

Investigating Listening Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by Sudanese University Students

Tahani Omer Musa Mahmoud¹ - Mahmoud Ali Ahmed²

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 diagnostic test for (30) Alneelain University second year students of English Language, in the Faculty of Arts. To analyze the data the researcher has used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

The findings of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese university students encounter some listening comprehension difficulties when they listen to English; they find it difficult to grasp the intended message. Furthermore, when it comes to doing exercises based on listening, they perform very poorly. In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommended that university textbooks need to give more attention to listening skills and strategies; in addition 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 كلفة أجنبية لدى طلاب الجامعات السودانية , استخدمت الباحثة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي و جمعت البيانات بواسطة الاختبار التشخيصي الذي أجري لعدد (30) طالباً و طالبة بالفرقة الثانية بجامعة النيلين بكلية الآداب , استخدمت الباحثة برنامج الحزم الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية لتحليل البيانات. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن هنالك صعوبات تواجه الطلاب في الاستيعاب عند الاستماع للغة الإنجليزية فهم يجدون صعوبة في فهم المعنى المقصود ويؤدون أداءً ضعيفاً عندما يطلب منهم القيام بتمارين ذات صلة بالاستماع .بناء على تلك النتائج فإن الباحثة أوصت بأن على إدارة مناهج الجامعات زيادة الإهتمام بمهارات الاستماع الاستيعابي و يجب أيضا على المعلمين أن يستخدموا مواد سمعية حقيقية مناسبة لمستويات و احتياجات الطلاب علاوة على ذلك يجب على المعلمين زيادة وعي الطلاب بأهمية الاستماع الاستيعابي في عملية تعليم اللغة الانجليزية كلفة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية : تعلم اللغة الأجنبية, استيعاب الاستماع, استراتيجيات الاستماع.

INTRODUCTION:

Listening is an important receptive language skill in the process of foreign language learning as it helps learners to understand the spoken language, it also provides them with the language input and plays an important role in the

development of learners' language knowledge (Rost 1994).

Listening helps learners to develop their grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary, Howatt and Dakin (1974) stated that "The effective listener is the person who is capable of doing

four skills simultaneously. These skills include understanding the speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar, his vocabulary and grasping his intended meaning".

Hassan (2000) and Hamouda (2013) asserted that listening comprehension provides the appropriate situation for the acquisition and expansion of the other language skills. According to Rost (2001) a major difference between more successful learners is related to their ability to use listening as an instrument of learning.

EFL learners tend to have some listening comprehension difficulties when they are listening to spoken English; they consider listening the most challenging and demanding language skill. Graham (2006) stated that " Many learners see themselves less successful in listening than in other language areas due to some uncontrollable facts such as fast speech rate, and speakers' accent".

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

2. Statement of the problem:

During her experience in teaching English as a foreign language for several years .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:

This study is carried out to achieve the following objectives:

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

4. Questions of the Study:

The following research questions formed the basis of the study:

1. To what extent do EFL Sudanese university students have difficulties with listening comprehension?
2. How do EFL Sudanese university students perform when they are asked to do exercises based on listening?

5. Hypotheses of the Study:

The following hypotheses are postulated:

1. EFL Sudanese university students face some listening comprehension difficulties.
2. EFL Sudanese university students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on listening.

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 investigating listening comprehension difficulties encountered by Alneelain University second year students of the English Department who study English as a foreign language and possess approximately the same English abilities during the academic year (2018-2019).

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, the data has been collected through using a diagnostic test which was administered to (30) Alneelain University second year students. Then the data has been analyzed statistically by using the Statistical Package for Social Science SPSS.

9. The Concept 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".

Listening consists of auditory discrimination, aural grammar, choosing necessary information, remembering it, and connecting it to the process between sound and form of meaning. (Morley and Lawrence 1971).

Mendelsohn (1994) suggested that in listening to spoken language, listeners According to Chastain (1976) listening is characterized by "five-phase processes",

need to be able to understand the speaker's intentions, process linguistic forms such as speech rate and fillers; they should also be able to interact with the listening text and understand the whole message without understanding every single word and recognize different genres as well.

(Nunan, 1998) claims that listening involves an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal message".

10. Characteristics of Listening:

Compared to the other language skills, listening has its own characteristics which distinguish it from the other language skills.

Listening is a dynamic complex process that involves mental abilities it is a "rather more demanding skill than reading" (Field, 2007 p.27), when listening, listeners cannot see the boundaries that exist between words and sentences because speech is linked, listeners have to be aware of the flow of speech as it consists of repairs such as false starts (correction of grammar and vocabulary and afterthoughts) and hesitation such as pauses, fillers and repetition.

Listening is also characterized by the presence of supra-segmental features such as stress, intonation, rhythm, loudness...etc and rules of rapid speech such as assimilation, elision, liaison...etc. Listening is an active and receptive process by which the listener listens and interacts with the speakers while they are speaking; this suggests that listening is a complex process that is based on the listener, the speaker, the situation and the intended message.

they are discrimination, perception of the message, auditory memory, decoding message and storing message.

Discrimination is related to pronunciation and intonation, perception of the message, on the other hand involves receiving the language input through the waves of sounds, in the phase of auditory memory, the learner stores the message in their memory while decoding the message, the message is then stored for some times, when the listener enters the fifth phase he recalls and utilizes the stored information.

Listening is associated with time rather than space, the listener cannot control the speed of the message that is uttered they receive the language input as it comes.

During listening to passages, listeners can easily forget what they have just heard; they find it difficult to recall information and they is no chance to refer back to the passage as in reading.

Compared to the teaching of the other skills, teaching listening is more expensive since it requires special equipments such as tapes or CD players, computer soft and hardware, language laboratories...etc.

11. Definition of Listening Comprehension:

There are different definitions for the term "listening comprehension" Listening comprehension is a complex , interactive, ,interpretive and complex process in which the listener takes a series of steps , from identifying sounds , vocabulary and grammatical structures , interpreting stress and intonation , to memorizing , decoding and interpreting input information .(Field 2007) as quoted in Gao(2014).

According to Nadig (2013) "Listening comprehension refers to the different processes of understanding the spoken language, these includes knowledge of speech sounds, comprehending the meaning of individual words and understanding the syntax of the sentence". Hamouda (2013) reported that " Listening comprehension refers to the understanding of what the listener has heard and his/her ability to repeat the text despite the fact that the listener may repeat the sounds without real comprehension".

12. Main sources of listening comprehension difficulties:

According to Yagang (1994) listening difficulties come mainly from four sources the message to be listened to, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting.

The message:

Learners usually find it more difficult to listen to a recorded message than to read the same message written on a piece of paper, since the learning message strikes the listener's ears in a fraction of a second whereas reading materials can be read as long as the reader wishes.

Listening materials may deal with almost any area of life such as street conversations, proverbs, films, interviews, unfamiliar situations and the language used for academic needs; which may pose some difficulties for EFL learners.

Moreover, students may not be able to predict what the speaker is going to say and they cannot control the speech rate of the message; even in daily conversations it is often considered impolite to ask the speaker to repeat something many times .

There are also some common linguistic features that make it difficult for the students to distinguish between individual words in the flow of speech, they are liaison (the linking of words in speech when the second word begins with a vowel, e.g., an orange) and elision (leaving out a sound or sounds particularly in fast speech e.g., ought to may be pronounced by dropping the 't' in rapid speech).

Everyday conversations may contain a lot of colloquial words and expressions such as stuff for materials as well as slang, students who are familiar to only bookish or formal English may not understand such words.

Moreover, in spontaneous daily conversations speakers sometimes use ungrammatical sentences and not well-organized speech due to their mood or hesitation; they sometimes tend to omit some elements from the sentence such as subjects and auxiliaries which may pose some difficulties for EFL listeners to understand.

The speaker
Ur (1984:7) says " In ordinary conversations or even in much extempore speech- making or lecturing we actually say a good deal more than would appear to be necessary to convey our message". This suggests that speakers may sometimes add some things redundantly in the form of repetitions, false starts, rephrasing, self-correction, elaborations, tautologies, and frequent meaningless additions such as I mean or you know, this redundancy is a natural feature of speech and may affect listening comprehension depending on the level of the students.

The listener:

Second language learners are often unfamiliar with clichés and collocations of English; as a result they may not be able to predict that a word like "rage" can come after the word "towering" in a phrase like in a "towering rage".

Lack of socio-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an obstacle to comprehension since language is used to express its culture. (Anderson and Lynch 1988).

Psychological and physical features can also affect listening comprehension; students may feel tired and lose concentrations when they are asked to do very long tasks.

Physical setting:

The environment can affect listener's comprehension; noises in the recording resulting from poor quality of the recording materials or environmental noises can take the listener's mind off the content of the message.

13. Previous Studies on Listening Comprehension Problems:

Mohammed (2017) made a study under the title " Investigating the Listening Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by EFL learners in Sudanese Secondary schools", the study adopted analytical descriptive method, the data has been collected through two tools; a diagnostic test for (40) secondary school students and a questionnaire for (40) secondary school teachers. The results of the study revealed that EFL Sudanese secondary school students face some difficulties when they listen to EFL comprehensively, the syllabus does not include enough listening materials, most of Sudanese secondary schools do not have language labs and teachers need more training.



Assaf (2015) conducted a study entitled "The Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Listening Comprehension as Perceived by ELC Students at the Arab American University -Jenin" with the aim to identify the difficulties the students face in listening comprehension and to study the relationship of the difficulties encountered by EFL students with students' academic level, academic year, gender, type of school and number of school years studying English, she used a questionnaire and an interview to collect data, the questionnaire was first developed and given to a sample of 189 EFL students, the sample was chosen randomly. The interview was held with 12 students chosen randomly from the sample of the study. The results of the study revealed that disability of word recognition, lacking of background information about the topic, noises around, poor quality of listening equipment, not enjoying the listening excerpt, speed rate and gliding over words while speaking were the main problems the students stated in the interview. Besides that, the researcher found out that there were no significant differences in the difficulties students encountered in listening due to academic level, academic year, gender, type of school and number of school years studying English.

Hadijah and Shalawati (2016) researched "A Study of Listening Skills and Perspectives to First Year Students at English Department of Academic Year 2015-2016" with the aim to collect information about the students' challenges in listening activities, their perspectives on listening subject, and positive factors

on the students' success in listening, they used a test and a questionnaire to collect data. The findings of this study showed that students faced problems in listening because they still could not complete the basic listening skills in the test. Furthermore, most of them considered that listening classes are challenging for them due to some problems and difficulties during the teaching and learning activities, besides that lack of practice, limited vocabulary mastery, native speakers' accent, pronunciation and uninteresting learning materials influenced the students' listening skill. Moreover, their knowledge about English structure and good facilities in listening classes supported them to be able to figure out some challenges in listening activities. In addition, the students realized the importance of listening activities, but assistance from the teachers and some other students were still needed during the teaching and learning activities.

14. Data Analysis and Discussion:

In this study a diagnostic listening test was given to (30) Alneelain University second year student to collect the data, the main purpose of this test was to investigate the listening comprehension difficulties that encounter EFL learners in both formal and informal settings. The test consists of two sections a monologue and a dialogue.

Hypotheses of the study:

1. EFL Sudanese university students face some listening comprehension difficulties.
2. EFL Sudanese university students perform poorly when they are asked to do exercises based on listening.

The following table shows the frequency distribution for the respondents' answers of the overall diagnostic listening test.

Answers	Frequencies	Percentage
Pass	9	30
Failure	21	70
Total	30	100

Table No (1) The Frequency Distribution for the Respondents' Answers of overall listening test.

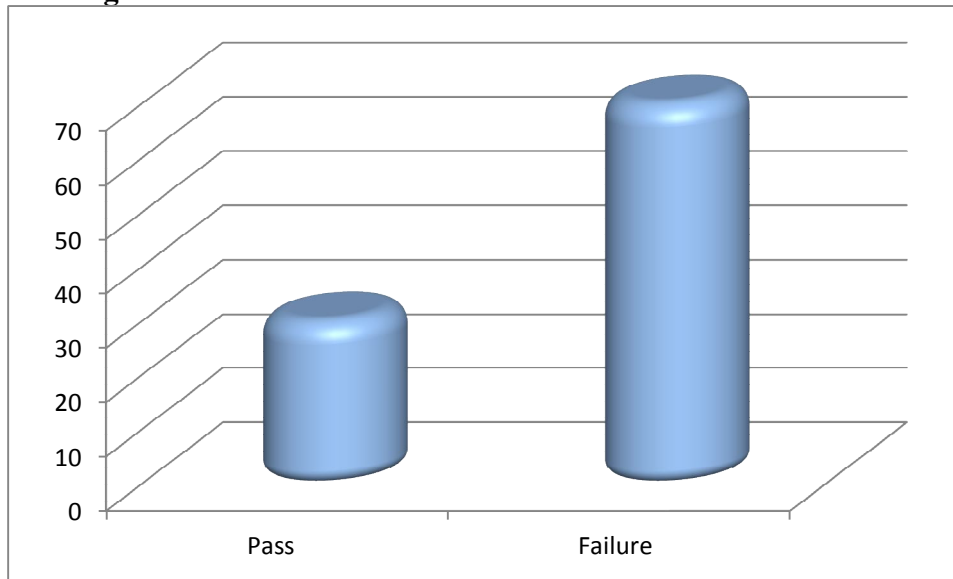


Figure 1

From the above table and figure. It is obvious that only (9) students in the study sample with the percentage (30%) have

passed the diagnostic listening test, while (21) students with the percentage (70%) failed the overall listening test.

Table No (2) The Frequency Distribution and decisions for the Respondent's Answers of all the questions of the diagnostic listening test:

Sections	Pass		Failure		Decision
	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	
Section 1	6	17	25	83	Accept
Section 2	7	23	23	77	Accept
overall	9	30	21	70	Accept

The above table shows the summary of the results of the study. For section one and two, it's clear that the percentage of students who failed in both sections of the

test is greater than the percentage of students who gave correct answers (83%) and (77%) respectively.

Table (3) one sample T-TEST for the questions of the study:

Sections	N	SD	t-value	DF	p-value
1	30	7.2	11	29	0.00
2	30	9.81	17	29	0.00
For all	30	8.03	15	29	0.00

The calculated value of T -TEST for the significance of the differences for the respondent's answers in the overall test was (15) which is greater than the tabulated value of T -TEST at the degree of freedom (29) and the significant value level (0.05%) which was (6.54). This indicates that, there are statistically significant differences at the level (0.05 %) among the answers of the respondents. On the basis of these findings we can conclude that the two hypotheses of this study are verified.

15. Conclusion and Recommendations:

The results of the study revealed that the highest percentage of the students faces the following serious listening comprehension problems:

- Students possess limited knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures and phonological rules.
- They failed to recognize stress, rhythm and intonation patterns.
- They find it difficult to pick up necessary information.
- They are unable to infer meanings of unfamiliar words and make predictions using their personal knowledge and experience.
- They lack knowledge of contextual and cultural aspects of the target language.
- They find it quite difficult to understand the text from the first listening.
- They have poor awareness of the features of connected speech.

- They face the problem of lack of concentration.
- They failed to understand informal words and idiomatic expressions.

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

- Students should be aware 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 and expressions.
- 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 authentic listening materials such as films, lectures, songs, conversations, and news to help them be aware of different accents of English, stress, intonation, pitch and the culture of English.
- Teachers should raise the students' awareness about the importance of listening comprehension in foreign language learning



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