

**Listening Comprehension for first Grade
Students of Department of English Language Arts at
AL-Yarmouk University College**

الإدراك السمعي لطلبة المرحلة الاولى
قسم آداب اللغة الانكليزية في كلية اليرموك الجامعة

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Abstract

The paper analyzes listening comprehension of English language skills for the first grade students at the Department of English Language Arts / AL-Yarmouk University College at Baquba city - Diyala - Iraq . The paper is attempt to answer the following questions: 1. What are the factors that determine students' interest in learning English? 2. How frequently listening educational instruments are used to improve the listening skills for student? 3. What are the common difficulties that face the respondents in the questionnaire implemented in this paper in terms of listening comprehension ? Thus, the paper aims to find the factors influencing English listening comprehension and the strategies to be taken to improve students' listening comprehension. The study used questionnaire for the collection of quick, valid, and update data from the respondents and it found the following :-

- 1- Accent, colloquial expression, pronunciation, lack of time, speech speed, and limited knowledge of vocabulary and structures of sentences were the problems which always existed during the process of listening exercises, while others not .
- 2- Approximately 50% of respondents do not want to learn English because it is difficult .
- 3- Students rarely used learning aids such as TV, radio, internet, tape recorder, and traveling to improving their listening skills.

INTRODUCTION

Listening plays a vital role in daily lives. People listen for different purposes such as entertainment, academic purposes or obtaining necessary information. As for foreign language learning, listening is of paramount important since it provides the language input (Rost 1994:141-142). Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement. In addition, without listening skill, no communication can be achieved (Cross, 1998). As for that, language learners, especially those who learn English as a foreign language in a non-native setting, find it difficult to acquire good listening skill.

However, Language is a medium of communication, which helps the members of a community in the society, to communicate and interact with one another. This involves both verbal and non-verbal communication. Language focuses on listening and reading that can be named as passive or receptive skills, while

speaking and writing can be named as, active or productive skills.

Listening is one of the important skills in learning a language. If we dig in deep, it is worth mentioning here that for the acquisition of a language listening plays a pivotal role. The process of acquiring a language starts with listening and ends up in the production of writing.

After birth, a child hears variety of sounds and can distinguish among them. Every language has a common and a natural sequence for the development of the language skills. Similarly English language has the natural sequence of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening skill is ranked first of all the four folds. This highlights the importance of listening skill in the life of human beings.

Students normally face and encounter listening problems especially in foreign languages . English is spoken across the world with different dialects and accents; therefore, the foreign learners encounter difficulty in understanding this language.

The most important communication skill, listening, is often the least developed. Ina Thomas and Brian Dyer (2007: p1) state that Listening is rarely taught because educators assume listening is synonymous to breathing—automatic. However, effective listening is a skill. Like any other skill, effective listening is achieved through study and practice. No matter how careful one person or group is in communicating their thoughts and ideas in a clear and friendly way, if the listener is not willing to receive the

information, communication will fail .

Literature Review

The demand for English speaking proficiency among students is rising. More specifically, listening comprehension has recently attracted considerable attention in Iraq . Despite students having mastered the basic elements of English such as grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is in general weak. According to Howatt and Dakin (1974), listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This process involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, the speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning. An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously.

Lundsteen (1979) stated, "Listening is highly complex, interactive process that has been defined as 'the process by which spoken language is converted to meaning in the mind'. As this definition suggests, listening is more than just hearing."

Rivers (1981) stated, "Listening is a critical element in learning any foreign language. It helps the Learner to acquire competence in language and he can exhibit his competence if he is communicating at school, at work or in the community. In normal course of a day listening is used nearly twice as much as speaking and four to five times as much as reading and writing."

Pearson (1983) stated, "Listening involves the simultaneous organization and combination of skills in Phonology, Syntax, Semantics, and knowledge of the text structure, all of which seem to be controlled by the

cognitive process. Thus it can be said that though not fully realized, listening skill is essential in acquiring language proficiency”.

Ronald and Roskelly (1985) define listening as an active process requiring the same skills of prediction, hypothesizing, checking, revising, and generalizing that writing and reading demand; and these authors present specific exercises to make students active listeners who are aware of the "inner voice" one hears when writing. In other words, listening is a two-way process involving reception, decoding of input, and production that involves predicting and compensating.

Hirsch (1986) stated, “Listening as an aspect of skills: involves neurological response and interpretations of sounds to understand and to give meaning by reacting, selecting meaning, remembering, attending, analyzing and including previous experience.”

Wolvin and coakley (1991) stated, “Listening was regarded crucial for communication at work at any level for employment, job success, and general career competence and for effective relationship between supervisor and subordinates.” According to Morley (1991), “Despite the recognition of the critical role that listening skills play in communication and acquisition of language, it remains one of the least understood skill in language learning.”

Listening is often erroneously considered a passive skill. In fact, in order to decode a message that the speaker is delivering, the listener must actively contribute knowledge from both linguistic and non-linguistic sources. The view of listening would involve the learner in listening to the message without paying attention to its component elements. Listening to a language can be defined as the ability to receive and decode oral communication by processing a language sample (McErlain 1999).

The importance of listening cannot be ignored as it is the first step towards the language learning. Unfortunately in those schools of Pakistan where English is taught as second or foreign language; teaching strategies lack development of proper listening skill among the students.

Aims of The Study

The paper aims at identifying the reasons that make some students in Department of English Arts of AL-Yarmouk University College master the English language skills while others do not . In addition, the paper's goal is to highlight the main obstacles facing students in acquiring listening skills. The paper also analyzes the methods used to master the listening skills. The focus of the paper was directed college students because the problems in listening have their origins in schools where few students have been the recipients of listening teaching. Thus, when these high school students move to college they find it difficult to adapt to college English teaching. During their first year of college English, the problem of listening deficiency is mostly noticeable. If this problem need to be corrected it has to be done at from their first Grade . More specifically, the paper will try to answer the following questions: What are the reasons behind attracting some students to learn English while others do not show the same affection? What are the methods used in learning listening skills? And what are the difficulties facing those female students in learning listening skills?

Procedure of the Study

Data were collected and presented in the form of table , which further illustrated in the form of percentages as well as results were drawn.

Population of the Study

The population of the present study comprised all the first grade college students of Department of English Language Arts – AL-Yarmouk University College for the academic year 2011-2012 .

Sample of the Study

Sample of the study included all the eighty-two students (males and females) of the first grade .

Delimitation of the Study

The scope of the study was narrowed down to only first grade college students of Department of English Language Arts , and the questionnaire was taken through their conversation class .

Instruments of the Study

A close-ended questionnaire was designed, with 30 items focusing on the problems and obstacles encountered by students during listening process in the classroom, for the respondents in order to collect update and quick data. The answers were recorded on 4-point liker scale. The researcher personally taught the class and distributed the questionnaires in English without even the students know that they were under test to gain a free natural react to the

questionnaires without any pretend. After a week time the questionnaires recollectd by the researcher herself.

Data Collection and Interpretation

The primary data were collected from the respondents on the problems faced by students during listening comprehension. The data were presented in the form of table and graph and further explained with the help of percentages.

Table (1)
Problems of Listening Comprehension among the Students

#	Items	Responses				
		Always	Frequently	Some Times	Never	Total
1-	Accent	39 47.6 %	27 32.9 %	11 13.4 %	5 6.1 %	82 100 %
2-	Dialect	16 19.5 %	31 37.8 %	28 34.2 %	7 8.5 %	82 100 %
3-	Acoustic	8 9.8 %	11 13.4 %	19 23.1 %	44 53.7 %	82 100 %
4-	Pronunciation	51 62.2 %	22 26.8 %	6 7.3 %	3 3.7 %	82 100 %
5-	Variation in Target Language	20 24.4 %	27 32.9 %	29 35.4 %	6 7.3 %	82 100 %
6-	Colloquial Language/Expressions	41 50 %	30 36.6 %	9 11 %	2 2.4 %	82 100 %
7-	Stuttering	23 28 %	45 54.9 %	9 11 %	5 6.1 %	82 100 %
8-	Listening Disabilities	4 4.9 %	21 25.6 %	10 12.2 %	47 57.3 %	82 100 %
9-	Lack of Time	33 40.2 %	19 23.2 %	20 24.4 %	10 12.2 %	82 100 %
10-	Application of Grammar Rule during listening.	26 31.7 %	23 28 %	18 22 %	15 18.3 %	82 100 %
11-	Long Listening	13 15.9 %	26 31.7 %	33 40.2 %	10 12.2 %	82 100 %
12-	Unfamiliar Topics	4 4.9 %	17 20.7 %	51 62.2 %	10 12.2 %	82 100 %
13-	Linking Words	60 73.2 %	15 18.3 %	7 8.5 %	0 00 %	82 100 %

14-	Hesitation and shyness	8 9.8 %	26 31.7 %	41 50 %	7 8.5 %	82 100 %
15-	Authentic Materials	18 22 %	41 50 %	23 28 %	0 00 %	82 100 %
16-	Speech Speed	41 50 %	21 25.6 %	15 18.3 %	5 6.1 %	82 100 %
17-	Limited knowledge of vocabulary and structures	33 40.2 %	26 31.7 %	18 22 %	5 6.1 %	82 100 %
18-	Making prediction what the speaker talk about	41 50 %	23 28 %	18 22 %	0 00 %	82 100 %
19-	Guessing unknown words or phrases	45 54.9 %	26 31.7 %	11 13.4 %	0 00 %	82 100 %
20-	Recognizing main points	20 24.4 %	23 28 %	21 25.6 %	18 22 %	82 100 %

The data presented in table (1) elicited that most of the respondents believed that accent, colloquial expressions, pronunciation, lack of time , speech speed , and limited knowledge of vocabulary and structures of sentences were the problems which always existed during the listening process in the classroom. It was further highlighted in the table that variation in the target language, dialect, stuttering, application of grammar rules, authentic materials, and recognizing main points were the problems which created frequent hindrance to the respondents during listening practice, while problems of unfamiliar topics , long listening, and hesitation and shyness sometimes existed in the process of listening, whereas, listening disabilities, acoustic, linking words , making prediction what the speaker talk about, and guessing unknown words or phrases were never considered a problem by the respondents during listening exercises.

It was highly pretended the fact that, the concept of this paper was given to students in the classroom through their teacher (the researcher herself). The researcher intentionally avoided conducting personal interviews with the students to give those participants the freedom to answer the questions and express themselves without any interference by the researcher. See the following Table :-

Table (2)
Distribution of Respondent of Why do Students Learn English

#	Distribution of Respondents	Number	Percentage
A-	Those who showed interest in learning English	39	47.6 %
1-	English as a global Language	19	23.2 %
2-	Make big jumps in careers , leaving others miles behind	2	2.4 %
3-	Learn English Because it is Fun	6	7.3 %
4-	Get satisfaction and access to knowledge	7	8.5 %
5-	Parents insistence	5	6.1 %
B-	Those did not Express interest in learning English	43	52.4 %
1-	Hardship in Learn English	18	22 %
2-	No enough time to learn English	10	12.2 %
3-	Lack of continuity for Learning English	9	11 %
4-	Different accents of English	4	4.9 %
5-	No specific reason	2	2.4 %
	Total	82	100 %

The paper highlights that the factors that affect students' interest in learning English include:

1. English as a global Language . The total number of respondents who gave the English language this importance in real life as a global Language is (19) out of (39) who showed interest in learning English. In other words, the percentage for those (19) students is (23.2 %)
2. Make big jumps in [careers](#), leaving [others](#) miles behind . The total number of respondents who gave the this item is (2) out of (39) who showed interest in learning English. In other words, the percentage for those (2)

students is only (2.4 %) .

3. Desire to learn foreign language because it is fun thing to do. The total number of respondents for this point is (6) out of (39) which amounts to (7.3 %) .

4. Get satisfaction and access to knowledge . The total number of respondents for this point is (7) out of (39) which amounts to (8.5 %) .

5. Parents insistence . The total number of respondents who studying English language only for their parents insistence not from their interest is (5) out of (39) . In other words, the percentage for those (5) students is (6.1 %) .

6. As for students who expressed no interest in learning English. Hardship in Learn English is one of the highest percentage . However ,the total number of students is (18) i.e. 52.4% of the total number of the sample (43).The researcher believe that this number is very high. Some of the reasons mentioned by these students for not being interested in learning English include: hardship they face in learning English (22 %) ; no enough time to learn (12.2 %) ; lack of continuity for learning English(11 %) ; different accents of English (4.9 %) ; and finally No specific reason which gets (2.4%).

By looking at table (2) , it becomes clear that out of the total number of students of (82) there are (39) who would like or have an interest in learning English language skill. In other words, these (39) students constitute (47.6 %) of the total percentage of students. On the other hand, those students do not have interest in learning English language skills amount to (43)

students (i.e. 52.4%) . It is to be noticed that there is no big gap between those who expressed interest in learning English and those who did not show the same interest.

Table (3)

Using Different Means to Enhance Learning Skill

The Means	Using The Means				Total	
	Answer (Yes)		Answer (No)		Number	Percentage
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage		
1- TV	60	73.2 %	22	26.8 %	82	100 %
2- Radio	6	7.3 %	76	92.7 %	82	100 %
3Internet	15	18.3 %	67	81.7 %	82	100 %
4-Tape recorder	31	37.8 %	51	62.2 %	82	100 %
5Traveling	2	2.4 %	80	97.6 %	82	100 %

The importance of utilizing learning tools, which is the topic of this paper, in mastering English language skills cannot be underestimated. Table (3) clearly indicates that using (traveling and radio) as a learning tools are low when compared with other tools or methods. More specifically, the percentage of respondents who used traveling was (2.4 %) while (97.6 %) of students do not use this tool and radio was (4.5%) while (95.5%) of the students do not use radio. It is expected that the rationale for the former students not to use the traveling and radio as a learning methods can

be contributed to their weakness in listening comprehension.

TV occupies the first place among other learning methods. Around (60) students indicated that they use TV as learning method for listening comprehension. In other words, (73.2 %) of the total students use TV. The reason for this overwhelming use of TV can be contributed to the joy and entertainment one experience when watching TV so that students attention are attracted to the images displayed on TV. According to the data displayed above, dependence on tape recorder to learn English language skills is somehow medium . As a matter of fact, just (31) students, i.e. (37.8 %), said that they use this method to learn English. To put in a different way,(51) students said that they do not use the tape recorder method. The researcher believes that these statistics are disappointing as the percentage of those using tape recorder should be higher since this method is easy to use, has low cost to own, and it can be easy moved from one place to another. Moreover, using the tape recorder can help students record their own statements and hear again. It is unfortunate that the methods of radio and tape recorder are not well-used although they have so many benefits in helping students improve their listening comprehension. Otherwise , around (15) students ,i.e. (18.3 %) students indicated that they use internet as learning method for listening comprehension. In other words, only 18.3 % who used internet and 81.7 do not.

The presence of a teacher in a classroom is considered among the most important tools used in

learning English language skills including listening comprehension. However, according the study conducted for the purpose of this article, it becomes clear to the researcher that teachers never use radio or TV as learning method. Somewhat, teachers use tape recorder. It is clear that there is weakness and limitation in using the different kinds of learning methods although some of these methods are easy to use and cheap to own. Therefore, using different learning methods should be inseparable part of the teacher's way of teaching English skills. Analyzing the data collected for this paper points out that 54% of respondents have improved their listening comprehension via the teacher while the remaining percentage have not learnt much. In addition, students' listening comprehension based on the use of radio, TV, and tape recorder other than internet and traveling .

Conclusions

Based on the data collected and interpreted, following conclusions were drawn:

1. Accent, colloquial expressions, pronunciation, lack of time , speech speed , and limited knowledge of vocabulary and structures of sentences were the major obstacles in the development of listening skills among the students.
2. Variation in the target language, dialect, stuttering, application of grammar rules, authentic materials, and recognizing main points were the problems, which frequently existed in the listening process.

3. Unfamiliar topics , long listening, and hesitation and shyness were the problems among the respondents, which sometimes hindered the process of listening in the classroom teaching.
4. Respondents did not consider listening disabilities, acoustic, linking words , making prediction what the speaker talk about, and guessing unknown words or phrases as the major problems in the comprehension of listening.
5. Approximately 50% of respondents do not want to learn English because it is difficult.
6. Students rarely used learning aids such as TV, radio, internet, tape recorder, and traveling to improving their listening skills.

Recommendation

On the basis of data interpretation and conclusions of the study, the following recommendation were made:

1. Students should spend much more time on practicing. They should listen to a variety of topics in order to get familiar with them. Hence, the background knowledge will be enriched as well as the skill.
2. Students should know to apply suitable strategies to each kind of listening text in order to get the best result.
3. Teachers should use audio visual aids for the development of English listening skill.
4. Teachers should utilized movies, multimedia, CD's, use dialogues and conversation in the classrooms for the developments of listening skills.
5. Teachers should place emphasis on proper

pronunciation, use of grammar and phonetics during listening speaking process

6. Teachers should use dialogues, conversation, and discussion in English as activities in the class.

7. Teachers should not bring any gape in the activities of listening skill in order to gain best possible results of the activities

8. Provision of listening skill should be inculcated in the textbooks of English.

الإدراك السمعي لطلبة المرحلة الاولى قسم آداب اللغة الانكليزية في كلية اليرموك الجامعة

الملخص :-

يتناول البحث الإدراك السمعي لمهارات اللغة الانكليزية لطلاب المرحلة الاولى في قسم آداب اللغة الانكليزية - كلية اليرموك الجامعة في مدينة بعقوبة - ديالى - العراق . حاولت الدراسة الاجابة على التساؤلات الآتية (١) ما هي العوامل التي تحدد اهتمام الطلاب في تعلم اللغة الانكليزية ؟ (٢) عدد المرات التي تستخدم فيها الادوات التعليمية السمعية لتحسين مهارات الاستماع لدى الطلاب ؟ (٣) ما هي الصعوبات الشائعة التي تواجه المشاركين في الاستبيان في عملية الإدراك السمعي ؟ وهكذا ، فإن هذا الدراسة تهدف الى ايجاد العوامل المؤثرة في عملية الادراك السمعي للغة الانكليزية و الاستراتيجيات التي من الممكن ان تحسن الادراك السمعي لدى الطلاب .

أستخدمت الدراسة الاستبيان لجمع معلومات سريعة وثابتة و حديثة من المستطلعين ، ووجدت الدراسة ما يأتي :-

١- اللكنة ، التعبير العامي، النطق ، الافتقار الى الوقت ، سرعة النطق ، و المعرفة المحدودة عن المفردات و تراكيب الجمل . تعتبر من المشاكل التي تتواجد دائماً خلال تمارين الاستماع بينما الاخريات لا .

٢- ما يقرب من ٥٠% من أفراد العينة لا يحبون تعلم اللغة الانكليزية بسبب كونها صعبة التعلم وانما يتعلمونها من اجل مستلزمات الشهادة فقط .

٣- استخدام الوسائل التعليمية مثل التلفزيون ، الراديو ، الانترنت ، المسجل ، والسفر من الوسائل التي يمكن ان تساعد الطلاب في تحسين مهارات الإستماع . ومع ذلك، أبرز البحث حقيقة ان الطلاب يستخدمون وسائل الإيضاح بصورة قليلة . بالإضافة الى ذلك ، قامت الباحثة بتدريس اللغة الأنكليزية من دون استخدام الوسائل التعليمية مثل الراديو أو التلفزيون بينما كان استخدامها للمسجل محدوداً جداً .

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