

The Role of Listening Skills in Developing Linguistic Proficiency among Arabic Language Learners

Imane Djebbari

University of Naama, Algeria
Email: djebbari@cuniv-naama.dz

Abstract

Listening is the first language skill acquired by individuals and constitutes a fundamental basis for the subsequent development of speaking, reading, and writing. Its importance is particularly evident in Arabic-language education, where learners frequently experience a gap between the colloquial varieties used in everyday communication and the formal Arabic taught in educational institutions. This linguistic divergence may limit learners' exposure to formal structures and create difficulties in developing linguistic proficiency.

This study examines the role of listening skills in the development of the Arabic linguistic faculty (*al-malaka al-lughawiyya*) and explores the cognitive and educational processes through which attentive listening supports language acquisition. A descriptive-analytical approach was employed to clarify the concepts of linguistic skill, hearing, listening, and active listening, as well as the relationship between repeated auditory exposure and the formation of stable linguistic competence. The theoretical analysis was supplemented by observations of primary-level Arabic-language learners to assess the contribution of listening activities to comprehension, retention, pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and oral expression. The analysis indicates that purposeful and sustained listening provides learners with essential linguistic input, reinforces their awareness of phonological and grammatical patterns, and facilitates the gradual internalization of formal Arabic structures. The study emphasizes the need to integrate structured listening activities into Arabic-language curricula and to treat listening as an active cognitive process rather than a passive reception of sounds.

Keywords: listening skills; linguistic proficiency; language acquisition; Arabic-language education; active listening; linguistic competence.

1. Introduction

Linguistic faculty (*al-malaka al-lughawiyya*) is an ingrained cognitive trait through which an individual can express their needs fluently and effortlessly. Language learners often encounter difficulties in acquisition because the language used for Daily communication differs from the formal language intended for mastery and use in official contexts. In light of the challenges currently facing the instruction of the mother tongue, educators and researchers are exerting tireless efforts to identify the most effective methodologies for teaching the Arabic language.

In this scientific paper, we aimed to highlight the significance of listening in language acquisition, employing a descriptive-analytical approach. We have defined the concept of the listening skill, its

¹ Received: April 12, 2026; Accepted: May 07, 2026; Published: July 15, 2026



importance, and the methods for its development. Furthermore, we conducted an empirical study based on the observation of primary-stage Arabic learners to identify the role of listening skills, seeking to underscore the necessity of their cultivation.

Language occupies a paramount position as it is the primary medium for communication and expression; it is the essence of human identity, civilisation, and existence. Without it, human interaction would be non-existent. The means to learning any language lies in understanding its grammar and internal logic ; thus, grammar is a means, not an end in itself. Consequently, the Arabic linguistic sciences—phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics—are "instrumental sciences" (ulum al-ala), whose ultimate objective is the mastery of the language in both speech and writing. These sciences serve the language and act as tools for its proficiency and articulatory and orthographic excellence. We may liken this to a mason who employs a hammer and other construction tools ; the function of these tools is realized only within the context of building. If isolated from their application, they lose their utility. Ultimately, mastery of a language can only be achieved through the mastery of its four Fundamental arts : listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

2. Linguistic Skill:

Lexical Definition of "Skill" (Maharah): As stated in *Mu'jam al-Ayn*: "I became skilled (mahurtu) in it... when I became proficient. A 'Maher' (expert) is proficient in any given task"¹.

Technical Definition : It is "Something that can be learned, acquired, or formed within the learner through imitation and training"².

For instance, a carpenter is considered "skilled" if he masters his craft, and a painter is "skilled" if he excels in the art of painting. Accordingly, linguistic skill is the process of learning, acquiring, and mastering a language.

Faculties (al-malakaat) are acquired through the repetition of actions. "An action occurs first, leaving an impression on the self; as it recurs, it becomes a "state" (hal)—meaning a non-permanent trait. With further repetition, it evolves into a "faculty" (malaka), which is a deep-seated, ingrained attribute. When the linguistic faculty was naturally inherent among the Arabs, a child would hear the speech and idioms of their contemporaries and observe how they expressed their intentions. Just as a child learns the use of individual words and their meanings, they later acquire syntactic structures through constant exposure. This auditory input is perpetually renewed by every speaker and reinforced through repeated use until it becomes a firmly rooted facul³. This is what we mean when we say that Classical Arabic was an innate disposition (saliqa) for the early Arabs—an inherited, natural trait.

3. The Listening Skill:

Listening serves as a vital conduit for connecting with the external world, enabling a child to perceive and understand their surroundings. Its significance lies primarily in the acquisition of language—the essential tool for human interaction—whether it be the **colloquial vernacular** used in daily life or the **formal language** employed in official and academic settings.

3.1. The Concept of Listening

Researchers define listening as: "A fundamental human communicative activity; it is the window through which an individual overlooks the surrounding world, and the primary tool for receiving oral messages."⁴

Scholars distinguish between three levels of auditory reception : **Hearing (Sima')**, **Listening (Istima')**, and **Attending/Active Listening (Insaat)**:

- **Hearing** is the mere physiological reception of sound waves by the ear from a particular source without deliberate attention⁵, such as hearing the distant sound of an airplane.

- **Listening**, however, is a complex art. It transcends the mere act of hearing, as it involves a conscious process where the listener pays specific attention and intentional focus to the sounds received¹.
- **Attending (Active Listening)** is characterized by sustained concentration. The difference between listening and attending lies in the degree of intensity rather than the nature of the act itself². While listening may be interrupted by various distractions, attending requires deep focus and alertness to achieve a specific objective.

Key conclusions drawn from these definitions include :

- Listening is a communicative activity involving two parties : the **sender** and the **receiver**.
- Listening is one of the fundamental **language arts**.
- Listening is the primary medium of linguistic communication, as the human journey of language development begins as a listener.
- Listening necessitates auxiliary cognitive skills such as **comprehension, assimilation, and retention**.
- Proficient listening is a prerequisite for proficient speaking.

Consequently, the essential skill for learning is listening, as it is a process that facilitates "paying attention to the speaker, engaging through inquiry and discussion, exercising judgment, and making informed decisions based on what is heard."³

3.2. Types of Listening ;

Listening can be categorized based on its intended purpose as follows⁴:

- **Listening for Information :** Such as attending lectures or lessons. Here, the listener must maintain focus and engagement to ensure an accurate and comprehensive reception of the content.
- **Critical and Analytical Listening :** This requires the listener to have a thorough understanding of the subject matter to provide an objective critique or judgment.
- **Listening for Appreciation :** This refers to aesthetic listening, such as listening to poetry for enjoyment and emotional resonance.

3.3. The Importance of Listening Skills :

Empirical studies have demonstrated that listening plays a paramount role in the **language acquisition** process. It has become a "cornerstone of most language teaching curricula in advanced nations." Research indicates that high school students in these countries allocate **30%** of their language learning program to speaking, **16%** to reading, **9%** to writing, and a significant **45%** to listening⁵. This distribution underscores its vital importance and efficacy in educational development.

The Primacy of Listening in Language Acquisition and Instruction

Listening is the primary and foundational linguistic skill. Ibn Khaldoun famously stated that "Hearing is the father of linguistic faculties"⁶, as it is the basis upon which linguistic proficiency is built. This does not diminish the role of other skills—speaking, reading, and writing—as they are complementary. They constitute the "pillars of linguistic communication and are deeply interconnected ; each influences and is influenced by the other arts. A good listener is, by necessity, a good speaker, a proficient reader, and an effective writer"⁷.

Integration among these skills is the cornerstone of successful language learning. This integration does not merely mean "the addition of one skill to another; it is more profound, reaching into the heart of the

communicative situation itself. Communication often requires the simultaneous employment of two or more skills"¹, and one cannot pronounce words correctly without first having heard them.

The importance of listening lies in the following²:

- It serves as a primary communicative tool through which vocabulary, formulas, and structures are acquired.
- It is the first skill upon which all subsequent linguistic skills are built.
- It acts as a medium for teaching and learning through the acquisition of information and knowledge.

3.4. Listening Etiquette:

The process of listening involves the transmission of auditory material from a sender to a receiver. This requires the integrity of the sender's articulatory system and the receiver's auditory system to ensure the safe delivery of the message. Furthermore, a listener should observe certain etiquette, including :

- Ensuring a quiet environment.
- Maintaining focus and active listening.
- Respecting the speaker and showing engagement (e.g., by taking notes).
- Refraining from interrupting the speaker without permission.
- Avoiding distractions, such as phone usage or side conversations.
- Using facial expressions to show engagement, as the speaker needs cues that the communicative process is active and uninterrupted.

3.5. Barriers to Effective Listening :

- Chaos and overcrowding.
- Inattentiveness and mental distraction.
- Physiological defects in the listener's auditory system.
- Lack of clarity from the speaker (e.g., speaking too fast, speech impediments, or language disorders).
- Poor articulation or lack of linguistic fluency in teachers. When teachers lack proficiency, learners fail to acquire sound language because they receive errors rather than correct linguistic models.

3.6. Developing Listening Skills :

Given the importance of linguistic skills in language learning, researchers and educators emphasize the necessity of mastering these skills through practice. Linguistic mastery is achieved by integrating language into Our learning processes. Key methods to develop these skills include :

- Concentration and avoiding anything that hinders listening.
- Identifying the speaker's intentions.
- Extracting primary ideas from auditory material.
- Committing to correct pronunciation.
- Reading and listening to the Holy Qur'an, classical poetry, and eloquent Arabic literature.
- Training in listening, speaking, and self-expression.
- Active listening and meticulous attention to understand the heard material.

4. Teaching Listening Skills :

Teaching listening skills means "we do not stop at recognition skills—merely receiving and identifying symbols and perceiving their meanings. We must attend to the second phase of this activity : perceiving the relationship between forms of speech, deepening the understanding of their intent, and ensuring the communicative goal has been achieved"¹.

In the modern era, we are in dire need of teaching listening and other skills because of our distance from Fusha (Modern Standard Arabic). Our innate linguistic intuition has been diluted by various dialects to the point where Fusha is rarely used except in specific contexts.

The primary school is "responsible for forming eloquent linguistic faculties when teachers of all specializations use Fusha in instruction, discussion, and interaction. This should not be limited to Arabic language teachers but must be a commitment for all. Teachers of other subjects must not undo the linguistic foundations established by the Arabic teacher. Collaboration among teachers is essential to achieve ². positive outcomes, as coordinated efforts are far more fruitful than isolated ones.

Teaching these arts rectifies the learner's tongue and prevents errors in speech and writing. Through our observation of primary school classrooms, we found that students who received language through listening—from kindergarten through primary school—possessed sound pronunciation and fluency. They built a linguistic repertoire that allowed them to express themselves effortlessly in both speech and writing. Acquiring language through listening enables the learner to master subsequent skills—speaking, reading, and writing—without deficiency.

The teacher's role in developing listening skills involves several measures³:

- Carefully selecting auditory material suited to the students' mental age, level, and abilities.
- Teaching listening etiquette and fostering an environment of mutual respect.
- Presenting auditory material (either personally or via recordings) to stimulate the students' sense of hearing and facilitate proper language acquisition.

Pedagogical Advice for Teachers: "Keep their ears tuned to you by varying your methods. For example, while explaining the 'Five Verbs', you might say: 'The Five Verbs are raised by...' (pause for a moment), and the students answer: 'the presence of the Noon.' Then continue: 'And they are in the accusative and genitive cases by...' (The students will answer: 'dropping it'). An alert student will immediately catch the error (that it should be 'accusative and jussive'), while a distracted student will be jolted awake. Alternatively, stop mid-explanation and ask a student : 'Repeat the last sentence I said,' or 'What was the last point I discussed?'⁴ Such methods ensure students listen with conscious intent.

The Relationship Between Skills: "The relationship between listening and speaking is that they are both phonetic skills—one receptive (listening) and the other productive (speaking). No speaking situation exists without a listener to receive the message. Similarly, listening and reading are receptive skills, while speaking and writing are productive skills." Integration is evident in that every good listener is inherently a good speaker, reader, and writer.

5. Conclusion:

Listening is an indispensable tool for communication and a vital means of language acquisition. This research underscores the importance of teaching listening to ensure the precise mastery of language.

Declarations

Funding: No funding was received.

Ethical Approval: Not applicable.

Data Availability: Available from the author upon request.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

AI Use Disclosure: AI-assisted tools were used only for language editing. The author reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

Key Findings :

- Listening is among the most critical linguistic arts.
- In the early stages of education, language must be taught through listening, as it is the "father of faculties."
- Teachers must provide ample training in listening and expression lessons, as mastery lies in the imitation and practice of linguistic patterns.
- Learners should be exposed to auditory models such as poetry, proverbs, and most importantly, the Holy Qur'an, which instills sound and correct pronunciation.

Endnotes

1. Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi, *Kitab al-'Ayn*, ed. Abd al-Hamid Hindawi, 1st ed., vol. 4 (Beirut: Dar al-Kotob al-Ilmiyah, 2002), entry "m-h-r," 170.
2. Abd al-Shafi Ahmad Sayyid Rajab, "The Effectiveness of a Proposed Program for Developing Spelling Skills—Necessary for Second-Cycle Basic Education Pupils—Among Students of Faculties of Education (Arabic Language Department)," *Educational Journal of the Faculty of Education at Sohag University* 12, no. 12 (1996): 213–218.
3. Ibn Khaldoun, *The Muqaddimah*, ed. Ahmed Jad, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Ghad Al-Jadeed, 2017), 555.
4. Rushdi Ahmad Tu'aimah, *Linguistic Skills: Levels, Instruction, and Difficulties*, 1st ed. (Cairo: Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi, 2004), 183.
5. Ali Ahmed Madkour, *Teaching Arabic Language Arts* (Egypt: Dar Al-Shawwaf, 1991), 75.
6. Ibid., 75.
7. Ibid., 76.
8. Madkour, *Teaching Arabic Language Arts*, 72.
9. Ali Sami Al-Hallaq, *The Reference in Teaching Arabic Language Skills and Sciences*, 2nd ed. (Lebanon: Al-Muassasa Al-Haditha lil-Kitab, 2019), 181–182.
10. Madkour, *Teaching Arabic Language Arts*, 72.
11. Ibn Khaldoun, *The Muqaddimah*, 548.
12. Madkour, *Teaching Arabic Language Arts*, 7.
13. Tu'aimah, *Linguistic Skills*, 182.
14. Ibtisam Mahfouz Abu Mahfouz, *Linguistic Skills*, 1st ed. (Riyadh: Dar Al-Tadmuriyya, 2017), 16.
15. Tu'aimah, *Linguistic Skills*, 184.
16. Samih Abdullah Abu Maghli, *Linguistic Studies*, 1st ed. (Jordan: Dar Majdalawi, 2004), 157.
17. Al-Hallaq, *The Reference in Teaching Arabic Language Skills and Sciences*, 186–188.
18. Ayoub Jirjis Al-Attiyah, *The Arabic Language: Culture and Skills*, 1st ed. (Lebanon: Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, 2012), 6.

References

- Abu Maghli, S. A. (2004). *Linguistic studies*. Dar Majdalawi.
- Abu Mahfouz, I. M. (2017). *Linguistic skills*. Dar Al-Tadmuriya.
- Al-Attiyah, A. J. (2012). *The Arabic language: Culture and skills*. Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah.
- Al-Farahidi, K. B. A. (2002). *Kitab al-'Ayn* (A. H. Hindawi, Ed.; 1st ed., Vol. 4). Dar Al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah.
- Al-Hallaq, A. S. (2019). *The reference in teaching Arabic language skills and sciences* (2nd ed.). Al-Muassasa Al-Haditha lil-Kitab.
- Ibn Khaldoun, A. R. (2017). *The Muqaddimah* (A. Jad, Ed.; 1st ed.). Dar Al-Ghad Al-Jadeed.
- Madkour, A. A. (1991). *Teaching Arabic language arts*. Dar Al-Shawwaf.
- Rajab, A. A. (1996). Effectiveness of a proposed program for developing spelling skills for second-cycle basic education students. *Educational Journal of the Faculty of Education at Sobag University*, 12(12), 218–269.
- Tu'aimah, R. A. (2004). *Linguistic skills: Levels, instruction, and challenges*. Dar Al-Fikr Al-Arabi.