

Diagnosing Barriers of ESL/EFL Learners' Listening and Speaking Comprehension

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Submission date: 2/ 4/2023

Acceptance date: 11/ 4/2023

Publication date: 21/8/2023

Abstract

The present study attempts to tackle problems of EFL/ESL learners' listening and speaking comprehension, in addition to the theoretical background of their obstacles. For this purpose, qualitative and quantitative methods have been conducted to get the response of the listening speaking questionnaire (LSQ) as a tool of data collection. Accordingly, forty (40) students participated in this study at the University of Sulaimani. Their responses show that many (up to %80) of the participants face difficulties in listening and speaking comprehension. The data is analyzed via the SPSS program and a conclusion has been drawn. Most of their challenges are internally related to their shyness as well as some external impacts belonging to both device and teacher guide with curriculum design. Accordingly, some recommendations have been given to overcome the obstacles.

Keywords: Comprehension, Listening skills, Speaking skills, Challenges, Diagnoses

تشخيص موانع الاستيعاب للإستماع والتحدث لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة ثانية أو اجنبية

د ريسان صالح بهة رش فهاد محمد

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية / كلية التربية الأساسية / الجامعة العراقية

ال د

تأول الدراسة ت م ا ك الاسماع والاث ل معطي اللغة الإنكليزية بصفها لغة أجنبية / اللغة الإنكليزية بصفها لغة ثانية، بالإضافة إلى اللغة الإنكليزية للغات التي تواجهها. لهذا الغرض، أج الأساليب الكمية والنوعية ل ل على استمارة استبان الاسماع والاث أداة ل مع اللغات، واء عليه، شارك في هذه الدراسة أربعين (٤٠) المتأ في جامعة الكوفة. تب إجاباتهم أن ع ال ار (٨٠٪) ياجهن صعبات في الاسماع والاث. وتل اللغات ع برنامج SPSS والاص إلى اسماج، كان مع ت م تة له بالإضافة إلى الأثبات المرجحة التي تي إلى م دل الهاز والاعط مع ت ال ا هج، واء عليه، وتق ع الاصوات ل اللغات.

اللغات الأخرى: الفهم، مهارات الاسماع، مهارات التحدث، اللغات الأخرى

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Online ISSN: 2312-8135 Print ISSN: 1992-0652

www.journalofbabylon.com/index.php/JUBH

Email: humjournal@uobabylon.edu.iq

1. Introduction

Due to the significance of listening and speaking, they are considered the basis of learning or acquiring any language. For anyone who wants to learn any language, the first thing he has to do is practicing listening. Some related studies show that the lack of using the English language in the EFL and ESL learners' daily lives communication impacts the learners' listening comprehension [1]. The problem is that most of the EFL/ESL learners face difficulties in listening and speaking English. Accordingly, the problem of learners' listening and speaking belongs to several factors either internal or external such as level of interest in the topic, accent, speed, word boundaries, speech impediments, an embarrassment of making mistakes background noise, no control (can't stop or interrupt), poor grammar, more than one speaker, poor production, no preparation, incomplete utterance, hear information only once, physical and psychological barriers, lack of eye contact, overloaded information, lack of interest in learning English. One of the internal challenges belongs to the fact that English is not their mother tongue. The other one is related to the limits of the EFL/ESL learners' vocabulary'. Besides, psychological issues related to the shyness of the learners and the atmosphere of the classroom is unhelpful to encourage learners to listen carefully and speak freely.

This study aims at diagnosing the challenges that EFL/ESL learners face in listening comprehension and speaking classes at the University of Sulaimani. Accordingly, the researchers try to find proper and feasible solution/s for them.

This research, therefore, tries to answer the following questions:

1. What difficulties do EFL/ESL learners encounter in listening and speaking?
2. Why do they have these difficulties?
3. How to find proper solutions for them?
4. What is the best strategy that is followed by the good learner?

2. Literature Review

Due to the importance of listening and speaking, several studies have widely been conducted in different settings by various researchers. They mostly accept that listening and speaking skills are significantly considered a two-way process between the speaker and listener [2]. Listening has a prominent role in foreign or second language learning[3]. That is, it is often difficult for someone to make contacts if he is not able to listen to learning tasks properly or sometimes learners employ improper ways while listening and this gives them a poor outcome. Listening difficulties might have positive and negative impacts on the student's understanding based on the student's insights and awareness[4]. Therefore, with the purpose of assisting students become more active or enhanced with their listening skill, it is required to indicate and show their listening difficulties which make problems to them. We as researchers agree with the declaration that to progress and improve listening skills, it is noteworthy to discover the listening difficulties irrespective of the knowledge or grade of learners in English classes. However, it might be difficult to indicate listening problems since each student has his or her own matters. In order to classify listening problems, four reasons are mentioned and indicated by Yagang [5], the reasons are the message, the speaker, the listener, and the physical context. Moreover, several studies have been conducted to show the difficulties

in listening. Higgins [6] shows that the problems of listening are available due to the rate of speech, words, and pronunciation. Additionally, some researchers confirm that the problems of listening belong to the promptness of speech delivery, the use of expressions and notions, and exertion in concentrating and the immediate setting [7]. The process includes comprehending a talker's intonation or accent, the talker's grammar, and lexical terminology, and understanding of connotation. Active listeners are able to do these four things concurrently. Moreover, it is believed that most students can do these things actively if they have a good setting. Boonkit [8] states that it is required to provide a diversity of circumstances and recurrent conversation activities that has an important role in the development and upgrading of learners' fluency while conversing. When learners have various tasks and activities for speaking or conversations in role plays, they attempt to speak freely, and they will have more freedom in English communications. This shows that using speaking activities and tasks assists learners and improves their speaking skills.

Listening can be seen as a doable process that needs contribution on the side of the hearer [9]. This reveals that when a learner listens to a speaker, he or she processes the knowledge emotionally so as to build a reply. Throughout the listening procedure, the listener is keenly involved. In foreign language learning, it is significant to listen to what is communicated with a countless deal of care since this assists the hearer in replicating precisely or almost precisely what he or she listens to. Thus, listening is an integrated skill; learners listen with the purpose of comprehending what has been listened to. The speaker and the listener should be communicating together in a social setting. If a student comprehends the language of a speaker, this contributes to his or her chance to be included in the process of interaction. Larsen-Freeman [10] states that messages are clearly conveyed if they are demonstrated through communication between a speaker and a listener. This clearness makes an understanding of what has been discussed or stated. Regarding speaking skills, speaking can be seen as the most significant or required skill or language proficiency [11]. Moreover, speaking appears to be a prominent skill that could be considered through the process of teaching and learning. Similarly, the aim of teaching speaking is to improve the learner's interactive and communicative skills. In this way, learners can introduce themselves and study how to monitor the public and traditional rules. Scott and Cutler [12] indicates that speaking is an activity that involves two or more participants who are identified as listeners and speakers. Each participant has a specific purpose or purposes which he intends to gain in the communication and a capacity to understand what is indicated.

Brown and Yule [13] believe that speaking is a communicative process of creating senses that include creating and getting information. The structure and sense rely on the setting in which the speaking appears, involving the respondents themselves. The speaker's experience, setting, and goals are also significant for communication. Speaking is almost unprompted, unclosed, and growing. Nevertheless, dialogues are not usually erratic. There are language functions that are likely to appear in different discourse circumstances such as apologizing, requesting and invitations. Not only do communications need students to identify how to produce certain language components and structures such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, but also need to

comprehend what time, why, and in what method to communicate via the target language.

Previous studies have shown that enhancement in listening skills is very helpful for speaking and communication. Listening and speaking are interconnected accomplishments in the process of learning. The above-mentioned studies also affirm the impact of listening on speaking. This shows that there is a strong correlation between listening and speaking. Rost [9] states three possible reasons for improving listening and speaking skills. Firstly, speaking offers a means of communication for the learner, since learners need to communicate in order to gain comprehension and other utterances of the language are necessary. Secondly, genuine spoken language shows a contest for the learner to try to comprehend the language as first-language users actually employ it. Thirdly, listening activities offer ESL or EFL instructors with the means for attracting learners' attention to new forms of language components in the target language. In addition, Hamouda [14] shows that EFL learners have vital difficulties in listening comprehension since universities pay more attention to grammar, reading, and vocabulary components. This means that listening and speaking skills might not be practiced well or they are not important parts of the study curriculum and instructors do not determine these skills in their classes. In addition, Osada [15] indicates that listening is not very prominent for both instructors and students and instructors' exams do not clarify listening and students learn listening not listening comprehension. As a result, it is still the most neglected aspect of language teaching. Hamouda [14] confirms that understanding speech is not an easy activity for learners. Thus, learners encounter many difficulties when they listen to a new language. If instructors are anticipated to help learners to advance and enhance their listening comprehension, they need to understand their listening problems or challenges in comprehending spoken tracks.

3. Methodology

The methods that have been conducted in this study are quantitative in order for the results to be more reliable and accurate [16]. The tool that has been used in this study is a questionnaire, due to its significance in collecting data. According to Dawson [17] a close-ended questionnaire is self-administered pre-written responses is provided and sent it the internet. In this research, a self-administered questionnaire is sent via Google form to 60 students studying at the Department of English at the University of Sulaimani. Their responses have been analysed throughout the SPSS program with the discussions. According to Grath [18], this program elicits the conclusion with an analysis of the collected data of the research. Choosing an appropriate method of analysis facilitates having a valid research conclusion.

The researchers use listening and speaking questions (LSQ) to assist them to collect their data in a short period of time. The aim of this procedure is to diagnose students' challenges toward learning to listen and speak English. Similarly, [2] uses the same procedure in their research.

3.1 Participants

The target group of the study is students at the College of Basic Education, Department of English Language at the University of Sulaimani. As it is notified that

listening and speaking are significant for second language learners and students at this level need improving these two skills as EFL and broadening their information in the English language to fulfill their graduation needs.

To achieve the objective of this study, a self-administered questionnaire is sent through Google Forms to students in the Department of English Language at the College of Basic Education, and then only 49 students answered the questions.

3.2 Procedures

Data gathering is seen to be a crucial component of statistical analysis. Primary data are required for this quantitative approach to provide answers to the research questions. Primary data is defined as one which is collected for the first time by the researcher and is factual and original. Meanwhile, the primary data is collected with the aim of getting the solution to the problem [19].

There are several sources for primary data, including questionnaires, experiments, observations, and surveys. The major method for gathering data for this study was the questionnaire. An important tool for spreading and collecting the questions was Google Forms.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The obtained data will first be shown in this part after they will be examined according to the intensity of the replies. Finally, regression analysis will be used to look into the data's correlations.

4.1 Data Analysis:

As previously stated, 49 students correctly completed this survey. The data was initially entered into the Microsoft Excel program. SPSS was then used to analyze the pooled results. The components converged into five categories and were labeled based on the contents of their underlying variables.

Table 1: descriptive Statistics for Listening and Speaking

Descriptive Statistics	St. Ag.		Ag.		Nut.		DisAg.		St.DisAg.		Mean	St.Dev
	Ferq	%	Ferq	%	Ferq	%	Ferq	%	Ferq	%		
List.-Comp.1	4	8.16	12	24.49	19	38.78	8	16.33	6	12.24	3.00	1.12
List.-Comp.2	2	4.08	12	24.49	23	46.94	6	12.24	6	12.24	2.96	1.02
List.-Comp.3	4	8.16	11	22.45	17	34.69	12	24.49	5	10.20	2.94	1.11
List.-Comp.4	8	16.33	16	32.65	11	22.45	12	24.49	2	4.08	3.35	1.11
											3.06	0.05
List.-Dev.1	3	6.12	12	24.49	15	30.61	17	34.69	2	4.08	2.94	1.01
List.-Dev.2	2	4.08	14	28.57	14	28.57	13	26.53	6	12.24	2.86	1.10
											2.90	0.06
List.-Teach1	3	6.12	11	22.45	14	28.57	16	32.65	5	10.20	2.90	1.03
List.-Teach2	6	12.24	15	30.61	16	32.65	7	14.29	5	10.20	3.27	1.11
List.-Teach3	3	6.12	12	24.49	10	20.41	18	36.73	6	12.24	2.76	1.15

											2.97	0.06
List.- Shy.1	13	26.53	17	34.69	7	14.29	3	6.12	9	18.37	3.45	1.43
List.- Shy.2	7	14.29	17	34.69	12	24.49	5	10.20	8	16.33	3.20	1.29
											3.32	0.10
Spea.- Teach.1	7	14.29	1	2.04	23	46.94	14	28.57	4	8.16	2.92	1.04
Spea.- Teach.2	11	22.45	15	30.61	14	28.57	6	12.24	3	6.12	3.55	1.10
Spea.- Teach.3	0	0.00	12	24.49	15	30.61	16	32.65	6	12.24	2.67	0.99
Spea.- Teach.4	11	22.45	15	30.61	16	32.65	4	8.16	3	6.12	3.65	0.99
											3.17	0.05
Spea.- comp.1	9	18.37	14	28.57	16	32.65	6	12.24	4	8.16	3.47	1.06
Spea.- comp.2	3	6.12	18	36.73	16	32.65	8	16.33	4	8.16	3.16	1.05
Spea.- comp.3	2	4.08	15	30.61	17	34.69	12	24.49	3	6.12	3.02	0.99
											3.21	0.04
Spea.- Class.1	5	10.20	9	18.37	20	40.82	12	24.49	3	6.12	3.02	1.05
											3.02	#DIV/0!

Source: measured by researchers using SPSS

In Table 1 shows that those factors have a serious impact on listening and speaking respectively. The most effective factor that has an impact on students is Shyness with the highest average (3.32), then it is followed by speaking comprehension (3.21), Teacher guide and curriculum design in speaking (3.17), Listening comprehension (3.06), Class atmosphere for speaking (3.02), Teacher guide and curriculum design for listening (2.97), Device in listening (2.90). Depending on these averages in this survey, factors of listening and speaking somewhat highlight the existing problems among students.

Cronbach's alpha is a measure of internal consistency, or how closely linked a group of things is. It is regarded as a scale dependability metric. Cronbach's alpha is a statistic that is used to evaluate the dependability, or internal consistency, of a group of scale or test items. Table 2 shows the result of the Alpha Cronbach test for this research.

Table 2: Alpha Cronbach Test

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of Items
0.787	7

Source: measured by researchers using SPSS

Hence, this research Cronbach's Alpha equals (0.787), which is considered an accepted questionnaire. Due to fact, since Cronbach's Alpha is (0.60 – 0.69) the questionnaire is accepted and questionable, but when the measure is equal to (0.70 – 0.79) the questionnaire is accepted. This result indicates that this research is reliable and valid.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

A correlation expresses the intensity and/or direction of the relationship between two or more variables. A positive correlation indicates that both variables change in the same way. A negative correlation indicates that the variables are changing in opposite directions. Correlational study results may be used to evaluate prevalence and correlations between variables, as well as to foresee occurrences based on existing data and knowledge. Despite its various applications, adopting the process and analyzing data requires caution. The correlation matrix is used to show the correlation between variables, which means two variables are perfectly correlated when the correlation is between (0.9 to 1) or (-0.9 to -1). However, the two variables have a strong correlation when it equals (0.5 to 0.9) or (-0.5 to -0.9). In the meantime, the correlation between the two variables is weak when the correlation equal to (0.1 to 0.5) or (-0.1 to -0.5). Moreover, uncorrelated variables are between (0 to 0.1) or (0 to -0.1). As a result, any correlation above (0.3) or below (-0.3) is considered to be significant (Salkind, 2017). Therefore, table (3) and (4) are used to elucidate the listening and speaking correlation respectively among the variables.

Table 3: Listening Correlation

	<i>LCOM</i>	<i>LDEV</i>	<i>LTEA</i>	<i>LSHY</i>
<i>LCOM</i>	1			
<i>LDEV</i>	0.746478	1		
<i>LTEA</i>	0.305758	0.247995	1	
<i>LSHY</i>	0.812603	0.730942	0.349702	1

Source: measured by researchers using SPSS

Table (3) shows that there is a substantial and significant correlation between shyness and understanding, implying that pupils' lack of shyness leads to improved listening skills. Then, by (0.746) there is a positive significant correlation between possessing a suitable device with listening comprehension. Finally, there was a substantial correlation between instructors' guides and curriculum design and listening comprehension.

Table 4: Speaking Correlation

	<i>STEA</i>	<i>SCOM</i>	<i>SCLA</i>
<i>STEA</i>	1		
<i>SCOM</i>	0.726709	1	
<i>SCLA</i>	0.681866	0.509282	1

Source: measured by researchers using SPSS

Table (4) shows a significant correlation between teacher guides and curriculum design with comprehension in speaking skills. Nonetheless, the class atmosphere has a positive significant correlation by (0.509) with compression; this suggests that having a comfortable class setting helps to develop speaking skills.

4.3 Regression Analysis

After determining the correlation between each variable, the data analysis procedure continues to determine the cause and impact of independent variables on dependent variables using regression analysis. The implementation of the regression analysis method is evaluated using the coefficient and P value, which both work together to demonstrate the importance of correlation and the nature of the connection among variables [20]. When a p-value is less than or equal to 0.05, it is deemed statistically significant and indicates strong evidence against the null hypothesis. Furthermore, the F-value is used to assess the significance of a group of variables together. R-squared is employed as a statistical measurement in this approach to quantify the amount of change in the response variable that is explained by one or more independent variables specified for this investigation [20].

Listening Regression

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	1.00223172	0.034316595
LDEV	0.249240977	0.032689865
LTEA	0.075183434	0.569022968
LSHY	0.334642373	0.000441607
Multiple R	0.871336766	
R Square	0.836059377	
Adjusted R Square	0.805130002	
F	99.43233015	
Significance F	0.0000597	

Source: measured by researchers using SPSS

R-square and adjusted R-square with their high rates of (0.836059377) and (0.805130002) respectively, demonstrate the degree of explaining dependent variable by independent variables that prove the model is fit for the purpose of the study. Meanwhile, the model's significance and the association between independent and dependent variables are confirmed by the significance of the F-statistic when its probability is equal to (0.0000597). In addition, the P value of all the explanatory variables (LDEV, LTEA, and LSHY) are smaller and equal to (0.05), which means they are significant, and they could be taken into consideration.

Regarding regression analysis, it can be noticed that students' shyness has a negative and significant impact on their listening skills, which means increasing students' shyness by one percent, decreasing their listening ability by (0.334). Moreover, both device, and teacher guide with curriculum design has a positive impact on students' listening skill by (0.249) and (0.075) respectively. Based on the result, providing a proper device help students improve their listening skill. Meanwhile, having a clear teacher guide and curriculum design assists students to progress their listening ability.

Speaking Regression

	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>P-value</i>
Intercept	2.346342733	0.000114622
STEA	0.09999907	0.049291035
SCLA	0.183250119	0.050957821
Multiple R	0.889433612	
R Square	0.813771816	
Adjusted R Square	0.793935808	
F	87.10291693	
Significance F	0.013368537	

Source: measured by researchers using SPSS

R-square and adjusted R- square with their high rates of (0.813771816) and (0.793935808) respectively, demonstrate the degree of explaining dependent variable by independent variables that prove the model is fit for the purpose of the study. Meanwhile, the model's significance and the association between independent and dependent variables are confirmed by the significance of the F-statistic when its probability is equal to (0.013368537). In addition, the P value of all the explanatory variables (STEA, and SCLA) are smaller and equal to (0.05), which means they are significant, and they could be taken into consideration.

Based on the regression analysis, the class atmosphere has a positive impact on students' speaking skills, which means having an uncomfortable setting demotivates students to speak. In addition, teacher guides and curriculum design positively affect students' speaking skills, which means helpful direction by the teacher and reinforced material with plenty of interesting topics aids to enhance their speaking skills.

5 Conclusions and Recommendation

Based on the result, the present study discussed some reasons for those obstacles come across English language learners' listening and speaking comprehension, due to the serious effect of independent variables namely (device, teacher guide with curriculum, and shyness) in listening skill and (class atmosphere, and teacher guide with curriculum design) in speaking skill, on dependent variable which is comprehension. Basically, the outcome indicates that providing a proper device without having sound problems leads to an increase in the level of listening comprehension. Moreover, clear direction, interesting topics, and a proper curriculum have a significant impact on listening comprehension. In addition, the reduction of shyness helps to progress in listening comprehension. Furthermore, the comprehension of speaking skills would be developed, if the class atmosphere has a comfortable setting, which means students can speak freely without any barriers. Consequently, to handle the diagnostic elements, there must be an association between independent and dependent variables in order to confirm that comprehension level has a noticeable increase.

The researchers' recommendation to overcome the blockages to flourish the style of teaching listening and speaking skills at the university level is designing a curriculum for that purpose. Creating a listening and speaking curriculum requires careful consideration of the goals, objectives, and results that you wish to attain. Determine the aims and objectives, make use of a conversational strategy, use of genuine materials, pay special attention to pronunciation, make chances for feedback and reflection available; are some suggestions to help you create a successful listening and speaking curriculum.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

There are no conflicts of interest

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