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## LISTENING COMPREHENSION A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS OF DELHI (CAPITAL CITY) AND SONIPAT (A HARYANA CITY).

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he word is half his that speaks and half that hears it.

--Michael de Montaigne

*Listening to a Second Language holds the foreground in communication as to inch forward the interlocutor needs to perceive, interpret and act searching the ambit of the context/situation. The activity involves ears and mind. The process is complex and needs to be rapid too, to make the interaction lucid. A communicative spell in the concurrent times makes listening an indispensable skill for a Second Language learner. To become an expert from a novice, the learner needs to train his ears, to grasp the standard pronunciation (Received Pronunciation), stress, intonation and of course immense vocabulary. A Second Language learner needs to be a good listener for not only the professional, but the social profile too demands a knack in handling all sorts of real life situations. This paper aims to investigate 'Listening Comprehension' with regard to the Government School at a Senior Secondary Level. A case study has been commissioned in the realm of locales like the capital city, Delhi; to corroborate, a comparison has been drawn to Sonipat (a District in*

*Haryana).*

**KEYWORDS:** ESL, Receptive Skills, Listening, L<sub>1</sub>, L<sub>2</sub>, Delhi and Sonipat.

### INTRODUCTION:

A Second Language learner learns the language with a goal to manage day to day communication. The learner aspires to use the second language in real life situations. To arrive at this aim the learner should be adroit in both, the Receptive as well the Productive Skills. By and large few SLA learners use the language for day to day communication because they do not achieve proficiency in all the four skills.

Hence, this paper investigates the Listening Skill of ESL learners, evaluating Listening Comprehension supplying four different situations. These Listening Tasks and their evaluation scales are taken from CBSE ASL for class XI, which has been created in collaboration of CBSE & Trinity College London. Along with this feedback is taken from the students regarding the type of homework assignments they get and their choice regarding the language use (L<sub>1</sub>/L<sub>2</sub>) in the ESL classroom. Keeping in view the present scope of the study, a survey of the Government Schools of Delhi and Sonipat (Haryana) has been made. The target population has been convened from students of the Senior Secondary level of these locales.



## I Listening Skill

Wolvin and Coakley define Listening as “the process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural stimuli” (1985:74). Morley says “We can expect to listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read and five times more than we write” (1991:82). Listening is the most desired and common activity in learning a language so in receptive skills, first comes *Listening*. It is central to all learning. A child listens to the sounds prior to his/her encounter to the graphics of the language. Even if we talk about the second language acquisition, listening comes first and Reading thereafter. Listening competence helps to construct a sound foundation for Speaking. This is a fact, regarding the language learning process that you cannot learn to speak unless you listen. Listening provides an exact knowledge of pronunciation, intonation and stress also. There is no other way to learn the trio.

### i) Goal of Listening

Listening involves interactive reception and this leads to active and self learning. One needs to listen to; for maintaining good relations, for entertainment, for gathering information and for the sake of knowledge. The whole gamut of listening activity can be divided in two on the basis of *goal of listening*:

#### a) Comprehension

At an initial stage in the listening process, the goal is comprehension. In general our approach is to listen and gather meaning to interact.

#### b) Second Language Acquisition

Second language learners need to learn all LSRW. In 1990 Schmidt drew attention to the role of consciousness in language learning, the role of noticing to acquire features of the language, to incorporate all this to produce language.

Listening is a positive activity. Tagging *Listening* as a *Receptive* skill doesn't mean that learner can perform the activity without putting any effort. If it happens so speech will reduce to just a stream of noise created by the producer. Listening is a creative process; it is an analysis of streams of sounds which involves perception analysis and synthesis. The listener remains busy in a continuous intellectual process where attention and memory, these two mental processes are much involved.

### ii) Types of Listening

Depending upon the *purpose and objective* it is divided into four types:

**a) Extensive Listening-** The purpose of this type of listening is to promote overall comprehension of the presented input. It introduces vast vocabulary and structures, but the listener needs not follow every word. S/he is to reach at a global understanding that is comprehending text as a whole. The language lab proves useful in providing diverse input required at varied stages.

**b) Intensive Listening-** In this type of listening accurate perception is crucial as listening is primarily for linguistic items. It requires attention to specific items of language. Grammatical and lexical units, both are to be understood.

**c) Selective Listening-** The listener listens for selected part of the input to draw information using the cues surrounding the sought information.

**d) Interactive Listening-** In this type of listening learner is either in pair or groups. The learner undergoes the real test as he is to respond to the speaker face to face. This is the hardest type for the listener as he is to bring in use his other linguistic skill simultaneously.

Depending upon the *type of situation* while *receiving input* Listening is divided into two types. Anderson and Lynch in 1988 distinguished between the two: (qtd in Nunan, 2001:23)

**a) Reciprocal or Interactive Listening-** A situation where the learner interacts responds to the input and listens and speaks alternatively. It includes situations like interviews, telephonic conversation, etc. Here the listener can avail the opportunity to ask for multiple inputs or inputs at a desired speed.

**b) Non reciprocal or Non-Interactive Listening-** The listener is there to listen only not to respond. It includes radio

chat show, lectures, etc. There is no chance of demand of repetition or of a slower speech.

### iii) Sub skills for learning listening

This art of listening can be perfected when the listener is well trained in a few sub skills like:

- Identifying the topic/talk
- Guessing the course of the talk
- Listening for general understanding
- Scanning for specific purposes
- Listening for detailed information
- The ability to see beyond literal meaning

### iv) Activating the Process of Listening

*Teaching of Listening skill* in SLA is a challenge and needs continuous practice and reinforcement. During the initial school years, students are given lessons in listening English. Most of the time a teacher is there to give them listening practice. By training their ears to listen to English, learners are made to recognise the sounds of English. This is the first step towards learning listening. After sounds, there are words and then sentences and then related sentences, essays and stories etc.

In the context of foreign/second language listening, it is a bit unfair to ask a student to listen and answer abruptly so an English teacher divides the listening activity in the following steps:

**a) Pre Listening-** (prior knowledge of listening activity) task assists; this not only facilitates comprehension, but also generates interest and builds confidence. Discussion and pre knowledge testing is much helpful, to arouse students' curiosity. Stauffer gives the term 'Directed Listening Thinking Activity'. He calls it a way to involve students in predicting. The teacher may ask what does the title of the topic indicate about the Listening task. The teacher may introduce the listeners to the key words and their meaning too, doing this will make them more comfortable and they will not waste time in guessing the meaning of the words. The students should be given a reason to listen to the task, for they need to know why they are listening. The students' interest can be kindled if the topic interests them.

**b) While Listening-** The teacher may instruct in between the listening task to listen for the gist and main points. In this way teaches the learners a strategy which can be used to guide the learner for an independent listening activity. The teacher also guides to put questions while listening and encourages to look for the answers. This questioning and generating answers help him/her to concentrate and activity becomes rewarding. The teacher should also direct the students to create mental pictures while listening. The teacher should give expressions to his/her voice so that s/he may help the students to teach how to use intonation to make the language more expressive. The teacher should also direct listeners to use context clues to know/guess the meaning of unfamiliar words.

**c) Post listening-** The students are informed that a question answer session will follow the listening activity, but they should be discouraged to get occupied with much writing activity. The quizzical section as a follow up activity will be the litmus test to find out whether the listening task was successful or not.

### v) Listening Activities

As described by Littlewood can be divided into major three types emphasizing listening for functional information:

- Performing a physical task (e.g. Selecting picture)
- Transferring information (e.g. Into tabular form)
- Reformulating and evaluating information (2002:68).

### vi) Sources of Listening Activities

Talking with friends (Informal English language conversations)

Before commencing the class, make one student (chosen randomly) to read an article from newspaper and

frame 4-5 activities (for group work) based on the content presented.

- Listening to radio
- Listening to announcements
- Watching chat shows
- Watching plays
- Listening to songs/hymns
- Listening to speeches/debates
- Audio books
- Sports commentaries
- Listening to English documentaries

### vii) Testing

An important task for the teacher is to test Listening. Testing listening incorporates simple aural tests for beginners involving simple commands, word or sentence dictation, etc. and advanced tests to evaluate proficiency in listening. The listening comprehension tests focus the use of language for broader communication. The listening tasks accompany appropriate response technique which may include Multiple Choice Appropriate Response, True/False, Picking the correct statement, fill ups.

## II Case Study

The sample of this research study has been taken from the students of Government Schools of two cities (of North India) at the Senior Secondary Level. The sphere of investigation is corresponding to the grade chosen. At this level of learning an ESL learner is expected to be able to comprehend and respond an advanced task in *Listening Comprehension*.

'Listening Comprehension is the process of relating language to concepts in one's memory and to references in the real world. Comprehension is the sense of understanding what the language used refers to in one's experience or in the outside world...' (Rost, M, 2002:59) Being an advance stage of listening the process involves much more than just aural inputs. Buck in '*Assessing Listening*' describes this as 'assessing the situation, taking stock of conditions surrounding a language task by assessing one's own knowledge, one's available internal and external resources and the constraints of the situation before engaging in the task.' (2001:104)

In the present study, the subjects of study are given four varied tasks of listening comprehension catering to wide ranging situations. The objectives of the case study are placed below:

- To investigate and compare the Listening Comprehension of the Government School students of the two locales viz. Delhi and Sonipat.
- To know the areas or sub skills required to work upon.
- To know the amount and type of listening exposure given in the ESL classroom.
- To suggest remedial measures.

The steps given below have been taken to carry out the study:

### SAMPLE SELECTION

To make the study practical and to minimize the scope of errors, stratified sampling has been used. The sample consists of group of boys' and girls' schools separately and some groups of coeducational schools.

### SAMPLE FOR STUDY

The sample of the study is gathered from 30 schools from all the 13 zones of Delhi and 14 schools across the 07 blocks of Sonipat District. The schools are stratified into boys' only, girls' only and the coeducational schools. One boy's, one girl's and one coeducational school (pertaining to the possibility of students' working together) are taken from each district/ block of the two locales. The students were selected from all the streams available in the school. Thus the sample culminates to a total of 737 students from Delhi Government Senior Secondary Schools and 386 students from Government Senior Secondary Schools of Sonipat District making a

total of 1123 students.

## DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

### a) Task used

The tasks to evaluate listening comprehension have been taken from 'CBSE Assessment of Speaking and Listening Skills (ASL)'. This is a joint effort of CBSE and Trinity College London. The Listening Comprehension Test comprises of four different tasks following exercises like choosing statements corresponding to the speakers while eliminating the extra ones, picking out the appropriate response from the multiple responses, marking the correct and incorrect options and completing the sentences respectively. The test carries 20 marks and is evaluated with the help of standard answer key that is provided to the test taker along with the test. Together with this test the students' feedback was taken about their choice for the use of language by the English teacher while teaching and also the type of homework they are assigned in an ESL classroom.

### b) Administering the Task

Talking about their ESL classroom activities the students were made to sit comfortably and the classroom environment was made congenial. The students were asked about the kind of listening activities they perform in their ESL classroom. They were encouraged to talk about their learning sessions. The students were intimated that they would be given a Listening Comprehension task. There were four tasks in all. The students were instructed to listen to the tasks attentively and carefully thereafter to look at the question and mark the answers carefully. Before playing each task they were given 30 seconds to read the question. Each task was played twice and thereafter 10 seconds were given to revise the answers of that task. Time allotted for the whole test was 45 minutes. Each student was handed over the Listening task sheet. The task was played with the help of a Philips CD player.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

From the results of the test and the feedback of the students both quantitative and qualitative analyses have been carried out respectively. The feedback regarding type of homework assignments and medium of teaching spotted out the frequency and type of listening activities they are exposed to.

For Quantitative Analysis the data of the listening comprehension test has been computed individually as well as comparatively. The evaluation has been done with the help of the *standard key* (accompanying the tester copy). For the purpose of grading a seven-point scale has been devised:

S. No.	Grade	Marks awarded
1	No Response	NR
2	Zero	All Wrong
3	Below. Average	1- 4 Right Responses
4	Average	5-8 Right Responses
5	Good	9-12 Right Responses
6	Very Good	13-16 Right Responses
7	Excellent	17-20 Right Responses

Table no. 1

For **Qualitative Analysis** an overview regarding the type of homework assignments the students get and their choice regarding the use of in L1/L2 in the ESL classroom was taken. This feedback further supported to calculate whether justice to the teaching of this receptive skill is done or not. Do the students get adequate opportunities to listen and then practice it independently?

### III Results

#### (a) Delhi Government Senior Secondary Schools

The findings of the case study reflect that the listening abilities of Government school students at the Senior Secondary Level in Delhi are not up to the mark. **Out of 737** students only **1% students** performed to achieve **Excellent** grade. These students were able to comprehend the listening tasks rightly. Out of the total 737 only **8%** could bag **Very Good grade**. Another stratum of 25% falls into the category of Good performance. Average grade shares the largest percentage that is 54%. There were 11% students who scored **Below Average**. **1% students** scored **zero**, they could not comprehend to respond to the demands of the tasks. The pie diagram presents the result:

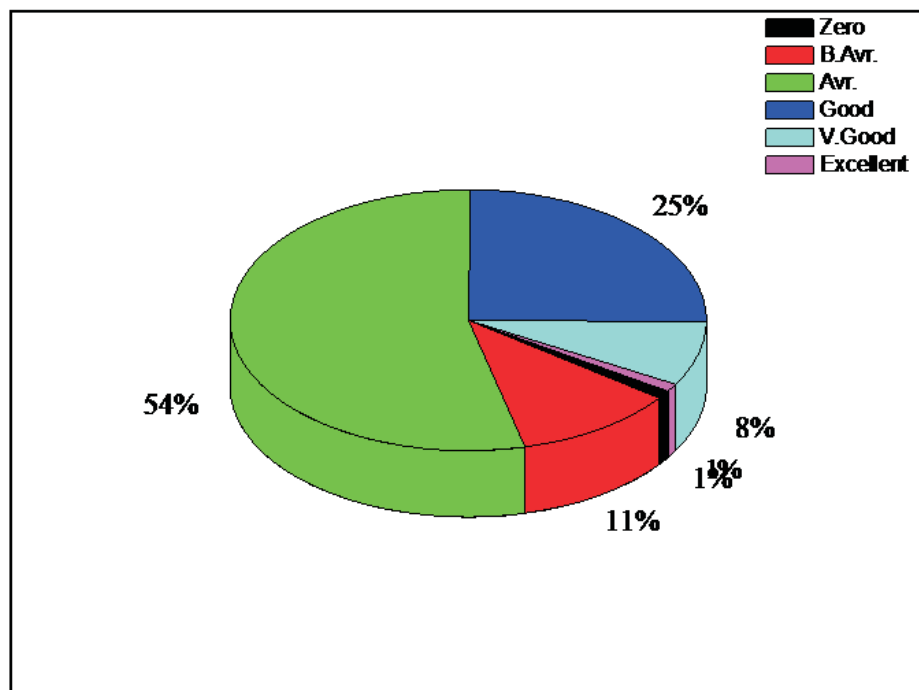


Figure- 1

#### (b) Sonipat Government Senior Secondary Schools

This district of Haryana reveals the poor listening abilities of the students. The data were amassed from a total of **386 students**. A large number that is **87 students** which to be precise constitute 23% scored **Below Average**, although they did fill the sheets but with incongruent and inconsistent response. Adding to this dismal picture, none of the student fall in Excellent category and a mere 3% .i.e. **Only 12 students fall into the category of Very Good**. Out of 386 only 66 students .i.e. 17% scored Good grade. The graphic presentation of the result is computed below:



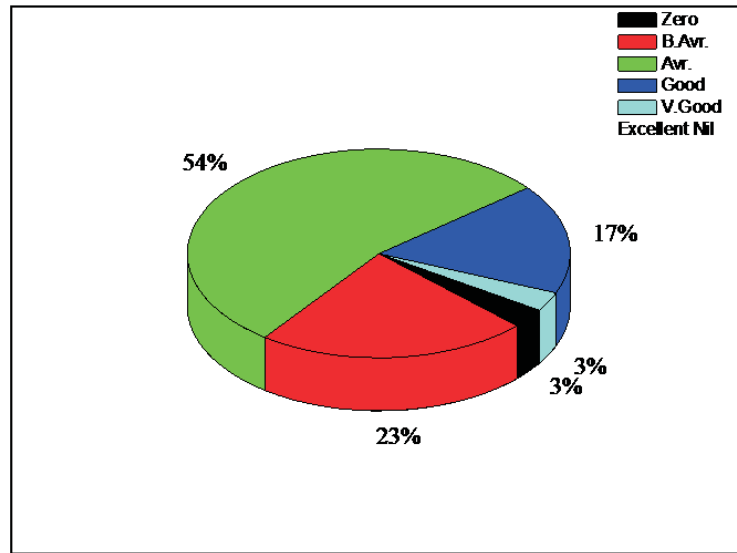


Figure-2

(C) Comparative Statement of Delhi & Sonipat Government Schools

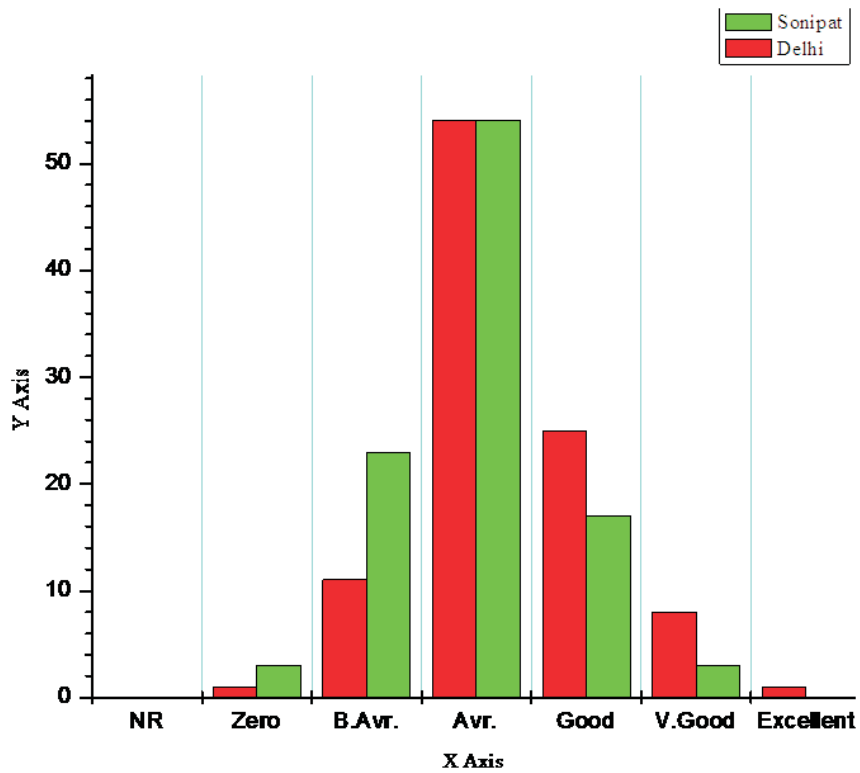


Figure- 3

To bring to the forefront the similarity in both Delhi and Sonipat, the survey made it evident that students of both locales need much more to train their ears and minds to excel in listening skills. The students asked the tester if they could get to know the Hindi(Mother Tongue) of the tasks given.

Taking an overview of the differences, the findings show to some extent a disparity between the listening abilities of the students of both locales although Delhi Government School students have performed much better. In the case of Sonipat, it is appalling that **none** of the students fall into **Excellent** grade, in Delhi too only 8 students out of 737 students **achieved Excellent**. Mere 59 students out of 737 bagged **Very Good** grade while this number decimates to just 12 out of 386 in the case of Sonipat schools. In Delhi schools just **one fourth** of the students achieved **Good** grade again in this grade too number of Sonipat students reduces to 17% only. A noticeable gap is perceived when scores of **Below Average** grade are viewed. 11% of Delhi students got this grade, whereas in Sonipat, this increases to 23%. Again in case of the zero grade too Sonipat leads with 3%, while Delhi has 1% of such students.

**QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

**Preferred Language in ESL classroom**

The students’ response reveals 45% of Delhi and 41% of Sonipat students like the teaching of L2 to be **bilingual**. Only 8% of Delhi and 15% of Sonipat students want only mother tongue (Hindi) to be used for teaching in an ESL classroom. 38% of Delhi and 30% of Sonipat students want a word for word translation. This clearly drives home the fact that while learning English the students find a prop in their mother tongue. Mere 5% of Delhi and 13% of Sonipat students wish only and only English language to prevail in an ESL classroom. This raises a grave concern regarding the training of listening skill that remains absent from an ESL classroom. A graphic representation is placed below:

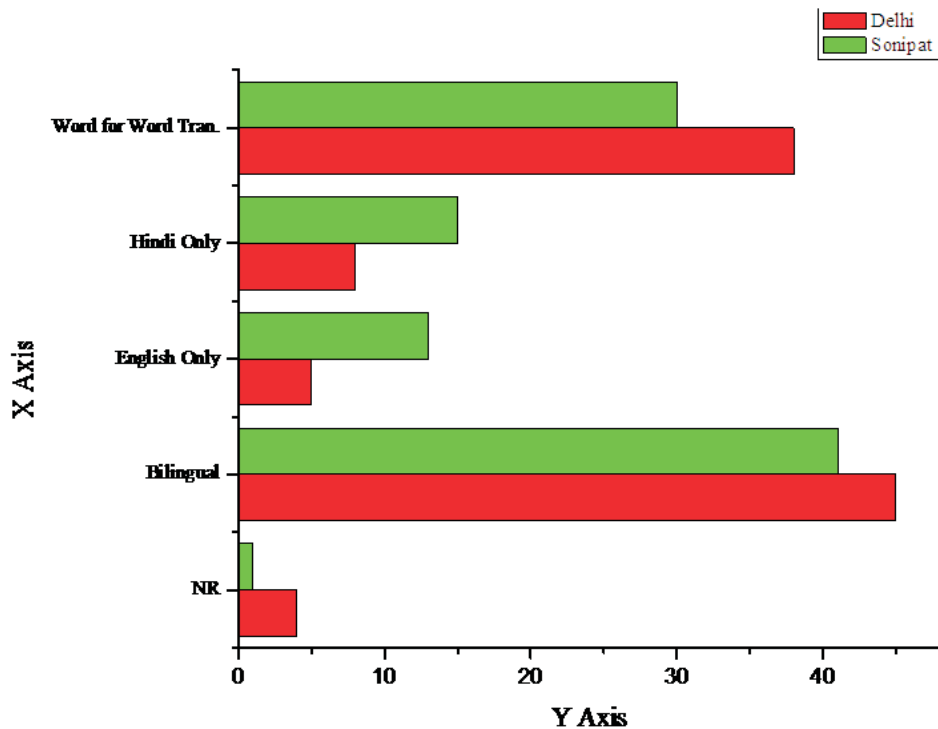


Figure -4

**TYPE OF HOME WORK ASSIGNED**

The response to this clearly indicates a total negation of the practice of listening skills. This skill finds no place in homework assignments. In both the locales, no amount of such homework is given which demands the

students to expose themselves to listening to the language. The graphics shown below state the fact:

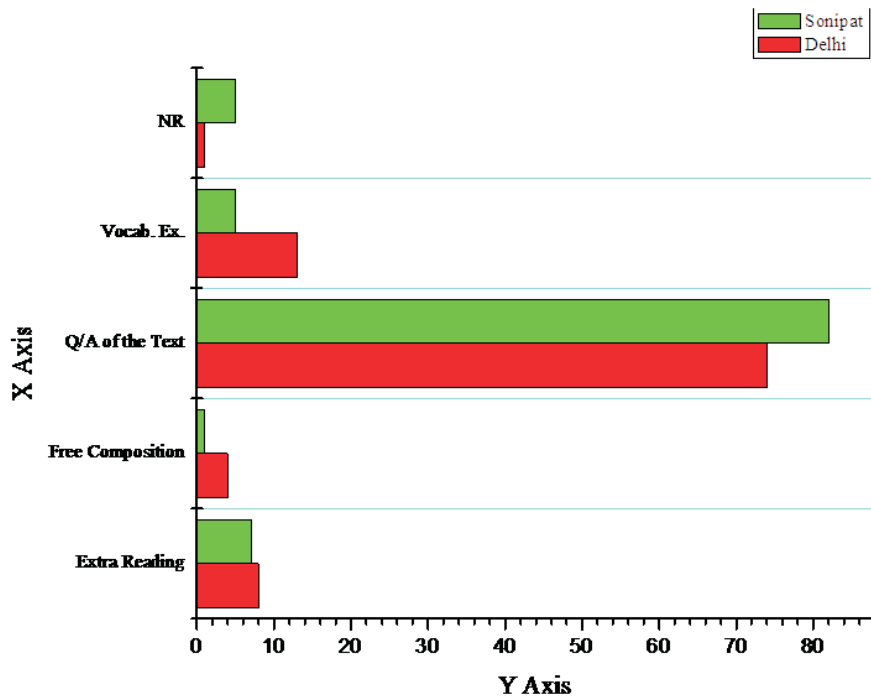


Figure- 5

## CONCLUSION

The results of the listening tasks clearly indicate the poor level of listening comprehension of the students at an advanced level. Although Delhi schools lead Sonipat schools in Good, Very Good and Excellent grades, but a major share of both the locales lies at an average level. This indicates that the students do not attain the required competence in the due course of time, although they receive systematic and formal teaching in ESL classrooms. The qualitative results further show that the training and practice of listening of the target language are completely overlooked. A small number of students want only English language to reign in the classroom. This accounts for an insignificant amount of interaction in English language in an ESL classroom. This creates a dismal picture as in the absence of use of the language itself in the teaching, learning environment the students get little to learn the right pronunciation, accent and intonation. The homework assignments further show a grim picture as no work is given to enhance listening skills. Although a lot many opportunities can be provided by making the listening tasks a routine activity. Indeed, there is poor handling of the teaching and learning of this receptive skill which, if dealt carefully and significantly can definitely help in polishing of the speaking skill too! The trainers of the language must remain vigilant to give proper training and adequate practice of this skill.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Listening Skill must be taken care of at the elementary level to create a sound foundation and practice must be given at all the levels of learning.
- Non learners should be spotted and retrained at primary levels.
- Teaching of Listening skill should be given its due place.
- Language Labs should be a norm in the schools catering to teaching of English language.
- Ample exposure of pronunciation, accent and intonation should be given for training the ears. The teachers should be instructed to act as models and make teaching and testing of listening skill a part and parcel of the ESL classroom.
- Only judicious use of the mother tongue should be made.

- This receptive skill must get its share in the syllabus for ESL.
- Listening tests should be made an integral part of exams meant for promotion to the next grade.

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