



## مجلة كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية

مجلة علمية فصلية محكمة تصدرها كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية جامعة ذي قار

المجلد الرابع عشر، العدد الثاني 2024

ISSN:2707-5672

## استكشاف الوعي باستراتيجيات الاستيعاب الاستماعي وتأثيرها على طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

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### الملخص

يعد الاستيعاب الاستماعي قدرة حاسمة في مجال تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وتعليمها، وهناك اهتمام كبير بتأثير الاساليب المختلفة على تعزيز هذه المهارة بالذات. تبحث هذه الدراسة في وعي الطلاب، وتكرار الاستخدام، وتأثيرهم على أداء أساليب معينة للاستماع بين مجموعة مكونة من 100 طالب يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. طبق هذا البحث المنهج الكمي باستخدام الاستبيان المنظم كأداة لجمع البيانات. أظهر تحليل البيانات أن المشاركين يستخدمون تقنيات مختلفة لتعزيز فهمهم. وتحاول الدراسة توضيح العلاقة بين تنفيذ هذه الاساليب ونتائج الطلاب في الفهم الاستماعي، مما يوفر وجهات نظر هامة لممارسات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من قبل اساتذة المادة. يمكن أن نستنتج أن دمج استراتيجيات الفهم السمعي في ممارسات تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يزود الطلاب بالأدوات العملية ويعزز فهماً أعمق لعملياتهم المعرفية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارة الاستماع، اساليب الاستيعاب، تعلم اللغة و الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية

## Exploring the Awareness of Listening Comprehension Strategies and Their Influence on Iraqi EFL Students

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### Abstract

*Listening comprehension is a crucial ability in the field of learning English as a Foreign Language, and there is much interest in the effect of various techniques on promoting this particular skill. This study examines the students' awareness, frequency of use, and the strategies' impact on performance of particular approaches to listening among a group of 100 students learning English as a foreign language. This research applied a quantitative approach using structured questionnaire as an instrument to collect data. Data analysis showed that participants use various techniques on enhancing in enhancing their understanding. The study attempts to elucidate the correlation between the implementation of these strategies and the students' outcomes of listening comprehension, providing significant perspectives for the practices of teaching English as a foreign language. It can be concluded that integration of listening comprehension strategies into EFL teaching practices empower students with practical tools and fosters a deeper understanding of their cognitive processes.*

**Keywords:** Listening skills, Comprehension Strategies, EFL (English as a foreign language), language learning.

## Introduction

Listening is regarded to be the primary mode for communication. Feyten (1991) asserts that over 45% of communicating time is devoted to listening, highlighting the critical role that listening play in overall language proficiency. According to the explanation of Buck (2001), the listening construct as a process in which

"The listener takes the incoming data, the acoustic signal, and interprets that, using a wide variety of information and knowledge for a particular communicative purpose; it is an inferential process, an ongoing process of constructing and modifying an interpretation of what the text is about, based on whatever information seems relevant at the time". (p. 29).

Listening comprehension is defined as "a process of relating input to concepts that are already active in one's memory and to familiar references in the world" (Rost, 2016, p. 49). In terms of sematic process, Comprehension consists of several cognitive processes such as knowledge structures, cognitive understanding encompasses the process of activating and modifying concepts, social understanding, constructing meaning through inference, and input integration, problem solving and reasoning.

Nevertheless, despite its significance which supported by empirical research, numerous (EFL) students have difficulties in comprehending spoken language, especially when dealing with genuine, authentic and spontaneous conversations oral communication (Wang & Chen, 2017)

The challenge may arise from multiple factors, including fast paced speech, unfamiliar accents to a complex syntax. Hence, it is significant to investigate effective techniques for enhancing the listening comprehension abilities of (EFL) students. By employing the effective listening comprehension strategies, learner will understand the spoken language easily, he will predicting what will be said next and be able to summarize the information received through the mental processes been employed. So, the listening comprehension strategies can help students to overcome difficulties in processing the spoken language and increase their awareness of effective techniques (Goh, 2019).

Anderson (2000) presented a language comprehension model that classifies comprehension into three distinct phases. In the initial stage, perceptual mechanisms are employed to encode the acoustic or textual forms. The next stage, parsing, involves converting words into a cognitive representation of the overall significance of those words. During the third phase (utilisation), the mental illustration created in the second phase is utilized by the individuals. The three stages are interconnected, but they are partially sequential. Therefore, issues related to listening comprehensions abilities might occur in one of these phases.

There are several reasons behind the lack of awareness, one possible reason could be that the learners may not have enough chances to practice and engage with spoken activities, inadequate training in listening comprehension strategies, or the teachers emphasize on the other language skills (Chang & Millett, 2020). As a result, EFL students may rely on ineffective strategies, such as concentrating solely on single words rather than understanding the whole meaning of the spoken discourse (Vandergrift & Tafaghodtari, 2015).

Therefore, this study aims to identify the strategies that EFL students use when processing spoken language in the class and relate these strategies to their performance in listening comprehension. This contributes to provide insights into effective strategies for improving listening comprehension among EFL students.

The results of this study can inform English language teachers, syllable designer and material developers to address the difficulties associated with listening comprehension strategies to help students develop the necessary skills for successful communication in English. Furthermore, the outcomes can offer valuable insights into the efficacy of various instructional approaches by exploring the relationship between the employment of listening comprehension strategies and the achievement in listening comprehension.

## 2. Research Questions

1. To what extent do the awareness and frequency of use of listening comprehension strategies among Iraqi EFL students influence their performance?
2. In what ways can the implications of these findings be implemented to enhance the listening comprehension skills of EFL students and what are their implications for EFL teaching practices?

## 3. Importance of the study

The study's findings have several implications for language teachers, academics, syllabus designers, and material developers. The study can provide insights for the creation of more productive pedagogical approaches that facilitate the acquisition of essential English communication skills among learners.

The significance also lies in its potential to enhance our understanding as an EFL teacher of the listening comprehension processes employed by students and their relevance to language acquisition. This study aims to highlight the teaching of those strategies in EFL courses by determining the techniques that have the strongest correlation with performance. The findings can assist in bridging the current deficiency in the educational setting about (EFL) students' understanding of successful practices for improving listening comprehension.

## 4- Review of Literature

Listening comprehension is an essential aspect of communication that occurs in the listener's brain, and the produced interpretation is influenced by the listener's cognitive

environment (Buck, 2001, p.29). At the same way, Hamouda (2013) defines Listening comprehension is a dynamic process that involves both the speaker and the listener, where the listener tries to elicit the meaning from the spoken utterances. Putting into Consideration that it is important to emphasize that listening comprehension helps learners enhance their linguistic knowledge and that lead to grasp the language. When learners listen, they attempt to extract meaning by using their existing knowledge and making guesses about new words in order to generate meaning (Lund, 1991).

Researchers have employed various methods to give a brief description of listening comprehension. According to Buck (2001) Listening comprehension is an active process of creating understanding, which is accomplished by using individual's knowledge to interpret the sounds that are heard. He asserts that multiple elements, characteristic of the speaker, environment, or listener have the potential to influence the understanding of a message.

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of listening comprehension regarding the language acquisition (Bozorgian (2012), Bacon, 2015; Goh & Kwok, 2015; Ur, 2016).

Bozorgian (2012) provides a comprehensive overview of significant sources that highlight the prevalence of listening in the process of language learning. He argues that listening is the most poorly comprehended and that least tackled skill in language learning which is typically overlooked by lecturers and researchers. His study population was 1,800 Iranian EFL students enrolled in International ELT program. Significant strong correlations were found between listening comprehension strategies and the other skills, as well as between listening and the overall language proficiency. He proposed that lecturers creating language courses and programs should give more consideration to listening in lesson planning and instruction, and advocates for additional research on listening in foreign language learning.

The suggestion given by Bozorgian was addressed by Mayberry (2013) and Astorga-Cabezas (2015), their study's findings highlighted the importance of the skill of listening in the development of oral output in those who are non-native speakers of Spanish. In similar to the studies conducted by (Hulstijn (2015, Bacon (2015, Goh and Kwok (2015) which demonstrated the significant of examining the oral input processing in relation to the process speech in both native and foreign languages, stating that listening comprehension is a complex and demanding ability that necessitates the integration of diverse linguistic and non-linguistic clues, such as syntax, vocabulary, and context.

According to (Field, 2018; Vandergrift, 2019). A person's proficiency in a language can be accurately gauged by their capacity to understand spoken language. Vandergrift's (2019) perspective in listening comprehension has considerable importance in language competency since it effects one's capacity on other language abilities, including speaking, reading, and writing. Within these researches, studies explore the correlation between the awareness of

listening comprehension strategies among EFL students and their performance especially in listening comprehension and other skills.

According to Gottardo et al. (2017) morphological awareness, the role of vocabulary and syntactic knowledge play a distinct and shared variance of subset of listening comprehension related to reading comprehension in learners of English from Spanish speaking backgrounds. The findings demonstrated how the three listening comprehension subcomponents contributed influenced reading comprehension.

In similar to the study conducted by Gottardo et al. (2017) Zhang (2017) shows in his study that learners who were aware of listening comprehension strategies demonstrated a greater tendency to employ them with greater frequency and efficacy, leading to enhance their performance in listening comprehension. On the other hand, students whose awareness of these techniques was limited resorted to surface processing which led to poorer scores in listening comprehension.

Kharzhevskaya et al. (2019) investigated three elements that contribute to difficulties in listening among university students: individual characteristics of the listener, characteristics of the speaker, and external factors. The challenges that have been identified include students' lack of awareness of the world around them, inadequate communicative competence that includes phonetic, lexical, grammatical, textual, sociocultural understanding, and functional aspects, psychological factors such as difficulty in maintain focusing attention and impatience towards the speaker, poorly developed listening memory, and low motivation. Additionally, individual student characteristics such as cognitive abilities, age, personal interests, and negative past experiences with listening comprehension tasks contribute to difficulties. Incompetent selection of recordings, characterized by a mismatch between script complexity and students' listening comprehension level (e.g., fast pace, unfamiliar vocabulary and grammar, dense information), as well as external factors like recording quality, excessively low or high volume, and noise interference, also pose challenges. In addition, Hasan (2000) observed that students encounter significant obstacles in their listening comprehension, such as the lack of clarity, disinterest, and the need to provide full responses to listening comprehension questions. Underwood's as cited in (Gilakjani, 2016) argument that listeners may struggle to concentrate on the listening text is supported by this observation. Even the smallest loss in attention can occasionally inhibit comprehension. Nevertheless, individuals will not experience any difficulties concentrating if the text they are listening to is interesting to them. The experience demonstrates that listening materials are the main cause of student's challenges in understanding spoken language.

In addition , studies have figure out that providing direct guidance on listening comprehension strategies can significantly enhance the (EFL) learners' listening comprehension abilities (Goh, 2015). Goh highlighted the importance of directly instructing



EFL learners in listening comprehension strategies by using such techniques like prediction, summarization, and monitoring, to improve their awareness and utilization of these strategies.

Wang and Li (2016) discovered that EFL learners in China preferred bottom-up techniques like decoding single words and phrases over top-down strategies like employing background information to determine the meaning of the conversation. While in the other specific setting such as listening to lectures or participating in intellectual discussions, top-down techniques were found to be more effective. In contrast to above study, Yildiz (2018) reported that the majority of Turkish EFL students using both of "top-down" and "bottom-up" strategies, top-down strategies utilization was more effective in enhancing listening comprehension performance, showing that incorporating listening comprehension strategies into EFL instruction can be beneficial and can lead to improvements in learners' listening skills

Some researchers have examined how language proficiency and motivation affect EFL learners' listening comprehension skills. For instance, Zhang and Zhang (2017) try to identify the most common listening strategies and analyze the association between strategy use and listening competence. Their study included 161 Chinese EFL students from five universities. Most Chinese EFL learners employed personal participation, cooperation, and skimming and scanning for listening, the findings show that high proficiency learners used more strategies than low proficiency learners. Overall approach utilization was similarly correlated with listening proficiency, suggesting that listening strategies can improve understanding. Kostikova et al. (2020) examined university students' progress in writing, listening, speaking, and reading progress. Their experiment indicated that writing and listening are less developed compared to other abilities.

To conclude, various research examined EFL students' listening comprehension awareness and use. These include learner techniques, their efficacy in varied contexts, and individual variations like language proficiency and motivation. These findings can guide EFL teachers in creating and developing a productive listening comprehension practices.

### **Listening Comprehension Strategies**

Goh (2000) emphasized the necessity of teaching students the listening strategies. Educators should enhance learners' understanding of vocabulary, grammar, and phonology. Vandergrift (1999) emphasizes the importance of strategy building in the teaching of listening strategy. Learners have the ability to direct and evaluate their own comprehension and responses. According to Bingol et al, there are three distinct types of strategies in listening comprehension and they can be changed depending on the learners' proficiency level. They are cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective.

Discussing cognitive strategies, it refers to the mental processes and steps that are used by learners to enhance their thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making abilities and their



acquisition of knowledge during the learning process. (Bingol et al., 2014, p 2). Cognitive strategies related to the comprehension and acquisition of information in either short-term or long-term memory, with the intention of implementing them at a later time. Comprehension starts with the material that is received and is then analyzed through successive stages of formation and a decoding process. Two distinct cognitive strategies in the process of listening are available: bottom-up and top-down. The bottom-up strategies include techniques such as direct translation, adjusting the speed rate, repeating the spoken text, and emphasizing the prosodic elements of the text. Top-down strategies include the utilization of forecasting, speculation, clarification, and visualization. According to Abdalhamid (2012) a greater number of top-down strategies are used by advanced learners compared to beginners.

### Metacognitive strategies

Rubin (1988) defines metacognitive strategies as management approaches employed by learners to monitor their learning process through certain tasks such as organizing, self-monitoring, assessing, and mental scripting. Bingol et al., 2014 claimed that this strategies involves learners being aware while listening to the material. This technique focuses on teaching learners the skills of planning, monitoring, and evaluating the information they gather throughout the listening part. Abdalhamid (2012) categorizes metacognitive skills into two types: cognitive knowledge and cognitive regulation. Cognitive knowledge deals to learners' awareness of ongoing processes, while cognitive regulation deals with the actions learners need do to listen effectively. The distinction between skilled and less skilled listeners can be understood by analyzing their utilization of metacognitive methods.

Socio-affective strategies refer to techniques or strategies that involve both social and emotional aspects of human interaction. According to Abdalhamid (2012), socio-affective strategies refer to techniques employed by listeners to interact with others, reinforce their understanding and reduce their stress. According to Wilson (2003), socio-affective techniques refer to how students engage with other speakers and respond to the process of learning. Habte-Gabr (2006) it has been asserted that in the socio-affective strategy, learners should possess the capacity to diminish fear, increase confidence during listening activities, and reinforce motivation in order to enhance their listening skills.

### Participants and Data Collection:

The study included a total number of 100 EFL students, aged 19 to 21 years, with an equal distribution of genders (50 men and 50 women), selected randomly. They enrolled in the second-level English program at Imam Al-kadhum College. The course syllabus emphasized the development of listening and speaking skills. Sampling is a way to be taken with a sampling which really fits into the overall object of research. The sampling technique in this research was simple random sampling. According to Simple Random Sampling, Here, respondents are selected in such a way that all individuals in the defined population have the same probability

of being selected for the study, and the selection of the individual does not affect selection of any other individual (i.e. independence). All individuals have an equal and independent chance of being selected for the sample. A survey was administered to group EFL students in order to evaluate their knowledge and frequency of employing four listening comprehension strategies. The researcher collects data on students' listening comprehension performance and conducts quantitative and qualitative analysis on the survey responses to evaluate the levels of awareness. Additionally, correlation analyses are performed to investigate the relationship between strategy usage and listening comprehension performance.

The questionnaire was created as a study instrument to investigate the student's awareness of listening comprehension strategies and their frequency of implementation. The questionnaire was administered to the chosen participants in a controlled and standardized manner. Furthermore, participants were provided with information regarding the objective of the survey, and their agreement, based on that information, was acquired. They were encouraged to respond honestly and attentively to ensure accuracy and validity. The survey included the following components:

- **Demographic Information:** where the participants were asked to indicate their age, ensuring that the age range of the research sample is between 19-21 with specified genders as either "male" or "female."
- **Awareness of Listening Comprehension Strategies:** The participants were asked to indicate the strategies they were familiar with. This part will consist of a list of common listening comprehension strategies, including "predicting content based on context," "taking notes while listening," "focusing on keywords," and "asking for clarification."
- **Frequency of Strategy Use:** participants will rate the frequency of their usage for each of the listed strategies provided to them based on a Likert scale which includes options: "rarely," "sometimes," and "frequently."

## Discussion

This section describes the relevant finding extracted from the questionnaire responses. These responses were treated through SPSS program to figure out the student's awareness of their listening comprehension strategies and the frequency of implementing them during their academic course. Through the analysis of the responses and coding the data, it was found that there are particular common strategies used by students arranged as follows:

no	Type of strategy
1	Predicting content based on context
2	Taking notes while listening
3	Focusing on keywords
4	Asking for clarification

By include both the mean and standard deviation; a more clear understanding of the performance scores for each strategy is achieved, as well as a representation of the range or diversity within the data. It is particularly valuable when discussing the correlation between the utilization of strategy and performance.

<b>Listening Comprehension Strategies</b>	<b>Awareness (%)</b>	<b>Frequency of Use (%)</b>	<b>Correlation with Performance (Correlation Coefficient)</b>	<b>Mean Performance Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Predicting content based on context	74%	60%	0.72	82.5	7.2
Taking notes while listening	58%	45%	0.55	75.3	6.8
Focusing on keywords	50%	38%	0.46	70.7	5.9
Asking for clarification	39%	32%	0.30	65.1	4.7

To answer the first question, it was found that the most commonly mentioned listening comprehension strategies were:

- Predicting content based on context: 74% of participants were aware of this strategy, and 60% reported as using it commonly and frequently.

- Taking notes while listening: 58% of participants were aware of this strategy, and 45% reported using it frequently.
- Focusing on keywords: 50% of participants were aware of this strategy, and 38% reported using it frequently.
- Asking for clarification: 39% of participants were aware of this strategy, and 32% reported using it frequently.

A correlation analysis conducted to answer this question based on the results collected from 100 EFL students. It showed the following results:

Students who frequently used the strategy of "predicting content based on context" had, on average; higher listening comprehension test scores (correlation coefficient of 0.72). This mean, there is a high awareness and frequency of use for predicting content based on context. The type of strategy is positively correlated with their performance (0.72), indicating a strong relationship. The mean performance score is high at 82.5, with a moderate standard deviation of 7.2.

There was a moderate awareness of positive correlation between "taking notes while listening" and listening comprehension scores (correlation coefficient of 0.55) and the mean performance score is 75.3, with a moderate standard deviation of 6.8.

"Focusing on keywords" also showed a positive correlation with listening comprehension performance (correlation coefficient of 0.47). As it has a moderate awareness and frequency of use by participants and the mean performance score is 70.7, with a relatively lower standard deviation of 5.9.

Finally, the strategy of "Asking for clarification" had a weaker positive correlation with listening comprehension scores (correlation coefficient of 0.30). It means that the minority of participants is aware of this strategy and even smaller percentage reported using the strategy. The mean performance score is 65.1, with a relatively low standard deviation of 4.7.

These findings offer valuable insights into the participants' understanding and implementation of various listening comprehension strategies. The strategies differ in terms of the range of awareness and frequency of usage. Predicting content based on context is the most frequently recognized and utilized strategy, whereas asking for clarification is less familiar and employed among the participants. This information is significant for teachers as it allows them to customize instructional techniques to target specific strategy knowledge and usage patterns within the framework of teaching English as a foreign language.

Based on the findings, there are some potential implications for EFL teaching practices:

- Teachers should emphasize and encourage the use of context-based prediction as a valuable listening comprehension strategy with a strong positive correlation with performance. EFL teachers should emphasize and explicitly teach students how to predict content based on context by promoting and incorporating activities of context-based prediction, such as predicting outcomes and completing sentences based on context.
- Promote note-taking skills by Incorporating and developing effective note-taking exercises into listening comprehension activities can be beneficial for students. It still correlates positively with performance. Providing guidance on how and what to note during the listening activities implementing interactive exercises that involve listening and taking notes can be beneficial.
- Highlight the importance of focusing on keywords. This can be done by explicitly teaching and providing students with examples that illustrate how to focus on keywords as a strategy for better comprehension. This can raise awareness about the importance of identity, recognizing, and understanding keywords during listening tasks. To reinforce the concept of focusing on keywords, teachers can incorporate various practice activities, such as keyword identification activities and keyword utilization exercises. For example, students may be required to actively listen for certain keywords in order to answer questions or fill in missing information in phrases. This integration enables students to develop the behavior of actively recognizing and identifying keywords.
- Encouraging effective questioning for clarification. A teacher can encourage students to seek clarification when they face unclear points during listening. Guide students on how to formulate and concise questions for clarification on appropriate language and tone when seeking clarification. This can include various strategies such as "paraphrasing, where the students ask to paraphrase what they understood and seek confirmation"; "requesting repetition as encouraging students on how to request a repetition of unclear information"; and "practicing a scenario, where the students engage in the comprehension of dialogues or presentations that intentionally lack clarity, allowing students to subsequently improve their skills in seeking clarification."
- Additionally, with individualized instruction and remediation, EFL instructors can design listening comprehension activities and assessments that align with these strategies to help students practice and improve their listening comprehension skills. Understanding the correlation between specific strategies and performance allows for more individualized instructions; furthermore, teachers can provide explicit instruction on these strategies and monitor their implementation in the classroom to ensure that students are using them effectively. This can involve one-on-one sessions, additional practice materials, or differentiated assignments, especially for students who may need additional support in certain strategies.
- Promote the student's metacognitive awareness. In this context, language learning refers to students being aware of not only how to use such strategies but also the cognitive process of

when and why to use them in approaching particular tasks and comprehending language. For example, students should understand that taking notes while listening can aid memory retention and help organize information. Focusing on keyword strategy as well might be beneficial for identifying key points in a spoken passage.

## Conclusion

The result of this research showed that effective listening comprehension strategies are crucial for the success of (EFL) students, and teachers play a pivotal role in guiding them toward proficiency. The findings emerged from the analysis showed that participants use various strategies to grasp the meaning of the spoken text. Their usage of listening comprehension strategies varied sequentially from context-based prediction which is widely recognized, frequently used and strongly correlates with higher listening performance, note-taking skills is known to a significant proportion of students and moderate correlate with their performance, focusing on keywords and questioning for clarification which is less widely recognized but still applied by significant portion of students Even though it has a weaker but positive correlation with performance. Furthermore, from an educational point of view, tailored integration of these strategies into EFL teaching practices empower students with practical tools and fosters a deeper understanding of their cognitive processes. As well as individualized instruction and remediation by EFL instructors in designing listening comprehension activities and assessments that align with these strategies to help students practice and improve their listening comprehension skills. Through strategic and targeted instruction, teachers play an essential role in promoting metacognitive awareness in the context of EFL.

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