovered that their expectations about the course content and facilitation approaches were not being met.
- Lack self-confidence, especially when they have to present an oral task individually. It is possible that the lack of confidence is due to their low English proficiency. This confirms what Nonkululo mentioned (*case 5*):

that the Xhosa-speaking students lack confidence in the classes of the lecturers for whom Xhosa is not a home language, but are comfortable with the two Xhosa-speaking lecturers in the Xhosa Teaching and Teaching Practice classes.

- Intend to change from ABET to BEDGEN. Some intend changing to other courses. There are three main reasons for this.

Firstly, students did not get an orientation to the ABET course and therefore were not aware of its curriculum.

Secondly, some registered for the ABET course because their first choices were full so they opted for any other available course that could still accommodate new students.

A third reason for wanting to change courses is that students failed assignments due to poor learning skills and consequently lost motivation to carry on with the course, thinking that BEDGEN or other courses would be easier.

- Get discouraged by lecturers who are inefficient or perhaps do not have expert knowledge and proper training in the subjects they teach. This raises the question of whether education is all about money making or quality. Deming (1991) claims that when students fail, it is often because the systems of

teaching, learning and assessment have been inadequate to meet their needs.

He suggests that lecturers should be dedicated to every learner's success.

- Learn through peer coaching and peer evaluation (e.g. Mongezi's case of understanding Andrew better than the lecturer).
- Are motivated to learn and determined to produce good academic results when they have families who strongly support them (refer to similarities between Nonkululo and Andrew in 4.3.2).
- Are negatively affected by social and financial problems with respect to the way they cope with their studies, which includes listening to lectures. Burley-Allen (1982) articulates that some first year students lose concentration in the lectures due to being distracted by thinking about personal problems that seem difficult to get solved. This interruption makes the students tend to be poor classroom listeners.
- Are influenced by socio-cultural factors that can either promote or discourage their listening competency levels. (For example, in Nonkululo's case, the values of having respect for and listening to others have made her an empathic listener which, in fact, promotes effective listening in class.) Tubbs and Moss (1987) confirm that empathic listening entails showing respect (by the listener) through verbal and non-verbal actions to the speaker, and through

this, the speaker may be stimulated to speak more effectively. Tubbs and Moss (ibid) further explains that demonstrating empathy when listening will therefore affirm the speaker's importance, recognition and acknowledgement through noting that the listener is not judgemental of the delivery but accepting.

From the above research findings, I can deduce that students coming from a rural environment, who have had very little or no exposure to English, and who were taught by teachers who themselves are second language speakers of English, have difficulty in absorbing oral information in lectures at tertiary level. Thus it can be said that schooling history, home environment (or family background) and social factors have an impact on students' listening efficiency levels.

This research then concludes that poor listening practices of first year technikon students, especially those of ESL speakers with limited English proficiency, result in a significant drawback in their level of academic performance.

There is therefore a need to improve first year technikon students' listening practices in order to promote academic success. This can only be possible if an action is taken by the relevant Department of Education at this technikon, such as organising programmes to develop first year students' English in ways previously suggested in 2.8 and in 5.2 that follows.

5.2 Recommendations

These recommendations are gleaned from knowledge gained from the literature study in Chapter 2 and conclusions based on an analysis of my findings:

- Re-visit admission requirements

This technikon should re-visit its admission requirements in the ABET Unit as most students show a lack of commitment or perhaps misunderstanding of the curriculum of the course they registered for at the beginning of the year.

- Introduction to the course

An introduction to courses is needed during the first week of registration (orientation week) so that a class does not comprise a group of students who change to other courses when they become demotivated in the course they are studying. This is the appropriate period to introduce the course clearly as students can then still change to other courses if they discover that they are not interested in a particular course.

- Curriculum plan and development

An urgent curriculum plan needs to be embarked upon, one which would involve co-operative work among content lecturers and English language lecturers. For instance, collaborating lecturers could look at the language difficulty of material, and perhaps include a glossary at the end of each chapter to clarify key concepts.

The same content subject related themes could be adapted in a language class as part of a comprehension exercise.

- Tutoring programmes

Properly trained tutors who specialise in certain content subject areas and have a strong command of the English language need to be involved. Content-based English tutorials should be compulsory. An alternative to this suggestion would be that of adopting a peer-tutoring programme where students who are competent in particular content subjects assist peers with work already covered by the lecturer. Such student tutors should be proficient in English. Remuneration for services rendered should be at a student rate.

- Parent involvement

Once every two months, parents should be invited to come and explore the academic performance of their child. They can track their child's record on notice boards using the student number of their child. They should, with proof of identity as parents, be allowed time to enquire about other affairs directly or indirectly affecting their child's academic performance. This might encourage students to apply more effort and perhaps take charge of own learning as they would not want to be embarrassed in front of their parents or else disappoint them.

- Stopping external noises

The technician should not under-estimate the distracting effects of noise in the corridors. Effective ways of implementing and maintaining order in the corridors should be followed.

- Accreditation for listening

Students should get accredited for demonstrating effective listening, whether it involves listening to each other in groups or to a lecturer. Lecture recall assessments should be done and marks should be part of continuous assessment so that these count towards the final year mark. Giving students credit for listening will not only encourage students to take listening seriously but also encourage lecture attendance and punctuality for classes.

- Developing a curriculum for listening training workshops

The curriculum for listening training or listening workshops should look at the following outcomes. Students should be able to:

Demonstrate an understanding of the steps involved in the listening process, as listed in section 2.2.1;

Follow instructions;

Recognise the ways in which the voice is used e.g. when a point is emphasised;

Recognise or anticipate when a point is being developed;

Recognise when the speaker is deviating from the main point;

Listen with attention to oral presentations and questions, e.g.

those of other students or the lecturer;

Understand and follow the verbal structures of a lecture by distinguishing between main points, arguments, facts and opinions. In this case, lecturers should set an example because the manner in which speakers organise and structure their wording impacts to a great extent the listening level of listeners (Burton & Dimbley, 1995). Organised verbal structures would then enable the students to understand the interrelated threads of the meaning in the lecture (Flowerdue, 1997).

5.3 Reflections on research findings – students’ and lecturers’ voices

In discussing the research findings with three students who participated in the case study and with one of the lecturers who were research participants, comments were as follows:

- Asanda commented: “I have wasted three years studying at first year level in different fields of teacher education, but no one has ever made me aware of the importance of effective academic listening. Now, I think, being a participant in this research has created something new in my mind and I believe that my dream of being a career woman one day is soon gonna be achieved. However, I feel I need some kind of support to achieve improved listening skills.”

- Mongezi agreed with the findings and said that he thinks that it would be a good idea to make photocopies of Chapters 4 and 5 of the thesis for display on the notice-board of the Department of Education so that other students may benefit as well.

However, Mongezi highlighted his slight disagreement with assuming that the reason for his poor listening practices is due to his limited English proficiency. He mentioned that his major problem is that of not being familiar with accents of non-Xhosa speakers. I asked him how is the accent different because he earlier told me that some of his teachers at high school were the so-called “Coloured”, so, I assume, he should cope with accents of non-Xhosa speakers. He responded by mentioning that even at high school, he was struggling to understand the so-called “Coloured” teachers, as a result, he obtained lower grades in the subjects that were taught by them when compared to those that were taught by the Xhosa speaking teachers. He stressed that, for him, getting used to the intonation and accents of people for whom Xhosa is not a L1 is not an easy task to do. He suggested that students who are in the same position as his, need to get support. He added by saying that, if for instance, a non-Xhosa speaker can deliver a speech in English, and the very same speech be uttered by a Xhosa L1 speaker in English, he would not struggle in listening well to the L1 Xhosa speaker’s delivery as he would be familiar with the pace of

talking, pronunciation and accent of L1 Xhosa speakers despite the fact that the speech delivery would be in English.

When discussing his performance results displayed in the graph – figure 1 in Appendix B, Mongezi said that the reason why he scored low marks in the oral open-ended / essay-type assessment is due to adapting the traditional way of learning. He agreed that he, of course, never took academic listening seriously until he was part of this research. He said that at high school, he used to rely on memorising, cramming and reciting notes. In the case of these performance results, he mentioned that he struggled in saying what he could recall from the lecture in the manner in which he understood it. In his oral presentation, he could not remember all those big words used by the lecturer nor could he rephrase the lecturer's speech in his own words to show understanding of what was said.

He suggested that lecturers should encourage self-expression by developing opportunities for communication and discussion. This would motivate students to be active rather than passive or else shy in class. He added by saying that lecturers can, perhaps promote effective academic listening by making use of audio materials and then create platforms for students to discuss the tape in English and then express their opinions in English so that they (students) can learn

to develop their expressive language and also improve their retention mode.

In discussing the research findings with Sandiso, he mentioned that he always took listening seriously, however, attending lectures has often been a stressful experience for him as he struggled to understand academic English. According to him, his limited English proficiency denied him access to effective academic listening and thus effective learning.

Despite all this, he said that these research findings brought a new hope for him but only if a provision is made for students to improve their English which is used not only as a medium of instruction at the technikon but also often as a major language of communication in the field of employment. In his words, he repeatedly said: "I really want to improve my English sis Phumla, I really want to improve my English!"

- One of the interviewed lecturers complimented the research findings. He agreed that first year technikon students lack spoken and written English and that educators need to devise new strategies in order to develop students' listening practices in order to enhance their opportunities of attaining academic achievement.

5.4 Reflections on my research findings – author’s voice

It was quite an amazing experience to learn that the students in the cases were so positive, serious and open to express their opinions about the findings of this research. I, indeed, have learnt a lot about how students learn and how they perceive academic issues.

This research has taught me that we, as educators are learners too and that we should continually study what happens to learners when they learn, in order to increase our capacity as educational practitioners. This would be a keystone to bringing about improvements for optimal teaching and learning.

In summary, effective listening is a capability that benefits one, not only in a learning environment, but also at work, social or home. For this reason, its development in schools and in higher education is of utmost significance. Maybe educators should heed to the words of Ralph Nichols:

“It seems that we shall eventually come to believe that the responsibility for effective oral communication must be equally shared by speakers and listeners. When this transpires, we shall have taken a long stride toward greater economy of learning, accelerated personal growth, and significantly deepened human understanding.”

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LIST OF APPENDICES

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APPENDIX A



PENINSULA TECHNIKON

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Enquiries
Ref No:

TO: Ms P. Kese
FROM M.F. Marlie
DATE: 29 May 2003

Dear Student

Re: Doing research within EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Your request to do research in the Department of Education has been approved by the Department as well as by the Management of the Science Faculty.

All the best with your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M.F. Marlie', written in a cursive style.

M.F. Marlie
Head of Department: Education

APPENDIX B

Graph displaying percentage (%) scores of written one-word lecture recall assessment and percentage (%) scores of oral essay-type lecture recall assessment:

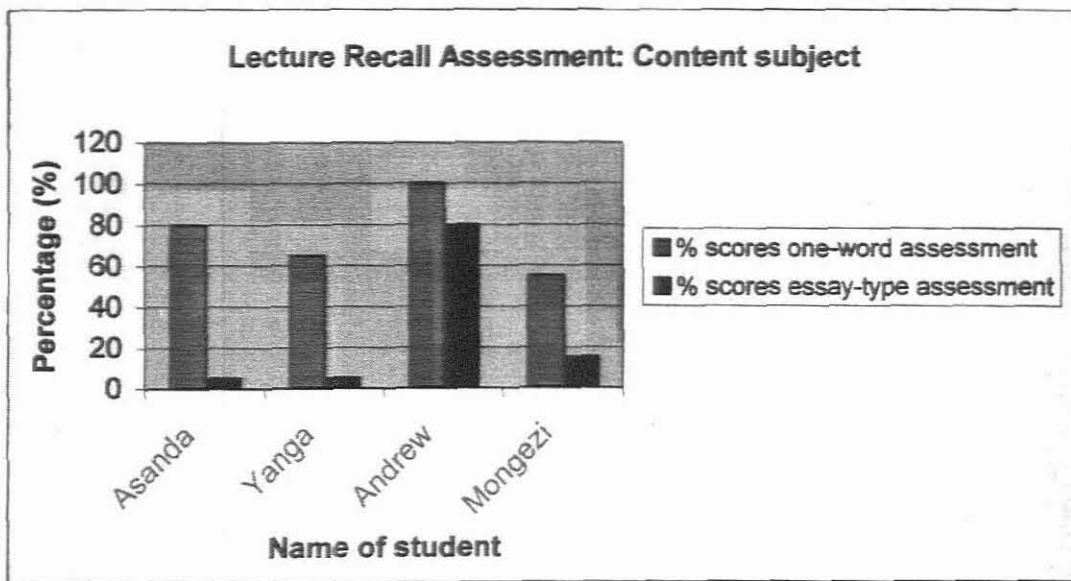


Figure 1.

TRANSCRIPTION CLIP: EMS CLASS

LECTURER 1: The economic system. This is the solution. What is the problem? Economic Problem. Two hands, one hand tells me something about the needs. Needs are up or down? The needs are heavy. Why? The needs are heavier than the factors of production. What is the actual problem? The factors of production are not enough. The needs are too many because we can count it. Also looking in our region. Get an example where we use too much in a sentence, e.g. I love you very much. I don't get I love you very, very much. Just the way it sounds is wrong. The right way to say it is I love you very much. How do we look at the stars at night? Do we say how much stars are up there? No, how many. Can you count it? Can't we count the number of stars? Because we can count each one. It is not impossible. The problem: This is the problem that this is too big and that we must manufacture that. How do we get this by using that? This is too big, we haven't got enough of this to manufacture all of that That is the problem. How do we solve the problem? I think this is the solution. The economic principle. What is the economic principle? Choose, choose, choose,... Exactly! Why choosing? Because the optic box is the problem. There is the box. There with certain factors of production. Right. So how do we solve this problem? What is the prime? Right. We must be selective. Selective means that we must choose. We cannot produce all of this so we are going to choose the most quality, then. The most important goods and services. How many do you choose? Give an example of (...) houses. Give an example in South Africa. When it is chosen, what must be done? Houses! (...) During a certain time of the year, It happened to me already, The dark month. People come and then you would hear the minister of finance say that a certain amount is going for housing for education or the social services for husbands. They not going to take the same amount of each one service. They consider it to be the most important service. Right. That is part of the solution besides what is very important. Second part. Choosing. We must be economical with factors of production. So, we try to produce when we cut it up, we can cut it up by trying to add the maximum output by using minimum input. What's the output? What do we mean by that? The goods and services by using factors of production. The next question now is who chooses? Who chooses? One, the people and two, the government. Give an example how the people choose. Are you people? Are you part of the people? Am I part of the people? Nobody, (...) Right! Explain to me how we choose? How do we choose? Here from goods and services. Here the economic principle has to do with stuff such as goods and services, then stock value, then we make it economic. Who chooses? Who makes the selection?

How we choose what we want them to produce. No manufacturer ever has come to me and asked listen I'm going to hand over to Phumla, the Masters' student to do a section on listening with you

STUDENT 1:
(Andrew)

I will be talking about the economic system. The system exist only for everybody
A need is something that has to be satisfied. In order for this
hunger for something either its something that has to be fulfilled. (...)
There are goods and services that we can get to satisfy the needs So the thing is
how do we get it? What do we do to get these goods and services? It is no use
telling us you thirsty... (...)

How do you get it? Follow economic activity. Its what you do about it. What are
you going to do to satisfy your needs? Everybody has needs. Because of this
activity that you are going to do. You are going to use the factors of production to
satisfy your needs. Based on factors of production, you take the goods and
services and stuff like that. Ok, so when you use it, you realise the problem that
everybody has needs, but then everybody use factors of production. There is
always more needs. Whoever feels that the resources are becoming less and less
and the needs should become more. To solve your problem. You must try and
figure out or sort out which needs have to follow their own principle. What does
the principle tell you? The principle tells us that we have many needs and
the resources to satisfy these needs are limited.

So, we shouldn't waste what we have and what we are going to choose, what we
are going to buy. We need to be selective and only choose the most important and best

QUESTIONNAIRE: 1st YEAR STUDENT

What is your mother-tongue (home language)? *Xhosa*

2. Did you study in private / "model C" schools or public / government schools? *model C schools*
- 2.1 Is there a difference between the way lessons were run in high school and the way lectures are conducted at the Technikon? Briefly explain?
Yes, there is a difference because in high school we used to change to the next period byt here in Tech. the lecturers come to the class
3. Did you learn English as a first language at school?
Yes.
4. Were your teachers in high school first language speakers of your home language?
If yes, what advantage did that bring to your learning experience?
No, it was kinda difficult to adjust because all the subjects were taught in First English language.
5. Were listening skills taught or developed in high school?
They were taught.
6. Are you aware of your own listening practices or styles?
Yes I am aware of my listening prac. and style.
- 6.1 How long is your listening span? / For how long can you concentrate, paying attention to the speaker? *As long as the speaker is completed with what he/she is saying.*
- 6.2 How much of what has been said can you recall?
The most important points.
7. What attracts your attention or makes you interested to listen when someone speaks?
In my opinion a person has to have a sense of humour that really attracts me.
8. What makes you bored or distracted when you are listening to:
I get bored when someone seem to be ~~repe~~ saying the same thing over & over again.
- 8.1 family members at home - *shouting instead of talking in a well mannered way*
- 8.2 friends - *telling me the same story more than once.*
- 8.3 other people - *hiding behind the bush not coming straight with what he want to say.*
- 8.4 lectures - *when going over the same thing over & over again.*
9. What services would you like the Technikon to provide in order to assist you improve your listening practices? *They should have a ^{low} speaker cause the class is increasing & the class has been extended.*
10. What impact do you think improving your listening practices could have on your academic performance?
It could have a huge impact because listening is a skill & I don't intend on forgetting what I have been taught/ told. So academically I have improved my performance in the classroom.

APPENDIX D1

Andrew

QUESTIONNAIRE: 1st YEAR STUDENT

- What is your mother-tongue (home language)? AFRIKAANS
2. Did you study in private / "model C" schools or public / government schools?
2. Is there a difference between the way lessons were run in high school and the way lectures are conducted at the Technikon? Briefly explain?
YES! STUDENTS HAVE SO MUCH LIBERTY AND THE LECTURERS TREAT YOU AS AN ADULT WITH A WHOLE LOT OF PATIENCE.
3. Did you learn English as a first language at school? NO!
4. Were your teachers in high school first language speakers of your home language?
If yes, what advantage did that bring to your learning experience?
YES! THE ADVANTAGE, WAS THAT I COULD IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTAND WHAT WAS BEING SAID, WITHOUT GETTING CONFUSED.
5. Were listening skills taught or developed in high school? NO! NOT SPECIFICALLY
6. Are you aware of your own listening practices or styles? YES!
- 6.1 How long is your listening span? / For how long can you concentrate, paying attention to the speaker? I TEND TO LISTEN QUIETLY TO A SPEAKER UNTIL THE END
- 6.2 How much of what has been said can you recall? I DON'T KNOW, I HAVE NEVER TRIED THAT; I USUALLY TAKE NOTES.
7. What attracts your attention or makes you interested to listen when someone speaks?
WHEN HE SPEAKS ABOUT SOMETHING, I BELIEVE IN.
8. What makes you bored or distracted when you are listening to:
- 8.1 family members at home NAGGING AND COMPLAINING!
- 8.2 friends WHEN THEY SPEAK ABOUT THINGS, THAT I WANT NO PART OF
- 8.3 other people SPEAKING ABOUT SUBJECTS AND STATING OPINIONS; OF WHICH I DISAGREE
- 8.4 lectures MONOTONISM!
9. What services would you like the Technikon to provide in order to assist you improve your listening practices? WORKSHOPS TO CLASSES THAT ALLOWS EVERYONE TO SHARE THEIR OPINION ABOUT LISTENING IN CLASS
10. What impact do you think improving your listening practices could have on your academic performance?
ONE EXAMPLE MIGHT BE THAT BY LISTENING TO OTHERS, I CAN DEVELOP A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHERE THEIR OPINIONS ARE ROOTED.

QUESTIONNAIRE: 1st YEAR STUDENT

- What is your mother-tongue (home language)? *Xhosa*
- 2 Did you study in private / "model C" schools or public / government schools? *✓*
- 2 Is there a difference between the way lessons were run in high school and the way lectures are conducted at the Technikon? Briefly explain?
students in high school were forced while at Technikon just give a work
- 3 Did you learn English as a first language at school? *No*
- 4 Were your teachers in high school first language speakers of your home language? If yes, what advantage did that bring to your learning experience?
Yes, because must have communication skills
- 5 Were listening skills taught or developed in high school? *Yes*
6. Are you aware of your own listening practices or styles? *facilitator*
- 6.1 How long is your listening span? / For how long can you concentrate, paying attention to the speaker?
- 6.2 How much of what has been said can you recall?
7. What attracts your attention or makes you interested to listen when someone speaks? *One hour*
- 8 What makes you bored or distracted when you are listening to:
- 8.1 family members at home *4 members*
- 8.2 friends *2 members*
- 8.3 other people *no*
- 8.4 lectures *no one*
9. What services would you like the Technikon to provide in order to assist you improve your listening practices? *I like to improve english*
10. What impact do you think improving your listening practices could have on your academic performance?
improving English / communication skills

29 July 2003

25%

2003/07/29

5/20

ENGLISH COMMUNICATION EAC NG1

LECTURE REAL ASSESSMENT

What were the instructions given by the lecturer to the class?

Distribution by the members to organize as a group three members to present in a class. 3/5

2 Oral presentations were made by ten student groups after they have read different articles from the USIB.A Pentech Campus newspaper. Briefly say something you can recall about five titles and the content of the various articles presented by the respective groups.

2 You are talking about the Clinton in particular who is responsible students
2.2 But the internet is unfortunately hidden at you are being by the state sovereignty. 2/15

2.3 or presentation is one of the article

2.4 kind Arnold transformed education that is Messer

2.5 Pentech merge with Cape tech

20
20

100%

29 July 2003

2003/07/29

ENGLISH COMMUNICATION TEACHING

LECTURE RECALL ASSESSMENT

1. What were the instructions given by the lecturer to the class?
 We were told to read the USIBA and discuss it in a group and give a feed back to the class and then giving your opinion. choosing a topic
5/5

2 Oral presentations were made by ten student groups after they have read different articles from the USIBA Pentech Campus newspaper. Briefly say something you can recall about five titles and the content of the various articles presented by the respective groups.

2.1 Student being robbed at the ATM. Students should be careful when standing at the ATM and should not ask help from a stranger. 3

2.2 Our topic was about the students taking over the stage. These students were performing in the theatre sort of a play. And they showed us how committed they were. 3

15/15

2.3 Girls cleanliness of the clinic. They were stating about the hygieness of the clinic. 3

2.4 Netball that took part in SASSU games in Port Elizabeth. Those girls performed well and they were giving their best performance. 3

2.5 HIV/AIDS and students. How students should use a condom and be very careful about who they go out with. ABSTAIN FROM SEX. 3

APPENDIX E

OBSERVATION SCHEDULE

Date	Student	Content	Language	Practical	Time/period

Tick box next to observed gesture and/or action to indicate frequency:

- Stretching arms
- Biting a pen or nails
- Looking around the classroom
- Staring blankly
- Nodding
- Yawning
- Falling asleep
- Smiling and/or laughing
- Hunching over the desk
- Sitting upright
- Fidgeting
- Taking more notes
- Checking the time
- Other, please specify

APPENDIX F1

QUESTIONNAIRE

LECTURER'S VIEW

Rate out of 5 Your rating scale will range from 0-5 Fill in your rating in the box next to the factor:

- 5: completely influenced
- 4: to a high degree
- 3: averagely
- 2: to a minimum
- very little influence
- 0: not influenced at all

STATEMENT: Poor listening of 1st year technikon students is influenced by the following factors:

- Vocal (tone of voice & audibility) of the speaker]
- Unfamiliarity with tertiary education style [
- Boring presentation by the lecturer [
- Lack of engagement / lack of understanding of the topic
- Psychological [
- Socio-cultural [
- Incompetence / inproficiency in the language used as a medium of instruction
- Posture of listeners (students)
- Gestures of both talkers and listeners (lecturers and students)
- Lack of mutual understanding / co-operation between lecturers and students]

In your opinion, what can be done by the Technikon to prepare its academic staff in effectively facilitating listening of lecture programmes to students?

Comments / Suggestions:

APPENDIX F2

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR ORAL INTERVIEWS WITH LECTURERS OF FIRST YEAR TECHNIKON STUDENTS:

How do lecturers get students to listen to them while talking or presenting lectures?

- 1 Comment on suggested techniques to get students' full attention:
 - to the lecturer
 - to each other as students in class

Note: Other probing questions will automatically build on the responses given by the interviewee in the above questions.

APPENDIX G

THREE VIDEO TAPES:

- Videotape 1: English class - 2002
- Videotape 2 Teaching Practice class -- 2003
- Videotape 3: English class 2003