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***Facilitating Academic Listening Comprehension in the Sri Lankan Context: From Theory to Practice.***

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper discusses the theoretical and pedagogical implications of emphasizing academic listening comprehension in the teaching and learning of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) in Sri Lanka. The spread of English as a Lingua franca has been accompanied by an increasing number of universities around the world offering academic studies in English medium. Along with this internationalization of university education, an ever-growing number of students are opting to study in English language as a medium of instruction at the university level. This is true to the Sri Lankan context as well. From among various instructional methods available to university lecturers, the central part of university instruction remains the lecture. Despite the important place of lectures in university studies, and the need for students to listen to extensive lectures, often little attention is given to the teaching, practicing and testing of listening comprehension. This practice is partly due to academic demands that primarily test students' reading and writing skills. This paper first shows the interconnection between listening comprehension and language learning, and argues why academic listening should be explicitly taught in EAP courses. It is followed by a discussion of the unique features of academic listening (in contrast to conversational listening) and approaches to language teaching and the role of listening comprehension. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ideal and feasible implications of incorporating an academic listening component to an EAP course in the Sri Lankan context.*

**Key Words: Academic Listening, EAP, University Students**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

With the global spread of English as an international language, more and more graduate and undergraduate students are opting to study in the English medium as a second/foreign language. In response to this demand, universities around the world are offering degree programs in the English language. This demand for English language instruction has also been accompanied by universities multiplying and diversifying the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs they offer. Although the purpose of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is to provide non-native speakers the academic language skills needed to be able to function and succeed in university, academic listening skills remain largely overshadowed by the other skills. As Richards (1983) and Benson (1989) point out, a major portion of university study still remains the lecture, and therefore academic listening skills are an essential communicative competence in a university environment. Moreover "academic listening" as opposed to "conversational listening" has its own distinctive features (Richards, 1983) and therefore need to be explicitly taught.

One of the reasons why academic listening has continued to remain relatively insignificant in EAP is due to the paucity of empirical research on academic listening. As Vandergrift (1999) points out, listening comprehension was identified as a distinctive and important skill in the language learning process only after significant debate about its validity. He points out that although listening was acknowledged as a language skill, it did not have a prominent place in the EAP curriculum. Research by Dunkel (1991) and Feyten (1991) were some of the first to support the need for incorporating listening. The publication of Flowerdew's (1994a) edited volume *Academic listening: Research perspectives* has also contributed immensely to the small body of literature on academic listening.

This paper first provides a glimpse of the teaching and learning of English in Sri Lanka. It is followed by a theoretical discussion. First the paper discusses the interconnection between listening comprehension and language learning; then it argues why academic listening should be *explicitly* taught in EAP courses. It will be followed by a discussion of the unique features of academic listening (in contrast to conversational listening). The paper concludes with a discussion of the practical implications of incorporating an academic listening component to an EAP course in the Sri Lankan context.

## 2. THE SRI LANKAN SITUATION

Free English education is not a new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. It has been free in all government schools since the 1939 Education Ordinance. However, the reality of English education is that it is still the language of a minority. Even after thirteen years of English instruction in primary and secondary school, many are still alienated from the language.

The most recent statistics of the national standardized examinations results show that over 60% of those who sit for General Certificate of Education, Ordinary Level (GCE O/L) and over 70% of those who sit for the General Certificate of Education, Advanced Level (GCE A/L) fail English even after studying it for eleven and thirteen years respectively (National Evaluation and Testing Services, 2005). This is not a new phenomenon, but it has been the trend for many years.

The students who go through the Sri Lankan school system can be divided into two groups where English is concerned: those who come from English speaking families and therefore learn English as a home language, and those who are first introduced to the language in school. Very often those in the latter group have little access to the English language outside school. Under these circumstances, those in the former group who speak English continue to speak Standard Sri Lankan English whereas many of those who are newly introduced to the language possess a passive knowledge of English (Canagarajah, 1993).

Although many students enter university with without sufficient proficiency to pursue a university degree in the English medium, as in the rest of the world, the growing need for English language skills is strongly felt in Sri Lanka. More and more students are opting to study in university in the English medium. In response to this, local universities are offering various EAP courses to suite the needs of their learners. These consist of non-credit intensive English language courses prior to commencing their programs as well as credit courses while in university. However, most of these EAP courses mainly focus on teaching reading, writing and speaking.

The lack of sufficient focus on the teaching of academic listening in EAP is mainly due to the over-emphasis on writing and reading, and the belief that they are the only skills students need for academic success. This is true in most academic contexts as students are only tested in reading and writing. Therefore, the underlying assumption is that academic listening is not important and teaching of listening is a waste of time. The lack of physical resources also contributes to the neglect of teaching academic listening. EAP instructors face huge challenges if they were to teach, practice and test listening. The challenges they face would range from the lack of teaching material, audio/video equipment, conducive classroom environments to listening comprehension not having a prominent place in the curriculum. Currently the treatment listening gets in many EAP courses is what Flowerdew and Miller (2005) call "the Cinderella of the four macro-skill" (xi).

### 3. WHY TEACH ACADEMIC LISTENING?

Listening is now recognized as a separate and important part of language learning and a skill in its own right (Flowerdew, 1994b; Vandergrift, 1999). It is anything but a passive activity (Vandergrift, 1999). Vandergrift (1999) defines listening comprehension as:

*...a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger sociocultural context of the utterance (p. 168)*

The coordination of all the above mentioned mental activities could be very demanding for a second language learner (Littlewood, 1981), and one cannot assume that the learners will acquire these skills on their own. Therefore second language learners deserve more assistance and explicit instruction on 'how to listen' in an academic context.

Dunkel (1991) highlights the critical role of language input in language learning. Moreover, as Long (1985) points out, many theories of second language acquisition, such as the monitor model (Krashen, 1977), the intake model (Chaudron, 1985), the interaction model (Hatch, 1983), the information processing model (McLaughlin, Rossman, & McLeod, 1983) etc., emphasize the crucial role listening plays in the development of a learner's second/foreign language, especially at the early stages of language learning. This finding further legitimizes the teaching of listening comprehension and recognizes the role played by listening in facilitating language learning.

In a discussion about the theoretical and pedagogical implications of developing listening fluency in a second language, Daniel, Pringle, and Wood (1986) highlight the benefits of delaying the oral practice and promoting listening at the early stages of language learning. Now, more and more second language teachers are placing less emphasis on the production of language and more on providing beginner level learners with a "silent" or "prespeaking" period in the language instruction. They argue that providing such "prespeaking" periods even in academic listening could prove to be beneficial for beginner level learners. Emphasizing reading, writing and speaking could prove to be daunting for some learners. According to Gary (1975), focusing more on listening comprehension at the early stages of the language learning process provides four different types of advantages: *cognitive, efficiency, utility and affective*.

The *cognitive advantage* of emphasizing on listening prior to speaking is that it is in line with the natural way of learning a language. Forcing learners to produce what is not in

their long term memory could lead to "cognitive overload" (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 169). This understanding is the reason why there has been a shift from the Audio-lingual approach which placed speaking before listening, assuming that learners will pick up listening, to a "strategy-based approach" which focuses more on teaching students how to listen (Mendelsohn, 1998). The *efficiency advantage* is that language learning can be more efficient if learners are not immediately required to produce all the language they have learnt. If the learners are not forced to produce the new language early on, they will be able to use their attentional resources to focus on meaning. Moreover, during the preliminary stages of learning, when the emphasis is on listening, the learners are exposed to good language structures as opposed to imperfect utterances by their classmates. This allows for more efficient use of class time especially at beginner level classes. The third advantage, the *utility advantage* is the usefulness of the receptive skills. It is estimated that adults spend 45% of their communication activities listening, 30% speaking and 16% reading and a mere 9% writing (Vandergrift, 1999; Rivers & Temperly, 1978). Even in an academic setting students mostly learn by listening to the teacher or their colleagues. (Flowerdew, 1994b; Richards, 1983; Vandergrift, 1999). While speakers can use their own pace and various paralinguistic strategies to communicate, listeners must "adjust to the speaker's tempo and active vocabulary" (Vandergrift, 1999, p. 169). This proves the necessity of learners processing good comprehension skills and the importance of teaching second language learners listening strategies. The final advantage of emphasizing listening prior to speaking is the *psychological advantage*. When the pressure to produce language is eliminated and there is less possibility of embarrassment about producing wrong and incorrect structures and sounds, learners can concentrate more on internalizing the language structures and gradually producing utterances when they are ready. This provides the learners a greater sense of confidence (Vandergrift, 1999).

#### **4. LECTURE COMPREHENSION PROCESS**

As mentioned above, listening is a distinct skill with distinctive features (Long, 1989). According to linguistic theory, comprehension process calls upon pragmatic, semantic, syntactic, lexical and phonological knowledge. These areas of knowledge interact facilitating each other (Flowerdew, 1994b). Although comprehension theorists distinguish between "top-down" and "bottom-up" process to listening, Richards (1990) asserts that fluent listening comprehension requires both "bottom-up" and "top-down" process of comprehension. Flowerdew (1994b) states that listening comprehension is conceptualized as a two-stage process which includes linguistic processing and application of that knowledge to background knowledge and context. Schemata which are an important aspect of top-down processing are another aspect that assists comprehension by organizing the text in the memory and assisting the generation of hypothesis.

#### 4.1 *Distinctive features of listening comprehension*

There are two distinctive characteristics of listening comprehension (in contrast to reading comprehension): real-time processing and phonological and lexico-grammatical features (Lund, 1991; Flowerdew, 1994b).

Firstly, listening exists in time rather than space, and therefore the listener must perceive the utterance as it is said. Unlike in reading, the listener does not have the freedom to revise, go over the text, backtrack, dwell on or skip certain sections of a text. Instead the listener has very little control over what is being said. Secondly, listeners may encounter difficulties posed by the sound system. As Flowerdew (1994b) points out:

Cognates in print may differ phonetically in ways which are hard to perceive aurally; the listeners must recognize unit boundaries phonologically which would be marked visually in a written text; she or he must also recognize irregular pausing, false starts, hesitations, stress and intonation patterns (p. 10).

This complex and demanding process involved in listening comprehension poses particular challenges to second language learners who have learned the language in the written form with little exposure to the spoken discourse. Such learners would have difficulty perceiving spoken language that is often rapidly delivered. (Brown, 1990). Moreover, as Biber (1988) points out, there are certain lexico-grammatical features in spoken texts which the listener needs to be aware of. For this listeners need to apply a special set of knowledge.

#### 4.2 *Distinctive features of lecture comprehension*

While listening comprehension has its distinctive features such as real-time processing and phonological and lexico-grammatical features, academic listening, or lecture comprehension, has its own distinctive features. Although different styles of delivering lectures have been identified (Dudley-Evans, 1994; Flowerdew, 1994b; Hansen & Jensen, 1994; Young; 1994), what is referred to as a lecture in this paper, is one that involves a lot of speaking on the part of the lecturer with little student participation. In order to understand the lecture comprehension process, it is important to comprehend the distinction between skills required for academic listening and conversation listening (Richards, 1983). Drawing on from Richards (1983), Flowerdew (1994b) identifies two differences between conversational and academic listening: differences in *degree* and *kind* (Flowerdew, 1994b).

The first difference of degree is in *the type of background knowledge required* in a lecture. A learner is expected to have some degree of background knowledge of the subject while in conversations the background knowledge required is quite general. The second is *the ability to distinguish between what is relevant and not relevant* to the main idea. The third is *the nature of turn taking conventions*. In an academic lecture one does not ask questions unless the lecturer allows the audience to do so. However, in conversational listening, responding and asking questions are essential. The fourth difference of degree between conversational and academic listening is the *amount of implied meaning* in an academic lecture as opposed to the illocutionary meaning in a conversation (Flowerdew, 1994).

The first difference of kind is *the ability to listen, concentrate and understand long stretches of speech* without being able to interrupt the speaker in the form of asking for repetition, negotiating meaning, using repair strategies etc. *Note-taking* is the second difference of kind (Flowerdew, 1994b). It plays an integral role in the lecture comprehension process (Chaudron, Loschky & Cook, 1994). Powers (1986) refers to note-taking as an important micro-skill in the lecture comprehension process. However, note-taking depends on the material (notes, handouts, etc.) the students are provided (Flowerdew, 1994b). Flowerdew and Miller (2005) observed that students relied on marking on the text rather than making notes. Incorporation of visual information into lecture notes is also prevalent among students (King, 1994). In their study of lecture-notes as a means of understanding the lecture comprehension process, Chaudron, Loschky and Cook (1994) identify a correlation between note-keeping and retrieving certain kinds of information, especially those needed to answer specific questions. However, they also indicate there is no direct parallel between the quality and quantity of the lecture notes and the level of comprehension. The third difference of kind is *the ability to integrate the information in the lecture to the information the learner is getting from other media* which might include text books, lecture notes, material displayed on the backboard, overhead projector, multimedia etc. (Flowerdew, 1994b).

In addition to the above mentioned differences, there is a difference in the type of vocabulary used in academic listening as opposed to conversational listening. In lectures, there is a higher usage of low frequency words one would not encounter in conversational listening.

## **5. APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE ROLE OF LISTENING**

The following section discusses three main approaches that have been used to teach listening comprehension: the communicative approach, strategy based approach and task-

based approach. These approaches are chosen to highlight the role of listening comprehension in different approaches to language teaching. The focus of each approach is different, and each approach cannot be used in a bona fide manner. However, they shed light on the role of listening comprehension in different approaches to language teaching.

### *5.1 The communicative approach*

The communicative approach to language teaching is based on the theory of language as communication. The aim of language teaching in this approach is to develop what Hymes (2003) calls "communicative competence". Hyme's theory of communicative competence is based on what a speaker needs to know in order to be "communicatively competent in a speech community". Canale and Swain (1980) take this further and look at four dimensions of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

Morrow's (1981) principles of communicative activities require that an activity is: "communicatively useful to the students", function "above the sentence level", have "real life aspects" to it, require responses and that errors are tolerated if it does not hamper the meaning. Therefore, real life listening needs to be integrated into this approach. The learners would be trained to "process spoken discourse for functional purposes" (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). An example of a lesson on listening comprehension taught through the communicative approach would consist of the getting students to listen to lectures (audio recorded or live). The lesson would consist of learners taking notes, answering comprehension questions and this could be followed by a discussion. Moreover, depending on the level of the learners, listening does not have to be taught in isolation, but can be integrated with the teaching of other skills. What is crucial is the "real life aspect" of the activity.

### *5.2 The strategy-based approach*

In Strategy-based approach (Mendelsohn, 1994) the curriculum evolves around teaching different strategies for listening comprehension. This approach teaches students "how to" listen as opposed to testing listening (Mendelsohn, 2006). The emphasis of this approach is on the learner finding the most effective strategies. Not only should the learners be equipped with strategies, they also have to be "weaned away from strategies that are unhelpful and/or even destructive" (Mendelsohn, 1994, p.37).

Mendelsohn's (2006) lists of principals that should underlie all listening comprehension courses states that: the activities should activate the learners' schemata, both authentic and non-authentic material be used, learners should listen to "spoken English" with natural delivery, material should be video and not audio, have a wide range of activities so the learners can use their listening strategies in different contexts, there should be plenty of teaching and practice as opposed to testing, enable the learners to play an active role in the activity instead of simply responding.

Mendelsohn (2006) also introduces "SIMT Units" to better comprehend the discourse. The "SIMT" include: setting, interpersonal relationship, mood and topic. This approach also emphasizes the learners predicting and using the SIMT to form hypothesis as early as possible irrespective of how much they have understood. These skills are especially important in academic listening.

### *5.3 Task-based approach*

According to Brown (1987) task-based approach to listening comprehension is aimed at making learners "active" listeners. Similar to the communicative approach, the students listen to authentic discourse and do something with the information that is presented to them such as completing activities related to that. In an EAP class, the learners would listen to a lecture and take notes. This would be followed by them transforming it into a graphic form such as a chart, diagram, notes etc. Different learners might have different ways of processing and recording information. How the learners record the information is not important, but what is important is the learners being able to report the information they have processed. There is emphasis on the processes the learners use to complete a task. "According to this approach, students need to use holistic inferential strategies" (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005. p.14).

The task-based approach can lend itself well to academic listening as real life academic listening involves listening to lectures which do not always involve the lecturers getting the students to complete comprehension question or doing any specific tasks. Instead the learners would listen to the lecture in order to prepare for an assignment or an exam they might have to do later on. For this the learners are required to record the information in any way that makes it easier for them to retrieve the information later on. What is important in the task-based approach as that the learners are able to do something, such as taking notes and recording is for future reference.

**6. DESIGN PHASE OF THE EAP LISTENING COMPONENT**

In Richards' (1983) three dimensions to teaching listening: approach, design and procedure, "design" consists of the assessment of learners' listening needs, isolation of micro-skills, diagnostic testing and formulation of instructional objectives. The first step in curriculum development is a needs analysis. The needs assessment does not have to be confined to their listening need but could be a communicative needs analysis (Munby, 1978) that gathers information about all the communicative needs of the learners.

The needs analysis should be followed by the isolation of micro-skills or specific skills necessary for effective listening. This micro-skills approach has had a huge impact in L2 curriculum development. The first taxonomy of micro-skills was proposed by Munby (1978). Richards (1983) takes this a step further by distinguishing between micro-skills needs for conversational listening and academic listening.

Micro-skills categories draw information from: comprehension theory, lecturers and students (Flowerdew, 1994b). Powers' (1986) survey of US university lectures identified nine micro-skills related to lecture comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994b). Benson's (1989) ethnographic study of an Arabic student in a US university revealed that the student was engaged in a variety of processes, rather than engaging in the new information that was presented to him. Once the micro-skills are isolated the learner should undergo a diagnostic test. This helps create individual learner profiles and formulate learning objectives (Richards, 1983).

**7. AN ACADEMIC LISTENING COMPONENT FOR THE SRI LANKAN CONTEXT: WHAT IS IDEAL**

Simply incorporating a listening component to an EAP course in Sri Lanka would be futile if the students continue to be tested on reading, writing and speaking. The first step in incorporating a listening component is incorporating the testing of listening into the curriculum. The test has a washback effect on the teaching and the learning of listening. Listening should not only be tested in the EAP course but also in other courses. This ensures that listening is not confined to the EAP class but goes beyond to other spheres of learning. The subject lecturers do not necessarily have to conduct listening tests, but they can allocate marks for class participation which demands active listening.

**7.1 *Design phase***

The foundation of any curriculum planning is a needs assessment. This can give a clearer idea about the listening skills the learners feel they need. Since EAP prepares learners to

perform well academically, even subject lecturers should be asked what kind of listening skills they expect their students to possess. Then, the micro-skills learners require should be isolated. Since most Sri Lankan undergraduates possess poor English skills, the micro-skills the learners require might not be confined to academic listening. Therefore depending on the learners' proficiency, they might first have to be taught some conversational micro-skills and then gradually move on to academic micro-skills.

To establish a profile of each learner they have to then undergo a diagnostic test. Considering the fact that Sri Lankan undergraduates' English language proficiency can vary from extremely poor language skills to native fluency, the students' results of the diagnostic test can be used to group students according to their abilities. If the students do not have the proficiency to take a credit EAP course they should be placed in non-credit EAP courses that can prepare them for the credit course. Depending on the level of the learners, behavioral objectives should be formulated for each group.

Although the learners listening skills are going to be tested at some point, the real aim of including a listening component is to teach the learners "how to" listen. In order to teach the learners how to listen, a strategy-based approach where the curriculum is built around teaching listening strategies should be adopted. First of all the students need to be made aware of the real-life value of learning how to listen well and that they are going to learn "how to" listen as opposed to being tested. Students should also be informed that their curriculum is built around learning strategies and that strategy use can facilitate the learning process.

### *7.2 Teaching micro and macro skills related to academic listening*

As discussed above, academic listening is mainly listening to academic lectures. Although lectures in Sri Lanka are very often a single person addressing a huge audience, the audience cannot merely sit back, listen and enjoy the monologue. While they listen, they have to take notes, look at visuals, recall background knowledge, recall readings, refer to handouts, understand the main and sub topics etc. Since second language learners face two challenges, understanding the language and linking that to background knowledge and context, the learners need to be trained "how to" do everything that accompanies listening to a lecture. The students should be given a lot of practice in different aspects of listening that prepare them to listen. The student should be engaged in tasks that consist of real-life communicative value.

In teaching "how to" listen, the students need to be introduced to both linguistic as well as paralinguistic features through task-based and communicative activities. Communicative,

strategy-based and task-based approaches emphasis the use of "authentic material" with real life value. In an academic listening class this would consist of academic lectures that are of longer duration and more complex linguistic, paralinguistic and extralinguistic features delivered at a natural speed. If the learners are not familiar with all the features of the authentic material presented to them they would be overwhelmed and discouraged. Therefore they need to be trained. As Mendelsohn (2006) reiterates, teachers first need to present to the learners non-authentic material to teach the numerous features of spoken language such as: stress, intonation, sound discrimination, chunking statements, extralinguistic and paralinguistic features, pragmatics, formulaic expressions etc. As the students gradually start to familiarize themselves and acquire various skills, they can be exposed to semi-authentic and then authentic material. They do not necessarily have to be taught academic skills if their proficiency is low, but they might have to start with conversational skills. In that case, the material they are presented should match the micro-skills they are taught.

### *7.3 Teaching material*

Once the learners are more familiar with the nature of academic lectures, they could start to listen to authentic lectures of longer duration. Listening does not have to take place in isolation, but should be integrated with other skills. The exercises that accompany this should be similar to what they would be expected to do at a lecture: making notes, referring to handouts, looking at visuals, identifying the main idea and the sub topic, completing assignments and projects etc.

Whether the lecturer is using contrived, semi-authentic or authentic material, whatever the stage the learners are in, there are certain aspects of listening comprehension that cannot be overlooked. As Mendelsohn (2006) states, there should be pre-listening and post-listening activities. The learners should be informed of what they are listening for and what they are expected to do. Material presented should be in spoken language in natural speed. The learners should listen to material in Sri Lankan English as that is the variety their lecturers speak as opposed to using material that accompany foreign published books. Although it is convenient for the lecturers to use foreign published material as they are easily available and is less work in terms of preparation, it might not be beneficial to the learners. The teacher has to be strategic and use their discretion when deciding the content. It should appeal to young adults and be socially and culturally appropriate, challenging and meaningful. The content does not have to be confined to Sri Lanka, but can be material that exposes the learners to the outside world. The learners should be encouraged to form a hypothesis using the information derived from SIMT.

The biggest challenge faced by Sri Lankan teachers is the lack of resources. The teachers and learners should be provided with textbooks for listening. These text books should consist of scripts of lectures, pre, while and post-listening activities, and handouts the teachers and the learners can use. They should consist of local material and should be accompanied by audio and video cassettes. Video has optimal value as the learners can see the speaker's expression, gestures, movement of the mouth etc. Once the lecturers have appropriate material to work on, they can either use it just as it is or exploit them in a way that is most beneficial to their learners. This does not force the teachers to rely heavily on foreign material that might pose greater challenges for the learners.

#### *7.4 Implications for teacher training and professional development*

While it is important to inform the learners about the nature of the listening component, it is also equally important to train or retrain local EAP instructors. Considering the fact that EAP was so far confined to the teaching and testing of other skills, instructors need to be made aware of the nature of the listening component and their role in it. As EAP is a process that prepares learners to perform academically well, the academic listening cannot be isolated from other academic courses the learners are taking. While the subject lecturers need to inform EAP lecturers what they expect from their learners, they also need to be aware of the linguistic needs of their second language learners. The subject lecturers might have to undergo a teaching methodology course that would train them to prepare their lectures and tasks to complement the language needs of their students. This in return would complement what the EAP instructors are doing. Assisting learners to improve their language skills does not have to be confined to the walls of the EAP class.

### **8. AN ACADEMIC LISTENING COMPONENT FOR SRI LANKA: A FIRST STEP**

In the previous section an ideal process of designing and implementing an academic listening component was described. In reality however, its implementation might not be feasible at present as it requires time and resources. Developing a fully fledged academic listening component in EAP would have to be done gradually over a period of time. This process would not only include curriculum change, but also changes in teacher training, assessment, material development, etc. This section proposes a more practical first step in the incorporation of an academic listening component to an existing EAP curriculum.

A first step to incorporating an academic listening component is to introduce teaching and testing of academic listening to existing EAP curricula. Merely introducing academic listening is not sufficient unless it is given equal weight as the other skills. The curriculum needs to explicitly acknowledge listening as a skill in its own right that deserves to be

taught. Along with the introduction and recognition of academic listening, the instructors need to be made aware of the importance of teaching listening. They need to have a clear understanding of what academic listening is, and how it can be taught. If the instructors do not have the skills to teach and test academic listening, they need to be provided professional development.

Although it would be ideal to have students' listening skills tested in other courses, it would take a while to introduce it to other subject areas. Besides, subject lecturers might not have training in teaching, not possess a good command of the language, be set in their teaching practices etc. Therefore, the teaching and testing of listening should at the beginning be confined to the EAP class. The introduction of listening alone is not sufficient if the instructors are not made aware of the significance of the explicit instruction of listening

The course should start with a needs analysis and a diagnostic test. The students can then be placed in different levels depending on their proficiency. This allows the teachers to design lessons to complement the learners' proficiency level. Although the availability of audio and video facilities and text books on listening could make the teaching of the listening optimal, the absence of it is not an excuse not to teach it. To overcome this barrier, first the instructors need to recognize their role in providing learners input. For all EAP learners, the instructor is the main source of academic input. Therefore, they play a very crucial role in facilitating the listening process. This is something the instructors need to be conscious of. The instructors need to see themselves as a resource that the students rely on. The instructors can present to the students lectures on various topics they are comfortable with, and give the students questions based on that. They can also work collaboratively with their colleagues and get other instructors to present lectures. This could break the monotony of one resource person providing all the input. There could be lectures on various topics and various lengths. If it is possible, the instructors can get subject lecturers to present short lectures or lead discussion that would be followed by comprehension and discussion questions. Watching a live presentation might prove to be even more effective than having technology do the job. Subsequently, the EAP instructors could get together and prepare a pool of material that could consist of non-authentic, semi-authentic and authentic material that teaches different aspects of listening comprehension. The instructors could also get input from subject lecturers in the preparation of material.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

This paper highlighted a major drawback in many existing EAP courses: the absence of a concrete academic listening component. The first part of the paper provided the

theoretical underpinning of teaching academic listening, and made a case for the explicit instruction of academic listening. It was followed by a discussion of the distinctive features of academic listening and the role of academic listening in three major approaches to language teaching. The paper proposed an ideal and an initial step in incorporating a listening component to an existing EAP curriculum. However, teaching in an academic setting does not take place in isolation, but is very much shaped by curriculum demands, assessment practices and the availability of resources. This does not mean that academic listening should not have an equal place in the EAP curriculum. Therefore the paper concluded by offering a feasible alternative to making the teaching of academic listening explicit.

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