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## **An Evaluation of Students Listening Comprehension Skills Using Schema and Genre-Based Strategies**

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### **Abstract**

This study used schema and genre-based strategies on the listening skills of students and the influence of students' Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) on their listening comprehension. Purposive sampling was used to select two faculties: Arts and Science. Simple random sampling was used to select four departments from each faculty and ninety-four students that participated in the study. The study adopted a pre-test, post-test, control group, quasi-experimental design involving three experimental groups and one control group with the use of three different treatments for six weeks. Data were collected through a lecture for pre and post-test and intervention materials for the treatment. ANCOVA was used to analyze the inferential statistics. The results indicate that schema and genre strategies improved students' listening comprehension [ $F_{(1,19)} = 24,038$ ;  $P = 0.000$ ]. The group exposed to the schema/genre performed best; followed by the schema, genre and the control strategies respectively. The results also showed that there was no significant main effect of CGPA on students' listening comprehension [ $F_{(4, 88)} = 0.838$ ;  $P = 0.505$ ]. The study recommended that instructors should employ these strategies in class and students should be motivated to develop interest in employing them.

**Key Words:** Listening comprehension, Schema theory, Genre theory, Strategy, Students

### **Introduction**

Listening is a key to all positive human relationship. It enables people to have cordial relationships, good social networks, improved self-esteem, higher grades in academic work and better well-being. Through effective listening, people can acquire knowledge, understand others and learn about the world around them. Listening precedes understanding in any kind of relationship. In the family, the members need to listen to one another to ensure good

understanding and cordial relationship. At school, students need to listen attentively to the teacher and to one another in order to acquire, develop and expand their knowledge for good academic performance. In an organization, effective listening helps employees understand employers' line of action and also help them understand their colleagues for enhancement of better productivity. Inability to listen efficiently can result in strained relationships, failure to get important information which could lead to poor academic performance and disconnection among people with general goals.

As a very significant communication skill, listening very often has assumed a lesser role in many educational, social and political spheres. Scholars tended to assign inappropriate roles to the four communication skills in achieving effective communication. According to them, writing and speaking are active skills, while listening and reading are passive. This made people devote more educational attention to the development of the former than to the growth of the latter. Today, these roles have been seen to be inappropriate. Scholars, Adler and Rodman (1991), Smit (2006) have shown from various researches that in decoding spoken or written messages, an active cognitive process is involved. Smit (2006) observed that the listener does not passively receive and record messages but needs to activate different types of knowledge in order for him to understand what the speaker means. This observation shows that listening involves an active cognitive process. Listening is a step further than hearing; it involves hearing and attaching meaning to what is heard. It is a process that requires concentration on what is being said despite distractions.

Among the four language skills, listening is one such skill that develops faster than speaking and which aids the development of reading and writing abilities in learning a new language (Vandergrift, 2007). Listening therefore can be seen as a major means of language acquisition. It is the most frequently used skill in the classroom and in daily life. Adler and Rodman (1991) posited that students spend an average of 14 percent of their communicating time, writing; 16 percent, speaking; 17 percent, reading; and 53 percent, listening. This statistics shows that listening is one of the most frequent activities which an individual engages in daily life. This result also reveals that students spend most of each school day listening and much of what they learn is acquired by means of listening. The foregoing review shows that listening is essential for learning generally. Bass and Davis (2003) acknowledged this by saying that 85 percent of our learning derives from listening. Listening therefore is a crucial part of the teaching and learning process in primary, post- primary and tertiary institutions. It is a vital tool for academic activities and enables the student to be adequately prepared for tests and examinations.

In spite of its significance, listening has been given little attention in many Nigerian schools. This may be due to fact that there has been a lack of research interest into listening. Also, listening has often been considered as a passive skill which learners can pick up (Othman & Vanathas 2003). In fact, some teachers believe that exposing students to spoken language is sufficient instruction in listening comprehension. This lack of adequate teaching of listening comprehension and exposure to listening strategies have made listening in the classroom a major challenge to many students, which has led to students' poor academic achievement.

As substantial as listening may be to effective teaching and learning, it is surprising to note that curriculum studies reveal that listening is not given as much attention as other communication skills (reading, writing, and speaking) in the English syllabuses of many Nigerian schools at the levels of primary and secondary school education. In the teaching of the other three language arts skills, that is, speaking, reading and writing, the teachers take time to explain

what the skills are about and how the students can acquire them practically. However, when teaching listening, the teachers only explain what the skill is about and the rules of the skill, without teaching them practical ways of acquiring the skill and specific listening strategies that students need to be effective listeners. The teachers erroneously assume that the students should acquire the skill easily as they listen to spoken text, which may not be the case. A number of the students graduate from the secondary school without training in listening.

### **The Problem**

Majority of the students who enrol in tertiary institutions have few listening experiences. Odejide, Soola, Oyetade and Mosuro, (1996) observed that since listening is not often taught in Nigerian secondary schools, the new undergraduate may pick up the skill in an inefficient way. Many of the students are not able to respond to questions on topics already taught in class; some ask questions on concepts already explained and some perform poorly in examinations even after attending classes. Researchers - Owca, Pawlak and Pronobis, (2003) have revealed that the lack of listening abilities found in students has negative effects on their academic performance.

As the need to improve students' academic performances increases, there have been some works on strategies that can be used to improve students' listening skills. Jensen and Hansen, (1995), Sadighi and Zare (2006), Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), and Li (2010) investigated the use of schema strategy on listening comprehension. They argued that schema activation has impact on listeners' cognitive ability. Schema activation helps listeners to identify and activate pre-existing background knowledge of lecture content to enable them to interpret meaning into the new information they receive. However, these studies focused on the use of schema instruction with a small number of students. Also, according to Manzouri, (2015), genre strategy, which was traditionally employed in improving reading and writing skills have been employed in recent times on listening comprehension. Manzouri (2015) and Sadeghi, Hassani and Noory (2014) argued that employing genre strategy enables students to develop ability to identify the type of text, the text-form and structural features of the text they listen to. Studies on the use of genre-based strategy on listening comprehension are scanty. There is the need for further investigation into the effect of employing prior knowledge and genre strategy on the listening comprehension of students. Again, the lack of studies that combine schema and genre-based strategies in improving listening comprehension presents a gap in knowledge that this study intends to fill. This study therefore investigated the effects of schema and genre-based instructions, on the listening comprehension of university students in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical frameworks of this study include: schema theory and genre theory. Schema theory will be discussed first.

#### **Schema Theory and Listening Comprehension**

According to Fang (2008) schema means an abstract textual structure stored in the listener's cognition that he uses to make sense of a given text. In other words, schema is referred to as background knowledge structures stored in the listener's cognitive system which he uses to comprehend a spoken text. In essence, schema theorists posit that a listener can comprehend a spoken text when he has relevant background knowledge structure with which he may be able to understand the new information better (Li, 2010). Scholars like Vandergriff (2007),

Flowerdew and Miller (2005) have shown from various studies the vital role schema plays in the listener's ability to understand spoken text.

The strength of this theory is that it enables listeners to identify and activate pre-existing schema to enable them to achieve listening comprehension and enhance their storage capacity. However, the listener may fail to comprehend a message if he lacks relevant background knowledge, if he fails to match his schema with the new input appropriately, or if he has listening or linguistic deficiencies. Also, the schema theory cannot explain how new schemata are acquired by listeners and how they can comprehend new information that does not have any link with their pre-existing schema. This limitation notwithstanding, schema theory reveals the significant role of background knowledge in listening comprehension.

### **Genre Theory and Listening Comprehension**

Swales's work (1981) was the first popular work in genre analysis. Swales' defines genre as a socially recognized way of using language to achieve communicative goals. His definition has influenced genre analysis which more recently is not only applied to literary works but also to linguistics. According to Chandler (1997), genres provide frameworks within which texts are produced and interpreted. A genre, therefore, can be seen as a shared code between the producers and interpreters of both written and spoken text included within it. Genre makes it possible for communicators to pass across the context of their message. Genres, then, can be seen as providing a vital frame of reference which helps individuals identify, select and interpret texts. It guides the interpreters of a text towards a preferred interpretation. The weakness in genre theory is that it appears to be rigid, since it may not allow students to develop a critical view of the text they listen to. Despite this weakness, genre theory is very important in comprehending spoken text.

### **Cumulative Grade Point Average and Listening Comprehension**

Cumulative grade point average (CGPA) refers to a student's overall grade point average (GPA) which includes dividing the number of quality points earned in all courses attempted by the total degree-credit hours in all attempted courses. In other words, it is the overall grade point average of student across multiple semesters. It is generally assumed that competence in the use of the language skills may lead to improvement in academic performance. However, researches need to be conducted to clearly ascertain this claim. Cook (2006) investigated the relationship between reading comprehension and students' academic performance of students in a Bachelor of Science in Nursing programme. She used a comparative approach to investigate possible relationship between students' CGPA and their reading comprehension abilities. The results show that students' improvement in their reading comprehension abilities promoted successful academic performance. Not much is known about studies that investigated the relationship between students' CGPA and their listening comprehension which shows the need for researches to be conducted in this area.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were tested in order to address the concern of this study:

H01: There is no significant main effect of the treatment on the students' achievement in listening comprehension.

H02: There is no significant main effect of CGPA on students' achievement in listening comprehension. Hypotheses is not part of methodology. Place it above that

## Methodology

### Design

The study adopted a pre-test, post-test, control group, quasi-experimental design involving three experimental groups and one control group. The three experimental groups were exposed to different treatments namely: schema-based strategy (S), genre-based strategy (G) and schema/genre –based strategy (SG). The control group received no treatment but was given usual lectures on listening comprehension without the practical experience. All groups were exposed to pretest and posttest condition for six weeks.

### Variables of the Study

The following categories of variables were used in the study:

**1) Independent Variables:** This is the instructional strategy which was manipulated at three levels:

- i) Schema-based strategy (S)
- ii) Genre-based strategy (G)
- iii) Schema/genre-based strategy (S/G)

**2) Dependent Variable:**

- i. Students' achievement in listening comprehension, this was ranked as high, average and low.

**3) Moderator Variable:** This is:

a) Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA)- This refers to a student's overall grade point average (GPA) which includes dividing the number of quality points earned in all courses attempted by the total degree-credit hours in all attempted courses. CGPA at five levels viz:

- i. 4.5 – 5.00 -----1st Class
- ii. 3.50 – 4.49 ----- 2nd Class Upper
- iii. 2.40 –3.49 ----- 2nd Class Lower
- iv. 1.50 – 2.39 ----- 3rd Class
- v. Pass Of what use is the moderate variable to this study. You have used year one students? How and which CGPA did you check? Fill this gap in this study

### Population and Sample

First year undergraduates of the Delta State University, Abraka, Delta State, Nigeria, were participants in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two faculties; which were Faculties of Arts and Science. Simple random sampling was used to select four departments from each faculty. Subsequently, simple random sampling method was used to select the students that participated in the study.

### Sample Size

Simple random sampling was used to select four departments from each faculty. This was done by writing the name of each department on pieces of paper, and placing them in a container. The papers were thoroughly mixed together and four departments were randomly picked out of

the container. Four departments from the Faculty of Arts - Music, English, Religious Studies and Fine Arts, four departments from the Faculty of Science – Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics and MicroBiology. The number of students to be used for this study was arrived at by using 21.5% according to the sizes of each of the departments in Faculties of Arts and Science. In all, a total of ninety-four (94) participants were selected from the Faculties of Arts and Science.

### **Research Instruments**

Two instruments were used in the study. They were

1. A lecture with a pre and posttest paper for evaluating competence in listening skills
2. Intervention materials for the treatment (Schema and Genre-based strategies)

### **Lecture, Pre and Posttest Materials**

The first instrument was an academic lecture which the students were exposed to. The lecture was on issues of infant mortality and focused on infant mortality rate in Nigeria, health inequalities and causes of infant mortality. After this lecture, a pre-test was given to the students. The pre-test was based on the content of the lecture. The listening skills that were assessed in the pre-test paper included listening for main idea, listening for details, inferential listening, critical listening and evaluative listening. The students' performances in these were graded.

### **Intervention Materials**

The second instrument was the intervention materials (Schema Treatment Programme (i), Genre Treatment Programme (ii), Schema/Genre Treatment Programme (iii)). The treatments consisted of a six-week programme commencing directly after the pre-test. The participants in the experimental group were divided into three sub-groups. Each of the sub-groups was trained in the use of one approach to listening, in comprehending academic lectures during the six-week programme. The programme consisted of a series of practical classes, in which the students were taught how to use each approach, that is, genre approach (GTP), schema approach (STP) and schema/genre approaches (S/GTP). The listening materials that were used for the treatments were authentic lectures selected from different disciplines and recorded in a tape player. The authentic lectures were played from the tape player to the students during the treatment programme.

### **Schema Treatment Programme**

This refers to a programme that consisted of twelve practical steps on what schema is, how to activate schema when listening to lectures and a set of questions which were related to the content of a lecture that was to be given to the students later on. These questions were introduced to activate relevant background knowledge in the students before they listened to the lecture. The students were asked to discuss these questions in small groups for about five minutes, after which a lecture was given to them. Following this lecture was a listening comprehension achievement test based on issues from the lecture.

### **Genre Treatment Programme**

This involved activities that were in seven practical steps designed to increase the students' awareness and enable them to identify features of text such as text-types, text-form and linguistic features that are found in the text. The text-type refers to the purpose of the speaker and may be categorized as; narrative, expository, descriptive and argumentative. These may be

found in letters, newspaper articles, textbooks, journals, novels, speeches or lectures. The text-form is the generic structures of the text which include the general organization of the introduction, body and conclusion of the text. The linguistic features include the vocabulary, tenses, modals, passive or active voices and types of clauses employed in the text. The students received the explanation of these textual features from the teacher, after which they were given a lecture to listen to. Following this lecture was a listening comprehension achievement test that focused on the text-type and the structural features in the listening passage.

### **Schema/Genre Treatment Programme**

This programme consisted of activities that lasted for six weeks. The first three weeks consisted of schema treatment programme and the last three weeks consisted of genre treatment programme. The students were taught using the schema treatment programme for the first three weeks and the genre treatment programme the last three weeks.

### **Control Group Instructional Guide**

This is a set of lectures on listening skills that uses the usual lecture method without the practical experience. These lectures were on the definition of listening, listening techniques, the stages involved in listening, listening requirements, importance of listening, types of listening and obstacles to effective listening. After these, a lecture was given to the students. Following this lecture was a listening comprehension achievement test based on issues related to the lecture.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Data for the study was obtained from students' responses to comprehension questions and their scores in both the pretest and posttest. The experimental and the control groups' performances in the pretest and posttest were compared to determine whether there was a significant improvement in their test scores due to the intervention programme. Also, comparisons were made at the levels of the faculties (Arts and Science) and CGPA. ANCOVA analysis was the statistical tool that was used to test the hypotheses at  $P > 0.05$  level of significance.

### **Results and Discussion**

This study investigated the influence of two strategies: schema and genre-based strategies on the listening comprehension of undergraduates.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant main effect of the treatment on the students' achievement in listening comprehension.

To test the hypothesis, an analysis of covariance was conducted. The result is presented in Table 1:

**Table 1: ANCOVA of Main Effect of the Treatment on students’ achievement in listening comprehension.**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3806.236	2	1903.118	18.780	0.000	0.292
Intercept	11884.362	1	11884.362	117.278	0.000	0.563
Pretest score	1625.598	1	1625.598	16.042	0.000	0.150
Groups	2435.840	1	2435.840	24.038	0.000	0.209
Error	9221.466	91	101.335			
Total	414610.000	94				
Corrected Total	13027.702	93				

\* **Dependent variable: Posttest score**

Table 1 reveals that there was a significant main effect of treatment on students’ achievement in listening comprehension [ $F_{(1, 91)} = 24.038$ ;  $\rho = 0.000$ ]. The null hypothesis is rejected. The table also reveals that a significant difference exists between the pretest and the posttest scores of the students. The pretest mean scores of the students of 15.0% influenced the post test scores.

In order to determine which group performed better, the mean values of the two groups were estimated and presented in Table 2:

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of the Control and Treatment Groups**

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Pretest grand mean	Posttest grand mean
Control	25	57.36	9.703	57.68	62.659
Treatment groups	69	68.26	11.238		
Total	94	65.36	11.836		

Table 2 shows that the treatment groups (Mean = 68.26; SD = 11.238) performed better than the control group (Mean =57.36; SD = 9.703). In comparing the mean scores for the control and the treatment groups to the pretest (57.68) and posttest (62.659) grand mean, it was observed that there was an improvement in achievement in listening comprehension of the treatment groups, while the control group did not record any improvement in their achievement in listening comprehension.

To determine which strategy was most effective in improving the listening comprehension of the students; the mean value of the post test score for each treatment group was computed as shown in Table 3:



**Table 3: Estimated Mean and Standard Deviation for Each Treatment Group.**

Treatment Group	N	Mean	Std. Error	Grand Mean	
				Pretest Score	Posttest Score
Combined group	23	71.534	2.061	57.07	68.275
Schema Group	22	67.141	2.114		
Genre Group	24	66.150	2.026		

Table 3 reveals that the mean score for the schema/genre group is 71.534, while that of the schema group is 67.141 and genre group is 66.150. The grand mean of the pretest score of the students across the three treatment groups is 57.07, while that of the posttest scores is 68.275. When the mean values were compared with the grand mean of the pretest scores, it was observed that the strategies were effective in improving the listening comprehension of students. When the mean values of the three treatment groups were compared, the result reveals that the strategy for the schema/genre group was most effective in improving the listening competence of students; next were the schema group and the genre group respectively.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant main effect of CGPA on students’ achievement in listening comprehension.

**Table 4: ANCOVA of main effect of CGPA on Students Achievement in Listening Comprehension**

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1797.964	5	359.593	2.818	.021	.138
Intercept	11081.768	1	11081.768	86.840	.000	.497
Pretest score	1330.472	1	1330.472	10.426	.002	.106
CGPA	427.568	4	106.892	.838	.505	.037
Error	11229.738	88	127.611			
Total	414610.000	94				
Corrected Total	13027.702	93				

After adjusting for the pretest score, Table 4 shows that there was no significant main effect of CGPA on the listening comprehension of students [ $F_{(4, 88)} = 0.838$ ;  $p = 0.505$ ; Partial Eta Squared = 0.037]. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. The result maintains that there was no significant main effect of CGPA on students’ achievement in Listening comprehension. Though there was no significant main effect, the partial eta squared of 0.037 shows that the CGPA had an influence of 3.7% on the students’ achievement in Listening comprehension.

The findings of this study reveal a significant main effect of the treatment on the students' achievement in listening comprehension. This result may be explained partly by the listening strategies administered on the students in the experimental groups which may have enabled the students to employ strategies to handle their previous listening difficulties and have resulted in improved achievement in listening comprehension. This result is in line with the findings of studies on the effect of listening strategies (Hamzah, Shamshiri, Noordin, 2009; Jia, 2010; Manzouri, 2015), which reported significant improvement in the listening competence of treatment groups.

In order to determine which of the listening strategies was most effective in improving students' listening competence, the findings reveal that the schema/genre group strategy was most effective, followed by the schema group and finally the genre group. The combination of two strategies may account for the high level of effectiveness the schema/genre group showed in the performance. This finding is consistent with Fola-Adebayo's (2014) study where she used three different reading strategies to find out their effect on three experimental groups of students: pre-question group, genre group, and pre-question/genre group. She reported that the pre-question/genre group was most effective in improving students' attitude towards reading; this was followed by the schema group, and the genre group.

The findings of this study indicate that there was no significant main effect of CGPA on students' achievement in listening comprehension. In other words, the academic performance of the students had no significant effect on their listening achievement. This implies that the academic performance of some of the respondents may be as a result of personal study. This view tallies with studies by Oluwatimilehin and Owoyele, (2012); Mashayekhi, Rafati, Mohamadisardoo, and Yahaghi (2014); Siah and Maiyo, (2015) who reported that there is a positive relationship between study habits and academic performance and that study habits have significant effect on students' academic performance. Students, who have missed classes for one reason or the other or are not effective listeners in the classroom, may try to make up for their deficiency by making personal efforts to study outside the classroom. This finding however, contradicts that of Dias, Montiel, and Seabra, (2015) who reported a significant relationship between academic performance and listening comprehension.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proffered:

- Teachers who teach listening comprehension should employ the schema and genre-based strategies in teaching listening to undergraduates, as this study revealed that activating background knowledge and employing genre strategies improve listening comprehension.
- Also, teachers should focus greater attention on the teaching methods they use and on fostering students' listening processes that enhance their listening comprehension, rather than merely testing their recall of listening content. This is because the methods that are used in teaching and the activities that go on during the listening event determine the students' listening comprehension achievement.
- Students should develop interest in employing listening strategies since these strategies empower learners with problem-solving abilities, so that they are better able to bring the strategies they employ, their listening problems and learning process into an effective chain to perform the listening task more successfully.

### Conclusion

This study investigated the influence of two strategies: schema and genre-based strategies on the listening comprehension of undergraduates. It revealed that the strategies facilitated listening comprehension. The combined group (schema and genre group) was the most effective in improving listening comprehension, followed by the schema and genre groups respectively. It also showed that CGPA did not have a significant effect on students' listening comprehension.

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