

Listening Skills and Academic Achievement of the Grade 9 Students of SIBULAO National High School: Basis for Instructional Enhancement

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ABSTRACT:

Listening is recognized as the most frequently used yet least taught language skill, and it plays a critical role in language learning and academic success. However, many students in rural and geographically isolated areas struggle with listening comprehension, which negatively affects their performance in English and other subjects. This study aimed to determine the level of listening skills and its relationship with the academic achievement in English of Grade 9 students at Sibulao National High School, providing empirical data to guide instructional improvements. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: What is the level of listening skills of the Grade 9 students? What is their academic performance in English? Is there a significant difference in listening skills when grouped according to gender and ethnicity? Is there a significant relationship between listening skills and academic achievement? Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study involved the total population of 41 Grade 9 students. Data were gathered using a validated researcher-made listening test and official class records. Statistical tools included weighted mean, standard deviation, t-test, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Results showed that the overall listening skill level was "Average," with females scoring significantly higher than males. Academic performance was "Below Average" for males and "Average" for females. A significant, strong positive relationship was found between listening skills and grades in English. The findings confirm that better listening comprehension leads to higher academic achievement. This study provides evidence-based recommendations for teachers and school administrators to design listening-focused activities and interventions, which can improve language instruction and learning outcomes in similar rural schools.

Keywords: Listening skills, Academic achievement, Instructional enhancement, Descriptive-correlational design, English language learning, Zamboanga City, Philippines

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Introduction

Listening is a skill that can be learned. Although listening is often ignored, it takes up the greatest amount of time among the four skills of communication: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening, like any other skill, has to be practiced because a person listens every day and assumes they know how to do it. Yet, one can learn to do it better and continue to improve listening abilities throughout life (Igoy & Saymo, 2004; Graham, 2021).

Listening is a process of receiving, interpreting, and reacting to messages received from the sender. Effective listening is an art of communication that is often taken for granted. Unfortunately, educational systems from kindergarten to college rarely give systematic attention to teaching effective listening strategies. Poor listening acts as a major barrier to learning and communication, often resulting in missed information and misunderstanding. It requires conscious effort to interpret sounds, grasp meaning, and respond appropriately (Richards, 2023).

Interpreting sound signals is a cognitive act that depends on the listener's knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and context, as well as their attitude toward the speaker. Active listening begins when the listener focuses attention and processes information cognitively. While hearing is automatic, listening is selective and requires effort (Vandergrift & Goh, 2021).

Research has demonstrated that adults spend 40–50% of their communication time listening (Gilman & Moody, 1984), but its importance in language learning was only fully recognized in recent decades (Oxford, 1993). Initially, listening was used only for repetition and pronunciation practice. However, studies by Asher, Krashen, and others established listening as the foundation of language acquisition and comprehension (Feyten, 1991). Recent studies further confirm that listening comprehension is the primary predictor of success in second language learning, as it provides the input necessary to develop other skills (Hamouda, 2020; Alharbi, 2022).

Listening is an invisible mental process. Listeners must discriminate sounds, understand vocabulary and grammar, interpret stress and tone, and retain information within a cultural and situational context (Wipf, 1984). Rost (2002) defines listening as a complex, active process involving receiving, constructing meaning, negotiating with the speaker, and creating understanding through involvement.

Despite its importance, most studies on listening skills have been conducted in urban schools or universities, with limited focus on rural and remote areas. In Sibulao National High School, located in a geographically isolated barangay, students have limited exposure to standard spoken English outside the classroom, and teachers often prioritize reading and writing over listening instruction. There is a lack of local data showing how listening skills relate to academic performance in this specific setting. This study addresses that gap: it provides baseline data on listening competence, identifies the relationship between listening and grades, and serves as a basis for developing localized teaching strategies that are currently missing in the school's curriculum.

The purpose of this study is to assess the listening proficiency of Grade 9 students and determine its influence on their achievement in English. Its findings will help teachers design better listening activities, guide administrators in planning staff development, and provide insights for curriculum improvement to ensure students develop all four language skills equally.

General Objective

This study aimed to determine and obtain empirical data on the listening skills and academic achievement in English of Grade 9 students at Sibulao National High School. It also intended to investigate whether listening skills influence the students' academic performance in the subject.

Specific Objectives

Specifically, this study aimed to:

1. Determine the level of listening skills among Grade 9 students of Sibulao National High School.

2. Identify the academic performance in English of Grade 9 students of Sibulao National High School.
3. Find out if there is a significant difference in the level of listening skills of the students when grouped according to gender and ethnicity.
4. Establish if there is a significant relationship between the students' level of listening skills and their academic performance in English.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design. The descriptive approach was used to describe the current status of listening skills and academic performance, while the correlational approach was used to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between these two variables. This design is appropriate because it allows the researcher to observe and describe phenomena as they naturally occur, and to analyze associations without manipulating variables (Creswell, 2014; Ary et al., 2019).

Descriptive research is concerned with determining present conditions or characteristics (Sevilla, 1993 as cited in Alicay, 2014). Correlational analysis helps determine if changes in one variable correspond to changes in another (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2002).

Research Locale

This study was conducted at Sibulao National High School (SNHS), located in Barangay Sibulao, under the Vitali District of Zamboanga City. The school was selected because it serves a rural, geographically isolated community where students have limited access to English media and learning resources, making it an ideal setting to study listening comprehension challenges.

Barangay Sibulao is situated approximately 80 kilometers east of the city proper. It is characterized by a mix of plains, hills, and mountains, and is prone to flooding and landslides during the rainy season. The area has limited technological infrastructure, with no internet cafes or media centers, which limits students' exposure to spoken English outside the classroom. Sibulao National High School was established in 1997 and currently serves 235 students from Grades 7 to 10, with 12 teaching staff members.

Population and Sampling Design

The respondents were all Grade 9 students enrolled during the School Year 2024–2025. Since the total population was only 41 students, total enumeration was used, ensuring that every student was included in the study to avoid sampling error and provide a complete picture of the group (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents by Profile

Profile	Classification	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	21	51.2%
	Female	20	48.8%
	Total	41	100%
Ethnicity	Zamboangueno	40	97.6%
	Visayan	1	2.4%
	Total	41	100%

Research Instrument

Two main instruments were used: a researcher-made Listening Comprehension Test and the students' official class records.

Listening Test: Composed of five activities covering different listening competencies: listening for understanding, listening for vocabulary, listening for details, listening to media, and listening for grammar. The test was validated by three experts in English language teaching and measurement, obtaining a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.92. A pilot test conducted with 15 students from another school yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, indicating good reliability.

Academic Records: Grades in English from the first and second grading periods were obtained from class advisers, ensuring accuracy and confidentiality.

Data Gathering Procedure

First, formal permission was secured from the Schools Division Superintendent and the School Principal. Informed consent was obtained from parents/guardians and assent from the students, explaining the purpose and voluntary nature of participation.

The listening test was administered in a quiet classroom setting. The researcher read instructions clearly and presented each activity: reading stories, playing audio clips, showing short videos, and describing images. After each activity, students answered the corresponding questions. All responses were checked, scored, and tabulated. Academic grades were collected and encoded. Data were analyzed using appropriate statistical tools.

Statistical Treatment of Data

The following statistical tools were used: Weighted Mean to determine the level of listening skills; Mean and Standard Deviation to describe academic performance; Independent t-test to compare listening skills between male and female students; and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to measure the relationship between listening skills and academic achievement. Note that Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) for ethnicity was not performed due to uneven distribution (only 1 Visayan student), which would produce unreliable results.

Results and Discussion

Level of Listening Skills

Table 2 Level of Listening Skills by Gender

Gender	Listening for Understanding	Listening for Vocabulary	Listening for Comprehension	Listening to Media	Listening for Grammar	Overall Score	Verbal Description
Male	9.42	6.33	7.95	6.00	7.71	37.42	Average
Female	11.50	6.10	9.10	7.45	9.50	43.65	Average

Scale: 45–50 = Very High; 35–44 = Average; 25–34 = Low; Below 25 = Very Low

Table 2 shows that both male and female students obtained an "Average" level of listening skills. However, females scored higher across most competencies, with an overall mean of 43.65 compared to 37.42 for males. This means

that while students have basic listening abilities, they still lack proficiency in understanding longer texts, identifying details, and retaining information.

This finding aligns with the study of Hamouda (2020), who noted that students in rural settings often perform at an average level due to limited exposure to spoken English. The higher scores among females support the findings of Alharbi

(2022), who observed that female learners tend to be more attentive and focused during listening tasks compared to males, who are more easily distracted.

Academic Performance in English

Table 3 Academic Performance in English

Gender	1st Grading	2nd Grading	Overall Mean	Verbal Description
Male	76.71	76.23	76.47	Below Average
Female	81.00	79.45	80.22	Average

DepEd Scale: 90–100 = Outstanding; 85–89 = Very Satisfactory; 80–84 = Satisfactory; 75–79 = Fairly Satisfactory; Below 75 = Did Not Meet Expectations

Table 3 reveals that males had a "Below Average" performance, while females achieved an "Average" rating. The slight decrease in grades during the second grading period may be attributed to more complex topics and reduced focus as the school year progresses.

This result is consistent with the study of Fuller (1989) and recent research by Adigwe (2023),

which found that female students generally outperform males in language subjects due to better study habits and motivation. The lower performance also reflects the general observation that students struggle when language skills are not fully developed.

Significant Difference in Listening Skills

Table 4 Difference in Listening Skills by Gender

Variable	Male Mean	Female Mean	t-value	p-value	Decision
Listening Skills	37.42	43.65	-2.220	0.032*	Significant

Significant at $p < 0.05$

The result shows a statistically significant difference, meaning females have better listening skills than males. This confirms that gender plays a role in how students process auditory information, as supported by the theory of Ellis (2000) and the findings of Graham (2021), who

explain that attention span and cognitive processing strategies differ between genders in language learning.

Relationship Between Listening Skills and Academic Achievement

Table 5 Correlation Between Listening Skills and Grades

Variable	r-value	Strength of Relationship	P-value	Decision
Listening Skills ↔ Academic Achievement	0.669	High Positive Correlation	0.000*	Significant

Significant at $p < 0.05$

The strong positive correlation means that as listening skills improve, grades in English also increase. This is the most important finding of the study, confirming that listening is a foundational skill for academic success. It supports the work of Vandergrift and Goh (2021), who state that listening comprehension is the main channel through which learners acquire language input and knowledge.

Compared to previous studies, this result is similar to the findings of Feyten (1991) and more recent research by Rahman (2022), who also found significant correlations between listening ability and grades. However, this study adds new evidence from a rural Philippine context, where language exposure is limited, showing that the relationship remains strong even under these conditions.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study concludes that:

1. The overall listening skill level of Grade 9 students is Average, indicating they possess basic but not fully developed comprehension abilities.
2. Academic performance in English is Below Average for males and Average for females, showing room for improvement.
3. There is a significant difference in listening skills between genders, with females performing better.
4. Listening skills have a strong, positive, and significant relationship with academic achievement, confirming that better listening comprehension leads to higher grades.

Limitations of the Study

The study was conducted in only one school, so results may not be generalized to other areas. Data were collected during one school year; long-term changes were not observed. Only listening skills were tested; other factors like reading habits and study environment were not measured.

Practical Implications

The findings are useful for: Teachers, as they show that listening instruction should be

prioritized and not neglected, and activities can be designed to improve focus, especially for male learners. For School Administrators, the results provide data to support the purchase of audio-visual materials and training for teachers in teaching listening. For Curriculum Planners, the study highlights the need to balance the four language skills in lesson plans. For Students, it helps them understand that improving listening will help them perform better in class.

Recommendations

Based on the results, the following are recommended:

1. For Teachers: Integrate structured listening activities in every lesson, use audio and video materials, and provide strategies for active listening. Give more guided practice to male students to improve their attention and comprehension.
2. For the School: Allocate budget for speakers, headphones, and English learning software. Conduct seminars for teachers on modern listening instruction techniques.
3. For Future Researchers: Conduct similar studies in other schools, include more variables like reading and writing skills, and use a larger sample size to confirm results.

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