

Exploring the Causes of Listening Comprehension Anxiety from EFL Iraqi students

¹Weam Lateef Fenjan Al-Furaiji

¹Department of English, College of education, Al-Zahraa University for Women, Kerblaa, Iraq,
alfuraijiw665@gmail.com

Published 17-03-2022

Abstract

However difficult task may seem anxiety, anxiety is a common side effect even when learning a new language. There are only a handful of studies on Iraqi students who are taking listening classes to learn English as a second language (EFL). Iraqi EFL students at Baghdad University in Iraq use semi-structured interviews to discover why listening comprehension anxiety occurs. Transcripts of the interviews were made available to the public after they were taped. Listening comprehension was a challenge for the participants because they were tense. According to the findings of this study, listening comprehension anxiety can be brought on by three different factors.

Keywords: anxiety, listening comprehension, EFL

1. Introduction

Researchers Kimura (2008), Ko (2010), and Lili (2016) have conducted extensive study on the topic of anxiety caused by learning a foreign language, and they are of the opinion that individual language abilities have to be evaluated. According to the findings of many pieces of study, all of them are associated with concern around certain linguistic talents (Abdullah and Rahman, 2010; Elkhafaifi, 2005, 2004; Cheng, 2004). The authors Ahmad, Nordin, and Rahman (2013) are all of the same opinion that al-Shboul is the most talented writer in the industry. In spite of the fact that studies have shown that speaking skill is the source of the greatest concern for EFL students, a significant number of them experience anxiety around their ability to comprehend what they are hearing (Young, 1992). Because they are unable to comprehend what their classmates are saying, the students have a difficult time paying attention in class. You will only be presented with this information once, but you are obligated to respond to all of the questions that are based on it (Vogely, 1999).

The word "listening comprehension anxiety" is one that may assist us in gaining a deeper understanding of this matter. According to Wheelless (1975), "a receiver's unease" refers

to the worry of misunderstanding, poor processing, or incapacity to react psychologically to information offered by others. This concern may manifest itself in a variety of ways (p.263).

It is essential for students of English as a Foreign Language to place a strong emphasis on listening comprehension since studies have shown that neglecting to do so reduces pupils' capacity to comprehend what they hear. High levels of anxiety have been connected to not just the academic achievement of students but also their aptitude and their capacity to comprehend what they hear (Moghadam, Ghanizadeh, and Akbari, 2015).

A. Problem Statement

Students who are studying English as a second language (ESL) usually struggle when it comes to listening to activities that use the English language. This is because they are expected to hear and grasp everything that the speaker says (Vogely, 1999). When listening, one must engage in activities such as guessing, predicting, generalizing, revising, and verifying the sensory information received (Vandergrift, 1997). It is challenging to comprehend what other people are saying when you are nervous about something.

According to a plethora of research, anxious pupils have a more difficult time learning foreign languages (Kim, 2000; Kimura, 2008; Vogely 1998). According to the dictionary, "the sense of worry and uneasiness, particularly while speaking, listening, or studying a second language" (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994, p.24). The anxiety that Iraqi students of English as a foreign language experience with listening comprehension was the primary subject of this study.

B. Research Question

The aim of the research is to discover what influences how well people listen. However, the following is the research question:

1. What are the causes of listening comprehension anxiety from EFL Iraqi students' perspective?

C. Research Objective

The purpose of this research is to figure out what factors contribute to poor listening comprehension. The study's objective, then, is as follows:

D. Significance of the study

The purpose of this research is to determine why Iraqi EFL students have difficulty understanding what they are hearing. Their importance lies in helping Iraqi students avoid and control their anxiety during a listening comprehension class in their schools.

2. Literature Review

Students learning English as a foreign language have a difficult time listening to English language activities (Vogely, 1999). Having the ability to listen includes the ability to form hypotheses and make predictions about what you're hearing (Vandergrift, 1997). A person's ability to understand what they're hearing suffers greatly when they're stressed. Research suggests that anxiety can make it more difficult to learn a language, especially English as a foreign language. Experience of worry, especially in situations involving speaking and listening in another language" (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994, p.24).

A. Listening comprehension Anxiety

Students learning English as a foreign language should be concerned about their listening comprehension because research shows that it can impede their ability to understand what they hear. Students' academic success, ability, and listening comprehension have all been linked to high levels of anxiety (Moghadam, Ghanizadeh and Akbari, 2015). This filter allows linguistic input into the mind's language learning systems when an affective element is present, says Krashen (1985).

B. Previous studies on listening comprehension Anxiety

A great number of research have been carried out in an effort to figure out what it is that makes students of EFL afraid of listening comprehension. The anxiety associated with listening comprehension has been connected to the features of listening tasks in a number of research, and the results of many of those studies support a diverse variety of ideas (Elkhafaifi, 2005). According to the findings of Scarcella and Oxford's study, students' lack of experience with a variety of hearing activities and their inability to successfully communicate in English are the primary factors that contribute to their concern around listening comprehension (1992). The researchers came to the conclusion that the factors of speech speed, clarity, and hearing text elements (such as punctuation) all contribute to improvements in listening comprehension (Gonen, 2009).

According to Kim, the primary elements that led to anxiousness over listening comprehension were the quality of the text, personal circumstances, and variables associated to the procedure (2000). Anxiety associated with listening comprehension has also been investigated from a cognitive and a linguistic point of view (Chang, 2008; Golchi, 2012). It was shown that a lack of self-confidence and role models contributed significantly to the severity of listening anxiety. A paucity of studies have been conducted on the anxiety associated with listening comprehension.

Some experts argue that there has been much too little attention paid to study regarding hearing comprehension anxiety (Arnold, 2000;

Gojion, 2014; Moghadam et al, 2015). Despite the fact that acquiring the auditory comprehension of a foreign language is a highly difficult experience for a lot of individuals, it can still be done. According to Krashen (1985), the relationship between anxiety and listening comprehension is a largely unexplored field of research. Anxiety about hearing comprehension is still a mystery due to the fact that earlier study concentrated on causes and consequences rather than the link between anxiety and listening comprehension in the process of learning a foreign language (Kimura, 2008).

It's possible that new insights about listening comprehension anxiety may emerge from research in the future that include participants from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. Concerning Western students, a substantial amount of study has been conducted on anxiety as well as listening comprehension. As a direct consequence of this, there is a serious dearth of research conducted in other regions of the globe, notably Arab ones (Al-Shboul et al 2013). Students of English as a Foreign Language in Iraq could have trouble comprehending what is being said, much like their peers in other countries throughout the globe. As a consequence of this, the research focused the bulk of its attention on Iraqi EFL students.

3. Methodology

A. Research Design

To get to the bottom of the phenomenon of listening comprehension anxiety, the researcher took a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is the best choice for this study because it focuses on people's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions (Creswell, 2012). You can delve deeper into a complex issue using qualitative research. Many people, at some point in their lives, struggle with listening comprehension anxiety. For this study, a qualitative case study design was used to find out the phenomenon's boundaries (Yin, 2009).

B. Participants

It's the main goal of a qualitative research project to find out new sources of information on the subject being studied by using sampling

(Dornyei, 2007). Purposive sampling was used to choose the participants for this study because they were readily available, compatible, and met some of the criteria the researcher was looking for (Creswell, 2002).

C. Data Collection

Six people were interviewed for this study using semi-structured interviews. Baghdad University's library was used for the one-on-one interviews. Additional information about the participants' experiences with listening comprehension anxiety was elicited through semi-structured interviews. Each interview was recorded and lasted between 15 and 25 minutes. During the semi-structured interviews, candidates were asked 15 questions (please refer to Appendix 1). Certain questions were crafted after consulting with the researcher's mentor.

D. Data Analysis

The study's data was generated using interview transcripts. The interviews had to be recorded, transcribed, and the transcriptions double-checked. Braun and Clarke's step-by-step thematic analysis guidelines were followed by the researcher (2006). As a result, the following steps were taken: The first step is to understand your data. The second step entails developing initial source codes for programs. Lastly, you're looking for overarching themes. The fourth person expresses an opinion that they don't agree with. Clarification is the fifth task. The sixth person is working on a document. Interviewed students reported that they had difficulty understanding professors because of their limited English proficiency, as well as the classroom atmosphere.

4. Findings and Discussion

Iraqi university students studying English as a second language are taking part in a study to find out what causes listening comprehension anxiety the most frequently. Six people were interviewed for the study, on the other hand. According to the findings, listening comprehension anxiety can be triggered by three different factors:

A. The problematic nature of listening comprehension

A long conversation can be stressful for some people, and if you ask Ahmed what stresses him out when it comes to listening, he'll probably say the speaker's speed, strange accent, time constraints, and inability to concentrate all play a role. He gave examples of times when he became worried because the speaker spoke too quickly and he was unable to focus. Even more so, he was convinced that the different accents had deceived him during the listening tests. Apparently, listening comprehension in English is not something Alil enjoys. According to Ismail, many of the problems students have with listening comprehension can be traced back to anxiety. In class, he got nervous about listening to speeches he didn't understand because he could only hear them once. Sarah found it difficult to maintain focus during lengthy conversations due to her tendency to become distracted. Sarah was also concerned that she would be unable to answer all of the listening questions before time ran out. To summarize, she said that mastering the art of listening comprehension is a difficult task.

B. The Classroom Atmosphere

To avoid being teased for not understanding the listening tasks, Ali provided an honest response to the survey question about the listening classroom environment. He claimed that the competition among the students had a negative effect on him. Rana attributed her anxiety to a variety of factors, including a lack of clarity in the classroom, a noisy testing environment, and teachers or proctors. She admitted that when the proctors were strict, anxiety and stress among the students increased. The classroom atmosphere and its role in Rami's poor listening comprehension raised concerns about his ability to understand what the researcher was saying. Rami explained that he was stressed out because of the rivalry among his coworkers. It was also brought up that the recording's sound quality fluctuated and that some of his classmates were rude.

C. The low English Proficiency of Students

A few individuals were curious about the level of fluency that the kids have in the English language. During the course of an interview with Ali, it was found out that almost all of the

pupils did not have English as their native language because of where they grew up, which was in rural regions. The four fundamental English language skills of the children were not given a significant amount of attention by the teachers at their schools. The essentials of reading and writing were all that was covered in this lesson for the students. Rami acknowledged that it was challenging for him to master listening skills at Baghdad University since they were something he had never done before.

He also admitted that he was unable of reading or writing in the English language. According to Ahmed, the fact that he only had a limited grasp of the English language made it difficult for him to comprehend what other people were saying. When it came to English, the fact that he was so terrible at it made him feel ashamed to confess it.

Because there was so little emphasis placed on vocabulary learning at his high school, he struggled terribly during his time there. In addition to that, throughout his time in school, he did not participate in any English courses that focused on developing students' abilities to understand spoken English via listening.

5. Conclusion

As a result of their admission, the Iraqi EFL students admitted that they lacked basic English skills. There was some difficulty understanding them because of their poor command of the English language. This made it difficult for them to understand listening tasks, and their grades suffered as a result. They also had a problem with a scarcity of experience and knowledge. They had no idea what to do in the listening exercises when it came to listening strategies. They also had a skewed view of their own communication skills, especially in terms of listening. According to Vogely (1999), when teachers were found to be unaware of listening exercises, their students were not receiving adequate listening instruction. These findings are also connected to Joiner's (1986) discovery that low confidence in one's listening abilities can cause listening anxiety. Many factors contribute to students' fear of listening comprehension, including the difficulty of the material, the classroom setting, and students' limited knowledge of the English language.

Reference

- [1] Al-Shboul, M. M., Ahmad, I. S., Nordin, M. S., & Rahman, Z. A. (2013). Foreign language reading anxiety in a Jordanian EFL context: A qualitative study. *Exploring the Causes of Listening Comprehension Anxiety from EFL Saudi Learners' Perspectives: A Pilot Study* *English Language Teaching*, 6(6), 38. DOI: 10.5539/elt.v6n6p38.
- [2] Arnold, J. (2000). Seeing through listening comprehension exam anxiety. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(4), 777-786. doi: 10.2307/3587791.
- [3] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. Retrieved from <http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735>.
- [4] Chang, A. C. S. (2008). Sources of listening anxiety in learning English as a foreign language. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 106(1), 21-34.
- [5] Cheng, Y. S. (2004). A measure of second language writing anxiety: Scale development and preliminary validation. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 13(4), 313-335. DOI: 10.1016/j.jslw.2004.07.001.
- [6] Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- [7] Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.
- [8] Dewaele, J. M., & Al-Saraj, T. M. (2013). Foreign Language Anxiety: Some conceptual and methodological issues. *Journal of Psychology*, 68 (3), 71-78. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2015.5.2.2>.
- [9] Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- [10] Elkhafaifi, H. (2005). Listening comprehension and anxiety in the Arabic language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, 89(2), 206-220. DOI: 10.1111/j.1540-4781.2005.00275.x.
- [11] Gojian, B. (2014). Effect of Anxiety Awareness on Listening Comprehension. *Journal of International Scientific Publications*, 12, 1057-1064. Retrieved from <http://www.ccseet.org/journal/index.php/ijel/article/download/17093/12699>.
- [12] Golchi, M. M. (2012). Listening anxiety and its relationship with listening strategy use and listening comprehension among Iranian IELTS learners. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(4), 115.
- [13] Gonen, M. (2009, July). The relationship between FL listening anxiety and FL listening strategies: The case of Turkish EFL learners. In *Proceedings of the 5th WSEAS/IASME International conference on educational technologies* (pp. 44-49).
- [14] Heinle & Heinle, Serraj, S. (2015). Listening Anxiety in Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 5(6). Retrieved from <http://www.ijsrp.org/research-paper-0615/ijsrp-p4285.pdf>.
- [15] Javid, C. Z. (2014). Measuring language anxiety in an EFL context. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(25), 180-193. Retrieved from <http://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/RHSS/article/view/12477>.
- [16] Joiner, E. (1986). Listening in the Foreign Language, in B. H. Wing (Ed.), *Listening Reading, and Writing: Analysis and Application*. Middlebury, VT: Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (pp. 43-70). Vermont, US.
- [17] Kim, J. H. (2000). Foreign language listening anxiety: A study of Korean students learning English. *English Teaching*, 57(2), 3-34. Retrieved from http://journal.kate.or.kr/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/kate_57_2_1.pdf.
- [18] Kimura, H. (2008). Foreign language listening anxiety: Its dimensionality and group differences. *JALT Journal*, 30(2), 173-196. Retrieved from https://jalt-publications.org/files/pdf-article/art2_7.pdf

- [19] Ko, Y. A. (2010). The effects of pedagogical agents on listening anxiety and listening comprehension in an English as a foreign language context (Doctoral dissertation, Utah State University, Utah, US. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/cgi>.
- [20] Krashen, S. D. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. New York: Longman.
- [21] Lili, Z. (2016) Influence of anxiety on English listening comprehension: An investigation based on the freshman of English majors. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 11(6), 40-47. Retrieved from <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/download/7952/8823>.
- [22] MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991). Methods and results in the study of anxiety and language learning: A review of the literature. *Language learning*, 41(1), 85-117.
- [23] MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1994). The subtle effects of language anxiety on cognitive processing in the second language. *Language learning*, 44(2), 283-305.
- [24] Moghadam, S. B., Ghanizadeh, A., & Akbari, O. (2015). The Effect of Bilingualism on the Listening Strategies and Listening Anxiety among Iranian Junior High School Students. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 2(4), 236-248. Retrieved from <http://www.jallr.com/index.php/JALLR/article/download/76/pdf>.
- [25] Scarcella, R. C., & Oxford, R. L. (1992). *The tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom* (p. 63). Boston
- [26] Spielberger, C. D. (1972). Conceptual and methodological issues in anxiety research. In C. D. Spielberger (Ed.), *Anxiety: Current trends in theory and research* (2nd ed., pp. 481-493). New York, US.
- [27] Vandergrift, L. (1997). The comprehension strategies of second language (French) listeners: A descriptive study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 30(3), 387-409. DOI: 10.1111/j.1944-9720.1997.tb02362.x.
- [28] Vogely, A. (1999). Addressing listening comprehension anxiety. In D. J. Young (Eds.), *Affect in foreign language and second language learning. A practical guide to creating a low-anxiety atmosphere* (pp. 106-123). Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- [29] Vogely, A. J. (1998). Listening comprehension anxiety: Students' reported sources and solutions. *Foreign Language Annals*, 31(1), 67-80.
- [30] Wheelless, L. R. (1975). An investigation of receiver apprehension and social context dimensions of communication apprehension. *Communication Education*, 24(3), 261-268. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03634527509378169>. 84 ALLS 8(4):79-84
- [31] Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and Methods*. SAGE publications. Thousand oaks.
- [32] Young, D. J. (1992). Language anxiety from the foreign language specialist's perspective: Interviews with Krashen, Omaggio Hadley, Terrell, and Rardin. *Foreign Language Annals*, 25(2), 157-172. Retrieved from www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ijel/article/download/15522/11842.