

LISTENING BEYOND THE STARS IN OUR DAYS OF INSECURITY: IMPACT ON THE NATION'S ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are composed of body, soul, and spirit, just as cosmic life consists of spiritual, physical, and psychological dimensions. These essential components require constant and harmonious interaction with one another, without which much is lost. Although listening is fundamentally a physical act, it is also highly psycho-mental and demands deep concentration if its immense benefits are to be fully realized. This study examines the art of listening intently, purposefully, and attentively in an age of chaos, highlighting its multidimensional benefits for the listener, the immediate environment, and humanity at large. Life is measured not only by how far one goes, but also by how well one lives. The paper explores the possibility of transforming life's experiences through meaningful relationships, conscious engagement with life's processes, and heightened sensitivity and attentiveness to one's environment.

Keywords: Listening, Attentiveness, Insecurity, Communication, Economy, National Development

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Great works of art, science, and technology owe their origin to discoveries made by seemingly common men sharing their unique experiences of life with others, starting from the composition of a poem as fundamental as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," to the technological discovery of the Boeing Airplane. Such gigantic innovations could owe their origin to just a willful yielding of self to an ordinary experience, intuition, insight, and action. Or sometimes by simply yielding self to practices with a measure of unbearable and unequal commitment. Moreover, it could answer to a natural gift that results from mere listening and attentive ears.

Mere listening? One may ask: who does not listen? What is the great task in listening? This is the nucleus of the matter. The paper makes bold to observe a huge gulf of difference between just listening and active or attentive listening.

Listening underscores, the acts of both hearing as well as understanding. Encyclopaedia Britannica considers listening as "to pay attention to someone or something in order to hear what is said; then to understand" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d). Listening involves two acts: to hear and interpret in order to understand (Anyadiegwu & Ejiesieme, 2017). It requires not only physical strength but also intellectual capacity. To hear does not in any way guarantee understanding. To understand means to process the message, recognize the import of the message, and be ready to act in tune with or against the message. It means to identify with the message as it concerns you, appreciate such identity, and be apt to act on the result. Meanwhile, the response received determines the effectiveness of the listening activity. When you understand, you take a stand.

Vocabulary.com aptly captures listening as "to hear with intention" and "pay close attention to" results. It further explains that when you listen to music, for instance, you not only intend to hear and understand the lyrics, but also the sound, with the intention to enjoy it. Affirming this statement, James Banks quips with illustrative furtherance: "We listen intentionally to God by turning from our distractions to meet Him in Scriptures and in prayer. God isn't distant. He longs for us to make time for Him so He can be the priority of our daily lives and then for eternity." Banks reminds us that listening is not an easy task. There could be distractions, absent-mindedness while listening, which one consciously shelves for effective listening.

In Forbes.com, Dianne Schilling identifies and stresses the importance of genuine listening, isolating tips to help one develop effective listening skills: eye contact, maximize genuine listening, be attentive but relaxed while listening. The reason cannot be overlooked. For one to be relaxed, he is ready to receive every good and needful message; then, attentiveness is action readiness. Simply put, it means: be present, give attention, be your own master, feel free and in charge, remain ready to serve, mentally screen out distractions, or do not get distracted by your own thoughts, feelings, and biases. We can go on and on relishing this action-packed act called listening, but for the purpose of this paper, proper planning is expedient. Hence, the paper delves into the intricacies of this seemingly simplistic act, devouring its implications on the daily life of individual citizens to discover a wealth of unharnessed benefits in our days of insecurity.

Divided into three parts, Part One continues to explain important terms implicit in the understanding of the topic; Part Two considers insecurity in its trends in the nation; Part Three views the impact of effective listening in our days of insecurity.

2.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS

2.1 Theory and Practice of Listening

Listening is a language skill that involves auditory perception and mental processing (Anyadiiegwu & Ejiesieme, 2017), showing that it is a complex act. The perceptual import of listening demands objectivity, but could be subjectively rewarded. In other words, a clouded mental disposition, judgmental mind set, or one already made up is a major hindrance to effective listening, as confirmed by Otto Scharmer and Jack C. Richards: “an effective listening involves analysing, organizing, interpreting sounds and inferring meaning before responding” (Richards, 2008; Scharmer, 2007). We, therefore, understand that listening can either be effective or ineffective. The “in-” before the second “effective” grammatically points to the absence of effectiveness. Hence, while one commands much effect, impact, and result, the other attracts no such effective impact.

To further broaden our perception of this impactful skill, Halone et al. (1998) add that listening is a nonlinear, multidimensional, affective, behavioural act. This sums the act up. Many actions take effect simultaneously. As we witness in communication, listening is equally transactional. It is behavioural, which shows that it is subject to the attitude of the listener, which aligns with effectiveness or ineffectiveness.

Effectiveness or ineffectiveness in listening makes a world of difference. Call it active listening, attentive listening, genuine listening, or impactful listening—it imports much, and without it, all efforts are in futility. In order to bridge this gap, writers have adduced listening tips for effective listening:

- (i) Maintain eye contact with the speaker.
- (ii) While listening, avoid distractions.
- (iii) Make a conscious effort to be present. This implies that one may be present yet absent-minded as one allows past actions to corrupt attention to vital issues. Divest yourself of worries, lack, boredom, lust, envy, and any inordinate passions.
- (iv) Listen to words, then picture what the speaker is saying. Listening does not entail planning what to say next. Both cannot effectively go concurrently. Planning what to say, do, or not do comes after the listening process. Then one can take the “longest” break, think on possible and available solutions. This cancels the attitude of listening and talking at the same time, as the next point suggests.
- (v) Do not interrupt the speaker while listening.
- (vi) Ask only clarifying questions for better understanding, but ensure such questions follow pauses from the speaker; else, you can lead the speaker away from focus (Schilling, D).
- (vii) Be empathetic while listening. This shows that only humans can listen effectively. Be humane; identify with the speaker’s feelings, challenges, inadequacies, and imbroglis so that you can proffer worthwhile solutions.
- (viii) Give feedback regularly to the speaker for better bonding. This could come through words or gestures. Communication must be effective.
- (ix) Pay attention to non-verbal cues (Forbes, 09, November, 2012.).
- (x) Mentally screen out distractions, as mentioned earlier, and others (Forbes, 2012).

It is vital to understand at this point what happens in the process of listening. One presents self physically and consciously, hears sounds and words, perceives signs and gestures and pictures, which are then subjected to a mental/intellectual process of analysis, organization, interpretation, and deductions or inferences. From the above comes the response. Keep an open mind: listening is not critiquing. As one indulges in criticism and judgment, one compromises effectiveness.

2.2 Listening and Attentiveness

The relationship between listening and attentiveness is likened to that of oil and salt served together. The taste of one depends on the other. For listening to be active and effective, it must be attentive, and attentiveness in listening releases uncountable positive results into every imaginable facet of the act.

Attentiveness: It is one thing to listen, yet another to be attentive in the act. Dictionary.com views attentiveness as “the action of paying close attention to something” (Dictionary.com, Retrieved June 18, 2022). The stress falls on the closeness relating to attention. One can be attentive in one’s movement, in the way one talks, speaks, or

acts. Attentiveness is a skill with which the bearer is greatly empowered to be observant and thoughtful of the considerations, polite, and courteous to conquer. This demands willingness, or better still, a conscious yielding of self, commitment, and physical and intellectual energy (courage).

A brief inference could be drawn from the biblical account of Elijah, the great prophet of God, and Elisha his successor, who eventually, by instruction, through attentiveness and strength, gained a double portion of his master's spirit of power and exploits (2 Kings 2:11-13). The skilled listener is fully divested of self and such suggesting intents. He is fully involved in his mission or goal and commitment, which eventually receives the deserved attention and effectiveness expected. To be attentive is to give attention to details, the acquisition of competence, effectiveness, thoroughness, and accuracy. The most effective people are those who give their undivided attention to people, problems, opportunities, and moments that come into their life. Wherever one's attention is, there the mind is also.

Illumination is the state of being illuminated, receiving light, comprehension, clarification, knowledge, understanding, and insight into a matter, topic, or complex challenge. An illumination could, therefore, be spiritual or intellectual. Whichever, it is a consequence of attentiveness. From our inference above, Elijah considered getting a double portion of his anointing an impossible act; however, if Elisha was alert and attentive to see him being taken up, Elisha collected the promised double portion of Elijah's spirit with which he did greater exploits than his master: "And it came to pass... that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder... And Elisha saw it, and cried, 'My Father, my father, the chariot of Israel...'" (2 Kings 2:12). Illumination could come through insight or in the form of enlightenment, which is beneficial to the receiver, as perceived above.

Insight: According to Dictionary.com, an insight refers to a sudden revelation, premonition, intuition, or comprehension of something or someone hitherto unknown to the receiver (Dictionary.com, n.d.). An insight suddenly appears. It could be spiritually, psychologically, or medically motivated. One gains an insight into some field of knowledge in such a manner that one knows with certainty that no love is lost. He suddenly exclaims, "Eureka, I've got it!" On gaining an insight, one is assured beyond data collection of both the content and the process. He could prove his conviction beyond all doubts. An insight further elucidates hidden truth through some revelation of facts of life. The slight difference from illumination is simply on the suddenness of an insight. An illumination is more or less expected because you are working toward it, full of expectation; however, an insight comes when your mind is least expecting it, but when it comes, you are sure you have it.

Consider the children's Snow White tale: the princess makes enquiry of the mirror, "Who is the fairest of the ladies?" Then she receives the answer that Snow White is. Her answer illuminates her and equips her for war. Then comes Snow White's challenge—to save her life—through insight. Snow White stayed safe with the dwarfs. Their house was not the only one in the neighbourhood, yet Snow White, through intuition, inner nudging, and premonition, found it safe to dwell in, and thanks to the insight, she was kept safe till the demise of the princess. The time of insecurity is a time of utter sensitivity. These ultra-sensitive endowments are put to work in such times as in the nation.

3.0 TRENDS OF INSECURITY IN THE NATION

Insecurity is a term which denotes the lack or absence of security. Security, according to Oxford Languages Dictionary, is "the state of being free from danger and threat" (Oxford Languages, n.d.). In other words, a secure state or system is a habitable, desirable, sustainable system or state guaranteed for life and development, as confirmed by Imobighe (1988). It is further viewed as a feeling of certainty that everything is under control and that all one's basic needs will be provided for. Here lies the great question for the nations of the world, especially the Nigerian nation, to answer: Are you really secure? How far? Can an innocent baby born into any Nigerian family be guaranteed free-flowing breast milk from the mother until it is weaned? Again, after the weaning process, how well? The basic needs of feeding, shelter, clothing, rights of living, and basic right of existence and choice—how far? The questions could go on and on, ranging from the home to the church and the society at large. Is there certainty that as a citizen of Nigeria, the basic infrastructure of roads, water, and electricity you need is guaranteed? Is there certainty in Nigeria that a citizen who wakes up early in the morning healthy and hearty and sets out to seek a living will return safely home without being gunned down by a stray bullet? These are issues of insecurity in a system, and the Nigerian nation is a major case.

In the Nigerian society of the digital era, it is common news that primary, secondary, or tertiary school students who set out from home to school for studies are kidnapped along the way to school, inside the bus conveying them to school, or even within the school environment in the process of acquiring academic training. The case of the

Chibok Girls and Leah Sharibu still remains a news item in Nigeria; yet the abduction of St. Mary's and others continues to stream in.

Needless to talk of social insecurity, which results range from utter carelessness to full acts of cruelty and gruesome murder.

An incumbent serving mayor from Arondizuogu was butchered like cow meat in broad daylight, and also heartlessly shown in mass media for all to see. For what crime the murder was committed still remains a mirage.

Travelers shut down on their journeys may not live to tell their sordid stories, yet domestic and relationship insecurity abound.

Recently in Lagos, some Igbo men leisurely watching a football match in the evening were gunned down in cold blood with no concrete reason for the brutality. Do we consider the ones tagged cult rival group clashes that claim lives in dozens on a weekly basis? Hunger, pain and bitterness, anger and jealousy equally take their toll. What about Fulani/herder-farmer clashes? This type renders families homeless and turns communities into IDP camps, as their community becomes a thing of the past. A mother of four was recently burnt with fuel by fire, as the perpetrator, so-called husband, shamelessly confessed his fits of envy, jealousy, mediocrity, and ignorance. At another end, it was discovered that a young man, an undergraduate, killed his lover and buried her in his bedroom. The list is limitless. Threats to life and social media murder cases are stories for another day.

Every attempt to access the true picture of the Nigerian security system online remains inaccessible. However, gleanings from comments and truisms in Human Rights publications (Human Rights Watch, 2021) enable the paper to solidly affirm the Nigerian nation as a breeding ground for insecurity.

This could be traced back to colonialism and amalgamation. Superficially, the term "amalgam" sends shivers into the bones of any level-minded individual who does not see reason to be joined with another. Marriage is a blissful union when consent is mutual; however, a bitter pill if disjointedly joined. It could be a living hell. The Language Dictionary.com opened up a perception to this paper that was hardly in view. Answering the question, "What is the reason for amalgamation?" the answer received is: "The surplus from the Southern Protectorate could be used to offset the deficit of the Northern Protectorate..." As thoughtful and concerned as the answer looks, still, if the contract means well for the parties involved, there is need for a regular review of the contract (agreement).

The top reason for amalgamation is selfishly motivated if the review plan is not in place. In the digital era we are in, it is expedient that people work together through mutual love, honour, and respect, and most important, through understanding and agreement. Coercion and amalgamation are outdated weapons of a bygone era. Relating to this, NigeriaFinder.com considers the reason a disadvantage of amalgamation, stating, "The first disadvantage of amalgamation is found in the aftermath, years after." The debate over whether amalgamation achieved unification of the people of Nigeria—arguably, it just didn't. Nigeria has witnessed civil war, Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram insurgency, terrorism from within its own territory, and others.

To the above, Human Rights Watch adds sincere and honest reports on basic human rights recklessly abused: the ban on Twitter in Nigeria for deleting President Muhammadu Buhari's tweet in June 2021, the killing of civilians in the Northeast, kidnappings in the Northwest—"over 1,000 children were kidnapped between January and August 2021." The #EndSARS peaceful protest and the Lekki Toll Gate brutality remain unaccounted for. In the Northwest, authorities imposed a telecommunication shutdown in a democratic society. In the Southeast and Southwest, agitations for freedom are responded to "with excessive use of force." Mazi Nnamdi Kanu was extradited from Kenya to Nigeria regardless of his rights as a citizen. Even when the court discharged and acquitted him, he is still under custody.

Finally, hear this: the Lagos Judicial Panel of Inquiry investigating the shooting of #EndSARS protesters by military officers at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos held its final hearing in 2021. The final report, till date, has not been made known in any quarter. What about freedom of expression? Election and electoral rights? What about the constitution of the Federal MDAs (Ministries, Departments, and Agencies)?

3.1 Causes of Insecurity

What could be the remote and immediate causes of insecurity? Colonialism has been fingered earlier as the key remote cause of insecurity in Nigeria. Meanwhile, leadership and government in power remain the agency through which such activities obtain easy access.

Other causes include:

1. The lackadaisical attitude of the government toward the preservation of life speaks volumes.
2. Government's identified attention and inclination toward wealth acquisition at the expense of people's lives and the preservation of humanity.
3. Forceful involvement of the people in lip service and vain politicking with the consequent destruction of values and virtues.
4. National and global trends that deemphasize life preservation and promote self-aggrandizement and power influence.
5. Trends in times and seasons of globalization, digitalization, and postmodernism.

4.0 THE IMPACT OF ATTENTIVE LISTENING ON INSECURITY

This part is concerned with the resume, logistics, and effects. It is pertinent to understand how important active listening is in communication and language learning. The place of effective communication cannot be overstressed. Active listening is key to effective communication. In fact, active listening cushions and fuels effective communication. As a result, it is indispensable in the communication process.

Only man can communicate through skills acquisition; thus, communicative prowess is largely linked to effective listening and speaking. It is vital for viable and vibrant interpersonal, group, organizational, and even intercultural communication.

In a time of insecurity, the teaching and learning of this soft skill is major. The multidimensional stress of the skill portends much in a severe system demanding serious and urgent intervention. The statement could not be adequately justified without reemphasizing the tasking exigencies of its practice, hitherto exposed in the study, together with the importance of active listening to the learner.

Effective communication by default means active listening plus effective message delivery with enhanced productivity. It is germane at this point to note some benefits of effective communication, as it opens the vista to the gains of active or attentive listening in times of insecurity.

Primarily, effective communication means effective understanding that intones effective speaking and listening. Where understanding is in place, progress is assured. On the contrary, as in days of insecurity, even life itself is at risk.

Effective communication means that all systems are working. If communication is not effective, we identify some interference. This implies there are impediments and obstructions along the channel. Nothing works normally; systems are broken down entirely or partially; people are disgruntled; discord abounds. Lack of flow stultifies and discredits others. This is the condition in insecurity and inattentiveness.

Moreover, ineffective communication means inadequacy in the communicative channel/medium: appropriate knowledge, voice tone, and temperance as the situation demands. What is lacking in Nigerian communication? It is not effective. There is much insecurity in the nation; all that are involved need to retrace their steps.

Effective communication breathes contentment. Both the encoder and decoder are satisfied that the feedback is appropriate and timely. None is antagonizing the other; rather, together they sing harmoniously in victory. But in an insecure environment, even lovers lie on a bed of suspicion.

Effective communication is a healthy relationship and fruitful intercourse. In an insecure environment, even a gift is a snare.

Freedom is guaranteed with effective communication. Every individual freely expresses grievances, suggestions, and mediations which are unbiasedly received. Where criticism is required, it is constructive and objective. It is not so in an insecure environment where governors move about in armored cars. Behold a cemetery for the governed. The irony of it all is that none is safe in such a milieu.

4.1 Impact on the Nation's Economy

The paper records so many impacts and benefits as a result of encounter with active listening amid insecurity. In Nigerian society, where insecurity is at top gear, active or genuine listening has much to offer. TheBalanceMoney.com, in that guise, makes these inputs:

1. Through active listening, one proves that one is interested and involved in an individual, organization, or matter. As a result, such involvement or interest means willingness to avail oneself for meaningful service or contribution.
2. Through active listening, one is ready to help another solve problems, resolve issues, impact knowledge, make differences, and engage in teamwork.
3. An active listener is a team player. There is a difference between just a worker and a dedicated staff.
4. Active listening builds trust and establishes rapport, be it personal or organizational.
5. Effective listening demonstrates concern and care through interpersonal rapport.
6. As a thoughtful, analytical person, he is highly desired in conflict management and restoration of peace.
7. Emotional intelligence is guaranteed with this soft skill.
8. Active listening is problem-sensitive.
9. It generates courtesy.
10. Professionalism is guaranteed through effectiveness and accuracy.
11. Transparency is unavoidable through honest involvement and care.
12. Integrity is optimized; humility is unavoidable through sincere concern.
13. The soft skill is proactive, empathetic, and guarantees self-awareness.
14. Error-free performance is ensured through genuine attention.
15. Understanding personalities and situations helps one to be on top of such situations and persons, to the effect that harmonious living and a fulfilled life are guaranteed.
16. Sensitivity to religious and ethnic/tribal diversity is a strong virtue in crises and insecurity.
17. The genuine listener is a great facilitator in group discussions and interpersonal communication.
18. Good health and general well-being are improved.
19. It means optimal attention to non-verbal cues.

5.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, listening remains a fundamental human skill that transcends the mere act of hearing and serves as a vital instrument for personal growth, social harmony, and effective communication. When individuals listen genuinely, attentively, and actively, they are better able to understand others, foster meaningful relationships, and respond appropriately to the complexities of life. Even in periods characterized by insecurity, uncertainty, and social upheaval, the practice of attentive listening helps to mitigate everyday challenges, promotes emotional balance, and enhances resilience. By cultivating sensitivity to one's environment and openness to the experiences and perspectives of others, individuals can make informed decisions and maintain a sense of purpose and well-being. Ultimately, the art of listening enables people to flourish despite adversity, contributing not only to individual fulfilment but also to the development of more empathetic, peaceful, and cohesive communities.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Keep attentive to keep safe.
2. Bridle your appetite to stay alive and safe.
3. Mind your own business always.
4. Late-night and night movements are discouraged.
5. Stay wise in relationships contracted.
6. Be your brother's keeper and resist entrusting your life into anybody's hand.
7. Treat strangers with caution; be firm but kind.
8. Report known and unknown cases to approved security quarters.

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