



Listening Difficulties Faced By The Third Semester English Major Students At Almarj University

صعوبات الاستماع التي يواجهها طلاب الفصل الدراسي الثالث بقسم اللغة الانجليزية في جامعة المرج

Submitted by: Maryam Wanis Alshelmani

College of Arts and Sciences – Marj / University of Benghazi

A-Abstract

The goal of this study is to investigate the student's difficulties in listening as well as to answer the research question and to explore the factors of students listening difficulties. Listening skill is one of the four important language competencies. However, it has not received the needed scholarly attention in studies and researches in Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as second language.

The participants were forty students who are majoring in English. An interview was delivered to collect problems. The interviewees were encouraged to answer orally; however, they could type the answers if they wanted.

The results showed that the difficulties in listening skills faced by students include unfamiliar vocabulary, different accent, unclear pronunciation, length and speed of the text. The factors of those difficulties, it involved the students' background knowledge, lack of practices and environment noise.

Basing on these difficulties, the researcher would like to make some suggestions to improve listening skill.

Keywords: listening difficulties, listening skills, listening comprehension.



الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة صعوبات الاستماع لدى الطلاب، والإجابة على سؤال البحث، واستكشاف عوامل صعوبات الاستماع لديهم. تُعد مهارة الاستماع إحدى أهم أربع كفاءات لغوية. ومع ذلك، لم تحظَ بالاهتمام الأكاديمي اللازم في الدراسات والبحوث في اللغويات التطبيقية وتدريب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية. كان المشاركون أربعين طالبًا متخصصين في اللغة الإنجليزية. أُجريت مقابلة لجمع المشكلات. شجّع المشاركون على الإجابة شفويًا، مع إمكانية كتابتها إذا رغبوا في ذلك. أظهرت النتائج أن صعوبات الاستماع التي يواجهها الطلاب تشمل مفردات غير مألوفة، واختلاف اللهجة، وعدم وضوح النطق، وطول النص وسرعته. وتشمل عوامل هذه الصعوبات خلفية الطلاب المعرفية، ونقص الممارسات، وضوضاء البيئة. بناءً على هذه الصعوبات، يود الباحث تقديم بعض الاقتراحات لتحسين مهارة الاستماع. الكلمات المفتاحية: صعوبات الاستماع، مهارات الاستماع، فهم الاستماع.

B- Introduction

Listening is essential for language learning because it offers aural input that is essential for language acquisition and allows learners to interact in spoken communication. Listening plays an important role in communication, without listening, communication cannot operate effectively, it also plays an important role in second language instruction for several reasons. If the students cannot hear it well, they will find it hard to communicate. The poor ability means that the students have difficulties in their listening. The difficulties make the learning purpose not achieved optimally.

Listening is a process of hearing the sound of the speaker and finding the meaning by the listener [1]. According to [2] while listening, the listeners receive the speaker saying and catch the idea. While [3] defined listening as a listening comprehension with meaning of an active process of receiving the incoming data and creating meaning in another way.



Students might have some problems in listening comprehension. The problems which appear are unfamiliar accent, unclear pronunciation, unfamiliar words, rate of speech and grammatical structure [4].

When students are conscientised to understand that, listening, reading, speaking and writing, are related and interdependent and therefore, one would not be able to fully develop his reading skills, speaking and writing skills without listening skills. They are enticed to take the lessons seriously [5]. Two major types of activities are done to enforce this strategy. These are, listening speaking activity, where the teacher reads or speaks while learners listen attentively and read\ speak after him, and listening- writing activities, where the teacher reads\ speaks while students listen carefully and write down what they hear. This listening teaching strategy is designed to build both listening and writing skills.

This study is intended to find out the difficulties of listening skills faced by students and the factors of those listening difficulties.

1.1 Aims of the study

- 1- To identify, classify and analyze the difficulties in listening skills faced by students at Almarj University to help them recognize their own problems.
- 2- To find out the factors influencing English listening difficulties.
- 3- To suggest some suitable solutions this problem.
- 4- To help the students to improve their listening skills.

1.2 Research questions:

This study aims to answer the following questions:

- 1- What difficulties in listening that English majored students at Almarj University are facing?
- 2- What are the factors influencing English listening difficulties?

1.3 Significant of the study

The important of this study is that it investigates, explores and analyzes the difficulties in listening skills faced by students and the factors of their difficulties. So it tries to find out



these problems and provides the suitable solutions for them so as to help the students to improve their listening skills.

2. Literature review

2.1 Definition of listening

Listening is a language modality. It is one of the four skills of language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. The four language skills are categorized into two categories: receptive and productive. Language and writing skills fall into the productive category, listening and reading skills are included in the receptive category.

Listening is a complex problem solving skill and it is more than just perception of the sounds. [6] Also say " Listening is an active process requiring participation on the part of the listener. Listening requires high level concentration. Effective concentration is a prerequisite for effective listening.

One can only remember, recall, repeat and rethink what they have listened only when they have concentrated adequately on what they listen.

Listening has not been given enough space in the curriculum. Listening is the most fundamental of the four language skills. Learners can be exposed to a lot of authentic input through listening and if the input is comprehensible, it would lead to improvement of other areas of language such as pronunciation, speaking and even reading and writing [7].

Listening is fundamental to speaking. Listening is an exercise. Listening is not just listening to something that " enter the left ear out of right ear " or vice versa. Listening is the ability to receive messages. It is a key to effective communication.

Hearing is through ears, but listening is through the mind. The two activities hearing and listening involve the use of ears, but they are different. Hearing is when you experience the sound waves and noise by ears, but listening is when you receive the sound waves and understand it by paying full attention to the words and sentences of the speaker. For many people, these two activities are one, but the truth is, the difference between hearing and listening is vital.



Hearing: the natural ability or an inborn trait that allows us to recognize sound through ears by catching vibration is called the hearing. In simple terms, it is one of the five senses; that makes us aware of the sound. It is an involuntary process, whereby a person receives sound vibrations, continuously.

A normal human being's hearing capability ranges from 20 to 20000 hertz, called as audio or sonic. Any frequency above and below the given range is known as ultrasonic and infrasonic respectively.

Listening is defined as the learned skill, in which we can receive sounds through ears and transform them into meaningful messages. To put simply, it is the process of diligently hearing and interpreting the meaning of words and sentences spoken by the speaker during the conversation.

Listening is a bit difficult, because it requires concentration and attention and the human mind is easily distracted.

[8] Said: "listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear. It means that, we should interpret the meaning from what we hear; therefore listening is an active skill.

2.1.2 The importance of listening skills

Listening is essential for language learning, because we need to listen first before speaking. The purpose of people listening is to learn, understand and get information. Listening skill is very important. According to [8] states that more than 50 percent of students spend time listening to language learning. Listening plays an important role in communication. This shows that listening takes a half of time in communication and how important listening is

Importance of listening in our lives:

1- Listening is an essential task for effective communicators. We actually do spend the largest part of our time listening. For instance it has been observed that college students spend up to 50% of their time listening. So listening is the first skill in communication skill.



2- Listening helps us build and maintain relationship part of our ability to build and retain relationships involves our ability to understand and respond empathetically to messages from others.

3- Listening can help us determine whether people we are communicating with are honest or deceitful.

4- Listening is an essential skill for success in academic and business world.

5- Listening is directly linked to our ability to remember information.

6- Listening is a crucial component of the communication process.

7- Good speaking and effective communication depend on good listening.

8- Effective listening is a skill required to maintain professional and personal relationships.

9- Ineffective listening leads to a breakdown of communication.

10- Effective listening enables us to evaluate the strong and weak points in message and give more useful feedback and constructive criticism.

11- In the field of education, attentive listeners become good learners. In social circles good listeners become respected, reliable and trustworthy friends.

So, good listeners become great speakers and successful persons. Thus, the importance of listening can be seen in a personal success in all fields.

2.1.3 Stages or steps in listening process

There are five stages/steps in the process:

1- Receiving: it is the intentional focus on learning the speaker`s message. It filters out other confusing stimuli.

2- Understanding: At this stage the listener attempts to learn the meaning of the message. The listener`s knowledge level, experiences and perception influence his understanding.

3- Remembering: In this stage, what has been understood is processed meaningfully and put to memory.



4- Evaluating: In this stage, the value or sense of the message received is judged. The same message may seem valuable or purposeless depending on the listener`s experiences, biases etc.

5- Responding: It is like a feedback to what has been received. It indicates in words, gestures or deeds, the listener`s involvement or participation in the conversation.

Errors at any of these five steps could lead to miscommunication/misunderstanding. So, attention must be paid from beginning to end.

2.1.4 Types of listening

There are seven types of listening skills, namely (1) Informational listening, (2) Discriminative listening

(3) Biased listening, (4) Sympathetic listening, (5) Comprehensive listening, (6) Empathetic or Therapeutic listening and (7) Critical listening. [9].

According to [10] there are twelve types of listening skills, namely (1) Active listening, (2) Reflective listening, (3) Critical listening, (4) Empathetic listening, (5) Communicative listening,

(6) Active non-listening, (7) Filtering listening, (8) Minimization listening, (9) Targeting listening,

(10) Cognitive multitasking listening, (11) Appreciative listening and (12) comprehension listening.

2.1.5 Qualities of a good listener

A good listener is one who overcomes all the barriers, which hinder listening. (s) he makes conscious attempts to keep the communication happening. Given below are some characteristics of a good listener.

A- Proficient: A good listener has good command over language in which the communication is taking place, whether it is English or some other language. (s) he is able to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words from context or sometimes (s) he clarifies the meaning from the speaker by asking questions.



B- Knowledgeable: To be able to understand a talk, one needs to have background knowledge about the topic. (s) he does not jump to conclusions and accept or reject the speaker without any reason. (s) he is prudent and knowledgeable.

C- Active: An effective listener involves actively in listening to anybody. (s) he is critical about speaker`s thoughts and ideas. An effective listener involves himself in thinking, evaluating the ideas and taking notes.

D- Composed: An effective listener is never in a hurry to know what the speaker is going to say. He is cool, composed and quit. (s) he waits patiently till the speaker completes his talk and evaluates the speech. Only then, he forms an opinion about the speech.

In addition to all these an effective listener:

- i) Does not sit too close or too far from the speaker.
- ii) Does not sit close to air conditioners or any such equipment which may disturb.

3. Previous studies:

Highlighted problems of listening techniques:

Reviewing the contribution of some other researchers is important for having a clear picture, which helps in giving suggestions and contributions. Therefore, in this section, the researcher will present the contributions of some other researchers in the area of teaching to students.

The objectives of this study focus on indentify the difficulties in the listening skills faced by students.

The finding of this study showed that there are four major problems of listening which commonly appear are unfamiliar vocabulary, different accent, unclear pronunciation, length and speed of the text.

[11] says listening is mainly related to the ability to understand the meaning of a form of language use that is expressed orally.

From the definition above, we can say that listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. It is also a complex activity, and we can help students comprehend



what they hear by activating their prior knowledge. This fact has been revealed by some studies; one of which was conducted by [12]. They found out that there were three factors which make listening difficult for the students.

These factors included listening materials which covered accents, pronunciation, length of speech, bad quality of the recorder.

Other study discussing problem in listening class was carried out by [13].

Students or learners may face various difficulties and obstacles in their listening skill learning process, including accents, quality of recorded materials, unfamiliar vocabulary, cultural differences, length and speed of listening and physical conditions. Similar to those previous studies, this study was also intended to find out students` obstacles in listening class. This paper discuss similar topic.

This study discussed about learning listening difficulties faced by students.

4. Research method

This study used qualitative method. This study used to describe the difficulties in listening skills faced by students and the factors of their difficulties. To get the data, the researcher interviewed 40 students who took basic listening class during 2023-2024 academic year.

The interview was done in the middle of the semester. The interview guide was used to focus on asking listening difficulties. After the students` answers were collected, they were classified and interpreted. An interview was a useful method for collecting more detailed information.

5. Result and discussion

5.1. Interview result

5.1.1 Difficulties of listening

The result of the interview showed that the difficulties in listening skills faced by students include; unfamiliar vocabulary, different accent, unclear pronunciation, length and speed of the text.



The most common difficulties faced by the students were unfamiliar vocabulary. This was elicited by all the students attending basic listening class. They said sometimes they make mistakes when listening text has much specialized terminology vocabulary. Specialized terminology vocabulary is some words specialized for particular areas. If learners do not have rich and plentiful vocabulary, they will be confused when listening. The speakers may use synonyms, antonyms to explain the word [14]. Points that, for students listening to a foreign language, it is certain that they cannot know all words in the speech like mother tongue. When students understood the meaning of words, it can increase their interest and motivation as well as improve their listening comprehension.

One of the **student (A)** said that "sometimes, I lose my concentration when listening because I think about the meaning of new words".

The next one (B) said that "when I hear the new words, I forget the content which was mentioned before". Another **student (C)** said that "unfamiliar words sometimes confuse me about the meaning, but if it is familiar to me it will be easy". Next listening difficulties found in this study was unfamiliar accents. Unfamiliar accent of both native and non-native can cause serious problems in listening comprehension.

Many countries speak English, such as British English, American English, Australian English and Japanese English. Learners find it hard to distinguish which words the speakers are mentioning when listening to a new accent for the first time.

[15] Indicate that when listeners hear an unfamiliar accent, such as Indian English for the first time after studying American English, they will encounter essential difficulties in listening.

This difficulty is evidenced by responses of the interviewee;

"it is difficult to distinguish word which was mentioned when hearing a new accent first time." **student(D)**.

Student (E) also stated that: "un familiar accents of both native and non-native speakers make me cannot recognize the familiar words".



Students also found it difficulties in length and speed of texts. It is proven by one of the interviewee's response: "I feel bored when the listening tasks are too long" **student (F)**.

"I cannot concentrate well when listening to a long text" **student (G)**. Another difficulty is that most students feel difficult on speed of the spoken text,

Which is conveyed by **student (H)**: "I cannot understand foreigners because they speak too fast".

Student (I) also stated the same problem, she said that sometimes if the speaker talks too fast, she would get confused. "If they speak to fast makes me confused".

The last problem found in this study was pronunciation. Students said that they were frequently confused with pronunciation of the models. Some students like **J, K, L, M, and N** explained that they were trying to check in dictionary but they could not find it, because they did not know the spelling of the word that was uttered by the model in the record.

After analyzing the interviews, students had some problems in listening. It was the fact that listening was an uneasy skill, it required learners spend time to practice and improve.

5.1.2 Factors of the listening difficulties

The second question was asked to know the factors of their difficulties in listening. There are some factors which affect the difficulties in listening. Students stated various responses toward this question.

1- background knowledge

The main factor of the difficulties is background knowledge. Having background knowledge is a key feature to the successful understanding of any kind of listening materials. Students need to prepare the listening materials based on topics which are political issue, business reports and daily conversation.

Students who do not have any background knowledge to face the difficulties.

Student (A) put it: " I don't have background knowledge about English ".



Background knowledge played an important role in listening. If students lacked knowledge, the listening process would be affected. It was hard to catch the meaning of sentence when lacking background knowledge. It is shown in the following extract of the interview, " I find it difficult to understand listening texts when the topic is unfamiliar to me. " . **Student (B).**

2-Lack of practices

Practice is the act of doing something regularly or repeatedly to improve your skill at doing it. Practice doesn't make perfect, but it does enhance confidence and can be a powerful tool that helps you reach your goals. Students (B/C/D) said that they only do the listening activities without practice.

3- Environment noise

Environment noise can be a factor to student's listening difficulties. Students often get difficulties in listening relates to the environment because they get problem when the environmental noises interfere students listening comprehension. Noise is another environmental barrier to comprehension interior as well as exterior class noise is an obstacle to comprehension. Noise, including both background noises on the recording and environmental noises, can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage.

Noise is the most problematic in listening. If the listening task is carried out with noises around, it is for sure students will not have a good result in listening.

The best place for students to do the listening in the laboratory room. This will bring out the better result for noises outside cannot get through the lab room. A good cassette recorder or a CD player may give them the better rather than that of the old one.

What are the useful suggestions for overcoming student's listening difficulties?

- 1-** Don't teach listening in isolation; embed the listening lessons into writing lessons. The students write what they heard.
- 2-** Get the students to make guesses and predictions on what the topic is going to be about.
- 3-** Asking the students some pre-lesson questions or brainstorming.
- 4-** Asking the students to summarize the lesson, either orally or through writing.



- 5- Giving the students tasks at the beginning of the lesson, they listen attentively to find out the responses. Students who listen well are able to complete the tasks.
- 6- Teaching the students some listening strategies to help them to minimize their problem in listening class.
- 7- Students should spend more time on practice.

Strategies for effective listening

- 1- **Be open-minded:** The speaker and the listener should be open-minded.
- 2- **Control emotions:** While listening, it is important to keep emotions in control. Neither the speaker nor the listener should react impulsively.
- 3- **Listen for the gist or the central theme:** The listener should not stress only on facts and must listen for the gist or the central theme of what the speaker says.
- 4- **Concentrate on the non-verbal cues:** The listener must concentrate on the non-verbal cues of the speaker in addition to the content of what is being said.
- 5- **Pay attention to implied content:** The speaker may make certain presumptions about the knowledge of the listener and his/her familiarity with the subject being discussed. The listener must pay attention to such implied content in the message and ask for necessary clarifications wherever required.
- 6- **Make a note of the major points:** A good listener takes notes. It is difficult to remember everything that a speaker communicates, so make a note of the major points, key words, etc., as this will help you retain information for future use.
- 7- **Feedback:** Feedback is essential to keep the communication process going: A good listener gives immediate feedback in the form of queries, clarifications or requests for extra information.
- 8- **Maintain eye contact:** Maintain eye contact with the speaker to show interest and attentiveness. The listener should have the right body language to indicate his/her attentiveness, understanding and agreement with the speaker's ideas.



9- Avoid distractions: The listener should try to avoid or eliminate distractions.

10- Understand the speaker`s point of view: Try to understand the speaker`s point of view and empathize with him/her.

Conclusion

Listening skill is one of the most important skills that learners need to master in learning English [16]. The difficulties in listening skills faced by students include unfamiliar words, rate of speech, unfamiliar accent and unclear pronunciation. Listening is important not only in language learning but also in daily communication. Students seemed to be weak and encountered various problems in listening skill, despite attending numerous lectures on the subject of listening.

English majoring students were still unable to achieve the level of good listening skills, for students, some suggestions that could be employed them to encounter listening skill problems include follows. Students should spend more time on practicing and practice regularly by using other English listening materials. Focusing on the variety of native-speakers` accent and the speed of the texts. Students should be equipped with a wide range of vocabulary and background information needed for the listening text.

Finally, they should be exposed to a variety of hearing resources, including films, TV plays and announcements. If students fail to develop their listening skill, they will fail in developing the other skills.

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