

## Investigating Teacher's Views and Perceptions about Listening Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by Sudanese University Students

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### ABSTRACT:

This study aimed at investigating listening comprehension difficulties experienced by EFL Sudanese university students. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method, the researcher collected data by using a questionnaire for (30) Sudanese University teachers. To analyze the data the researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese university students encounter listening comprehension difficulties when they listen to English. In the light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that university textbooks need to give more attention to listening skills and strategies, teachers should use authentic listening materials that suit the level and the needs of the students. Moreover, teachers need to raise the students' awareness about the importance of listening comprehension in the process of foreign language learning.

**Key words:** listening comprehension, listening strategies, foreign language learning.

### المستخلص:

هدفت هذه الورقة لتقصي صعوبات الاستيعاب عند الاستماع للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدى طلاب الجامعات السودانية , استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي و جمعت البيانات بواسطة الاستبانة التي وزعت علي (30) معلماً للغة الإنجليزية بالجامعات السودانية استخدمت الباحثة برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية لتحليل البيانات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هنالك صعوبات تواجه الطلاب في الاستيعاب عند الاستماع للغة الإنجليزية. بناء على تلك النتائج فإن الباحثة أوصت بأن على إدارة مناهج الجامعات زيادة الاهتمام بمهارات الاستماع الاستيعابي و يجب علي المعلمين أن يستخدموا مواد سمعية حقيقية مناسبة لمستويات و احتياجات الطلاب . علي المعلمين , أيضا زيادة وعي الطلاب بأهمية الاستماع الاستيعابي في عملية تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.  
**الكلمات المفتاحية :** تعلم اللغة الأجنبية, استيعاب الاستماع, استراتيجيات الاستماع.

### INTRODUCTION:

Compared to the other skills of language, listening is observed to be used more in EFL language classrooms as EFL learners spend most of their learning time listening to their teachers or listening to each others. They may receive as much as 90% of their learning input through listening.

Listening plays a crucial role in the communication of every day life .Guo and Willis (2006) stated that " Listening

is the medium through which people gain a large proportion of their education , their information , their understanding of the world and human affairs , their ideals , sense of values".(p.3).

Listening has also an essential role in academic contexts Rost (1994) pointed out that listening comprehension is very important in foreign language instruction as it is the process by which the learner gets the input and without understanding it learning cannot simply occur.



Listening does not only allow learners to receive information from their teachers (language input) but also gives them the chance to learn vocabulary and new language items that will help them in language production (language output).

Foreign language learners encounter many difficulties that are frequently associated with learning foreign languages; they find it difficult to understand recorded texts, dialogues and even direct speech of their teachers.

These difficulties are attributed to many factors such as native speaker's speed of speech, accents, vocabulary, stress, intonation and so on. These listening comprehension difficulties lead to other learning difficulties since listening takes precedence over the other language skills when it comes to language acquisition (Putriani, et. al.2013).

In this paper the researcher tries to investigate the causes of listening comprehension problems among EFL Sudanese university students and propose some suitable solutions to overcome them.

## 2. Statement of the problem:

The researcher has noticed that many EFL learners (university students) face numerous serious deficiencies in listening comprehension; they find it difficult to grasp the intended message. Furthermore, when it comes to doing exercises based on listening, they are observed to be very poor performers, resulting in comparatively poor achievement, too.

So, the researcher finds it important to explore these listening comprehension hurdles with the intention of suggesting the appropriate rectifications.

## 3. Objectives of the Study:

The study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

1. To shed light on the causes of listening comprehension problems that face EFL Sudanese university students.
2. To propose some suitable solutions to overcome these listening comprehension difficulties.

## 4. Questions of the Study:

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. What are the causes of listening comprehension problems that face EFL Sudanese university students?
2. How can teachers help students to overcome these listening comprehension problems?

## 5. Hypotheses of the Study:

The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. Listening comprehension difficulties are attributed to many factors.
2. Teachers can help students to overcome listening comprehension problems by raising their awareness about the importance of listening for learning in general and the types of listening techniques to be adopted to improve their listening skills.

## 6. Significance of the Study:

This study is significant for a number of reasons:

It contributes to the existing literature in the field of teaching listening.

Teachers will have a better understanding of their students listening difficulties and examine their own teaching techniques and materials, accordingly.

Learners can identify their problems and be aware of the factors that contribute to their difficulties and can apply the right strategies and techniques of listening.

The study shall also form a point of departure for syllabus designers and educators in the field of their specializations.

#### **7. Limits of the Study:**

This study is limited to EFL Sudanese university teachers during the academic year (2018-2019) in order to investigate the causes of listening comprehension difficulties and propose some suitable solutions to overcome them.

#### **8. Methodology of the Study:**

As has been mentioned, the purpose of this research is to investigate the difficulties affecting listening comprehension among EFL Sudanese university students, to achieve this goal and in an attempt to answer the research questions, data has been collected through using a questionnaire which was administered to (30) professional Sudanese university teachers who have long experience in teaching English and doing research in English. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

#### **9. Definition of Listening:**

Rost (1994) defined listening by saying that "Listening is an active mental ability that helps us to understand the world around us and is one of the most necessary parts in making successful communication."

According to Saricoban (1999) as quoted in (Ziane 2012) listening skill means the learners' ability to pick up what the speaker is saying and to grasp the intended meaning behind any spoken or recorded messages.

#### **10. The Difference between Hearing and Listening:**

The difference between hearing and listening has been stated by Kline (1996)

when he said that "Hearing is the reception of sound, listening is the attachment of meaning to the sound. Hearing is passive, listening is active" (p.7).

Rost (2002) stated that "Hearing is a form of perception, listening is an active and intentional process. Although both hearing and listening involve sound perception, the difference in terms reflects a degree of intention" (p.8). This suggests that hearing is an unconscious process while listening is an active conscious process through which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple strategic reasons to fill the task requirement. (O'Malley et. al. 1989).

#### **11. Types of Listening:**

According to (Simonds and Cooper 2011) there are five types of listening comprehension depending on the situation of listening:

##### **1. Informative Listening:**

In this type of listening, the main objective of the listener is to interpret the message as closer as possible to the intended meaning of the speaker.

##### **2. Relation Listening:**

This type of listening is used to assist a person or to identify a relationship as when a psychologist listens to a troubled person.

##### **3. Appreciative Listening:**

The main purpose of this type of listening is to enjoy or entertain ourselves like when we listen to a person because of his style.

##### **4. Critical Listening:**

Critical listening means to check the authenticity and the validity of what we hear as when we listen to politicians.

##### **5. Discriminative Listening:**

Discriminative listening is the most important type of listening because it is the base of all the above mentioned types. The listener here needs to be accurate and sensitive so that he can comprehend the slight differences in meaning according to the stress, intonation and pitch of the speaker.

## 12. The Elements of Teaching and Learning Listening:

### 1. The Teacher:

The teacher is the most important element in the process of teaching and learning since he guides and monitors the students to understand the lesson, he is the one whose task is to transfer the components of the textbook into real practical classroom activities.

### 2. The Learner:

The learner is the main focus of the teaching and the learning process; he is the listener whose proficiency level and concentration affects his listening comprehension.

### 3. The Materials of Teaching:

The teacher should choose the listening materials that suit the level of the students, in doing so he should consider some factors such as:

#### A. Speech rates:

The teacher should provide listening tasks by controlling the speech rate and gradually increasing the speed of speech while making some pauses during the listening time when necessary to allow students make some notes.

#### B. Stress and Intonation:

Stress and intonation should be considered by the teacher since they determine the intention of the speaker; when the speaker changes stress and intonation, he conveys a different message from the literal meaning of the individual words.

## 13. Approaches of Teaching Listening:

There are some approaches that are used to teach listening comprehension: they are the grammar- translation approach, the direct approach, the audio-lingual approach and the communicative approach.

### A. The Grammar-Translation Approach:

Traditionally, listening was taught in ordinary classes without using language laboratories; the main aim of teaching listening was to learn about the grammar of English.

This approach claimed that language consists of a set of rules that should be learnt first; the grammar translation syllabus was mainly designed to teach the students the grammar and vocabulary through the translation to and from L1 and L2 while using L1 as the medium of instruction.

In this approach, students did not use to listen to enough language; they listened mainly to the grammatical rules of the language and the vocabulary being drilled and explained.

### B. The Direct Method Approach:

This approach came out to tackle some of the shortcomings of the grammar translation method with the claim that students should learn the language by using only L2 in classroom setting , grammar was taught implicitly while the vocabulary was taught by using objects ,pictures and explanations with strong emphasis on pronunciation.

This approach was based on the assumption that students should learn the target language through teaching and practicing listening by listening to their teachers while they are explaining grammar and vocabulary, it was believed that students would pick up listening in an inductive way through repetition and use then other skills of the language can be acquired later.

This approach was efficient as it helped the students to use English since it was the language of instruction however; teachers wasted too much time trying to explain complex grammatical rules when simple translation to L1 would be more efficient.

#### **C. The Audio-Lingual Approach:**

This approach was affected by the methods through which international languages were taught; it focused mainly on the teaching of listening comprehension by drilling new lexical items and grammatical forms.

Students used to listen to their teachers as a model or sometimes they listened to tapes then repeat and practice what they have heard.

This approach became widely used with the emergence of language laboratories in the 1960s.

#### **D. The Communicative Approach:**

In this approach listening is taught in the same way like the other language skills; all language skills are of equal importance and are taught with the assumption that language is mainly learnt as a tool of communication and to improve the students' linguistic capabilities.

In the communicative approach, teachers use language laboratories and authentic listening materials which have resemblance to real life language, while motivating students and providing them with feedback immediately.

#### **14. Stages of Teaching Listening:**

An effective listening activity includes three stages: pre-listening, while listening and post-listening.

Houston (2016) stated that in pre-listening, the teacher should give the students an idea about what they are going to listen to in a very short time

maximum fifteen minutes. In while – listening stage students listen and respond to the task at hand. In the final stage post-listening, the teacher checks the answers with the students by asking them to compare answers with each other and with the class, then the teacher should give the students a chance to practice the new items being learnt.

As an example of this, in teaching listening to English conversations, the teacher should pre-teach new vocabulary and grammatical items and give the students an idea about the topic they are going to hear in the pre-listening stage, then in the while listening stage students listen extensively and follow the task in an attempt to answer the questions. In the final stage the teacher checks answers while providing feedback then he/she may revise some new vocabulary and grammatical items to ensure that the students have learnt them, finally he may play the recording again, ask the students to listen and repeat or follow the tape script and then to role play the tape script with their partners.

#### **15. Previous Studies on Listening Comprehension Difficulties among EFL learners:**

Cubalit (2016) studied "Listening Comprehension Problems of Thai University English Learners" with the aim to identify the listening comprehension problems that the students face with regard to the listening text, the speaker and the listener. The researcher used a questionnaire to collect data, the findings of the study showed that most of the participants faced problems relating to the text, the speaker and the listener besides lack of opportunity to practice their English skills.

Hamouda (2013) made a study called "The Listening Comprehension Problems Encountered by Saudi Students in the EFL Listening Classroom", he used a questionnaire and an interview to gather information, the results of the study indicated that the accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, different accents of the speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety and the bad quality of the recording were the major listening comprehension problems.

Izzah and Keeya(2019) conducted a study entitled "Common Listening Challenges : Indonesian EFL Learners Perception" with the aim to identify the common listening challenges experienced by Indonesian EFL learners .In collecting data, the researchers used a self-structured questionnaire which refers to

**Table (1) the mean and standard deviation and chi-square values for the study Hypothesis (1):** Listening comprehension difficulties are attributed to many factors.

Nom.	Statement	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	Universities do not pay much attention to teaching listening comprehension.	3.6	0.8	29	0.023
2	Teachers do not use suitable listening materials and tasks that suit the level of the students.	2.4	0.5	28	0.010
3	Most of the time teachers test listening rather than teach it and neglect listening strategies.	3.3	0.7	23	0.006
4	Many listening textbooks contain artificial dialogues which have absolutely no resemblance to real speeches.	2.5	3.8	15	0.046
5	Teachers do not usually train students to listen to the speech of native speakers of English.	3.4	2.5	22	0.000
6	Poor qualities of recorded materials may cause some listening comprehension problems.	2.8	1.7	12	0.000

three categories ; the listener, the passage and the physical setting .The findings of the study showed that speech rate, the complex nature of the passage ,lexis and phonological rules were the main challenges that encounter the subjects of the study.

#### 16. Data Analysis and Discussion:

The questionnaire consists of two parts, part one contains fifteen statements which investigate the causes of the difficulties that EFL learners face in listening comprehension, the second part consists of ten statements to elicit some of the solutions of listening comprehension problems. The questionnaire was given to 30 respondents who represent the teachers' community at Sudanese Universities.

7	Limited, unfamiliar vocabulary can cause great listening comprehension problems.	2.9	4.8	34	0.000
8	In teaching listening comprehension it is essential for the teacher to be well-prepared. (to be aware of what can cause difficulties for the students and what might be the causes and be ready to overcome them).	2.7	0.5	22	0.000
9	Teachers should motivate students and help them to interact with the listening task and provide feedback immediately.	2.9	0.7	32	0.023
10	Attitudes of the speakers, learners' beliefs, listening stimuli, lack of exposure to the target language, syntax, lexis, phonological and grammatical rules are some of the factors that affect listening comprehension.	2.6	0.5	22	0.036
11	Spontaneous, colloquial speech that contain repetitions, false starts, self-correction, elaboration, omission of some words, tautologies and fillers may make it more difficult for the students to understand the listening text.	3.6	0.8	22	0.023
12	Psychological and physical features can pose some listening comprehension difficulties.	3.4	0.5	28	0.010
13	Lack of socio-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language can cause some difficulties in listening comprehension.	3.6	0.8	29	0.023
14	Students may find it difficult to understand salient features of spoken discourse such as clarity, intonation, pitch, pauses, stress and pronunciation.	2.4	0.5	28	0.010
15	Teaching listening comprehension in small classes can be rewarding for both teachers and students.	3.3	0.7	23	0.006

Source: The researcher from applied study, SPSS 24

It is clear from the above table that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the (15)

statements are greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level

(5%) which indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents. According to the above findings , we can say that EFL Sudanese

university students face some problems in listening comprehension because of the above factors, so the first hypotheses of the study is verified.

**Table No.(2 ) Chi-Square Test Results for Respondents' Answers of the Questions of the study Hypothesis No (2) :** Teachers can help students to overcome listening comprehension problems by raising their awareness about the importance of listening for learning in general and the types of listening techniques to be adopted to improve their listening skills.

Nom.	Statement	mean	SD	Chi square	p-value
1	I try to familiarize my students with the rules of pronunciation in order to help them hear different forms of rapid speech, different accents, and I encourage them to imitate native speakers' pronunciation.	2.4	1.9	12	0.00
2	I design listening tasks that arise the students' interest and help them learn listening skills and strategies and I avoid tasks that requires memorization rather than understanding.	2.5	2.6	17	0.00
3	I pre-teach new vocabulary, grammatical items and provide my students with background knowledge, socio-cultural knowledge and linguistic knowledge before listening to the text.	2.4	2.4	13	0.00
4	I use audio –visual aids with high qualities rather than tapes to teach listening comprehension because I believe that body language and facial expressions make it easier for the students to understand the speaker's intended meaning.	3	0.8	25	0.03
5	I train my students to listen and try to grasp the main idea depending on their background knowledge rather than to understand every single word or phrase.	2.9	1.6	20	0.00
6	I teach listening in small classes and I use different types of language input such as films, everyday conversations, and interviews etc.	2.4	1.9	12	0.00



7	I design listening tasks according to the level of complexity; simple tasks to lower level students and complicated authentic material to more advanced learners.	2.5	1.4	17	0.00
8	I try to raise my students' awareness about the purpose of listening (listening for gist, specific information or detailed information) and I motivate and encourage them to interact with the listening task.	2.7	2.6	15	0.00
9	I try to get my students to understand the intended oral message by predicting and inferring the meaning depending on the speakers' mood and the setting of the utterance.	2.8	0.8	20	0.001
10	I raise my students' attention to the importance of listening in language development and that listening is a complex task that requires many skills such as attention, perception, recognition and memory.	2.5	0.7	21	0.008

Source: The researcher from applied study, SPSS 24

From the above table, it is obvious that the calculated value of chi-square for the significance of the differences for the respondents' answers in the 10 statements is greater than the tabulated value of chi-square at the degree of freedom (4) and the significant value level (5%) which indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (5%) among the answers of the respondents, so the second hypothesis of the study is confirmed.

#### 17. Conclusion and Recommendations:

According to the findings of the questionnaire which conveys the views of teachers about the problem of the study, EFL Sudanese university students face serious problems in listening

comprehension due to many causes such as the following:

- Universities do not pay much attention to teaching listening comprehension as they do for reading, vocabulary and grammar.
- Teachers do not use suitable listening materials and tasks that suit the level and the needs of the students.
- Teachers do not usually train students to listen to the speech of native speakers of English.
- Poor qualities of recorded materials cause some listening comprehension problems.
- Limited, unfamiliar vocabulary cause great listening comprehension problems.

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends the following points for the students:

- University textbooks should give more attention to listening comprehension as they do for reading, vocabulary and grammar.
- Teachers should raise the students' awareness about the importance of listening comprehension in the process of foreign language learning, since listening provides them with the language input.
- Students should learn and practice new vocabulary, grammatical structures and expressions.
- Students should listen to spoken English as far as they can to help them to be aware of different native-speakers accents, pronunciation and culture.
- Teachers should use listening materials that suit the level of the students, needs, interest and background knowledge.
- Teachers should be well-trained and experienced; having good pronunciation help students to be good listeners and applying teaching techniques helps to improve students' listening comprehension.
- Teachers should provide students with the necessary vocabulary that is likely to encounter them in listening.

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