

# LISTENING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS FACED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS AT MUTAH UNIVERSITY

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed at investigating the level of listening comprehension difficulties among English major students in the English Department at Mutah University from their point of view and finding out if there is a significant relationship between listening comprehension problems and learners' gender. A questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was designed to gather data from a random sample of (230) students from the English Department at Mutah University. The findings of the study show that the level of listening comprehension difficulties among English major students at Mu'tah University was medium, with an arithmetic mean of (2.51) and a standard deviation of (1.02) for all items between (2.51 - 4.46). The findings of the study revealed that the major problem faced by participants in listening comprehension was due to auditory features, such as: native speakers speaking at a rapid pace, use of contractions, connected speech, and unfamiliar accent, and was also due to physical settings. The analysis of the questionnaire data also showed that there were no significant differences between listening comprehension problems and learners' gender with a level of significance (0.584). The study highlights the need for effective listening strategies to be incorporated into language learning, understanding connected speech rules about assimilation, intrusion, elision, and other features. Additionally, language learners should actively seek out opportunities to engage in more activities that can help them overcome the challenges

**Key Words:** Listening Comprehension, Problems in Listening Comprehension

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Listening skill is one of the four English language skills. It is a fundamental skill for language learning since it is most commonly utilized in daily life [1]. Listening skill is a critical component of language learning as it provides crucial auditory input necessary for language acquisition and enables learners to engage in oral communication [2]. It is a key element of successful communication, with listening accounting for 45 % of the total communication time, while speaking takes up 30 %, reading 16 %, and writing approximately 9%, as stated by [3]. Listening is regarded as more valuable and commonly employed than the other three macro skills [4]. It is the key method of acquiring a foreign language in a way similar to native tongue acquisition [5, 6, 7].

Learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) should listen to the target language every day if they are to effectively communicate [8]. Learning a foreign language (L2) necessitates the improvement of listening skills [9].

In fact, listening skill is undoubtedly essential when learning English since it offers second language learners linguistic input, which is critical for language development [8, 10]. Listening naturally influences foreign language acquisition more than other skills [2]. It can effectively enhance the other three skills [8]. If learners, through listening, are exposed to comprehensible authentic input, it will help them improve markedly in other language areas such as pronunciation, speaking, and even reading and writing [11].

Listening is also essential in determining communicative language proficiency [12]. It is a critical component of foreign language proficiency and is heavily emphasized in foreign language programs [13]. Although listening skill is important, listening skill is regarded as an ignored, undervalued, and underestimated skill [4, 6, 14, 15, 16], and listening comprehension in a second or foreign language is regarded to be the most challenging of the four language skills that all language learners are expected to acquire because of its complex and intricate nature [13]. In order to contribute to the body of knowledge in this fundamental field, the present study

investigates the listening comprehension problems that students majoring in English at Mutah University encounter. This study was created to answer two questions.

## 2.0 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

2.1 What is the level of listening difficulties among the students of the English Language Department at Mutah University from their point of view?

2.2 Is there a statistically significant relationship between the level of listening difficulties and the gender of the learners?

## 3.0 RESEARCH LIMITS

1. The study is limited on English department students at Mutah University. The academic year is 2021 – 2022.

## 4.0 RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE

This study can contribute to the body of knowledge in this fundamental field. Gaining a better understanding of listening comprehension difficulties can be highly beneficial not only to language learners but also to language teachers, lecturers and curriculum designers. The findings of the study can help learners get more insights into listening comprehension problems which can help them create proper learning methods to overcome their listening challenges and advance their listening comprehension skills. The findings of the study can also help language teachers, lecturers and curriculum designers because they get more insights into listening comprehension problems to create effective teaching methods which could help flourish the process of improvement in language learning and teaching. EFL students frequently seem to struggle with a variety of listening comprehension issues. The listening issues encountered by English major students at Mutah University, however, have not yet been investigated. The present study also attempts to contribute to the little existing literature by finding if there is a significant relationship between listening problems and learners' gender.

## 5.0 PREVIOUS STUDIES

When learners listen to English, they encounter listening challenges. They struggle with listening comprehension because universities and institutions place a greater emphasis

on other skills and language areas. Many course manuals and teachers do not emphasize this crucial skill [17].

[13] conducted a study on thirty-six freshmen majoring in English at Tay Do University in Vietnam. The aim of the study was to find out the difficulties that first-year university students majoring in English face in learning listening. A questionnaire and a paper interview were used to collect data. The results of the study attributed the main listening difficulties to the background knowledge of the students, the length and speed of the text, the unfamiliar vocabulary used in the listening passages, and the accent of the speaker.

[18] carried out a study on sixty students and five teachers to identify the difficulties that the students face in listening comprehension. A questionnaire was distributed to the students and an interview was made with their teachers. The researchers found out that there are different factors that make listening difficult. These factors are related to the listening text itself, the speaker, the listener, and the physical setting.

[19] investigated listening comprehension problems and strategies among Iranian intermediate EFL learners in a private language institute in Hamedan, Iran. The sixty participants learning English as a foreign language were randomly selected. The study investigated the relationship between the participants' listening problems and strategy use. The results indicated that the learners suffered from input and affect listening comprehension problems.

Others [20] conducted a study on 87 Saudi female university students to find out if they encounter difficulties in listening comprehension. The participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire concerning their attitudes to learning English language skills in general, learning listening skills in particular, their attitudes concerning listening activities, and improving their listening skills. The results of the study showed that most of the participants felt that speaking and listening were the most important skills to learn, but listening was also the most challenging. Participants' difficulties in listening were speech rate, pronunciation, anxiety, lack of vocabulary, and lack of background information.

[21] conducted a study on students' problems related to linguistic features in the listening skill. The research aimed at finding out the problems of students who had attended listening courses in the English Department of IAIN Bukittinggi in Indonesia. The data was collected by a questionnaire of eight statements related to linguistic features. The results showed that their listening skill was low and found that about 50 percent of the students face problems with each statement in the questionnaire.

[16] conducted a study to examine the listening problems faced by (50) first-year students at Hakkari University in Turkey. The data was collected by means of a questionnaire and an interview. The results showed that the participants mainly encounter the following listening comprehension difficulties: understanding the listening text because speakers speak with varied and unfamiliar accents, not being able to understand the meanings of words that are not pronounced clearly, not being able to quickly remember the words or phrases they have just heard.

[22] conducted a study that aims at investigating the listening problems encountered by (60) students of first-year English major students at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia. Data

was collected by means of a questionnaire and an interview. The results showed that accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, the different accents of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording were the major listening comprehension problems that EFL Saudi learners encountered.

According to the findings mentioned above, EFL students frequently struggle with a variety of listening comprehension issues. The listening issues faced by English major students at Mutah University, however, have not yet been investigated. The study has also the potential to contribute significantly to our understanding of whether gender may influence listening comprehension. This study has significant implications for language learners, researchers, teachers, and educators alike.

## 6.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The items of the questionnaire were mainly adapted from [23]. The questionnaire was created with Google e-forms and the link was available to students through Microsoft Teams. (230) English major students at Mutah University in Jordan actively participated in giving their responses.

### 6.1 STABILITY OF THE STUDY TOOL

The research was conducted from the stability of the field, after the field study began, with (25) male and female students from the study population and its sample, using the Cronbach alpha coefficient as a measure of the internal consistency, as it reached (0.82), these values are suitable for the study.

### 6.2 CORRECTION OF THE STUDY TOOL

In its final form, the tool consisted of (18) items. In front of each item, a scale of five degrees according to the five-point Likert scale reflects the degree of agreement of the respondent with the item. (Strongly agree) was given five degrees, (agree) was given four degrees, (neutral) was given three degrees, (disagree) was given two degrees, and (strongly disagree) was given one degree, and the following criterion was adopted in determining the level of difficulties:

The criterion for Judging Arithmetic Averages:

1.00 – 2.33 with a low score

2.34 – 3.67 with an a medium score

3.68 – 5.00 with a high score

This estimate was adopted by dividing the maximum score (5) into three equal categories within the range (1-5), according to the following formula: The highest value of the answer alternatives in the study tool - the lowest value of the answer alternatives in the study tool divided by the number of the three levels: ( high, medium, and low) which are as follows:

$$\frac{N-1}{3} = \frac{5-1}{3} = 1.33$$

## 7.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results related to the first question: What is the level of listening difficulties among the students of English Language Department at Mutah University from their point of view?

To answer this question: Arithmetic means and standard deviations were calculated for the level of listening difficulties among English major students at Mutah University from their point of view, and the following are the results.

**Table (1):** The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the level of listening difficulties among students of the Department of English at Mutah University from their point of view, arranged in descending order:

<b>Table (1): The arithmetic means and standard deviations of the level of listening difficulties among students of the Department of English at Mutah University from their point of view, arranged in descending order:</b>					
<b>N.</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Arithmetic mean</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>	<b>Difficulty level</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
8	Understanding native speakers is difficult because they seem to speak fast	4.46	0.97	High	<b>1</b>
9	Using contractions by speakers makes listening difficult	4.01	1.08	High	<b>2</b>
7	In English, words are connected rather than isolated. This can make listening difficult	4.00	0.97	High	<b>3</b>
18	Unclear sounds resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom during listening increase difficulty	3.86	0.90	High	<b>4</b>
6	Unfamiliar accent of a listening text increases difficulty	3.82	1.11	High	<b>5</b>
17	Poor- quality sounds during listening increase difficulty	3.79	0.86	High	<b>6</b>
2	Idioms and culturally specific words and phrases in a listening text increase listening difficulty	3.60	0.77	Medium	<b>7</b>
1	Unfamiliar words in a listening text increase listening difficulty	3.58	0.86	Medium	<b>8</b>
5	Implied meaning (not directly expressed) of some points in a listening text increases listening difficulty	3.35	1.00	Medium	<b>9</b>
4	Having listening texts which are about abstract topics increases listening difficulty	3.15	0.97	Medium	<b>10</b>
3	Complex grammatical structures in a listening text increase listening difficulty	3.13	0.95	Medium	<b>11</b>
10	It's difficult to focus on the listening text when I have an expected answer in my mind	3.11	1.04	Medium	<b>12</b>
16	Answering informational questions (e.g. why or how questions) about a listening text is difficult	2.98	1.13	Medium	<b>13</b>
14	Recalling information from a listening text is difficult	2.97	1.07	Medium	<b>14</b>
11	It is confusing when looking for answers and listening at the same time	2.93	1.03	Medium	<b>15</b>
12	It is difficult to get a general understanding of the listening text from the first listening	2.73	1.12	Medium	<b>16</b>
15	I feel anxious when doing a listening exercise and that increases difficulty	2.53	1.26	Medium	<b>17</b>
13	It is difficult to make predictions about listening texts	2.51	1.02	Medium	<b>18</b>
<b>Total</b>		<b>3.36</b>	<b>0.47</b>	Medium	

**Table (1)** shows that the level of listening comprehension difficulties among students of the Department of English at Mutah University was medium, with an arithmetic mean of (2.51) and a standard deviation of (1.02) for all items between (2.51 - 4.46).

It also appears from Table (1) that six items came with a high degree, which are those with numbers (8, 9, 7, 18, 6, 17) and their arithmetic averages ranged between (3.79 - 4.46), and results also indicate that the rest of the items came with a medium degree. They are those with numbers (2, 1, 5, 4, 3, 10, 16, 14, 11, 12, 15, 13), and their arithmetic averages ranged between (2.51 - 3.60).

Results related to the second question: Is there a statistically significant relationship between the level of listening difficulties and the gender of the learners?

Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the level of listening difficulties were calculated according to the gender variable, and to examine the significance of the apparent differences between the averages of males and females on the study tool, the t-test was used for independent samples.

Table (2) Arithmetic means and standard deviations for the level of listening difficulties according to the gender variable, and the results of the (T-Test) for independent samples

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Level of Significance	Degrees of Freedom	T Value	Standard Deviation	Arithmetic Mean	Number	Gender
0.584	228	0.548	0.42	3.38	97	Male
			0.51	3.35	133	Female

Table (2): There are no apparent statistically significant differences between the average responses of the study sample (males and females) towards the level of listening difficulties, and therefore the level of listening difficulties does not differ according to the gender variable.

The results of the study show that the level of listening comprehension difficulties among students of the Department of English at Mutah University was medium. However, The major problems that the participants encountered in listening comprehension were due to both auditory features and physical settings. As shown in table (1), auditory features play a challenging role in creating difficulty in listening comprehension, and they are observed to be highly difficult for participants. The auditory features identified according to their level of difficulty include native speakers seeming to speak at a rapid pace, use of contractions, connected speech, and exposure to an unfamiliar accent. Physical settings resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom and poor-quality sounds are also challenging. In addition, the study reveals that other factors, such as lack of knowledge of vocabulary, lack of focus, the text, and the listener, contribute to an intermediate level of difficulty.

As shown in table (2), the analysis of the study data revealed that there are no apparent statistically significant differences between the average responses of the study sample, which includes both males and females, towards the level of listening difficulties. This suggests that gender does not play a significant role in the perception of listening difficulties among language learners. However, it is important to note that further research is needed to explore other factors like proficiency level that may impact the perception of listening difficulties in different groups of language learners.

Based on the findings of the study, some suggestions are thought to be useful to students to overcome critical listening comprehension challenges. They should adjust the speed of a track in a manner that makes it comprehensible, but increasing the speed of a track over time can make listening at the normal speed feel far less challenging. Listening activities should also focus on English contractions pronunciation and the different components of auditory features mainly connected speech features. EFL learners should be taught the rules of connected speech, such as linking sound rules- catenation, inserting sounds to join words- intrusion, dropping sounds- elision, assimilation, geminates, delayed plosion, and contractions. Students should be encouraged to get involved in listening comprehension activities. They should also be taught English intonation patterns and be familiarized with English accents. They should be provided with authentic listening materials and exercises to practice mainly spotting connected speech

features and provide them with transcripts to help them realize the difference and learn how native speakers normally speak. Such focus will help them understand better the natural speech of native speakers. It is also important to provide them with different types of input like TV or Radio news and reports, TV documentaries, lectures, live broadcasts, movies, everyday conversation, and interviews.

Future research on listening comprehension should examine the listening comprehension strategy used by EFL learners. It is also likely to be a highly fertile direction for future work to examine if there is a significant relationship between listening comprehension problems and EFL learners' academic year or proficiency level. Such research would help to fill the gap in the existing literature and can contribute to the body of knowledge in this field.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION

This study shows that the level of listening comprehension difficulties among the students in the English Department at Mu'tah University was medium. The results also reveal that the biggest obstacles to listening comprehension are fast speech, contractions, connected speech, unfamiliar accents, and poor acoustic settings, which result in a high level of difficulty. Furthermore, the intermediate level of difficulty is linked to a lack of knowledge of vocabulary, lack of focus, the text, and the listener. The study also shows that there were no significant differences between listening comprehension problems and learners' gender. The findings emphasize the importance of language learners developing their listening skills to overcome these challenges. This has significant implications for language teaching and learning, highlighting the need for effective listening strategies to be incorporated into language learning programs.

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