

## Factor Analysis: The Challenges in English Listening Skill of Bangladeshi EFL Learners

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**Abstract:** *The principal purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the factors responsible for poor listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. The study was conducted from 01 March 2015 to 25 May 2017. Thirty-two variables which are mostly responsible for poor listening skill are selected from related literature and the researcher's own experience in teaching EFL learners. Factor analysis has been conducted to reduce the amount of the total variables, to identify the important variables and to arrange them into useful categories. SPSS 16 has been used to analyze the data collected from the primary sources through a complete set of Likert scaled questionnaire. Data for this research have been collected from 142 EFL teachers and 171 MA students studying English Language at 29 public and private universities located in different parts of Bangladesh*

**Keywords:** *Listening, EFL (English as a Foreign language), ELL (English Language Learning), factors, related barriers*

### Introduction

This paper concentrates on analyzing and categorizing the factors responsible for poor listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. EFL students face a lot of difficulties while listening English audio material as little attention is paid to this skill from the primary to the tertiary levels of education in Bangladesh. The listening skill had been entirely ignored until the decade of the 1960s. In the early 70's, when the Audio lingual method was introduced to the world; listening skill was somewhat emphasized. But this method was not introduced to a developing country like Bangladesh because of the inadequacy of the equipment at all levels of education. But when the communicative approach was introduced in the mid 90s in Bangladesh, the listening skill received some attention. From the 1980s through 1990s, researchers highlighted the important role that listening skill plays in language acquisition. (Brown & Yule, 1983; Tanaka & Yamajaki, 1994; Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Fayten, 1991; Long, 1985). In ELT classrooms, listening skill was stressed more at that period. With the advancement of technology and the growing awareness, EFL learners started paying more attention to this skill. Comprehending English audio material was then recognized to be a complex and active skill involving many processes (Richards, 1983). In a word, listening comprehension becomes a key to achieve speaking proficiency. Teaching listening has, in fact, become a polestar of foreign language instruction (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Bernhardt & James, 1987; Brown, 1987; Byrnes, 1984; Dunkel, 1991; Morley, 1991; Richards, 1983; Rost, 1990; Ur, 1985). Chastain (1971) stated in this regard that "the goal of listening comprehension is to comprehend the language at normal speed in an automatic condition."

Other ELT theorists have pointed out the importance of listening skill too. For example, Hamouda (2013) said that "listening skill is very important in acquiring understandable input. Learning never occurs if there will no input. "Furthermore, Goss (1982) said that in listening comprehension listeners try to construct a meaning from the information they get from the source.

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This article tries to show the principal factors that act as the barriers to a competent listening skill using 32 variables. Among these 32 variables, only 9 variables are extracted. Among these 9 variables only 6 variables are categorized as the main factors for Bangladeshi EFL learners.

### **Rationale of the Study**

This paper intends to minimize the factors that act as barriers to English listening skill and tries to arrange them in new categories to provide ELT professionals some insights for a well-structured and refined curriculum for promoting successful and sustainable listening skill among Bangladeshi EFL learners. Bangladeshi learners, who are mostly from rural areas, have the very limited opportunities to build up their skills in listening and speaking due to diverse factors. And these factors are reduced and renamed in different categories to make it easier for ELT professionals to take corrective steps.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of the study are to

- I) minimize the important variables among 32 variables related to this literature,
- II) range them in new categories,
- III) analyze the selected factors under different categories, and
- IV) understand which are the most important factors

### **Significance of the Study**

Though a lot of studies have been conducted in this sector, this article tries to minimize the factors affecting English listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. This paper identifies various factors causing common errors related to the listening skills among the learners from the different public and private universities. These factors will lead the way for ELT practitioners to get revised list of factors responsible for the poor listening skill of EFL learners. By going through the findings of the article, ELT teachers can be more conscious about the factors causing problems for the weak learners in the EFL classroom. The findings prove that EFL learners have weakness in listening skill because of less intelligence, ability to distinguish between ideas, less knowledge in specific topics, poor memory, motivation, sense, attitude, level of interest, poor attention and concentration, weak linguistic competence, pronunciation, accent variation, voice, speed delivery, catching coherence, lack of directness and concreteness, little knowledge in cohesion, difficulty of contents, noise and distortion, position of relevant information, tendency of orality, difficulty in understanding pragmatic information, little usage of media, poor alertness, inability to pick up the discourse markers, information density, no knowledge of phonology, little knowledge in lexis, syntactical error, and difficulties in picking up syntactic features. And these factors are categorized in the six major variables like varieties of learners' barriers and environmental issues, the incomprehensibility of contents combined with learner's inefficiency, deficiency of equipment with an overload of information, learner's less knowledge in English grammar, learners' having a little orientation to English listening skill, length of contents, and learners' weak background. These six factors will be analyzed in the later part of the article. ELT practitioners need to get an overview of them to appreciate the current challenges of Bangladeshi EFL learners.

### **Literature Review**

Though Listening is one of the basic skills among the four skills of a language, it is often ignored in schools, colleges and even at the tertiary level education of Bangladesh. In some cases, not allocating any marks to listening skill implies how unemphasized it is in the context of Bangladesh. However, listening skill is equally important like reading, writing, and speaking skills

for EFL students. According to researchers and learners, “Listening is a complex and active mental process that involves perception, attention, cognition, and memory” (Hamouda; 2013).

A lot of factors responsible for the poor listening skill are mentioned in the present study. Among them the foremost factors are analyzed and categorized in the findings. Some factors that have been the focus of research include speech rate (Conrad 1989; Blau 1990; Griffiths 1992; Zhao 1997), lexis (Rost 1992), phonological features, and background knowledge (Long 1990; Chiang and Dunkel 1992). Other factors are related to the learners’ inability to cope up with different kinds of environmental issues.

Brown (1995) acknowledged the relevance of all these issues, and further argued that listeners’ difficulties are also related to the levels of cognitive demands made by the content of the texts. Buck (2001) identifies numerous difficulties which can be confronted in listening tasks such as unknown vocabularies, unfamiliar topics, fast speech rate, and unfamiliar accents. A considerable number of difficulties learners face in listening comprehension are discussed in literature. (Underwood 1989; Ur 1984)

Theoretical explanation of those factors can provide the trainers and professionals some understanding. But the real life problems learners face in the listening classes are equally, if not more, important to study. Vogely (1995: 41) states in this regard, “We still need research that documents empirically the relationship between what the theory says and what learners actually know and more importantly do”. To locate the sources of audio material, we need to consider the discourse itself in the context of the classroom.

According to Goh (1999), the most common problems faced by students in listening in the order of frequency are forgetting what is heard very quickly, not recognizing the words they know, having some understanding but not the intended message, neglecting subsequent parts of the meaning of something immediately heard, and being unable to form a mental representation of words heard. Apart from that, Goh also emphasizes the problem of concentrating and missing the beginning of the text. He also suggests that more investigations about learners’ attitudes to their listening problems and how they deal with these problems are urgent.

Underwood (1989) organizes the major problems as follows:

- lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak,
- not being able to get things repeated,
- the listeners’ limited vocabulary,
- failure to recognize the “signals,”
- problems of interpretation,
- inability to concentrate,
- established learning habits.

Sometimes it happens that learners know some words but the accent variation and phonological differences create obstacles for them to grasp the meaning of the audio materials. Yiching (2005), however, thinks that some barriers including belief barriers, material barriers, habitual barriers, information processing barriers, English proficiency barriers, strategic barriers and affective barriers cause problems in listening. He suggests that barrier analysis is important to facilitate the instructors and learners, recognize and tackle learning barriers, and proceed towards autonomy in listening strategies.

### **Limitations and Scopes of the Study**

This study has been conducted through a questionnaire to ELT teachers and students of

MA level in English at different public and private universities of Bangladesh. Basically 67% respondents are from Dhaka city which is a limitation of this study. So it cannot evaluate the listening competence of Bangladeshi EFL learners in general. It was a lengthy process because the respondents were from different cities. And the process of data collection through the questionnaire required approximately 2 years. Most of the variables used in the study were derived from reviewing the literature of different studies and from the teaching experience of the researcher. There might be more significant variables which were not covered in this research. Considering this perspective, a number of studies have been conducted in the context of rural areas of Bangladesh. And the sample size of the respondents could have been larger covering multiple locations of Bangladesh in order to have a comparatively accurate picture of the current condition of the listening skill of the current EFL learners.

### **Research Methodology**

This study has been conducted to analyze various factors that affect the listening skill of English language of Bangladeshi EFL learners. This is a quantitative research whose data have been collected through survey. This research is based on primary data. In order to collect the primary data, a structured questionnaire was designed on the basis of the study which has been attached to the appendix part of this study. The copies of the questionnaires were distributed to respondents physically.

**Participants:** The target populations of the study cover 142 EFL teachers and 171 students of MA in English from 29 public and private universities from 1<sup>st</sup> March 2015 to 25<sup>th</sup> May 2017. A sample of 171 (n=171) MA in English students have been selected purposefully from 29 private and public universities of different regions of Bangladesh. The sample size is 171 + 142 = 313 considering 99% incident rate and 95% completion rate. The simple random sampling technique has been selected for conducting this research.

**Instrument:** A structured questionnaire has been used to collect the opinion regarding the factors that affect the listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. The questionnaire consists of 5-point Likert scale (where 1 indicates strong disagreement and 5 indicates strong agreement) along with 32 multiple choice questions. The collected data have been analyzed using SPSS 16 through 32 variables. These variables are as follows:

- V1- Use of media,
- V2- Poor Intelligence,
- V3- Poor Ability in Distinguishing between Ideas,
- V4- Poor knowledge in Specific Topic,
- V5- Poor Memory,
- V6- Motivation and Sense,
- V7- Attitude,
- V8- Level of Interest,
- V9- Poor Attention and Concentration,
- V10- Poor Language Ability,
- V11- Pronunciation Accent Variation,
- V12- Speed Delivery,
- V13- Speaker Accent,
- V14 - Poor Sense of Coherence,
- V15- Lack of Directness and Concreteness,
- V16- Poor Knowledge in Cohesion,
- V17- Difficulty of Contents,
- V18- Noise and Distortion,
- V19- Position of Relevant Information,

- V20-Orality,
- V21-Not Understanding Pragmatic Info,
- V22- Little use of Media,
- V23-Poor Alertness,
- V24- Difficulty in registering Discourse Markers,
- V25-Information Density,
- V26- No Knowledge of Phonology,
- V27-Less knowledge in Lexis,
- V28-Syntactical Error,
- V29-Difficulties in registering Syntactic Features,
- V30-Information density,
- V31-length of the audio,
- V32- Difficulties in registering the pragmatic information

**Data Analysis:Total Variance Table Explained**

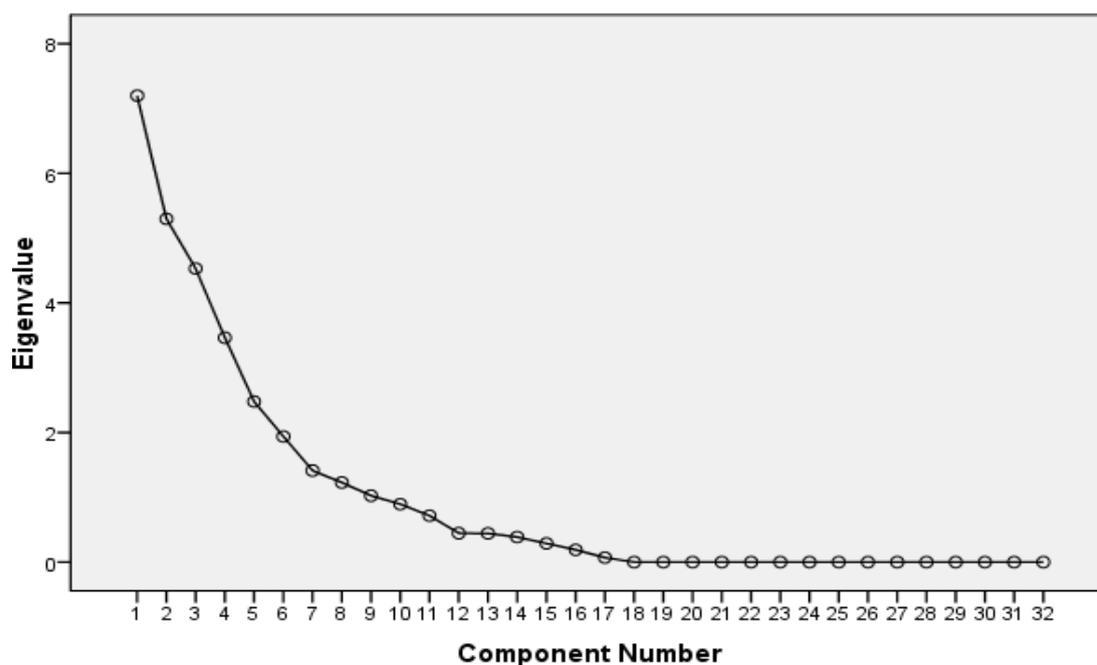
Component	Initial Eigen values			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	7.199	22.496	22.496	7.199	22.496	22.496
2	5.297	16.552	39.048	5.297	16.552	39.048
3	4.530	14.156	53.204	4.530	14.156	53.204
4	3.463	10.821	64.025	3.463	10.821	64.025
5	2.477	7.741	71.766	2.477	7.741	71.766
6	1.939	6.059	77.825	1.939	6.059	77.825
7	1.412	4.413	82.237			
8	1.228	3.838	86.076			
9	1.025	3.202	89.278			
10	.894	2.795	92.073			
11	.716	2.237	94.310			
12	.446	1.394	95.703			
13	.443	1.384	97.088			
14	.386	1.206	98.294			
15	.288	.900	99.193			
16	.189	.590	99.784			
17	.069	.216	100.000			
18	6.830E-16	2.134E-15	100.000			
19	4.911E-16	1.535E-15	100.000			
20	3.528E-16	1.103E-15	100.000			
21	2.498E-16	7.807E-16	100.000			

22	1.731E-16	5.409E-16	100.000		
23	7.757E-17	2.424E-16	100.000		
24	6.288E-17	1.965E-16	100.000		
25	-7.413E-17	-2.317E-16	100.000		
26	-1.427E-16	-4.460E-16	100.000		
27	-2.523E-16	-7.883E-16	100.000		
28	-3.020E-16	-9.437E-16	100.000		
29	-3.567E-16	-1.115E-15	100.000		
30	-5.721E-16	-1.788E-15	100.000		
31	-6.867E-16	-2.146E-15	100.000		
32	-1.511E-15	-4.721E-15	100.000		

**Figure 1: Total Variance Table**

The table above indicates that there are 9 factors which have more than 1 variant. But among these 9 factors, the first 6 factors are covered by 77.8% cumulative variance which indicates its dominance in this analysis. And the rest of the three factors carry very little cumulative variance. So it is observed that there are 6 factors which are prominent in the analysis.

**Scree Plot**



**Figure 02: Scree Plot**

Moreover, in the Scree plot, there are 6 albs which are clearly visible. We can conclude that these 6 factors are the main factors in the analysis. The component matrix of these six factors is below:

Component Matrix	Component					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Poor use of Media		-.336	.758		-.329	
Poor Intelligence	.666	.461	.355		-.324	
Poor Educational Background	.413				-.489	.603
Less Alertness	.358		.715	-.354		
No Knowledge of Phonology		.491		-.779		
Poor knowledge in Lexis	.354			-.725		
Error in Syntax	.332	.336	-.408	-.597		
Poor knowledge in Cohesion		.662	-.463			
Difficulties in Distinguishing between Ideas	.695				-.316	
Poor knowledge in Specific Topic	.756					
Poor Memory	.467	-.461				.465
Motivation and Sense	.586	-.559				
Attitude	.571	-.438				
Level of Interest	.809					
Poor Attention and Concentration	.662			.408		
Poor Language ability	.688	-.516				
Pronunciation, Accent, Variation of Voice	.825		.308			
Speed Delivery	.650		-.599			
Difficulty of Contents	.378	-.489		.360		
Noise and Distortion	.309	.453	-.406			
Hesitation and Pauses		.323	.340		.586	
Speaker Accent	.532				.464	
Position of Relevant Information	.303	.664				
Difficulties in registering the Discourse Markers		.386	-.721		.337	
Difficulties in Catching Coherence	.546	.527				-.306
Tendency of Orality		.626	.581			
Not Understanding Pragmatic Info		.800	.328			
Lack of Directness And Concreteness	.578	.467				
Difficulties in Catching Syntactic Features		.504		.692		.324
Lack of Redundancy	-.358		.444	.434	.554	
Information Density			.591		.521	
Length of Audio Material			.547			.603

**Figure 03: Component Matrix**

## Results

The extracted six factors can be interpreted in terms of the variables that contain high co-efficient. These six factors are given below with their components which are found from the rotated component matrix table.

**Factor 1** can be identified as **Varieties of Learners' Barriers and Environmental Issues** because this factor contains the highest coefficients for Less Intelligence (.666), Poor Ability in Distinction in Ideas (.695), Poor knowledge in Specific Topic (.756), Poor Memory (.467), Motivation and Sense (.586), Attitude (.571), Level of Interest (.809), Poor Attention and Concentration (.662), Less Language Ability (.688), Pronunciation, Accent Variation, Voice (.825), Speed Delivery (.650), Speaker Accent (.532), Dwindling in Catching Coherence (.546), Lack of Directness And Concreteness (.578).

**Factor 2** can be identified as **Incomprehensibility of contents combined with Learners' Inefficiency** which affects listening skill because it holds high coefficients for Less Knowledge in Cohesion (.662), Difficulty of Contents (-.489), Noise and Distortion (.453), Position of Relevant Information (.664), Tendency of Orality (.626), Not Understanding Pragmatic Info (.800)

**Factor 3** can be identified as **Deficiency in Equipment with Information Overload** because this holds high coefficients for Less use of Media (.758), Less Alertness (.715), Not Catching the Discourse Markers (-.721), Information Density (.591).

**Factor 4** can be identified as **Learner's Poor Knowledge in English Grammar** because of possessing negatively high coefficients in No Knowledge of Phonology (-.779), Less knowledge in Lexis (-.725), Syntactical Error (-.597), Not Catching Syntactic Features (.692).

**Factor 5** can be identified as **Learner's Poor Orientation to Listening** as this factor holds high coefficients like Hesitation and Pauses (.586), Lack of Redundancy (.554).

**Factor 6** can be identified as **Length of Contents and Learner's Weak Background** because this factor holds high coefficients like Poor Educational Background (.603), Length of Audio Material (.603).

### Analysis of Findings

It is obvious from the above analysis that there are some specific factors which cause most of the barriers in the listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. Further discussion is provided here on those extracted factors.

#### Varieties of Learner's Barriers and Environmental Issues

It has been found from the analysis that students' listening skill is poor because of having poor knowledge of the specific topic and difficulties in distinguishing between ideas. They possess less intelligence and poor memory to comprehend the meaning of the English conversation. Often they are not motivated and their attitude towards listening English is unhelpful. They have been found little interested, and pay little attention to it. Because of their weak language capabilities and poor knowledge of variations in accent, students cannot construct meaning after listening English. Sometimes speed delivery of language and the accent of the speaker cause problems. Students often demonstrate an inability in grasping the coherence of the English language while listening. Their lack of directness and concreteness often create a hindrance to their listening English.

#### Incomprehensibility of Contents Combined with Learners' Inefficiency

Students sometimes have difficulty in contents and they also have poor knowledge in cohesion, which is another important barrier to understanding English audio material. Occasionally, noise and distortion level in a listening environment create problems in listening to English audio material. If the position of the relevant information cannot be disordered while the learners are listening English audio materials, it creates barrier for them. Orality and poor understanding of the pragmatic information pose challenges too.

#### Deficiency of Equipment with Overload of Information

Lack of the use of media for listening English is one of the issues that creates difficulty in comprehension. Bangladesh is largely constituted of villages where advance learning facilities are

almost non-existent and teachers of rural area cannot use media for the lack of good equipment. Poor alertness and difficulty in registering discourse markers often prevent EFL learners from comprehending the meaning of the English audio material. Sometimes because of the density of information, it gets overwhelming for students while listening.

### **Learners' Poor Knowledge in English Grammar**

This is one of the common problems of Bangladeshi EFL learners. However, this factor contains some negative coefficients because of far more students' responses in comparison with those of the teachers. But teachers invariably admit that students have poor knowledge in phonology, lexis and syntax. Sometimes they cannot understand some syntactical features which ultimately cause problems in understanding English listening material.

### **Learners' Poor Orientation to Listening Skill**

Bangladeshi EFL learners have little exposure to listening material because of the lack of proper equipment. Sometimes the occasions of hesitation and pauses in the middle of audio material mislead them. Lack of redundancy creates another barrier in listening.

### **Length of Contents and Learners' Weak Background**

Most of the Bangladeshi EFL learners possess a poor educational background which causes another problem in listening skill. And sometimes the length of the audio material is so much that students are not able to follow the meaning of the listening material. If they are asked to provide answers during while-listening activities, they are not capable of doing that.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the above mentioned discussions, the recommendations are as follows:

- As the demand of English listening skill cannot be ignored in the context of Bangladesh, the EFL learners should be more committed and must give more attention to English listening skill.
- Students should be actively motivated, culturally exposed to comprehend English listening materials. They should acquire knowledge on varieties of accents in English to understand them better. They should be able to adjust to the speed of speech of recorded materials.
- During the while-listening activity, environmental issues like noise and distortion levels should be avoided in order to gain a better and conducive environment. Listening materials should be sequential to help learners to grasp the meaning. Tendency of orality of students should be avoided as it may create problems for other students.
- Students should provide complete concentration and should be more alert to comprehend the discourse markers and pragmatic information. ELT teachers should avoid the density of information for choosing test materials.
- Learners should increase their knowledge in phonetics and phonological features, vocabulary and syntax of the English language to understand audio materials in English. They should be exposed to the English audio-visual materials from their primary level by using TV or radio programs like English news, movies, songs, and the like.
- Teachers should be careful about the length of the audio materials. They cannot be too long because the students may lose attention during the while-listening activity.
- The Government can create more facilities of equipment for the educational institutions in the rural areas to enhance the listening skill of weak learners. The government can provide more training sessions to ELT teachers so that they are able to teach rural students more efficiently than now.
- National Curriculum and Textbook Board and University Grant Commission should consider about allocating marks for listening skill at all levels.

### Conclusion

From the analysis of the findings and recommendations, it can be concluded that among the 32 factors, nine factors are more prominent in defining the barriers in listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. Among nine factors only six are categorized as the most important factors. It is obvious from the study that along with the learners' incapability, environmental issues like the noise and distortion, deficiency in equipment, length of the audio material are also responsible for poor listening skill. On the other hand, some factors have some negative influences on listening skill such as learners' poor knowledge in grammar though it has been attempted to be addressed. Lastly, it can be said that to overcome the problems in listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners, these factors should be taken in consideration. Before implementing any listening project, teachers and trainers should consider the findings of this article. This research will contribute to ELT professionals' redesigning the curriculum and syllabus in a new way in order to have more efficiency in the field of listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners. By being attentive to the reduced number of six factors, they may be able to effectively manage the barriers to English listening skill. This article can also be extended in a wider context with a larger number of respondents and it can generate another article as a consequence for finding proper solutions to the barriers of Bangladeshi EFL learners.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire: Factors hinder the listening skill of English Language Learning in Bangladesh

ItemNo.	Statement	Strongly Agree5	Agree4	Not Sure3	Disagree2	Strongly Disagree1
1	Use of media- cinema, TV, radio are rarely available to the Bangladeshi EFL learners for improving their listening skill.					
2	Intelligence register the whole conversation is a factor contributing to the weakness in listening skill of Bangladeshi EFL learners.					
3	Educational background and type of school is the factor for having weakness in listening skill of English.					
4	Alertness is an important strategy to comprehend the meaning of English conversation.					
5	Poor knowledge in phonology causes distraction while listening English.					
6	Knowledge of lexis is a common factor contributing to weakness in listening skill.					
7	Knowledge of syntax is also a common factor in the listening of English conversation.					
8	Lack of Knowledge on cohesion make students fail to grasp the main idea of English conversation.					
9	Attempts to distinguish between main and supporting points are distracting.					
10	Lack of Knowledge about the specific topic or subject causes problem in comprehending the meaning of English conversation.					
11	Memory is significant factor that influences listening comprehension.					
12	Motivation and sense are necessary in order to master the listening skill of English Language.					
13	Attitude of the listeners to the speaker is another significant factor in listening comprehension.					
14	Level of interest is a factor influencing listening skill in English language.					
15	Attention and concentration vary from person to person influencing listening skill in English.					
16	Language ability of the speaker is the factor influencing the listening skill among the Bangladeshi EFL learners.					
17	Speaker's production: pronunciation, accent, variation, voice, etc help listening comprehension.					
18	Fast speech delivery influence listening comprehension.					
19	Difficulty of content and concepts from different cultures creates problems for Bangladeshi EFL learners while Listening English.					

20	Noise and distortion cause distraction and impacts English Listening comprehension negatively.					
21	Hesitations and pauses distracts learner while registering the meaning of listening conversation.					
22	Speaker accents have influences on the listening comprehension of English conversation.					
23	Position of relevant information causes difficulty in listening comprehension of English language.					
24	Incapability to understand the information of other culture is another hindrance for Bangladeshi EFL learners to listen English better.					
25	Difficulty in registering the discourse markers is the typical problem for Bangladeshi EFL learners.					
26	Difficulty in understanding English Conversation coherently contributes to poor listening skill.					
27	Orality causes distraction during listening comprehension of English.					
28	Difficulty in registering the pragmatic information in English Listening material causes another problem for Bangladeshi EFL learners.					
29	Lack of Directness and concreteness also hinders the better understanding of English audio materials.					
30	Difficulty in understanding Syntactic features is one of the common problems for Bangladeshi EFL learners.					
31	Lack of Redundancy to understand English audio material is an obstacle for Bangladeshi EFL learners to listen better.					
32	Sometimes Information density creates problems for Bangladeshi EFL learners during listening.					