

This study aimed at measuring learners' listening comprehension proficiency in order to establish their weaknesses and strengths in this area. It also sought to analyse the listening materials learners were exposed to and the extent to which listening skills were taught. Factors affecting listening comprehension proficiency were also explored.

A stratified sample of 520 students, 56 teachers and 8 heads of department, English section from 15 schools in two districts were involved. An audio-based test was used to measure students' listening comprehension proficiency. Content analysis of the *Integrated English Book 3 (1992)* was done to assess the quantity and quality of listening materials and tasks. A questionnaire for teachers of English was used to get information about the teaching of listening comprehension. This was complemented by interviews with heads of department and Kenya Institute of Education English curriculum head. Instruments were refined through a pilot study. Data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. Procedures used for data analysis were frequencies, means, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and correlations. Inferential statistics (the t- test) were used to explain observed differences and address the factors determining listening competencies. Results indicated that English language course books had negligible provision for materials and tasks that promote listening and that teachers were not guided on teaching listening skills yet they wholly depended on the same course books for teaching the same. The majority of students (89.6%) performed poorly on listening comprehension skills. Further, students scored better on explicit items than on inferential items. Performance was poorest on skills that tested competence in listening to dialogue, drawing inferences, inferring meanings of unfamiliar words, paraphrasing and predicting outcomes. These were also the students' areas of weakness among the micro-skills tested. Areas of relative strength were found to be those that demanded competence in listening for specifics and details.

Urban school students performed better on listening comprehension skills than those in rural schools and students in boarding schools performed better than those in day schools on the same. Mixed day schools recorded the poorest performance. There was no consistent relationship between girls' and boys' performance on the listening comprehension test girls' scores in mixed schools were significantly (at 0.05 level) lower than those of boys in the same schools. Boys in rural schools performed significantly better than the girls in the rural schools. Although, the boys in urban schools performed better than the girls, there was generally no significant difference between their performance on the listening comprehension test.

Among the main conclusions made were: teaching of listening skills was not given its due emphasis; type of school affected learners' listening comprehension abilities; boarding environment gave students better cognitive disposition; gender did not make a difference in performance in listening comprehension, test material type and task were significant in ESL listening and students were more inclined to listen with understanding to continuous prose than to dialogue.