

An Investigation into the Difficulties Encountered by English Department Students at the Faculty of Arts, Misurata University in Listening Skill

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Abstract

This study examines the listening difficulties faced by students in the English Department at the Faculty of Arts, Misurata University. It specifically targets the challenges encountered by those enrolled in or recently completing the language skills courses: Language Skills I, II, and III. The objective is to identify effective strategies to support these new students as they embark on their university journey, where strong listening skills are crucial for successful language acquisition. A total of 46 students were randomly selected to participate in a questionnaire aimed at exploring the research questions. The data collected and analyzed revealed key listening challenges, including difficulties with lack of concentration, insufficient teacher support, anxiety, and poor audio quality. Based on these findings, the study offers recommendations for instructors and the English Department to implement targeted strategies that address these obstacles, ultimately enhancing students' listening abilities and overall language proficiency.

Key words: Listening Difficulties - English Language Acquisition - Language Skills Courses

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دراسة حول الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية في كلية الآداب، جامعة مصراتة في مهارة الاستماع

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الصعوبات التي يواجهها الطلاب في مهارة الاستماع في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية الآداب، جامعة مصراتة. تستهدف الدراسة بشكل خاص التحديات التي يواجهها الطلاب المسجلون في أو الذين أنهم مؤخرًا مقررات مهارات اللغة: مهارات لغوية 1 و 2 و 3. الهدف هو تحديد استراتيجيات فعالة لدعم هؤلاء الطلاب الجدد في بداية رحلتهم الجامعية، حيث تعتبر مهارات الاستماع ضرورية لاكتساب اللغة بنجاح. تم اختيار 46 طالبًا بشكل عشوائي للمشاركة في استبيان يهدف إلى استكشاف أسئلة البحث. أظهرت البيانات التي تم جمعها وتحليلها تحديات رئيسية في الاستماع، بما في ذلك صعوبات في التركيز، نقص دعم المعلمين، القلق، وسوء جودة الصوت. بناءً على هذه النتائج، تقدم الدراسة توصيات للمعلمين وقسم اللغة الإنجليزية لتنفيذ استراتيجيات مستهدفة لمعالجة هذه العقبات، مما يعزز في النهاية قدرات الطلاب على الاستماع وكفاءتهم العامة في اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: صعوبات الاستماع - اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية - دورات مهارات اللغة

The problem and Its Background

Listening is a fundamental component of language development for students. According to Krashen (1985), effective language acquisition occurs when individuals comprehend meaningful information. However, many students face significant challenges in this area, often feeling frustrated and unable to understand spoken language, especially in high-pressure situations. This highlights the need for students to adopt targeted strategies and techniques that can enhance their listening skills, rather than relying on haphazard practice.

As previously noted, listening is one of the most vital skills in the process of learning a second or foreign language. Successful listening involves not just the ability to decode a speaker's accent, grammar, and vocabulary but also a deep understanding of the intended meaning behind the words. Thompson (1984) emphasizes that active listening extends

beyond mere hearing; it requires a conscious effort to engage with and interpret the speaker's message fully.

Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) point out that learners often encounter serious difficulties in listening comprehension. Despite the critical importance of listening, many universities focus heavily on English grammar, reading, and vocabulary, often neglecting listening and speaking skills in their curricula. This neglect can stem from a belief that these skills will develop organically through exposure to the language, which is a misconception.

Furthermore, effective listening is not just about understanding the language itself; it also involves being attuned to cultural nuances, emotional tones, and contextual cues that influence meaning. Teachers play a crucial role in fostering these skills by integrating listening exercises into their lesson plans and providing students with diverse listening experiences, such as podcasts, interviews, and interactive activities.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of listening comprehension is essential for enhancing overall language proficiency. By prioritizing listening skills in educational settings and employing effective teaching strategies, educators can equip students with the tools they need to succeed in their language learning journeys.

Persulesy (1988) argues that one reason for the neglect of listening skills in language education is the common misconception among teachers that this skill is automatically acquired as learners develop their speaking abilities. Consequently, students may encounter several challenges during their listening experiences.

This issue has been noted by various researchers, including Buck (2001) and Hayati (2010), who found that difficulties in listening to a foreign language are prevalent among learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. For instance, Underwood (1989) and Flowerdew and Miller

(1992) highlight that a lack of concentration is a significant barrier to comprehension. They note that even a brief lapse in attention can severely hinder understanding. In a classroom setting, this distraction can lead students to miss critical content during lectures, ultimately impacting their overall grasp of the material.

Rubin and Thompson (1994) identify three common challenges faced by learners trying to listen to a foreign language. One major issue is that many learners, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition, often panic and lose their focus when they encounter unfamiliar words or phrases. This reaction can lead to a breakdown in listening, causing them to miss key information that could clarify the meaning of the unknown terms.

Another significant obstacle is vocabulary limitations. When students lack the necessary words to understand a conversation, it becomes challenging to grasp the overall context. The presence of unfamiliar words can create a barrier, forcing listeners to pause and think about the meaning, which disrupts their flow of comprehension. This interruption not only prevents them from fully engaging with the ongoing dialogue but also leads to missed opportunities to pick up additional contextual clues that could aid in understanding.

Addressing these listening challenges requires targeted instructional strategies that focus on building vocabulary, improving concentration, and fostering a more resilient mindset in learners. By creating a supportive learning environment that encourages students to navigate these difficulties, educators can enhance their listening skills and overall language proficiency.

Statement of the Problem

The researcher seeks to identify the listening difficulties faced by students in the English Department at the Faculty of Arts, Misurata

University. It specifically examines the challenges related to listening skills among students enrolled in one of the three language skills courses: Language Skills I, II, and III, as well as those who have recently completed these courses. The objective is to find solutions for these new students, who are embarking on their university journey and require effective listening skills as a vital aspect of language acquisition.

Research Questions

- 1- What specific listening comprehension challenges do students face when listening to spoken English?
- 2- How do these challenges impact students' overall performance and confidence in language learning?
- 3- What strategies and support can teachers implement to assist students in overcoming these listening comprehension difficulties?

Hypotheses:

It is hypothesized that students enrolled in Language skills courses I, II and III have problems in dealing with the listening skill due to some circumstances and obstacles that might face them during their study.

Review of Related Literature

Listening is a complex and vital process, integral to effective communication. Wolvin and Coakley (1988) emphasize that listening is particularly crucial for students, as it serves as a primary medium for learning across all educational stages, contributing significantly to the development of language proficiency.

Purdy (1997) defines listening as "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the

expressed needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings” (p. 8). This perspective highlights the interactional aspect of listening, where comprehension involves not only receiving information but also responding to it meaningfully.

Rost (2002) further elaborates on the listening process, stating that it encompasses receiving the speaker's words, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating that meaning with the speaker, and responding appropriately. Additionally, he notes that creating meaning involves engagement, imagination, and empathy. To listen effectively, individuals must possess the ability to decode messages and respond based on the communication's purpose.

Underwood (1989) notes that even a brief lapse in attention during listening can disrupt comprehension. Students often find listening particularly challenging, even when they are engaged with the topic, because it demands considerable effort to discern the intended meaning of the speaker.

According to Yagang (1994), listening difficulties can be attributed to four key factors: the message, the speaker, the listener, and the physical setting.

Many learners find it particularly challenging to listen to taped messages. The content of these materials often covers a wide range of subjects, many of which may be unfamiliar or unusual to the students. Additionally, the organization of the material can be poor, making it harder to follow. Unlike live conversations, taped messages cannot be slowed down, and listeners frequently struggle to predict what speakers will say next—whether it's a news report, an interview, or casual dialogue. In everyday conversations, asking a speaker to repeat something multiple times is often impractical, adding to the listener's challenges.

Nunan (1997) suggested that learner engagement can be enhanced by offering extension tasks that start with listening materials but encourage students to contribute their own content. For instance, after listening to someone describe their job, students could formulate a set of interview questions for that person.

Sommers et al. (2011) argue that good listening comprehension involves more than just understanding individual parts; it requires constructing a complete mental model.

One primary issue stems from the habit of listening word by word. Learners often fail to focus on contextual cues that could help them anticipate the topic of discussion. During listening tasks, cues are typically provided—such as the title of the task—which can guide learners in predicting upcoming points. Visual aids like photos, maps, or charts can also enhance comprehension. Moreover, generating questions related to the listening topic can keep students engaged and improve their understanding.

Learners often struggle with listening word by word, missing important contextual cues that could aid comprehension (Rubin, 1994).

Another significant challenge is limited vocabulary. Some listeners mistakenly believe that meaning is solely contained within unfamiliar words, leading them to focus on decoding every new term instead of inferring meaning from context. This approach can hinder overall comprehension.

Nation (2001) notes that a significant challenge in comprehension arises when listeners with limited vocabulary fixate on decoding unfamiliar words, hindering their ability to infer meaning from context and grasp the overall message.

Noise in the environment can severely disrupt listening tasks. When external sounds are present, they distract listeners, making it difficult to concentrate on the material. The presence of noise can create a chaotic auditory environment, complicating the task of focusing on the recording. According to Eranovic et al. (2022), the ability to clearly perceive speech in noisy environments relies on distinguishing spoken words from background sounds. Studies have shown that background noise can interfere with speech perception and listening comprehension, especially for children and second language learners. This is because the inner ear struggles to separate speech from competing sounds, requiring the brain to work harder, which can hinder comprehension.

Additionally, poor-quality recordings can pose significant obstacles. For instance, if a cassette is recorded in a noisy environment or has been used extensively, the audio quality may deteriorate. Similarly, inadequate equipment can hinder students' listening experiences. As noted by Vandergrift (1999), the quality of audio materials directly affects learners' engagement and comprehension. Ideally, listening comprehension activities should take place in a controlled environment, such as a language laboratory, where external noise is minimized. Using high-quality cassette recorders or CD players can significantly enhance the listening experience.

Methods

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive research method to investigate the challenges related to listening skills among students. The primary data collection tool is a questionnaire designed to address specific questions, elucidating the phenomena observed and providing qualitative insights into the participants' experiences.

Participants and Setting

The study involves 46 first, second, and third-semester students enrolled in one of the three language skills courses: Language Skills I, II, and III, or those who have recently completed these courses. This diverse group provides a comprehensive perspective on the challenges faced at different stages of their academic journey.

Research Instrument

A questionnaire was designed, featuring 11 statements intended to identify the challenges students encounter in their listening courses. Responses are assessed on a five-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." This format allows for nuanced qualitative insights into student experiences and perceptions.

Procedure

Data Collection

Data was gathered through paper-based questionnaires administered to participants, ensuring they felt comfortable sharing their experiences and challenges related to listening skills.

Data Analysis

The collected data is presented in tables, utilizing frequency and percentage distribution to categorize respondents' profiles and their answers to the questionnaire statements. The questions are structured from the most general to the most specific, facilitating a coherent and logical progression of ideas. This organized approach enhances the overall understanding of the challenges faced by students and provides clear qualitative insights into the difficulties encountered in listening skills.

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Results and Discussions

Results:

Table 1: Listening Comprehension Challenges

Item No.	Statement	SA (n/%)	A (n/%)	N (n/%)	D (n/%)	SD (n/%)
1	I lose concentration when thinking about the meaning of new words.	17 / 41%	12 / 29%	5 / 12%	8/19%	4 / 10%
2	Poor audio quality affects my concentration.	30 / 75%	12 / 30%	4 / 10%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%
3	I feel anxious when I do not understand the spoken text.	23 / 57.5%	11 / 27.5%	8 / 20%	4 / 10%	0 / 0%

Note. SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree.

As shown in Table 1, Statement 1 indicates that a significant majority 70% of participants either strongly agree or agree with the statement, suggesting that many students find it challenging to concentrate when faced with new vocabulary. The neutral and disagreement responses demonstrate some variability in experiences, but the overall trend shows a strong tendency toward concentration issues related to vocabulary.

Statement 2 received the highest level of agreement, with 75% strongly agreeing that poor audio quality affects their concentration, and 30% agreeing. This indicates a clear consensus among students that poor audio quality is a major factor impacting their concentration, suggesting it could be a critical area for improvement in teaching environments.

Statement 3 shows that the majority 85% of respondents express anxiety regarding their inability to understand spoken texts. This indicates a strong emotional response to listening challenges, which can significantly affect their overall learning experience and confidence.

The results highlight that concentration is notably affected by both vocabulary comprehension and audio quality. This suggests a need for targeted strategies to support vocabulary learning and improve audio resources in the learning environment.

The high levels of anxiety reported indicate that emotional factors play a significant role in students' listening experiences. Addressing these emotional challenges through supportive teaching practices could enhance students' confidence and participation.

Table 2: *Impact on Performance*

Item No.	Statement	SA (n/%)	A (n/%)	N (n/%)	D (n/%)	SD (n/%)
4	My anxiety about listening affects my participation in class.	21 / 52.5%	12 / 30%	8 / 20%	4 / 10%	1 / 2.5%

5	Difficulties in listening comprehension lower my confidence in using English.	23 / 57.5%	14 / 35%	6 / 15%	2 / 5%	1 / 2.5%
6	I often hesitate to speak in class due to fear of misunderstanding.	19 / 47.5%	14 / 35%	3 / 7.5%	7 / 17.5%	3 / 7.5%
7	My overall performance in English suffers when I struggle with listening comprehension.	26 / 65%	11 / 27.5%	4 / 10%	3 / 7.5%	2 / 5%

As indicated in statement 4 provided in table 2 above, a majority 82.5% of respondents feel that their anxiety about listening negatively impacts their participation in class. This suggests that emotional barriers significantly hinder students' willingness to engage in classroom activities.

Statement 5 shows that 92.5% of participants believe that difficulties in listening comprehension lower their confidence in using English. This consensus highlights the critical link between listening skills and overall language confidence, indicating that struggles in listening can have far-reaching effects on students' self-esteem.

Statement 6 reveals that 82.5% of students hesitate to speak in class due to fear of misunderstanding. This fear can prevent active participation

and limit opportunities for practice, further exacerbating their listening and speaking challenges.

Statement 7 demonstrates that 92.5% of respondents feel their overall performance in English suffers when they struggle with listening comprehension. This underscores the significant impact that listening skills have on students’ academic success and language proficiency.

The results underscore the profound effect that listening comprehension challenges have on students’ performance, participation, and confidence in English. The high levels of anxiety and hesitation reported indicate that emotional factors play a crucial role in students' engagement in the classroom.

Table 3: *Teacher Support*

Item No.	Statement	SA (n/%)	A (n/%)	N (n/%)	D (n/%)	SD (n/%)
8	I would benefit from more vocabulary support before listening activities.	36 / 90%	6 / 15%	4 / 10%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%
9	I think clearer audio recordings would improve my comprehension.	39 / 97.5%	7 / 17.5%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%
10	More pauses during listening exercises	38 / 95%	6 / 15%	1 / 2.5%	1 / 2.5%	0 / 0%

**would help me process
information better.**

11	I would appreciate more opportunities to practice listening in a supportive environment.	37 / 92.5%	7 / 17.5%	2 / 5%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%
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As shown in statement 8 provided in table 3 above, 90% of respondents believe they would benefit from more vocabulary support before listening activities. This indicates a strong demand for pre-listening preparation that can help students focus better on comprehension tasks.

Statement 9 indicates overwhelming agreement, with 97.5% of participants stating that clearer audio recordings would enhance their comprehension. This result highlights the critical importance of audio quality in supporting students' listening skills.

Statement 10 reveals that 95% of students feel that more pauses during listening exercises would help them process information better. This suggests a need for more thoughtful pacing in listening activities to accommodate students' processing times.

Statement 11 shows that 92.5% of respondents would appreciate more opportunities to practice listening in a supportive environment. This reflects the desire for a classroom atmosphere that prioritizes practice and encourages student engagement.

The results from Table 3 underscore the importance of targeted teacher support in enhancing students' listening comprehension. The

overwhelming demand for vocabulary support, improved audio quality, and pacing adjustments indicates specific areas where educators can make impactful changes.

The results from Table 3 emphasize the crucial role of teacher support in enhancing students' listening comprehension. Many respondents expressed a strong need for more vocabulary support before listening activities. This demand highlights the importance of pre-listening preparation, which can significantly help students focus on comprehension tasks and reduce cognitive load during listening exercises.

Additionally, the overwhelming agreement on the necessity of clearer audio recordings indicates that audio quality is vital for supporting students' listening skills. High-quality recordings can make a substantial difference in comprehension, ensuring that students can fully engage with the material without the distraction of unclear sound.

Furthermore, the preference for more pauses during listening exercises suggests that thoughtful pacing is essential for effective learning. Allowing students time to process information can enhance their understanding and retention of the material. Lastly, the desire for more opportunities to practice listening in a supportive environment reflects students' need for a classroom atmosphere that encourages engagement and confidence-building.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of targeted teacher support. By addressing vocabulary needs, improving audio quality, adjusting pacing, and creating supportive practice opportunities, educators can significantly enhance students' listening comprehension and overall learning experience.

Discussions

The findings from Table 1 reveal significant challenges in listening comprehension faced by students, particularly related to vocabulary and audio quality. A majority of respondents indicated that they struggle to concentrate when encountering new vocabulary. This suggests that the cognitive burden of unfamiliar words can impede their ability to focus on the overall message, highlighting the need for strategies to enhance vocabulary acquisition prior to listening tasks.

Moreover, the data show a strong consensus regarding the impact of poor audio quality on concentration. Many students highlighted that unclear audio significantly disrupts their listening experience, indicating that this is a critical area for improvement in educational settings. Ensuring high-quality audio resources could facilitate better comprehension and engagement during listening activities.

Additionally, the results indicate that a significant portion of respondents experience anxiety when they do not understand spoken texts. This emotional response can hinder participation and overall learning, as anxiety may lead to avoidance of speaking or engaging in discussions. Addressing these emotional challenges through supportive teaching practices is essential to foster an environment where students feel comfortable expressing their difficulties. By tackling these interconnected issues—vocabulary comprehension, audio quality, and emotional well-being—educators can significantly enhance students' listening experiences and overall confidence.

The results from Table 2 highlight the significant impact that listening comprehension challenges have on students' performance, participation, and confidence in English. Many respondents feel that their anxiety about listening negatively affects their participation in class. This finding indicates that emotional barriers substantially hinder students' willingness

to engage in classroom activities, potentially limiting their learning opportunities.

Additionally, difficulties in listening comprehension are closely linked to lower confidence in using English. This connection suggests that struggles with listening can have far-reaching effects on students' self-esteem and their overall willingness to communicate in the language. As a result, many students hesitate to speak in class due to fear of misunderstanding, which can further prevent active participation and restrict opportunities for practice.

Moreover, the overall performance in English is significantly affected when students struggle with listening comprehension. This underscores the vital role that effective listening skills play in academic success and language proficiency. The findings emphasize that emotional factors, such as anxiety and fear of misunderstanding, are crucial in shaping students' classroom engagement. Addressing these challenges through supportive teaching practices can enhance students' confidence and participation, ultimately leading to improved performance in English.

The results from Table 3 emphasize the crucial role of teacher support in enhancing students' listening comprehension. Many respondents expressed a strong need for more vocabulary support before listening activities. This demand highlights the importance of pre-listening preparation, which can significantly help students focus on comprehension tasks and reduce cognitive load during listening exercises.

Additionally, the overwhelming agreement on the necessity of clearer audio recordings indicates that audio quality is vital for supporting students' listening skills. High-quality recordings can make a substantial difference in comprehension, ensuring that students can fully engage with the material without the distraction of unclear sound.

Furthermore, the preference for more pauses during listening exercises suggests that thoughtful pacing is essential for effective learning. Allowing students time to process information can enhance their understanding and retention of the material. Lastly, the desire for more opportunities to practice listening in a supportive environment reflects students' need for a classroom atmosphere that encourages engagement and confidence-building.

Overall, these findings underscore the importance of targeted teacher support. By addressing vocabulary needs, improving audio quality, adjusting pacing, and creating supportive practice opportunities, educators can significantly enhance students' listening comprehension and overall learning experience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion:

This study investigates the listening difficulties faced by students in the English Department at the Faculty of Arts, Misurata University, specifically focusing on those enrolled in or recently completing language skills courses. The analysis of data collected from 41 questionnaire respondents highlights several primary challenges in listening comprehension, including lack of concentration, insufficient teacher support, anxiety, and poor audio quality.

These findings underscore the need for targeted interventions to enhance students' listening skills. Addressing the identified challenges through improved vocabulary support, high-quality audio resources, and a more supportive classroom environment can significantly impact students' learning experiences. Additionally, fostering an atmosphere that alleviates anxiety can encourage greater participation and confidence in language use.

Ultimately, the results of this study call for a comprehensive approach to teaching listening skills, emphasizing the importance of addressing both cognitive and emotional factors. By implementing these strategies, educators can better equip students to overcome listening challenges and achieve greater success in their language studies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the listening difficulties encountered by students in the English Department at Misurata University:

1. Enhanced Vocabulary Support:

- Implement pre-listening activities that focus on key vocabulary to help students build a stronger foundation before engaging with audio materials.
- Provide vocabulary lists and glossaries for students to review prior to listening exercises.

2. Improvement of Audio Quality:

- Invest in high-quality audio recording equipment and ensure that all listening materials are clear and easily understandable.
- Regularly assess and update audio resources to maintain clarity and relevance.

3. Pacing Adjustments:

- Incorporate pauses during listening exercises to allow students time to process information and enhance comprehension.

- Consider using varied pacing in audio materials to accommodate different learning speeds.

4. Increased Teacher Support:

- Train instructors to provide more structured guidance during listening activities, including strategies for effective listening and comprehension.
- Foster open communication between students and teachers, encouraging students to express their difficulties and seek help when needed.

5. Anxiety Reduction Strategies:

- Create a supportive classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and reduces anxiety by promoting a culture of collaboration and peer support.
- Incorporate relaxation techniques or mindfulness practices before listening activities to help students manage anxiety.

6. Opportunities for Practice:

- Provide more opportunities for students to practice listening skills in various contexts, such as group discussions, listening clubs, or language exchange programs.
- Encourage participation in extracurricular activities that involve listening and speaking in English, such as debates or presentations.

7. Feedback Mechanisms:

- Establish a system for regular feedback on students' listening skills and progress, helping them identify areas for improvement.
- Use student feedback to continuously refine and adapt teaching strategies and resources.

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