EPH–International Journal of Educational Research
Published by: **Southern Cross Academic Press**
ISSN (Online): **2208-2204**
Volume 10 , Issue 03, August, 2026
DOI: https://doi.org/10.69980/ng89zx18

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING LISTENING IN ESL CLASSROOMS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY THROUGH THE BELIEF–INFRASTRUCTURE–TECHNOLOGY FRAMEWORK

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Article History:
Article Type: **Research**

Received Date: 17/05/2026
Revised Date: 16/07/2026
Accepted Date: 11/08/2026
Published Date: 31/08/2026

Keywords: Listening pedagogy, teacher beliefs, ESL classrooms, educational infrastructure, technology integration

ABSTRACT

Listening is a foundational yet persistently marginalized skill in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms, particularly in multilingual educational contexts. Although contemporary second language acquisition (SLA) research emphasizes listening as an active, strategic, and teachable skill, classroom practices often fail to reflect this understanding. This study investigates secondary school English teachers' perceptions of teaching listening and examines how these perceptions interact with teachers' learning histories, institutional environments, and access to technological resources. Using questionnaire data and informal interviews with teachers from government, aided, and private schools, the study provides a detailed descriptive and analytical account of listening pedagogy in practice. Based on the empirical findings, the paper proposes the **Belief–Infrastructure–Technology (BIT) Framework**, an original conceptual model explaining why listening instruction remains limited despite widespread awareness of its importance. The study contributes to ESL pedagogy by offering a data-driven, context-sensitive explanation of listening instruction and by suggesting directions for teacher education and institutional reform.

1. Introduction

Listening is the primary channel through which language learners access linguistic input, making it central to the development of speaking, reading, and writing skills. Research in second language acquisition consistently demonstrates that effective listening facilitates vocabulary acquisition, grammatical development, pronunciation awareness, and pragmatic competence. Despite this, listening continues to receive limited pedagogical attention in many ESL classrooms, where it is often assumed to develop naturally through exposure to teacher talk.

In the Indian educational context, this neglect is particularly significant. English functions as a second or foreign language for most learners, and teachers frequently serve as the principal source of spoken English input. Consequently, teachers' beliefs, prior learning experiences, and institutional conditions play a decisive role in shaping listening pedagogy. This study revisits an empirical investigation conducted among secondary school English teachers and re-examines the data using contemporary SLA perspectives and current trends in technology-enhanced language learning.

The central argument of this paper is that listening instruction cannot be understood merely as a methodological choice. Instead, it emerges from a dynamic interaction between teachers' beliefs, institutional infrastructure, and technology integration, conceptualized here as the BIT Framework.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Listening in Second Language Acquisition

Modern SLA research conceptualizes listening as an active cognitive process involving decoding, meaning construction, and meta-cognitive regulation. Learners engage simultaneously in bottom-up processing (sound discrimination, word recognition) and top-down processing (schema activation, inference-making). Listening is therefore neither passive nor automatic but requires explicit instructional support.

However, classroom-based studies repeatedly show that listening is under-taught compared to speaking, reading, and writing. This gap is often attributed to curricular pressure, examination-oriented teaching, and misconceptions about the nature of listening.

2.2 Teacher Beliefs and Instructional Practices

Teacher cognition research highlights that teachers' instructional decisions are shaped less by formal training and more by deeply held beliefs formed through personal learning histories. Teachers tend to replicate the pedagogical models they experienced as learners, even when these models are inconsistent with current research.

When teachers themselves have not experienced explicit listening instruction, they are less likely to conceptualize listening as a skill that requires planning, task design, and assessment. This phenomenon is particularly evident in ESL contexts where content mastery is prioritized over language skill development.

2.3 Technology and Listening Pedagogy

Advances in digital technology have transformed the possibilities for listening instruction. Audio-visual materials, podcasts, interactive videos, speech recognition tools, and AI-assisted platforms offer exposure to authentic language use and diverse accents. However, research cautions that the mere availability of technology does not guarantee pedagogical innovation. Teachers' beliefs, institutional support, and professional learning opportunities determine whether technology is meaningfully integrated into classroom practice.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed-methods descriptive design, combining quantitative questionnaire data with qualitative insights from informal interviews. This approach enabled both breadth and depth in understanding teachers' perceptions and practices.

3.2 Participants

- Fifteen secondary school English teachers participated in the study. They were drawn from:
- Central government schools
- State government schools
- Aided schools
- Private schools

This diversity allowed for comparison across different institutional and infrastructural contexts .

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Questionnaire (20 items):

Focused on teachers' beliefs about language skills, prior learning experiences, classroom practices, institutional support, and technology use.

Informal Interviews:

Explored teachers' explanations for their practices, perceived constraints, and attitudes toward listening instruction.

3.4 Validity and Ethics

Data validity was enhanced through triangulation, direct researcher–participant interaction, and consistency across responses. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Teachers' Beliefs about Language Skills and Listening

Table 1. Teachers' Beliefs about Language Learning and Listening (N = 15)

Statement	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Sometimes (%)
Language learning is achieved through practicing language skills	100	0	0
All four skills (LSRW) are necessary for proficiency	71	29	0
Listening is the basic and prime skill in language learning	86	0	14
Effective listening leads to effective speaking	80	20	0

Interpretation:

While teachers demonstrated strong awareness of the importance of listening, disagreement regarding the necessity of all four skills indicates conceptual inconsistency. This suggests that awareness alone does not guarantee pedagogical coherence.

4.2 Teachers' Learning Histories

Table 2. Prior Exposure to Listening Instruction

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Sometimes (%)
Listening was explicitly taught during schooling	22	57	21
English was medium of instruction	57	43	0
English teachers were resourceful	43	50	7
Content prioritized over skills	43	36	21

Interpretation:

The majority of teachers lacked explicit exposure to listening instruction during their schooling. This finding explains the persistence of traditional, content-driven pedagogy and supports the argument

that teacher beliefs are shaped by prior learning experiences.

4.3 Classroom Practices in Teaching Listening

Table 3. Reported Classroom Practices

Practice	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Sometimes (%)
I plan listening lessons separately	64	7	29
I provide listening worksheets/tasks	79	21	0
I use audio clips for accent exposure	57	7	36
I am the primary listening source	36	43	21
I help students overcome listening barriers	71	14	15

Interpretation:
Although many teachers reported planning listening activities, interview data revealed that such planning was often informal and limited to teacher talk. This highlights a belief–practice gap.

4.4 Institutional Support and Infrastructure

Table 4. Institutional Environment

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Sometimes (%)
Management supports innovative teaching	57	22	21
Infrastructure supports listening	50	29	21
Teaching aids are available	57	14	29

Interpretation:
Institutional support varied considerably across school types. Teachers in private and central government schools reported greater flexibility and resources, while state government schools faced structural constraints.

4.5 Technology Use in Listening Instruction

Table 5. Technology Availability and Use

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Sometimes (%)
Language lab / AV facilities available	29	42	29
Learned technology use from colleagues	57	29	14
Regular technology integration	36	43	21

Interpretation:
The data show that technology availability does not ensure integration. Peer learning and institutional culture play a crucial role in determining usage.

4.6 Interactive and Collaborative Practices

Table 6. Interactive Strategies

Strategy	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)
Seminars, debates, quizzes	86	14

Pair/group work	86	14

Interpretation:
High use of collaborative strategies suggests untapped potential for structured listening pedagogy.

5. Discussion: Situating the BIT Framework within Global Research on Listening Pedagogy

This section interprets the findings of the study in relation to existing international research on listening pedagogy, teacher beliefs, institutional ecology, and technology integration. By comparing the present findings with studies conducted across diverse educational contexts, the discussion demonstrates both the global relevance of the results and the distinctive contribution of the proposed Belief–Infrastructure–Technology (BIT) Framework.

5.1 Teacher Beliefs about Listening: A Global Parallel

The present study reveals a clear pattern: although most teachers recognize listening as essential for language learning, this recognition does not consistently translate into systematic classroom practice. Similar belief–practice gaps have been reported internationally. For instance, Goh (2018) found that teachers in Singapore acknowledged the importance of listening but lacked confidence in designing structured listening tasks. Likewise, a study in Turkey by Yeldham and Gruba (2016) reported that teachers often equated listening instruction with testing comprehension rather than teaching listening strategies.

In European contexts, Graham, Santos, and Vanderplank (2014) observed that secondary school teachers viewed listening as difficult to teach due to its transient nature and learners' varied proficiency levels. These findings resonate strongly with the present study, where teachers reported conceptual awareness but relied heavily on teacher talk and incidental exposure. The consistency of these findings across contexts suggests that misconceptions about listening as a "natural" skill are globally entrenched, not context-specific.

5.2 Influence of Teachers' Learning Histories: Cross-Cultural Evidence

A key finding of this study is that most teachers had not experienced explicit listening instruction during their own schooling, which significantly shaped their current pedagogical practices. This phenomenon aligns with international research in teacher cognition. Borg (2019) emphasizes that teachers' classroom practices are often deeply influenced by their "apprenticeship of observation" as learners.

Studies from East Asia reinforce this conclusion. In China, Chang (2013) found that teachers who were trained in grammar-translation-oriented systems tended to undervalue listening strategy instruction, despite curricular reforms. Similarly, research in Japan by Siegel (2015) demonstrated that teachers' limited exposure to listening pedagogy during training resulted in a reliance on textbook-based comprehension questions rather than process-oriented listening tasks.

The present study contributes to this body of research by empirically demonstrating how teachers' learning histories in the Indian context perpetuate an intergenerational cycle of pedagogical neglect, reinforcing the belief component of the BIT Framework.

5.3 Institutional Infrastructure and Educational Ecology

The findings show that institutional infrastructure and administrative support significantly influence listening pedagogy. Teachers working in private and centrally administered schools reported greater access to resources and flexibility, whereas those in state government schools faced rigid structures and limited facilities. This aligns with ecological perspectives on language education, which argue that pedagogy is shaped by material, organizational, and cultural conditions (van Lier, 2004).

Comparable results have been reported in other developing and transitional educational contexts. In a study conducted in Ghana, Osei and Mensah (2020) found that lack of audio equipment and overcrowded classrooms severely constrained listening instruction, even among motivated teachers. Similarly, research in Iran by Rahimi and Katal (2013) highlighted that institutional examination pressures discouraged teachers from investing time in listening activities.

By foregrounding infrastructure as a core component, the BIT Framework extends existing ecological

models by explicitly integrating institutional affordances with teacher beliefs and technology use, offering a more comprehensive explanation for instructional realities.

5.4 Technology Integration: Global Trends and Local Constraints

The present study demonstrates that access to technology does not automatically lead to its pedagogical integration. While some teachers reported the availability of audio-visual tools, regular and systematic use remained limited. This finding mirrors global research on technology-enhanced language learning. Ockey and Wagner (2018) argue that technology functions as a pedagogical amplifier rather than a catalyst; it enhances existing practices but rarely transforms beliefs on its own. Recent studies in digitally advanced contexts further support this claim. In South Korea, Kim (2020) found that teachers used multimedia resources primarily for motivation rather than for developing listening strategies. In contrast, studies in European higher education contexts show that when teachers receive targeted training, digital tools can significantly enhance listening comprehension and learner autonomy (Vanderplank, 2016).

Emerging research on AI-assisted listening tools—such as adaptive captioning, speech analytics, and automated feedback—suggests new possibilities for addressing long-standing challenges in listening pedagogy (Godwin-Jones, 2023). However, the present study cautions that without belief transformation and institutional support, even AI-based tools may remain underutilized.

5.5 The BIT Framework as a Global Integrative Model

By synthesizing teacher beliefs, institutional infrastructure, and technology integration, the BIT Framework offers a novel, integrative perspective that extends existing models of listening pedagogy. Unlike studies that focus on individual variables in isolation, this framework conceptualizes listening instruction as an interactional outcome shaped by systemic forces.

The comparative analysis presented above demonstrates that the challenges identified in this study—belief–practice gaps, infrastructural constraints, and uneven technology use—are not unique to the Indian context. However, the BIT Framework's strength lies in its ability to theoretically integrate these dimensions into a single explanatory model, making it applicable across diverse educational contexts.

6. Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have important implications for teacher education, institutional policy, and curriculum design, particularly in multilingual ESL contexts where listening remains under-instructionalized despite theoretical recognition.

6.1 Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Development

The study clearly demonstrates that teachers' beliefs about listening are deeply rooted in their own learning histories. Since a majority of participants reported minimal or no exposure to explicit listening instruction during their schooling, they tend to conceptualize listening as a naturally acquired or secondary skill. This belief significantly limits pedagogical innovation.

Teacher education programmes—both pre-service and in-service—must therefore move beyond methodological training and explicitly address teacher belief formation. Courses on language pedagogy should:

Treat listening as an active, teachable skill rather than a receptive by-product of teaching.

Include hands-on training in designing listening tasks (pre-listening, while-listening, post-listening).

Integrate metacognitive listening strategies, enabling teachers to guide learners in predicting, monitoring, and evaluating comprehension.

Continuous professional development workshops should also focus on helping teachers critically reflect on how their past learning experiences influence their present classroom practices. Without such reflective engagement, improvements in listening pedagogy are likely to remain superficial.

6.2 Implications for Institutional Policy and School Leadership

The data analysis shows that even motivated teachers are often constrained by institutional factors

such as rigid timetables, syllabus completion pressure, inadequate classroom acoustics, and limited access to audio-visual resources. This suggests that responsibility for improving listening instruction cannot rest solely with individual teachers.

School leadership and educational administrators should:

- Recognize listening as a core language skill requiring time, space, and infrastructural support.
- Provide administrative flexibility that allows teachers to incorporate listening tasks without fear of syllabus lag.
- Invest in low-cost but high-impact resources, such as portable speakers, shared digital repositories, and curated audio materials.
- Encourage a collaborative teaching culture where teachers share listening materials and strategies, as peer learning emerged as a significant factor in technology adoption.
- Institutional acknowledgment of listening as a pedagogical priority is essential for sustainable change.

6.3 Implications for Curriculum Design and Assessment

The findings reveal a mismatch between curricular ideals and classroom realities. While curricula often mention listening as part of communicative competence, assessment practices rarely evaluate listening in meaningful ways. This absence sends an implicit message that listening is less important than other skills.

Curriculum designers and policy makers should:

- Embed task-based listening outcomes aligned with real-world communication.
- Include formative listening assessment, focusing on comprehension processes rather than only correct answers.
- Integrate listening tasks across subjects where English is the medium of instruction, thereby increasing authentic exposure.
- When listening is assessed meaningfully, teachers are more likely to allocate time and effort to its instruction.

7. Limitations of the Study and Directions for Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights into teachers' perceptions and practices, certain limitations must be acknowledged.

7.1 Limitations

- First, the sample size is relatively small and confined to a limited number of schools. Although the participants represent diverse institutional contexts, the findings cannot be generalized to all ESL settings without caution.
- Second, the study relies primarily on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Some teachers' claims regarding planning or using listening activities may not fully reflect classroom realities.
- Third, the study focuses exclusively on teachers' perspectives. Learners' experiences, difficulties, and strategies related to listening were not examined, which limits the scope of interpretation.

7.2 Directions for Future Research

Future studies can build on this research in several ways:

- Large-scale studies across different regions could validate and refine the proposed BIT Framework.
- Classroom observation-based research could triangulate self-reported data with actual teaching practices.
- Learner-centered studies could explore how students perceive listening instruction and which strategies they find most effective.
- Longitudinal research could examine the impact of AI-assisted listening tools, such as adaptive listening platforms, automated feedback systems, and speech analytics, on listening development over time.

- Comparative studies between urban and rural schools may further illuminate the role of institutional ecology in listening pedagogy.

These directions would deepen understanding of listening instruction as a systemic, rather than isolated, pedagogical issue.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to examine teachers' perceptions of teaching listening in ESL classrooms and to understand how these perceptions interact with institutional and technological factors. The findings clearly indicate that listening instruction is not neglected due to a lack of awareness, but rather due to the complex interaction of teacher beliefs, institutional constraints, and uneven technology integration. By proposing the Belief–Infrastructure–Technology (BIT) Framework, the study offers an original, empirically grounded explanation for why listening remains marginal in practice despite its acknowledged importance. The framework reframes listening pedagogy as an interactional outcome shaped by systemic forces rather than individual teacher competence alone.

Ultimately, improving listening instruction requires:

- Transforming teachers' beliefs through reflective professional education,
- Creating institutionally supportive environments, and
- Integrating technology with clear pedagogical intent.
- When these conditions are aligned, listening can be repositioned from a neglected receptive skill to a central component of communicative language teaching. In multilingual contexts like India, such a shift is essential for enabling learners to participate effectively in academic, professional, and global communicative domains.

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