

## The Determination of Levels of Active Listening Competencies of Pre-service Teachers

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**ABSTRACT** By determining the levels of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers, this study aims to compare these levels in terms of a wide range of variables. This research is designed in accordance with a survey model. The sample of the study consists of 672 pre-service teachers studying as senior students in their own departments in the Faculty of Education at Firat University. The findings reveal that the pre-service teachers have most of the active listening competencies in the 'usually' level. In the study, when the pre-service teachers' level of active listening competencies have been observed as regards to the gender variable, it has been determined that female candidates are more likely to show the note taking listening competency. In addition, it has been observed that they frequently nod their head to the meaning of 'I see' while listening. Furthermore, the pre-service teachers in the verbal field display higher levels of active listening competencies.

### INTRODUCTION

People need effective communication skills so as to establish healthy relationships with others. The most widely used communication medium by human beings—language consists of 4 basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The listening skill is the first one to be utilized and also the most-used one among the others. Lundsteen (1979) emphasizes that the listening skill is one of the skills human beings acquire first and is a basis for other language skills. Studies also show that the language skill that human beings make use of most in daily life is the listening skill (Bird 1953; Burley-Allen 1995). Hagevik (1999) states that people spend forty percent of their time for listening, thirty-five percent for speaking, sixteen percent for reading, and nine percent for writing. According to another research, listening constitutes forty-five percent of the time one spends on communication (Szukala 2001). It is known that people ac-

quire most of their knowledge throughout their life through listening. Therefore, the listening skill is important not only for the time it constitutes in communication, but also for its contribution to daily life.

Studies also indicate that in addition to daily life, human beings spend a lot of time listening in the education environment (Barker cited in Cihangir 2004; Robertson 2004). Wilt (cited in Winn 1988) emphasizes that listening constitutes fifty percent of the time spent at school and forty-five percent of the time spent outside school, whereas Gogus (1978) points out that students spend from two and a half to four hours listening during the process of communicating with their teachers and peers. Therefore, the majority of formal and informal learning takes place while one is listening. Since listening requires unique characteristics, skills, habits and knowledge, in the education environment, these skills, habits and characteristics should be taught and the students' listening skills should be improved.

People employ a variety of listening methods in their daily life so as to fulfill several needs such as hearing, thinking and understanding. Individuals make use of a wide range of listening types and strategies with respect to the environment, their expectations, the content of the message, and their knowledge and experience. Therefore, the purpose of listening and different needs

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require a variety of listening types and strategies (Karaduz 2010: 43). One of the listening types—active listening is considered to be the most effective listening type by researchers in this literature. Active listening offers more interaction than other types of listening and shows that the listener has heard and understood the message correctly as well. Active listening includes the fact that one realizes if he/she is listened to in a communicative environment (Kaya 2015: 324). Active listening makes it clear to the speaker through words or gestures that the listener has understood the speaker or is taking part in the talk in some way (Ciftci 2007: 236). Referred to as “effective listening” as well, active listening is a type of listening in which the listener reacts through mimics and gestures to show that the message is received although the listener is silent during the conversation. In this respect, through such kind of attitude, the listener shows that s/he is interested in the talk and is really listening to the speaker. In active listening, the message receiver must be as active as the speaker. The receiver primarily tries to understand the feelings and thoughts of the sender and the meaning of the message, and then responds to the speaker by his/her own words so as to check the accuracy of the message and the things s/he understood (Cihangir 2004: 41).

In the teaching-learning environment, active listening can be effective in reflecting the students’ feelings and thoughts that are perceived while communicating with them, for active listening is performed to demonstrate that the feelings and thoughts of the speaker are respected, and the speaker is also followed and understood. Therefore, when active listening is utilized in teacher-student interactions, students realize that their teachers try to understand them, and students also put in more effort in getting the message across with the purpose of conveying their thoughts and ultimately develop their self-esteem and self-respect (Yoncalik and Cimen 2006: 137). In addition, active listening plays a vital role in academic success (Wolvin and Coakley 2000). Legge (1971) points out that students with active listening skills are more successful than their peers who do not make use of the same skills.

In addition to enabling students to express their basic interest, needs and demands, active listening is important in terms of the effectiveness of the teacher and determining the teaching process in accordance with the student feedback in the communication process (Celep 2002: 25). Therefore, the effectiveness of active listen-

ing in the classroom depends on whether the teacher has this particular competency or not. In this respect, pre-service teachers must be good listeners and have active listening competencies so as to establish healthy relationships with their students in the future. If pre-service teachers possess active listening competencies, they will be able to make best use of these skills in their family life, social interactions and the teaching-learning process as well. On the basis of these considerations, a study was needed to determine the level of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers in their pre-service training.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of the study is to determine the level of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers in the Faculty of Education and to analyze these results with respect to such variables as the pre-service teachers’ gender, departments and university entrance exam score types.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Research Model**

In this research, the relational screening model, one of the general screening models, has been utilized. This model tries to identify the degree and direction of differentiation between given variables (Karasar 2014: 81). In this paper, the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers are determined and these levels are separately described in terms of a range of variables (gender, department and university entrance exam score type).

### **Population and Samples**

The population of the study consists of the students studying in the Faculty of Education at Firat University in 2013-2014 academic year. The samples consist of pre-service teachers in their final year, studying in Primary School, Social Studies, Science, Turkish, Computer Education and Instructional Technologies (CEIT), Mathematics, Arts and Pre-School teaching departments in the Faculty of Education at Firat University.

### **Data Collection Tool**

In order to collect the research data, first of all, a 21-item questionnaire draft is prepared after

the literature review and the examination of similar scales. Since the questionnaire items are taken into account independently so as to make a detailed analysis and comments on the basis of items, the reliability of the questionnaire results is not analyzed separately (by Cronbach Alfa coefficient of inner consistence).

To ensure the content validity of the measurement instrument, two faculty members with studies on the relevant topic, four from the field of educational sciences, and two from the field of statistics have been consulted. After the necessary arrangements and changes are made in accordance with the opinions of the experts, the questionnaire with 18 items have been applied to 672 senior students studying in the departments mentioned above.

### Analysis

In addition to the frequency, the percentage and meaning the analysis of the data obtained, t-test has been used in comparison of the gender variable. For comparisons on the basis of the variable of the university entrance exam score types,

according to the results of the normal distribution compliance test, analysis of variance is used when the distribution is normal, and the Kruskal-Wallis H (KWH) tests are used when the distribution is not normal. If there is a meaningful difference after getting the results of the KWH test, the Mann-Whitney U (MWU) test is implemented so as to determine the source of the difference by taking two combinations of the groups. In the statistical analysis of the scale, comprehensibility level is accepted at .05. In order to determine the level of the relevant items on the scale, point intervals are considered as “*Never 1.00-1.80, Rarely 1.81-2.60, Sometimes 2.61-3.40, Usually 3.41-4.20, Always 4.21-5.00*”.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the findings on the levels of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers. When analyzed, it is seen that the point of average of the items related to the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers is 3.48. This finding indicates that the

**Table 1: The point of average of the views of the pre-service teachers on their active listening competencies**

Item No.	Items	Total	
		M	SD
1	I listen to the speaker to really understand what s/he is trying to tell.	4.03	.79
2	I make a speaker feel that I am listening to him/her.	4.12	.78
3	I have eye contact while listening to the person.	4.08	.86
4	I make an effort to listen to the end of the topic in the face of all kinds of psychological and physical barriers.	3.72	.92
5	I respond to the speaker telling what I have understood with my own words to check whether I have understood the speaker accurately.	3.57	.96
6	After an individual complete his/her talk, I make explanations and comments related to the content of the talk.	3.49	.91
7	While somebody is talking, I make them feel that I respect them and their views.	4.05	.72
8	I would think about other things while listening to a speaker.	3.14	.83
9	I listen to a speaker without critical judgement.	3.43	.91
10	I listen to a speaker by taking notes.	2.67	1.13
11	I listen to an individual not with the intention of understanding the speaker, but with the intention of answering potential questions.	2.60	1.13
12	I want the phrases I could not understand during the talk to be explained when the talk comes to an end.	3.53	.96
13	While listening to somebody, I indicate that I accept what they are telling without making any verbal comments.	2.93	1.05
14	While listening to somebody, I nod my head at appropriate intervals to mean “yes, I see”.	3.65	.89
15	I ask questions which will help elaborate on the things told by the speaker.	3.22	.90
16	I make an effort to be willing to listen to somebody while they are talking.	3.79	.81
17	I accept the feelings and thoughts of the speaker as stated.	2.68	1.13
18	While listening to somebody, I carefully watch and observe their body language.	4.01	.86
	Total	3.48	.37

participants of this study “usually” have the active listening skills provided in the questionnaire.

However, when the point of average of the items related to the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers is analyzed separately, with the highest rate, the pre-service teachers have checked the “usually” box ( $M = 4.12$ ) for the following statement: “*I make a speaker feel that I am listening to him/her.*” In addition to this, for the following statement, “*I respond to the speaker with my own words to check whether I have understood the speaker accurately,*” which provides the broadest meaning of active listening, the pre-service teachers have marked the “usually” box ( $M = 3.57$ ). When these items are considered as the basis for active listening, these findings can be interpreted positively. For the following statements, formed considering the crucial role of having eye contact and using body language in active listening, “*I have eye contact while listening to the person*” ( $M = 4.08$ ), and “*while listening to somebody, I carefully watch and observe their body language*” ( $M = 4.01$ ), the pre-service teachers checked the “usually” box. These findings point out that pre-service teachers pay attention to not only the content of the conversation but also the visual movements of the speaker. Since for the following statement, “*I listen to a speaker by taking notes*”, the pre-service teachers have checked the “sometimes” box ( $M = 2.67$ ), it can be concluded that the pre-service teachers ignore “note taking”, which is one of the active listening competencies. In fact, note taking while listening enables the listener to follow the flow of the speaker’s thoughts and understand the speaker better. Therefore, even if the notes taken during a talk are not visited again, note taking is important because it requires being active while listening. When these statements are taken into account, the fact that the pre-service teachers sometimes take notes while listening indicates that the pre-service teachers are not at the expected level in terms of possessing active listening competencies.

According to the t-tests conducted to determine the levels of critical listening ability of pre-service teachers in terms of their gender, it is found out that there are meaningful differences for statements 5, 7, 8, 10 and 14 ( $p < .05$ ). For the statements with differences except item 10, the male and female pre-service teachers have

checked the “usually” box. When viewed proportionally, the male pre-service teachers respond to the speaker telling what they have understood with their own words to check whether they have understood the speaker accurately, and they think about other things while listening to an individual more than the female pre-service teachers. When compared to the male pre-service teachers, the female pre-service teachers make a person feel that they respect the speaker and his/her ideas, and they nod their heads at appropriate intervals to mean “yes, I see” more than the male pre-service teachers. The differences in these basic skills of active listening competencies of male and female pre-service teachers indicate that their perspectives on communication and their behavior during the listening process differ. In addition to this, for item number 10, “*I listen to a speaker by taking notes*”, the female pre-service teachers have checked the “sometimes” box ( $M = 2.78$ ), while male pre-service teachers have checked the “rarely” box ( $M = 2.53$ ). This finding suggests that female pre-service teachers take notes while listening more than male pre-service teachers do (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the result of the variance analysis conducted to determine the differences between the levels of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers in accordance with their department. When analyzed, it is seen that there are meaningful differences for items 6 and 10. However, according to the Scheffe test implemented to determine in which groups the differences exist, the results have indicated no meaningful differences. KWH test has been applied to the items which do not show normal distribution (items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 16 and 18) according to the results of homogeneity test ( $p < .05$ ). After analyses, items 1, 7 and 14 with meaningful differences are implemented with the MWU test so as to determine in which groups the differences exist. According to this, to the statement, “*I listen to the speaker to really understand what s/he is trying to tell,*” the pre-service teachers studying in the Departments of Social Sciences and Arts Teaching demonstrated more positive attitude that those in the Departments of CEIT and Mathematics Teaching. Moreover, the students in the Department of Turkish Language Teaching perform the behavior mentioned in this item more frequently than the students in the Department of Mathematics Teaching. These findings suggest that the pre-service teachers,

**Table 2: t-test results of the views of the pre-service teachers on their active listening competencies in accordance with the variable of gender**

No.	Items	Gender	M	SD	t	p
5	I respond to the speaker telling what I have understood with my own words to check whether I have understood the speaker accurately.	Male	3.65	.95	2.042	.042*
		Female	3.50	.97		
7	While somebody is talking, I make them feel that I respect them and their views.	Male	3.99	.71	-1.995	.046*
		Female	4.10	.72		
8	I would think about other things while listening to a speaker.	Male	3.25	.80	3.294	.001*
		Female	3.04	.84		
10	I listen to a speaker by taking notes.	Male	2.53	1.15	-2.802	.005*
		Female	2.78	1.11		
14	While listening to somebody, I nod my head at appropriate intervals to mean "yes, I see".	Male	3.54	.97	-3.031	.003*
		Female	3.75	.81		

\*  $p < .05$

**Table 3: The results of the variance analysis of the views of the pre-service teachers on their active listening competencies in accordance with the variable of department**

Items	Department	N	M	SD	df	F	p	Difference
6. After an individual complete his/her talk, I make explanations and comments related to the content of the talk.	Primary School	110	3.63	.93	7	2.342	.023*	
	Science	81	3.35	.91				
	CEIT	115	3.25	.87				
	Mathematics	80	3.56	.89				
	Social Studies	96	3.48	.90				
	Turkish	103	3.65	.80				
	Arts	35	3.51	1.12				
	Pre-school	52	3.46	.91				
10. I listen to a speaker by taking notes.	Primary School	110	2.70	1.12	7	2.355	.022*	-
	Science	81	2.95	1.10				
	CEIT	115	2.51	1.12				
	Mathematics	80	2.49	1.11				
	Social Studies	96	2.56	1.11				
	Turkish	103	2.88	1.13				
	Arts	35	2.80	1.25				
	Pre-school	52	2.44	1.14				

\*  $p < .05$

studying in the departments, which focus on verbal skills, listen to the speaker to really understand the things covered in the talk more than the students in the departments, which focus on mathematical skills.

Furthermore, the pre-service teachers, studying in the Departments of Primary School Teaching, Social Sciences Teaching, Turkish Language Teaching and Art teaching, demonstrated more positive attitude to the following statement, "While somebody is talking, I make them feel that I respect them and their views," than those in the Department of CEIT. This finding suggests that the pre-service teachers in the Department of CEIT have difficulties in making the speaker feel that they respect the speaker and his/her thoughts. For another statement with a differ-

ence, "while listening to somebody, I nod my head at appropriate intervals to mean 'yes, I see,'" the pre-service teachers studying in the Departments of Social Science and Pre-school Teaching have stated that they perform this particular behavior more than those in the Department of Primary School, CEIT and Arts Teaching.

When the score type used by the pre-service teachers while entering the university is taken into consideration, according to the results of the analysis of variance, there have been meaningful differences for the following statements: "I respond to the speaker telling what I have understood with my own words to check whether I have understood the speaker accurately," and "After an individual complete his/her talk,

*I make explanations and comments related to the content of the talk*" (Table 4).

It has been observed that the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type perform such behaviors and use active listening competencies more than the pre-service teachers with the numerical score type. It is understood that the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type are likely to react verbally and have a positive attitude to using a variety of verbal reaction while listening to an individual. Additionally, this finding can be interpreted as a fact that the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type generally have more active listening competencies than those with the numerical score type.

According to the result of the test of KWH implemented to the items not demonstrating homogeneous distribution (items 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 17 and 18), there are meaningful differences for items 1, 7 and 18. According to the test of MWU implemented to these items, when compared to the pre-service teachers with the equally weighted and numerical score type, the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type have demonstrated more positive attitude to the following statement: "*I listen to the speaker to really understand what s/he is trying to tell.*" When the departments they are studying in are taken into account, the pre-service teachers in the departments focusing on verbal skills have a more positive attitude to the same item than those in the departments focusing on mathematical skills. This finding supports the previous one.

For one of the statements with a difference, "*While somebody is talking, I make them feel that I respect them and their views,*" the pre-service teachers with the verbal and equally weighted score types have stated that they perform this particular behavior more than the pre-

service teachers with the numerical score type. Additionally, for the following statement, "*While listening to somebody, I carefully watch and observe their body language,*" the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type have stated that they perform this particular action more than the prospective teachers with the numerical score type do.

When the findings on the levels of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers in accordance with the variable of their score type are totally analyzed, the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers with the numerical score type are lower than those of the pre-service teachers with other score types. This situation might result from the fact that listening activities require more characteristics in common with those of the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type.

## DISCUSSION

According to the results of the paper designed to determine the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers, it is found out that the participants of the questionnaire "usually" have the active listening competencies presented in the questionnaire. The fact that the pre-service teachers have these competencies suggests that they are good at daily interactions with other people and these competencies will contribute to their success in their future profession and affect their career in a positive manner. Possessing effective listening skills has a vital role in communication in the business world because it influences success in business, general career skills, management skills, and the effectiveness and adequacy of relationships with directors and managers (Wolvin and Coakley 1991).

**Table 4: The results of the variance analysis of tests of the views of the pre-service teachers on their active listening competencies in accordance with the variable of score type**

Items	Score type	N	M	SD	df	F	p	Difference
5. I respond to the speaker telling what I have understood with my own words to check whether I have understood the speaker accurately.	Verbal	197	3.73	.99	2	4.474	.012*	1-3
	Equally weighted	185	3.57	.99	669			
	Numerical	290	3.47	.91	671			
6. After an individual complete his/her talk, I make explanations and comments related to the content of the talk.	Verbal	197	3.58	.88	2	3.767	.024*	1-3
	Equally weighted	185	3.55	.94	669			
	Numerical	290	3.38	.89	671			

\*  $p < .05$

When the point of average of the items related to the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers is analyzed separately, the pre-service teachers possess the skill of *making a speaker feel that you are listening to him/her* at a higher rate than other skills. Additionally, it is found out that the pre-service teachers “generally” have the ability to *respond to the speaker telling what they have understood with their own words to check whether they have understood the speaker accurately*, which is the basis for active listening. Hoy and Miskel (cited in Ustuner and Kis 2014: 4) consider communication competence as a set of skills and researches one interactant possesses. In this regard, people with communication competence are expected to be able to send messages, listen to feedback, and provide feedback well. In this respect, the pre-service teachers in this paper generally have communication and active listening competencies. Furthermore, *having eye contact with the speaker and observing their body language while listening to somebody* is among the active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers. Thus, this situation suggests that the pre-service teachers pay attention to the movements of the speaker. Myers and Myers (1988) point out that it is a must that the listener should pay attention to the non-verbal messages of the speaker. In this respect, the pre-service teachers in this paper generally have active listening competencies.

Apart from these, it stands out that the pre-service teachers “sometimes” take notes while listening to a speaker. Yet, the fundamental principle of being an active listener is taking notes while listening, and the best way to take notes effectively is to be an active listener. Studies reveal that one forgets seventy percent of what one hears in an hour and eighty percent of that in a day. The most important way to prevent oneself from forgetting things is by taking notes. Even if the notes taken during a talk are not looked at again, they are important for making one active while listening (Ozbay 2005: 85). Thus, the fact that the pre-service teachers “sometimes” take notes can be interpreted as a negative result for their active listening competencies.

When the levels of active listening competencies of the pre-service teachers are analyzed in terms of the gender variable, the female pre-service teachers perform note taking while listening more. Moreover, the female pre-service

teachers nod their heads to mean, “*yes, I see*”, while listening to an individual more than the male pre-service teachers do perform the same behavior. In the paper conducted by Cihangir-Cankaya (2012) to determine whether the students studying Psychological Counseling and Guidance are likely to take the courses covering listening skills and whether their gender affects this decision, it is found out that the listening skills of the students differ depending on the gender, and female students have better listening skills. This finding also supports the results of this present paper.

There has been a meaningful difference between the pre-service teachers studying in the departments focusing on verbal skills and the pre-service teachers studying in the departments focusing on mathematical skills. This finding suggests that the pre-service teachers studying in the fields, which require verbal skills, demonstrate higher levels of active listening competencies than those studying in the fields, which require mathematical skills. In the departments focusing on verbal skills, especially Turkish Language Teaching, the listening skills of the students are aimed to improve so as to make the students successful in other fields and improve their social skills as well (Karaduz 2010: 45). Therefore, the objective mentioned above is parallel to the results of this paper. Moreover, according to the paper conducted by Elias and Pihie (2003) to analyze the listening skills of the university students, the listening skill levels are generally lower among the students especially not in a technical field. The students studying in technical fields such as mathematical environmental science, economics, computer science and information technology have better listening skills than those studying in the faculty of education. This finding is considered to be related to the content of the courses in these departments, for the students studying in technical and mathematical fields should be better listeners to follow the content of the courses.

There has been a meaningful difference between the score types of the pre-service teachers and the levels of their active listening competencies. This difference is related to the fact that the pre-service teachers with the verbal and equally weighted score types demonstrate better active listening competencies than those with the numerical score type. The findings point out that the students with mathematical skills make

use of their active listening competencies less frequently than the pre-service teachers with verbal skills. This result might show that having mathematical intelligence and possessing active listening competencies have a negative correlation. Furthermore, the fact that the pre-service teachers with the verbal score type generally have better active listening competencies supports the results of the study analyzing the students in term of their departments.

### CONCLUSION

The findings acquired as a result of the paper can be summarized as follows. It has been revealed that pre-service teachers have active listening competencies at the “usually” level. When the levels of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers are analyzed in terms of gender variable, the females perform note taking more while listening, compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, they nod their heads to mean, “yes, I see” while listening to somebody more than the males. As for the department of the pre-service teachers who took part in the paper, the ones in the fields which require verbal skills demonstrate higher levels of active listening competencies than those in the fields which require mathematical skills. Finally, when their score types, which are used for university entrance and the level of their active listening competencies are compared, it is revealed that those with verbal and equally weighted score types demonstrate better active listening competencies than those with the numerical score type.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the results of this paper, the following recommendations can be made. The pre-service teachers studying in the departments focusing on mathematical skills should include more studies designed to improve active listening competencies in their undergraduate education. The habit of note taking should be encouraged so as to enhance the level of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers. Researches can be conducted to paper a variety of listening strategies so as to enhance the level of active listening competencies of pre-service teachers. Considering the year the pre-service teachers are studying in, their active listening ability levels can be determined, and the contributions of undergraduate education in this respect can be studied.

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