

Evaluation of Teaching Practices and Listening Competencies at Higher Secondary School Level in Pakistan

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Received: February 2024

Accepted: May 2024

Available Online: June 2024

Abstract

According to education experts in Pakistan, teaching English in Pakistan is not up to the required standards due to which the students, despite studying English for several years, are unable to communicate in English. This is, therefore, clear that English language teaching in Pakistan has not made the students communicatively competent. Considering this, the present study was designed to evaluate the competency of listening to English at the higher secondary school level in two cities of Pakistan, Karachi, and Quetta. The study was carried out using three instruments: the listening comprehension test, the teacher questionnaire, and the higher secondary school students. The data was analyzed quantitatively to investigate the teaching and learning of listening skills. The analysis revealed that there are many drawbacks to the teaching English language at the higher secondary level. The results also yielded valuable recommendations for developing English language listening skills.

Keywords: Evaluation, teaching practices, listening comprehension, listening competencies, higher secondary schools, Karachi, Quetta, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

The English language is among those languages that are spoken and learned throughout the world. It is the language of civilization and unique in the sense that it has been borrowed from thousands of miles away, belonging to an entirely different nation. English as a language is universally very popular because of its flexibility, elegance, and dignity. In Pakistan also, English enjoys a special position in politics, education, business, and other fields of life. “English has a vital role to play in Pakistan as a lingua franca and it is a common means of communication” (Amir, 2021) but education experts in Pakistan are very much concerned with the situations and the conditions, under which English as a language or a subject is taught in various institutions of the country. According to them, the conditions under which English is being taught and learned are very far from satisfactory (Amir, Kang & Saeed, 2018).

Although students study English in their schools and colleges for several years, they cannot communicate in English. In those regions of Pakistan where the national language Urdu is learned after some regional language as the first language, English is learned or spoken as a third language. “The students in those areas lack competency in all of the four major linguistic skills – reading, writing, listening, and speaking” (Amir, 2022). This is, therefore, concluded that “methods of teaching the English language in Pakistan are faulty and have not yielded the desired objective of communicative competence” (Amir, Kang & Saeed, 2018).

Considering the importance of English in the Pakistani educational system, this study aimed to evaluate the listening comprehension competencies in two cities of Pakistan, Karachi (the provincial capital of Sindh), and Quetta (the provincial capital of Baluchistan). The population of the study was the students at the Higher Secondary levels and their English teachers. As students

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must be kept abreast of the latest developments and knowledge in any field, they need to efficiently acquire listening skills. Therefore, this study attempts to evaluate the teaching practices and listening skill competencies of English language learners in Pakistan.

1.1 Research Objectives:

The research objectives of this research study are as follows:

- i. Evaluate the teaching practices of English language teachers at the higher secondary school level in Karachi and Quetta, and
- ii. Evaluate the listening comprehension competencies of students at the higher secondary school level in Karachi and Quetta.

1.2 Research Questions:

The study will attempt to answer the following questions:

- i. What are the teaching practices of English language teachers at the higher secondary school level in Karachi and Quetta?
- ii. What are the listening comprehension competencies of students at the higher secondary school level in Karachi and Quetta?

2. Review Literature

The English language in Indo-Pak has gained social, political, and official status. Before partition, it was learned only through formal education and this continued even after the creation of Pakistan in 1947 despite Urdu being the national language of the country (Khan, Ali & Hussain, 2020, p. 94). Evaluation of prominent English language coursebooks taught in Pakistan points out that there is a lack of balance among the materials used for all four language skills. This means that there is a requirement of improving English pedagogy (Nomaan, 2022). In a second language classroom, listening is the most neglected skill by teachers. Conventionally, in schools, “language teaching means proficiency ... of reading and writing ... but in real-life, ... [it is] the ability to speak and listen” (Krivosheyeva, Zuparova & Shodiyeva, 2020, p. 520). Listening has become important due to the influence of technology in education but in a traditional language classroom it is still being ignored and very less or no time is devoted to listening (Sejdiu, 2017, p. 60).

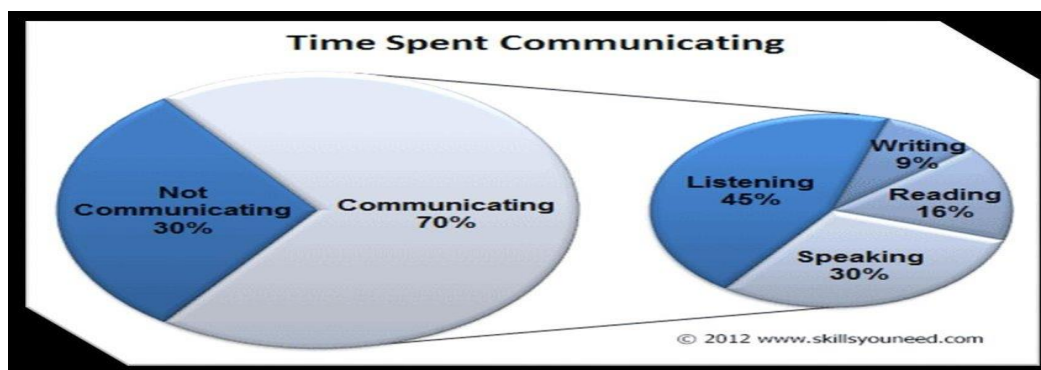


Figure 1: The distribution of time to each language skill while communicating (Asst, et al., 2019).

The teaching of listening strategies is almost non-existent in Pakistani classrooms. “Although, some English medium schools have prescribed listening in their curriculum; still, it is not being taught and tested seriously and causes deficiencies in learning among students” (Rifat & Noreen, 2021). Often in Pakistan, investigating the extant academic English listening skills has brought results that indicate inadequacy concerning listening skills. The results manifest less accurate answers and more fallacious responses. Students have been identified as having less-than-average listening skills, and an intense need to practice this skill has always been recommended. The education system requires a syllabus to provide practice in the skill of listening. As a single whole, it could be asserted that developing listening skills there are required personal efforts of the students, motivation, language laboratory, and functional syllabi so that the students will not encounter listening difficulties while adopting a profession in the future (Amir, Sharf & Khan, 2020; Amir & Saeed, 2019; Amir, 2021, 2022).

In an academic context may be an academic English language course can help to cope with the required academic listening skills. A syllabus different from General English may be suitable to fill the gap between the existing and target situations by taking into account the eclectic approach. Possibilities of listening skills to be developed concerning background knowledge, socio-cultural backgrounds, gender, age, and influence of learners’ native languages may be explored (Rubab, Butt & Masood, 2020, p. 44). Moreover, the role of the teachers can also be shifted from being a mere teacher to an expert, advisor, supporter, and consultant although for doing so, innovative teaching styles, listening strategies, and teaching methodologies need to be incorporated (Amir, Sharf & Khan, 2020; Amir & Saeed, 2019). Approximately 94% of school teachers in Pakistan lack the basic language skills that can ensure quality education in English (Rajan, 2013). They are unable to use lesson plans and computers and are not familiar with everyday expressions and simple phrases. As a result, they cannot check their learners’ understanding of the lesson with follow-up questions (Rajan, 2013, Alvi, Haider, Aziz & Rehman 2020). A small number of teachers from the new generation are relatively more capable than their older colleagues (ibid.). Therefore, in this regard, research from different perspectives of linguistic and non-linguistic variables which should focus on meta-cognitive processes and listening comprehension goals is essential (Rubab et al., 2020).

“Because humans listen more than they read, speak, or write, this fact puts listening first in the language learning process” (Asst, et al., 2019; Figure 1). In academics also “the basic distinction between high-achieving and low-achieving language learners pertains to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition” (Gonulal, 2020) but much valuable time in an English language classroom is dedicated to reading, grammar, and vocabulary learning. Therefore, second language learners “often remain unaware of the significance of listening as a language component and its development” (Asst, et al., 2019). Extensive listening practices beyond the classroom can help language learners in this regard as due to advancements in technologies, the platforms where listening can be practiced even beyond the language classrooms are easily available (Amir, & Kang, 2018a, 2018b; Gonulal, 2020).

The attitudes of English language learners toward learning listening skills, listening activities, and improving their listening skills have been found positive if they acknowledge that listening is important for learning a new language and for communication. Listening is thought to be the most challenging for second language learners of English while reading is commonly used and an effortless skill, “suggesting that frequency of use contributes to students’ perceptions of the ease of learning a skill” (Alzamil, 2021, p. 372). Learners face difficulties with learning to listen to English due to “speech rate, pronunciation, nervousness, limited vocabulary, and lack of background information” (p. 373). In such cases, if the attitude of the learners towards improving their listening skills is positive, and the language teachers can understand and exploit it they may

find it easy to eradicate the listening problems of their students and improve teaching practices ultimately, in turn, improving learners' listening comprehension during academic years (Amir, Kang & Saeed, 2018).

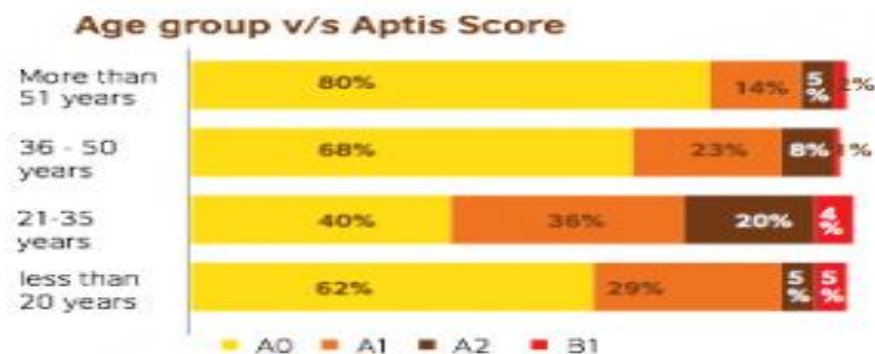


Figure 2: A comparison of English competency and age of teachers. Yellow, Orange, and Maroon indicate the percentage of basic, independent, and proficient users respectively (Rajan, 2013)

Even those students who perform well in the English classroom, often encounter trouble while listening to foreigners or native speakers in real life. Some even find it difficult to understand their teachers if they speak fast. They need teachers to speak slowly and clearly. This is principally due to the lack of adequate teaching methods and materials in the schools. In a conventional listening classroom, the learners just listen to the taped text from a textbook otherwise solve MCQs based on that text. Only correct answers are required but the decoding of information is taught. “The skills and strategies that are required for effective listening are not practiced in the classroom and students, on their own, answer without being taught how to listen to English” (Rifat & Noreen, 2021). They are not “sufficiently exposed to various types of authentic materials” (Amir, 2021) and can understand English spoken clearly and slowly. Real-life exposure is embarrassing and frustrating for them as real English has normal speaking speed. They are not aware that written and spoken English are different in features like “ungrammatical utterances, false starts, hesitation, assimilation, and redundancy” (Krivosheyeva et al., 2020), therefore, it is relatively easy to read but difficult for them to listen and comprehend the English language.

Language teachers must realize that “learners will only become active listeners if they will deliberately attend to what the speaker is saying” (Rifat & Noreen, 2021). The learners should also “immediately apply their background and cultural knowledge and assess the information that they are listening to” (Amir, 2021). They may take notes, ask questions, evaluate the speaker’s intentions and be emphatic apart from trying to distinguish between facts and opinions (Amir et al., 2018). Otherwise, listening carries anxiety factors that further hamper listening and language acquisition. Therefore, it is to acquire a language that teachers incorporate listening to it in their lessons and use strategies to develop listening. (Amir, 2021; Rifat & Noreen, 2021).

3. Methodology

For the present study, three instruments were used, the listening comprehension test, the questionnaire for the teachers, and the questionnaire for the higher secondary school students. The test was prepared from the contents of prescribed textbooks of English taught in both cities. The students listened to a text and then solved a test based on the listening text. Their scores and the data collected through the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively. The questionnaire for the

teachers and higher secondary level students were carried out principally to inquire about various issues related to teaching-learning of listening skills and the practices of teaching listening skill. The sample consisted of students (96 from Karachi and 48 from Quetta) from various government and private schools in both cities. The sample also included 68 (48 from Karachi and 20 from Quetta) teachers of English who participated in the questionnaires designed for them on “the Likert Scale” (Best & Kahn, 2007, p. 318). Another questionnaire was also designed for the students who participated in the listening comprehension test. These questionnaires were meant to gather data about the particulars of respondents and also to provide directions for answering. Each questionnaire contained 25 items to investigate the teaching and learning of listening skills. The collected data were descriptively analyzed. For ease of scoring, the “Strongly Agree and Agree” were combined to “Agree” while the “Strongly Disagree and Disagree” were combined as “Disagree.”

4. Testing of Hypotheses:

The data collected through a listening comprehension test, designed from the prescribed textbooks of English in Karachi and Quetta, i.e. test scores of students of Karachi and Quetta were analyzed quantitatively to test the formulated hypotheses. Therefore t-test for independent samples was carried out to find out the statistical difference and find out the correlation between the scores, Pearson Product Movement correlation coefficient (r) was calculated. The following hypotheses were formulated for the present study:

Null Hypothesis No. 1: There is no statistically significant difference between Karachi and Quetta higher secondary school students in their Listening Comprehension scores.

Null Hypothesis No. 2: There is no statistically significant correlation between Karachi and Quetta higher secondary school students in their Listening Comprehension scores.

For testing of hypotheses and analysis of the problems, the following steps were adopted:

Test of Hypotheses No 1

1. $H_0: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$
2. $H_1: \mu_1 = \mu_2$
3. $\alpha = 0.05$
4. Test Statistics: t
5. Decision Rule: Reject H_0 if the computed value of t \geq the tabulated value of t
6. Conclusion

Test of Hypotheses No 2

1. $H_0: \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$
2. $H_1: \mu_1 = \mu_2$
3. $\alpha = 0.05$
4. Test Statistics: r
5. Decision Rule: Reject H_0 if the computed value of t \geq the tabulated value of t
6. Conclusion

Null Hypothesis # 1

Test = t test for independent samples

$\alpha = 0.05$

$N = 144$ (96 Karachi + 48 Quetta students)

$Df = N - 2 = 142$

Table 1: t-test for Karachi and Quetta Listening Comprehension Test Scores

Subjects	N	Mean	SD	t
Karachi	96	18.45	4.45	*2.8577
Quetta	48	16.29	3.90	

* > 0.05

Table 1 shows that the tabulated value of $t = 1.9768$ is smaller than the calculated value of $t = 2.8519$ at $\alpha = 0.05$ with $df = 142$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Based on this calculation, there is found a statistically significant difference between the Listening comprehension scores of Karachi and Quetta higher secondary school students.

It is clear from the inspection of Table 23 that the mean score of Karachi students is = 18.45 whereas the mean score of Quetta students is = 16.29. It further verifies that the listening comprehension skill of the higher secondary school was different. Karachi students performed better on the listening comprehension test than Quetta students.

Null Hypothesis # 2

Test = Pearson Product Coefficient Correlation

$\alpha = 0.05$

$N = 96$ (48 Karachi + 48 Quetta students)

$df = N - 2 = 94$

Table 2: Calculation of r for Karachi and Quetta Listening Comprehension Test Scores

Subjects	N	Mean	SD	SE	r	t
Karachi	48	18.45	4.45	0.093	0.1836	*0.1799
Quetta	48	16.29	3.90	0.081		

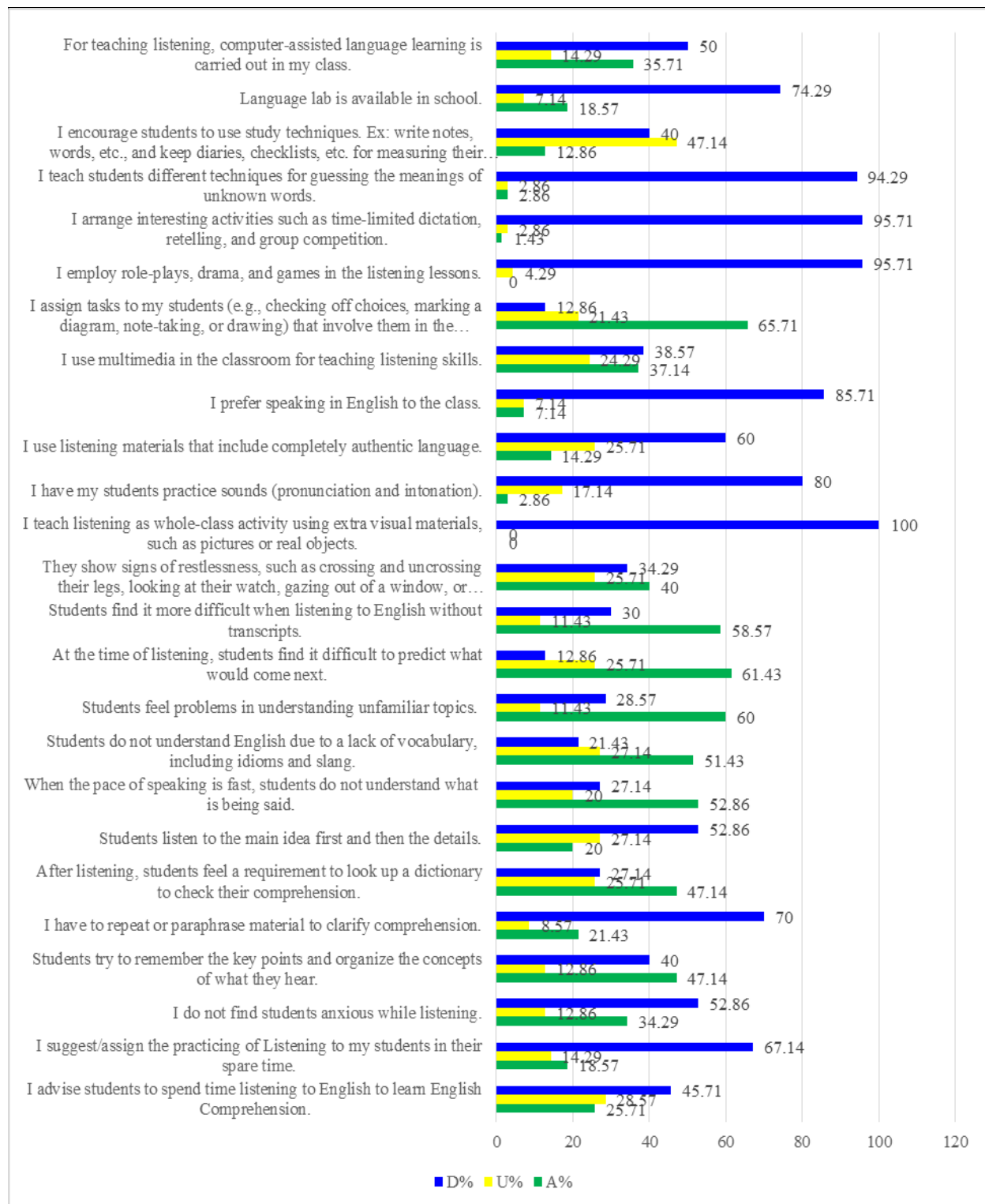
* < 0.05

Table 2 shows that the tabulated value of $t = 1.9768$ is greater than the calculated value of $t = 0.1799$ at $\alpha = 0.05$ with $df = 94$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. The result indicates that technically a weak positive correlation exists between the two variables i.e. between Karachi and Quetta scores. It is, therefore, concluded that there is no significant correlation between Karachi and Quetta students in their Listening Comprehension scores.

4. Analysis of data collected through Questionnaire for the Teachers:

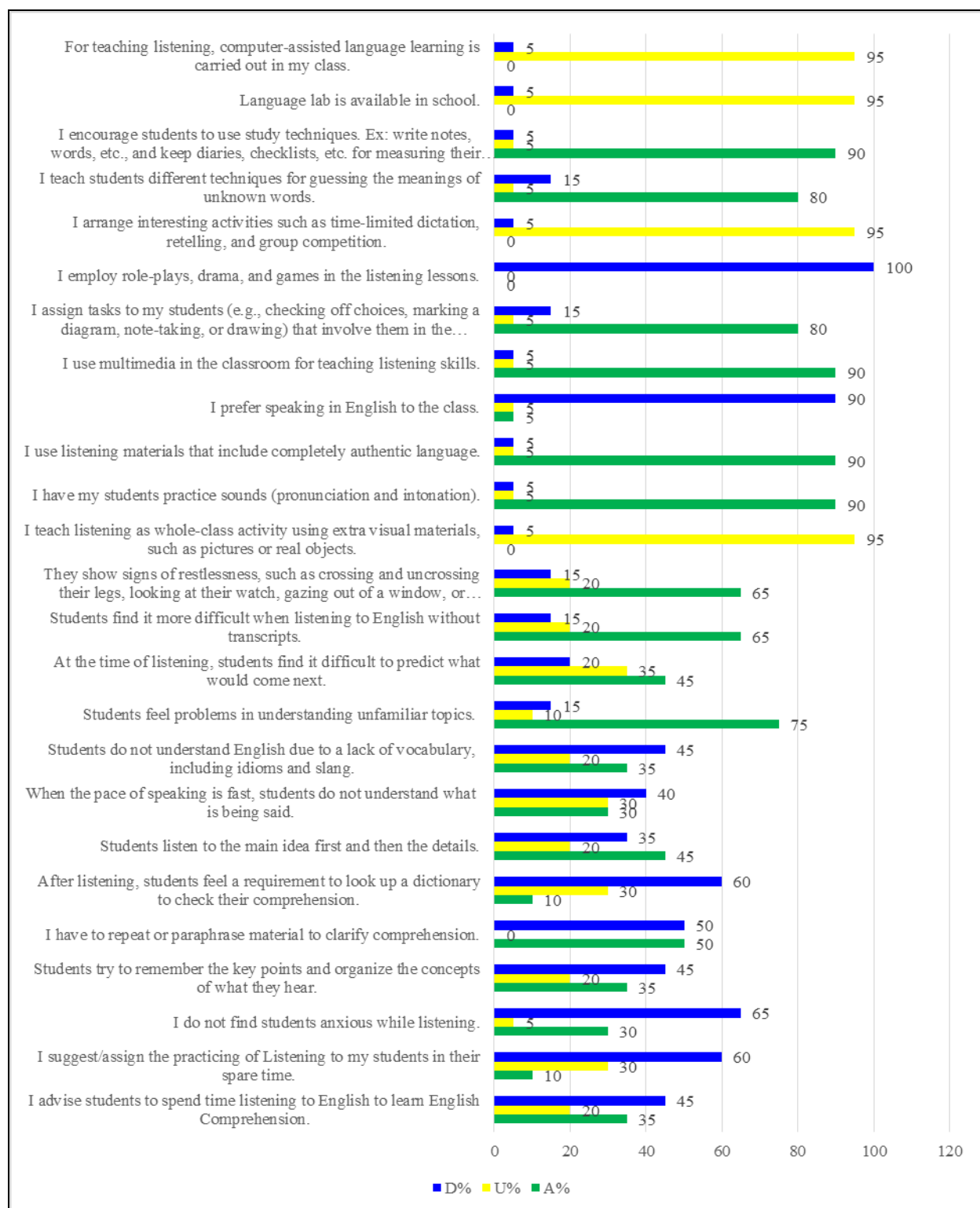
The analysis of the questionnaire for teachers of Karachi was as follows:

Figure 1: Questionnaire Data of English Teachers from Karachi



The analysis of the questionnaire for teachers of Quetta was as follows:

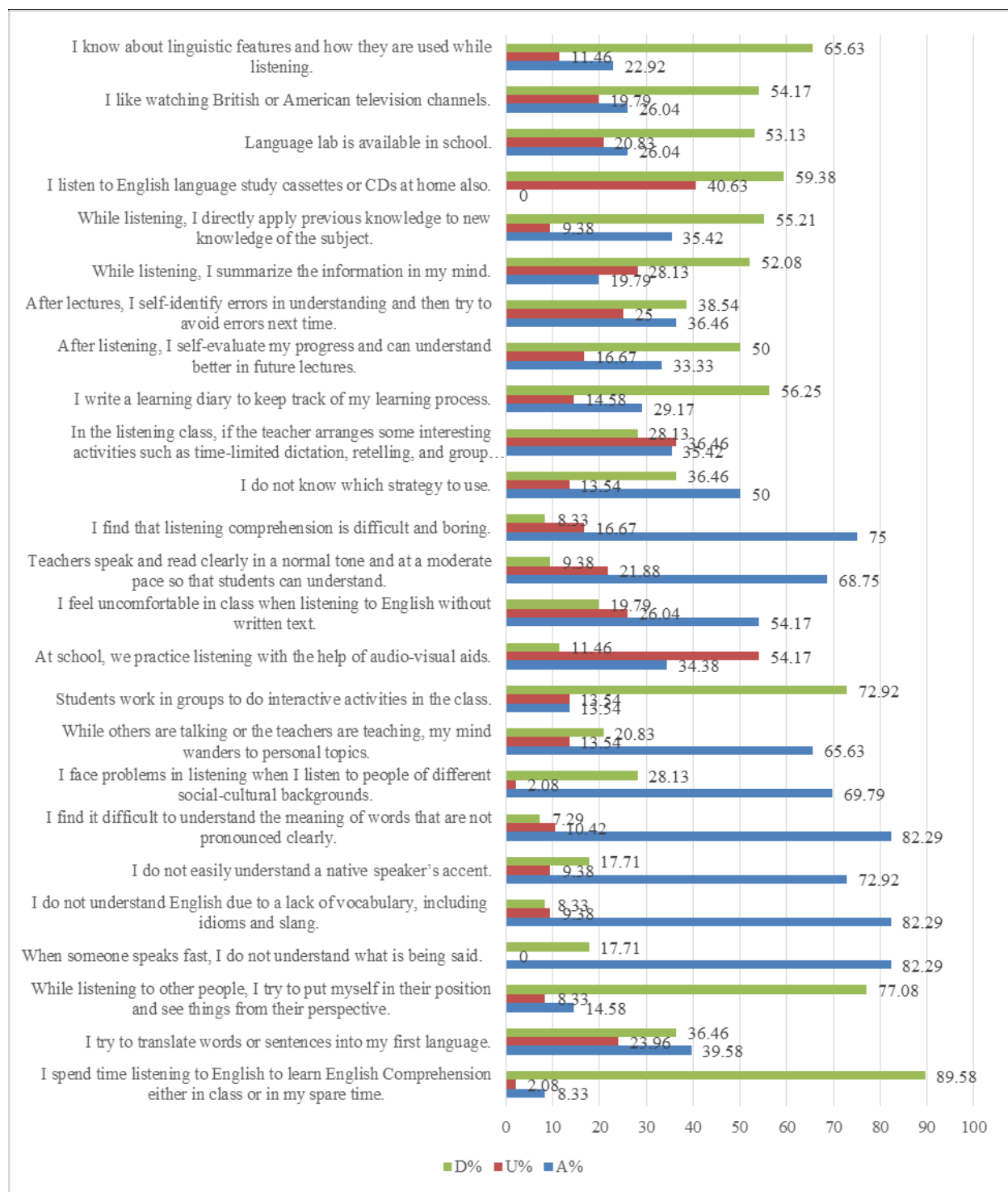
Figure 2: Questionnaire Data of Teachers from Quetta



4.2 Analysis of Questionnaire for Higher Secondary School Students:

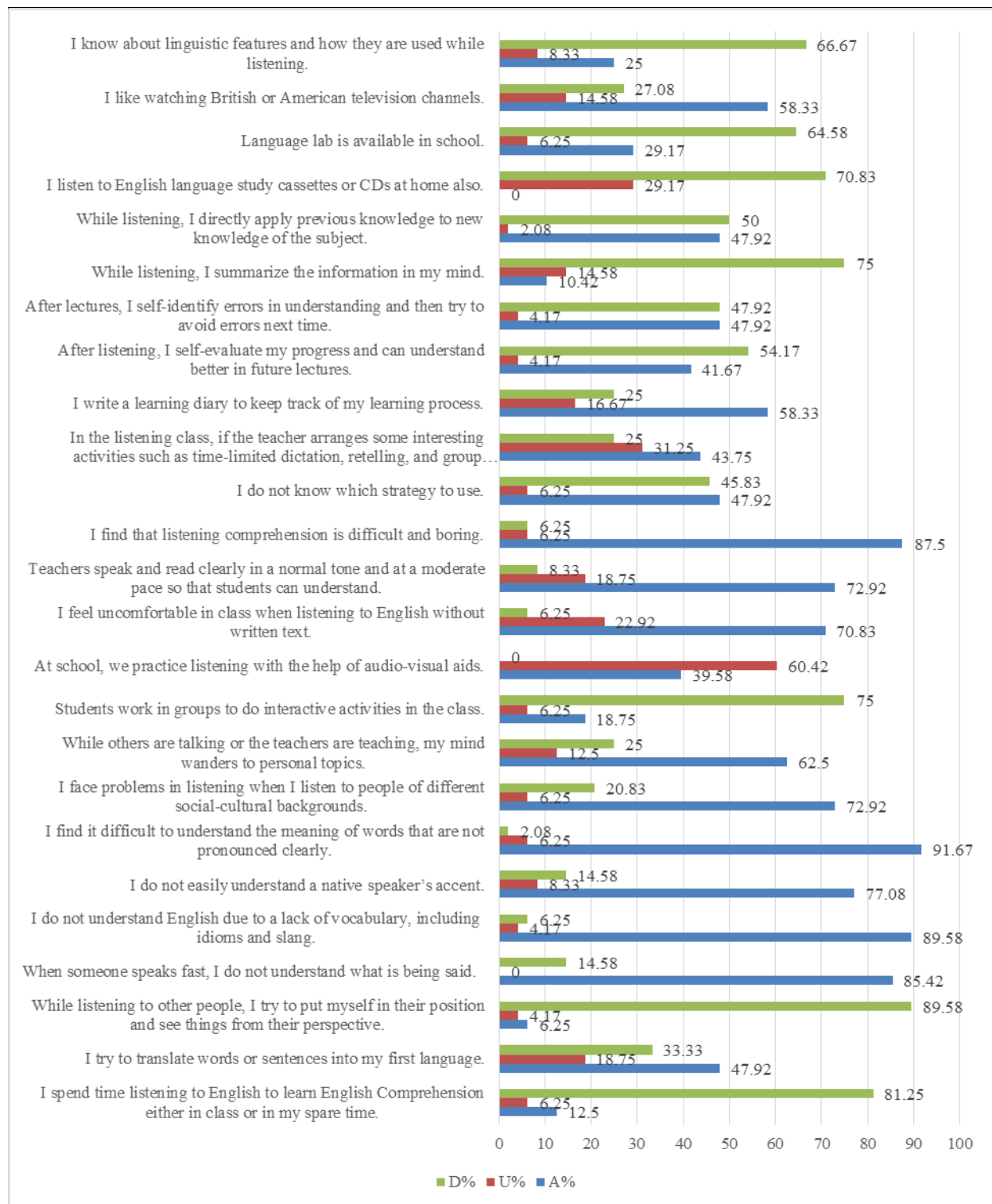
The analysis of the questionnaire for Higher Secondary School Students in Karachi was as follows:

Figure 3: Questionnaire Data Students from Karachi



The analysis of the questionnaire for Higher Secondary School Students in Quetta was as follows:

Table 6: Questionnaire Data of Quetta Students



4.3 Findings:

Based on hypothesis testing and data analysis, the followings are the findings of this study:

1. The listening comprehension test scores of Karachi and Quetta HSSC students are statistically different (Table 1).
2. Karachi students performed better on the listening comprehension test than Quetta students (Table 1).
3. A significant correlation does not exist between Karachi and Quetta students in their Listening Comprehension scores (Table 2).
4. Students in Karachi, as well as in Quetta, are not being advised by their teachers to practice listening outside the classrooms. However, during class hours, teachers of English in both cities assign their students tasks that could help them in the listening activity (Figures 3 & 4). Resultantly, the majority of the students do not utilize their spare time in listening practices and activities (Figures 5 & 6).
5. The students of Karachi usually do not feel anxiety while listening activities are going on in the class. However, the students of Quetta are observed to be anxious during listening activities (Figures 3 & 4).
6. At times, the teachers of Karachi observe their students making efforts to remember and organize the key points and concepts of listening materials but the students of Quetta do not take up this activity (Figures 3 & 4).
7. To clarify whatever is being listened to, the teachers of Karachi do not have to repeat or paraphrase the text, but the teachers from Quetta have to do so for their students to understand better (Figures 3 & 4).
8. The students of both cities do not have a habit of looking up a dictionary to check their comprehension after listening activities (Figures 3 & 4).
9. Listening to the main idea first and then to the details is not practiced by the students of both cities usually (Figures 3 & 4).
10. Students of both cities do not understand the fast speed rate (Figures 3, 4, 5 & 6).
11. Students of both cities lack vocabulary and understanding of idioms and slang. Therefore they mostly do not understand what they are listening to (Figures 3, 4, 5 & 6).
12. The majority of students in both cities feel problems understanding unfamiliar topics (Figures 3 & 4).
13. Predicting and inference, while listening is in progress, are difficult for students of both cities (Figures 3 & 4).
14. Listening to English text without a written transcript is more difficult than listening to transcripts for the students of both cities. (Figures 3 & 4)
15. The Karachi students generally are comfortable while listening but signs of restlessness and boredom are found in the majority of the students from Quetta (Figures 3 & 4).
16. Listening comprehension is not generally taught in institutions in Karachi or Quetta (Figures 3 & 4).
17. Listening is not carried out in the class as a whole-class activity. There is no use of extra visual materials (Figures 3 & 4).
18. The majority of teachers in both cities do not make their students practice the language sounds, pronunciation, intonation, etc. (Figures 3 & 4).

19. Teachers in Karachi do not use those listening materials that include completely authentic language. On the other hand, the teachers from Quetta use completely authentic material (Figures 3 & 4).
20. Teachers in both cities do not prefer speaking English in class (Figures 3 & 4).
21. In Karachi, a small number of teachers use multimedia to teach listening but in Quetta, the majority of teachers use it (Figures 3 & 4).
22. Teachers in both cities use various activities like games, role-plays, and drama, during class to enhance listening comprehension. Moreover, activities that could be interesting for the students e.g. time-limited dictation and retelling, etc. are not arranged in the classroom (Figures 3 & 4).
23. Teachers in Karachi do not encourage their students to use study techniques (Figures 3 & 4).
24. The language lab is usually not available in Karachi or Quetta schools (Figures 3, 4, 5 & 6).
25. In Karachi and Quetta also, listening is rarely taught through the CALL (Figures 3 & 4).
26. Usually, the students of Karachi do not translate words or sentences into their language but in Quetta, students follow this practice (Figures 5 & 6).
27. While listening, students do not try to be emphatic, i.e. to see things from the speaker's perspective (Figures 4 & 5).
28. Students from both cities do not easily understand the native speaker's accents (Figures 4 & 5).
29. The majority of students face problems due to pronunciation and different social and cultural backgrounds (Figures 4 & 5).
30. They find it difficult to concentrate while listening. In such a situation their minds wander to personal topics (Figures 4 & 5).
31. Interactive group activities are not done during the class (Figures 4 & 5).
32. Teachers speak at a slow pace to make their students understand (Figures 4 & 5).
33. Listening comprehension is difficult and boring for the majority of students (Figures 4 & 5).
34. Students do not know which strategy to use. They have not even heard about a listening strategy (Figures 4 & 5).
35. Karachi students usually do not record their learning process e.g. in a diary but students in Quetta, however, practice this habit (Figures 4 & 5).
36. After listening, students do not self-evaluate their listening progress or self-identify their errors for future understanding (Figures 4 & 5).
37. While listening, they do not summarize the information in their mind (Figures 4 & 5).
38. Usually, the students cannot apply previous knowledge to new knowledge during listening (Figures 4 & 5).
39. Students use study cassettes or CDs at home but they like watching British or American television channels (Figures 4 & 5).
40. They do not know about linguistic features or their usage for/during listening (Figures 4 & 5).

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings following is concluded:

1. There is a statistically significant difference between the Karachi and Quetta higher secondary school students' listening comprehension scores. Karachi students performed better on the listening comprehension test than Quetta students.
2. Listening comprehension is not generally taught in institutions of Karachi or Quetta. Mostly, the language lab is not available in higher secondary schools. Moreover, teachers in both cities do not specifically prefer speaking in English in class. Therefore, there is no concept of teaching listening as whole-class activity using extra visual materials, such as pictures or real objects, practising the language sounds, pronunciation, intonation, etc., or computer-assisted language teaching. Listening probably only takes place when the teacher is speaking or reading aloud while the students are listening to him. Therefore, the students face problems such as due to the fast pace of the speaker, understanding the accents of native speakers, a lack of vocabulary, not understanding unfamiliar topics, not being able to predict and infer, listening without a written transcript, translating words and sentences into the first language specifically by students in Quetta.
3. Resultantly, teachers and students are not aware of various strategies that could be used to enhance listening comprehension competencies. For example, employ role-plays, drama, and games in listening to lessons, time-limited dictation, retelling, group competition, etc. Teachers also do not encourage their students to use study techniques. Therefore, the students do not have a habit of recording their learning process e.g. in a diary. However, where listening is taught, it is mostly without using authentic material, and multimedia is the most frequently used technology for teaching. Moreover, after listening, students do not self-evaluate their progress and can understand better in future lectures. They also do not self-identify errors in understanding and then try to avoid errors next time. Their teachers speak and read clearly in a normal tone and at a moderate pace so that students can understand as the majority of students find it difficult to understand the meaning of words that are not pronounced clearly. Teachers also, although in a smaller number, assign tasks to their students to involve them in the listening activity.
4. Students of both cities showed their eagerness about watching British or American television channels. However, they indicated not knowing about linguistic features and their use while listening. They were unable to apply various techniques while listening, apply previous knowledge to new knowledge of the subject, summarize the information in their minds, listen to the main idea first and then the details, and look up a dictionary to check their comprehension after listening activities. They have no readily available guidance for all these techniques from their teachers who mostly do not advise their students to spend time listening to English to learn English comprehension or assign practice of listening to their students in their spare time. The majority of students, therefore, find listening comprehension difficult and boring. Moreover, they are not aware of some basics of listening such as trying to put themselves in the speakers' position and see things from their perspective or listening to people of different social-cultural backgrounds.
5. Although at a minute level, but few differences were also observed between the teaching and learning of listening comprehension in both cities. The use of authentic material for teaching is more in Quetta than in Karachi. Anxiety and concentration issues while listening are less observed in Karachi than in the students in Quetta during listening activities. Likewise, at times, the teachers of Karachi have observed their students trying to remember the key points, and

organize the concepts of what they hear but the students of Quetta do not take up this activity. The students in Karachi have a better understanding of accents and material as the teachers of Karachi do not have to repeat or paraphrase listening material to clarify and make their students' comprehension of listening material better but the teachers from Quetta have to do so for their students. Lastly, the teachers in Karachi do not use those listening materials that include completely authentic language. On the other hand, the teachers from Quetta use completely authentic material.

5.1 Recommendations:

Based on the conclusion following is recommended:

1. Listening comprehension should be taught separately in higher secondary schools/institutions in both cities as whole class activity using various techniques and materials.
2. The language lab should be provided to the schools in both cities.
3. Moreover, teachers in both cities should develop a habit of speaking in English in their classes.
4. The students should be given authentic material to listen to so that the fast pace of the speaker and understanding of the accents of native speakers may not result in listening failures.
5. The students should be instructed and guided to record their learning process, self-evaluate their progress, and self-identify listening errors.

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