



An investigation into students' listening skill difficulties: A Case Study at the Language Center of Elmergib University

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دراسة حول صعوبات مهارة الاستماع لدى الطلاب:
دراسة حالة في مركز اللغات الخمس بجامعة المرقب

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة إلى دراسة الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب الليبيون في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أثناء أنشطة الاستماع، ويركز الهدف الأساسي للورقة على الصعوبات التي ذكرها الطلاب، ومفاهيمهم حول أنشطة الاستماع، واستخدمت الدراسة تصميم البحث النوعين حيث تم استخدام أداتين لجمع البيانات المطلوبة: المقابلة والملاحظة حيث أجريت المقابلة مع 15 طالبًا تم اختيارهم عشوائيًا، أما الملاحظة فقد أجريت خلال الفصل الدراسي من 1 أكتوبر 2024 إلى 19 ديسمبر 2024 وأبرزت النتائج الصعوبات المختلفة التي ذكرها ولاحظها الطلاب، وكشفت النتائج عن مشكلات الطلاب في أنشطة مهارة الاستماع وتحديد الصعوبات التي يواجهونها أثناء أنشطة الاستماع.

الكلمات الدالة: طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، صعوبات الاستماع، مهارة الاستماع.

Abstract:

This paper aims to investigate the difficulties encountered by Libyan students of English as a foreign language during listening activities. The essential objective of the paper focuses on the difficulties mentioned by the students, and their concepts about the listening activities. The study used a qualitative research design. Two instruments were employed to collect the desired data: an interview and observation. The interview took place with 15 randomly selected students. The observation was conducted during the semester from October 1, 2024 to December 19, 2024. The results highlight different difficulties that mentioned and observed by the students. The results

reveal students' issues on listening skill activities and identify the difficulties they encounter during listening activities.

Keywords: English foreign language students, listening difficulties, listening skill.

1.1 Introduction

Communicating with individuals across the globe relies significantly on the English language. This is why English is recognized as a global language. The innate ability of native speakers to comprehend and construct grammatically correct sentences constitutes language (Chomsky, 2000, pp. 3-5).

Despite its crucial role in mastering English, educators frequently overlook the development of listening skills. Consequently, students encounter considerable difficulties when engaging in classroom listening exercises. The outcome of this negligence is often student frustration with listening tasks, leading them to perceive listening as the most challenging skill to acquire. Therefore, teachers should support and motivate students to actively engage in listening activities. Furthermore, educators should endeavor to create accessible listening classes and streamline tasks through various exercises designed to improve listening proficiency.

1.2 Problem statement

Listening is one of the most important skills that learners of English have to acquire and master. It requires the learner to understand what other speakers, either native or non-native speakers of English. However, listening to English recordings is considered the most difficult task for many learners of English, and Libyan students are not exceptional. In this context, most Libyan students face many difficulties when they engage in listening activity or task. They hardly understand what is said. Moreover, most Libyan students in the classroom are unable to understand the target words or sentences stated in the listening activity. Many attempts were conducted in order to determine the factors and causes behind these difficulties; however, in Libyan context, where English is a foreign language, the studies are very rare. Therefore, this study aims to h

1.2 The Importance of the Study

The ability to listen attentively is essential when it comes to successfully picking up a new language. According to Brown (2007: 296), it is clear that listening forms the very groundwork on which language acquisition is built. Students benefit from enhanced listening skills more than any other skills when it comes to learning. Field (2008:13) pointed out that "at the start of teaching English as a foreign language, listening was mainly a tool for presenting fresh grammar concepts by using standard conversations"

Instructors need to focus on improving students' listening skills, as this will allow them to participate more effectively in class discussions.

This study is important because it aims to highlight and pinpoint the major challenges encountered by English language learners when it comes to listening exercises, as this skill is often seen as one of the hardest skill for many non-native speakers of English to master.

1.3 Research Questions

The researcher should seek to provide answers to the questions presented below:

1. What are the difficulties that the students have in listening activities?
2. What are the factors that make listening activities difficult for students?
3. What are the solutions can be followed to overcome listening difficulties?

1.4 Hypothesis of the Research

This study is conducted under the assumption that a significant number of students struggle when engaging in listening exercises. To put it differently, majority of students encounter numerous challenges related to their listening capabilities.

2. Literature Review

Listening, as explained by numerous researchers, encompasses various definitions. Howat and Dakin (1974:29) articulated "listening involves paying attention to and comprehending the message conveyed by others" According to Underwood (1989:1), listening entails concentrating on a speaker's words and endeavoring to fully grasp their intended meaning.

Furthermore, Buck (2001: 247) clarified that listening is an intricate activity where the listener receives auditory signals and analyzes them using a broad spectrum of linguistic and non-linguistic insights.

Ur (1984) highlighted several obstacles encountered by students during listening activities, including:

- 1: Students struggle with the way some words are spoken in English.
- 2: Students struggle when something is repeated.
- 3: They do not understand the definition of words because they are new to the language structure.
- 4: They struggle to recognize commonly used words.
- 5: Students are unable to change the speed at which they listen.
- 6: Students struggle to understand different ways of speaking.
- 7: Students cannot make use of their existing knowledge of the world to understand the complete meaning.

Such problems with understanding when listening can make it more challenging for students to develop other abilities in English. If students do not grasp what is being communicated, they will not have the speaking abilities needed to react appropriately.

Underwood (1989) pointed out that many things affect the listening abilities of students studying English as a foreign language. He found that when students do not have sufficient prior knowledge or understanding of the situation, it can be hard for them to understand what they are hearing. Even if students understand the simple meaning of what they are listening, they frequently miss the more nuanced or complicated meaning.

Ahkam (2015) aimed to investigate the obstacles that students learning English as a foreign language encounter when trying to understand spoken English. The individuals in her study consisted of 95 male students and 94 female students. The results indicated that significant factors included struggles with identifying vocabulary, insufficient pre-existing understanding of the topic, interruptions caused by sounds in the area, substandard audio equipment, and experiencing a lack of pleasure during the listening task. Furthermore, the students mentioned that the rate at which individuals spoke and the omission of words when speaking were considered intermediate obstacles.

Moreover, Nadia (2024), aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by King Faisal University's Applied College students as they acquire English listening proficiency. The results indicated that Saudi female students encounter great obstacles compared to male students, yet both groups have difficulty in acquiring English listening abilities. As a result, it was recommended enhancing listening techniques, furnishing universities and schools with materials to instruct English listening comprehension, and motivating students to raise their language competence.

Purwanto, Fadhly, and Rahmatunisa (2021) investigated the listening barriers as well as listening strategies used by intermediate and upper intermediate college students. The result of intermediate students faced difficulties due to accents, lack of concentration, speed, lack of vocabularies, and unclear speakers' statement. Meanwhile, the upper intermediate's barriers are accents and lack of vocabularies. Moreover, in order to overcome the issues, those students used several strategies that mostly for both intermediate and upper intermediate levels use these strategies, such as: (a) reading, (b) focus, (c) predicting, and (d) find the keywords.

Permatasari, Syam, and Sastrawati (2023) aimed to determine the difficulties faced by students in learning listening comprehension from the listening material factor. The results showed that the students had a difficulty in unfamiliar words, unfamiliar topics, and in interpreting the meaning of spoken texts. They also find it difficult with long spoken text. speaker's speaking speed was also another difficulty experienced by all students.

Thi (2024) investigated the problems encountered by students when trying to grasp listening material. The study employs a method consistent with Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses, focusing on the exploration of available research. Data collection focuses on publications relevant to the problems that students face during listening activities, and the systematic review or meta-analysis mainly utilizes research outcomes. Twelve articles gathered over the previous two years formed the basis of the analysis. The results suggested that numerous aspects are likely contributing factors to the challenges in listening comprehension. These encompass the listener's previous understanding and experiences, along with the degree of clarity. The elements encompass the listener's prior knowledge and lived experiences, the level of precision and excellence in the spoken communication, the listener's degree of concentration and enthusiasm, restricted lexical resources, cognitive and linguistic proficiencies, variations in cultural and societal norms, along with the listener's affective condition.

3. Methodology of the Study

The study employed a qualitative research design. The study utilized an interview method in order to collect the required data. The interview was conducted with the students at Elmergib University. The interview questions pertained to the challenges encountered in listening exercises, alongside their individual perspectives on strategies to mitigate these challenges. The comprehension levels of students regarding listening exercises can guide instructors to address the specific difficulties precisely. Moreover, academic observations were carried out during the course of lectures throughout the academic term. These lecture observations by the researcher were executed between October 1, 2024, and December 19, 2024, within the language center of Elmergib University. The audience consisted of approximately 25 students gathered in the auditorium.

The participants are the second-level students at the English department at Elmergib University. They are fifteen students picked randomly to participate in the interview. They are males and females and their age ranged between 26 to 30 years old.

3.1: The Procedure of the Study:

During this study, the researcher used the interview as a method to gather data. The students were given four questions prepared in advance in order to gain insights into their views and responses pertaining to the research topic. Before beginning the interview, the researcher made sure that all students who were going to participate had given their permission, and they had all consented to take part. Every student had a one-on-one interview that lasted between 5 and 10 minutes. To guarantee the precision and clarity of their answers, the researcher also took the time to go over each of the interview questions with the individuals who were participating.

Concerning the observation, it took place over the duration of the semester, during which time the researcher carefully recorded any habits and actions that became apparent while the listening exercises were being done in the lecture room. Every individual taking part in the study is a speaker of Arabic as their first language, and they are all learning English in a formal educational setting.

The assembled details presented dependable and perceptive information, which was helpful in strengthening the study's discoveries and examining them with greater clarity.

4. Results

This section presents the results obtained from the interview and observation.

4.1 Results of the Interview

1: What are the difficulties that you face in listening activities?

In order to improve their listening abilities, the students emphasized a number of ideas. The majority of them stated that it is challenging to understand native speakers because of their rapid speech and pronunciation. They also brought up the fact that different speakers have different accents, which frequently leads to misunderstandings.

Additionally, they have trouble with new vocabulary and expressions, and occasionally they have trouble understanding sentences, including their structures. They added that some recordings have poor audio quality, which makes listening comprehension even more difficult. Moreover, because many teachers do not emphasize or focus on regular listening exercises, students are not accustomed to them. Lastly, there is not enough repetition of listening exercises, which restricts practice and development opportunities.

2: What are the factors that make listening activities difficult to you?

The main idea is the absence of regular practice with listening exercises, which causes anxiety and fear because of the anticipation of not grasping the subject. Students' stress levels during listening assignments rise when they are exposed to new vocabulary and expressions. Another significant factor is that some teachers do not focus enough on helping students develop their listening skills in the classroom, which leaves them with few opportunities to do so.

These challenges are also exacerbated by technical problems, such as low-quality audio recordings, especially those made by native English speakers, and poor sound clarity in some classrooms due to large spaces or a large number of students. Furthermore, some students stated that they completely neglect listening practice due to their lack of motivation to advance their English language proficiency.

3: What are the solutions can be followed to overcome listening difficulties?

The participants offered a number of solutions to deal with the problems they ran into during the lecture's listening exercises. They stressed the significance of having the instructor repeat the listening exercises several times and give thorough explanations in advance. Additionally, it was advised to start with a slower audio recording for the initial listening and then switch to a faster version to improve understanding. To improve clarity, some students suggested that the first recording made by an Arabic speaker and that the second recording be made by a native speaker of the target language. In order to encourage and assist students, they also mentioned the necessity of the teacher explaining new vocabulary and expressions before the activity. Other recommendations included increasing the quantity and frequency of listening exercises and having the teacher demonstrate the listening tasks before utilizing the original native-speaker audio.

4.2 Results of Observation:

According to the researcher's observations made throughout the academic semester, the majority of students declined listening exercises due to their inability to concentrate and comprehend new vocabulary. A lot of students expressed dissatisfaction with the speaker's pace and the way words were pronounced. Students displayed fear, anxiety, hesitation, frustration, and a lack of confidence at the start of the training because they were worried about not understanding. The researcher observed that the students were impatient and unable to repeat the listening exercises, which distracted them and made it challenging for them to focus while listening. Additionally, students' listening skills were significantly impacted by their surroundings, which made it more difficult for them to concentrate and comprehend.

These factors all contributed to the majority of students' poor listening abilities. Over time, though, students began to react favorably to listening exercises with encouragement and repeated practice.

4.3 Conclusions:

This study aimed to focus on listening difficulties faced by Libyan students at university level. The findings brought to light some of the challenges students encounter when practicing their listening skills. These results are consistent with Nadia (2024) who found that Saudi female students have problems in listening. Furthermore, the study clarified some reasons that make listening exercises difficult which results in a lack of interest in listening and an effort to avoid it as much as possible. These factors are new vocabulary, and the speed of speech. These results were also reported by previous studies such as Purwanto, et al, (2021) and Permatasari, et al, (2023). The study also found that most students are dissatisfied with listening exercises and have a lot of trouble developing this ability. Through this study, the researcher aimed to identify some of these challenges, as well as students' perspectives on how to overcome them. Additionally, the researcher looked at how teachers handle these challenges during listening skill exercises.

4.4 Recommendations:

The following recommendations were suggested to improve students' listening skills and assist teachers in effectively developing this skill during learning:

1. Giving students systematic guidance on the significance of listening skills and presenting them in a simplified and structured manner, which may help learners become more self-assured and improve their overall language proficiency.
2. Since regular exposure to listening practice is crucial for the development of communicative competence, the researcher counsels students to get over their hesitation and anxiety when participating in listening activities.
3. Given their critical role in language acquisition and efficient language use, the students are advised to practice listening skills intensively and continuously.
4. To better deliver instruction and support students' learning, teachers who are in charge of teaching listening skills should have sufficient pedagogical and practical experience in this field.
5. By incorporating more listening-focused exercises and activities into classroom instruction, teachers are urged to emphasize listening skills more.
6. By reducing noise disruptions and making sure that audio materials and recordings are of excellent quality and clarity, universities should give top priority to creating a supportive learning environment.
7. carrying out more empirical research in this area to find more underlying causes and create practical solutions.
8. Conducting additional research on methods for teaching listening skills so that the results can help researchers, educators, students, and academic institutions.

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