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An investigation of Listening Problems Encountered  
by EFL Learners

A Case Study of Second Year License of English at  
UKMO

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**on:**

**Before the jury**

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## **Dedication**

To my lovely father and mother

To each member of my family

To my fiancée Amel Temmar

To my closest friend Abdelzarak Boukhala

To all my classmates

To all who care about me

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **List of Abbreviations**

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**ESL:** English as a Second Language

**FL:** Foreign Language

**KMUO:** KasdiMerbah University –Ouargla

**L1 :**First language

**L2:** Second Language

## List of Figures

<b>Figure1:</b> Information sources in comprehension.....	07
<b>Figure2:</b> Participants' Profile.....	14

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1:</b> Students' general self-rating to listening proficiency .....	17
<b>Table 2:</b> Students' perceptions related to their high school education .....	18
<b>Table 3:</b> Students' perception to the importance of the English listening skill .....	18
<b>Table 4:</b> Listening problems related to the content of the listening text.....	19
<b>Table 5:</b> Listening problems related to linguistic features.....	21
<b>Table 6:</b> Problems caused by the failure to concentrate.....	23
<b>Table 7:</b> Listening problems related to psychological characteristics.....	24
<b>Table 8:</b> Listening problems related to listener.....	25
<b>Table 9:</b> Listening problems related to the speaker.....	26
<b>Table 10:</b> Listening problems related to the physical setting.....	30

## Table of Content

Dedication.....	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
List of Abbreviations.....	III
List of Figures.....	IV
List of Tables.....	V
Table of Contents.....	VI
<b>Chapter One: Introduction.....</b>	<b>01</b>
1. Background to the study.....	01
2. Statement of the problem.....	02
3. Purpose of the study .....	02
4. Research questions .....	03
5. Research hypotheses .....	03
6. Structure of the dissertation.....	03
<b>Chapter Two: Review of Literature.....</b>	<b>04</b>
1. Introduction.....	04
2. Definition of listening.....	04
3. Views of listening.....	06

3.1. Listening within environmentalist view .....	06
3.2. Listening within innatist view .....	06
3.3. Listening within interactionist view .....	07
4. Types of listening.....	07
5. The Processes of Listening Comprehension.....	09
5.1. Bottom-up processing.....	09
5.2. Top-down processing.....	10
5.3. Interactive Processing.....	10
6. L1 and L2 listening.....	11
7. Conclusion.....	12
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology.....</b>	<b>13</b>
1. Introduction.....	13
2. Research methods.....	13
3. Participants and setting.....	13
4. Description of the questionnaire.....	15
5. Data collection and analysis.....	15
6. Validity and reliability.....	16
7. Conclusion.....	16

<b>Chapter Four: Results and Discussion.....</b>	<b>17</b>
1. Introduction.....	17
2. Students’ self-rating to listening proficiency .....	17
3. Students’ self-rating to English four Skills .....	18
4. Students’ perception to the importance of the English listening skill .....	18
5. Listening problems encountered by students .....	19
6. Conclusion.....	29
 <b>Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations</b>	
1. Introduction.....	30
2. Summary of the major findings.....	30
3. Limitations and suggestions for further research.....	31
4. Implications of the study.....	31
 <b>References.....</b>	<b>33</b>
 <b>Appendix.....</b>	<b>37</b>
 <b>Abstract</b>	

# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1. Background to the study

Listening is one of the main four language skills that vehicles messages in language communication. Though, listening is a complex process which is often a confusing matter especially for L2 learners, it is the most frequent activity among learners. Gupta (2002) stated that the listening skill was neglected and considered as a passive process earlier in language teaching. However, it is given much importance in current language teaching approaches that listening seems to be a simple and natural task to the fact we tend to take it for granted. This simplicity of listening is questionable.

Nunan (1993) reported that listening is the cinderella skill in second language teaching. That is, listening is the main skill which plays an effective role in teaching second language. Rost (2002) mentioned that “listening is a vital mental capacity-one of the principal’s mean by which we can understand and take part in the world around us” (p, 01). That is to say, listening is the cognitive ability of messages decoding, comprehending and communicating effectively with others. Hamouda (2013) stated that listening is essential not only as receptive skill but also to the development of spoken language proficiency.

Devine (1982) stated that listening is the primary means which incoming ideas and information are taken by. Wolvin and Coakley (1991) asserted that it is evident that listening is more important for the learning process since it is used as a primary medium of learning at all stages of education. Mendelsohn (1995) pointed out that in spite of the importance of the listening skill in foreign language learning, the teaching of listening comprehension has been neglected and poorly taught aspect of English in many EFL programs. Rost (2002) revealed

that a number of researches of L2 findings indicate that listening is the most important skill for language learning because it is the most used language skill to facilitate the development of the other language skills. Hamouda (2013) additionally, confirmed that EFL learners have serious problems in English listening comprehension due to the fact that teachers pay more attention to reading, speaking and writing. Listening and speaking skills are not important parts of many course books or curricula, and teachers do not seem to pay attention to these skills while designing their lessons. Most teachers take it for granted and believe that it will develop naturally within the process of language learning.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

Goh (2000) asserted that listening difficulties are defined as the internal and external factors that might interrupt text understanding and real-life processing problems directly related to cognitive procedures that take place at various stages of listening comprehension. Consequently, Algerian second year students of English encounter different problems while listening to English. These problems could be related to listening material, linguistic aspects, lack of concentration, psychological factors, and physical setting.

## **3. Purpose of study**

The present study aims at investigating the problems encountered by Algerian second year students of English at the University of Kasdi Merbah Ouargla while listening to English. The present research investigates the relationship between two variables:

**Independent variable:** listening difficulties

**Dependent variable:** EFL listening comprehension

#### **4. Research questions**

In view of what is said above, the present study attempts to answer the following question:

- 1- What listening problems do EFL students of UKMO encounter when listening to English?

#### **5. Research hypothesis**

The present research hypothesizes that the listening skill is the most important and the most used among the four skills. Therefore, Algerian second year students face various problems in listening to EFL due to the quality of listening materials, linguistic features of language, lack of concentration, the speaker's accent, the listener background knowledge, psychological factors and physical setting.

#### **6. Outline to the dissertation**

The present research consists of five chapters. Chapter one starts with background to the study. Then, the purpose of this study is provided. Then, the research questions and research hypotheses are formulated. Afterwards, Chapter Two reviews the related literature which provides an overview about EFL listening and its approaches. Chapter Three presents the methodology that was employed in this study. This chapter clarifies research methods and setting. Likewise, data collection, and analysis procedures are described. Then the validity and reliability of the present study are discussed. Then, Chapter Four presents the findings and its discussion. Finally, Chapter Five deals with the summary of the major findings, the study limitations, and suggestions for further research. Ultimately, the implications of the findings are proposed.

## Chapter Two

### Review of Literature

#### 1. Introduction

The present chapter is divided into six sections. The first one defines the listening skill. Then, section 2 tackles briefly the different views to language listening teaching and learning. The third section presents the types of listening. Section 4 provides the different processes of listening comprehension. Section 5 discusses the relationship between listening in L1 and in L2 and the final section presents teaching listening through the discourse approach.

#### 2. Definition of listening

Wolvin (2010) stated that the four elements of the listening process need to be mentioned in order to give a reliable definition for listening: First, the Physiological dimension which deals with physiological capacity of receiving the vocal message. Second, Psychological dimension which is assigning meaning to the incoming sound by the cognitive and mental capacity. Third, Sociological dimension, which has to do with the response of the listener for the message once he receives and interprets it. Fourth, the Communication dimension, which has to do with how the listener cooperates for the communication purpose. Anderson and Lynch(1996) and Wolvin (2010) mentioned that hearing is a receptive process related to the biological or the physiological system which lets listeners receiving sound whether it is meaningful or not. Hearing underlies listening and not *vice versa*. Therefore, hearing is very important for listening comprehension.

Dunkel (1991) stated that both L1 and L2 listening researches show their concern about the lack of a generally agreed upon definition of listening. According to Rost (2011)

this disagreement about definitions of listening may be because of two reasons. First, both specialists and individuals have a tendency to define listening depending on their interests whether they are personal or theoretical. Second, it may be due to the listening nature. That is to say; listening is a mental process which is temporary and invisible that is not easy to define and describe.

After the review of listening definitions in the literature, Rost (2011) asserts that almost each of listening definition revolves around one of these four orientations:

- *Receptive orientation*, where listening means the act of receiving what the speaker says (e.g.: listening means capturing what is said by the speaker; listening means decoding the message of the speaker).
- *Constructive orientation*: listening means building or representing meaning (e.g.: listening is to figure out what is in the mind of the speaker; listening is to find out what is relevant for you).
- *Collaborative orientation*: listening is to negotiate meaning with the speaker and to respond. (e.g.: listening means responding to what is said by the speaker.)
- *Transformative orientation*: listening is to create meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy (as cited in Nizigama, 2014, pp.6-7).

The lack of accord upon listening definition is noticed in the history of ELT as well. Listening has been defined differently. Each definition reflects the role that has been given to listening by any approach to L1 or L2 teaching.

### **3. Views of Listening**

Through the history of ELT, listening has not been viewed in the same way. Therefore, for a deeper understanding of learning and teaching approaches, the study will present the role of this skill within the environmentalist, the innatist and the interactionist language learning trends/approaches (Martinez-flor & Uso-join, 2006).

#### **3.1. Listening within environmentalist view**

Before the 1960s listening was neglected and considered as a passive process in language learning due to the environmentalist approach to language learning, it was structuralism in linguistics and behaviorism in psychology. The first viewed language as consisting of different elements (phonemes, morphemes, words and sentence types) which are related to each other depending on a number of rules. On the other hand, the second viewed that learning is based on: stimulus, response and reinforcement (Martinez-flor & Uso-join, 2006). The environmentalist approach viewed that learning is a result of imitating and practicing the same structure over and over. Learning any language was seen as a mechanical process. Consequently, a listener's role was to recognize and discriminate sounds rather than to understand what he was listening to (Brown, 1990).

#### **3.2 Listening within innatist view**

Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2006) asserted that by the late 1960s, both fields of linguistics and psychology witnessed many changes. In linguistics, according to Chomsky's innatist theory (1957, 1965) who asserted that children are born with an innate ability which enables them to acquire any language despite of the complexities of its rules. Following Chomsky's innatist theory, much linguistics undertook some studies so that to test Chomsky's theory of acquisition such as Klima and Bellugi (1966), Solbin (1970) and Brown (1973) who showed that children were active rather than passive in the process of language learning. In

consequence, learning was seen as an active process where listeners use their cognitive strategies in order to understand what they were listening to. (Martinez-Flor & Uso-Juan, 2006).

### **3.3 Listening within interactionist view**

Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2006) stated that by the late 1970s, listening took a great importance. This change shaped the interactionist approach due to the significant shifts in variety of research fields. The attention within cognitive psychology was in understanding the processes involved in the listening comprehension. As a result, their findings were in two types; first, comprehension of a certain message comes only when it was internally produced in the mind of the listener. Second, listeners constructed meaning according to their prior knowledge as well as their own purposes for listening rather than processing and receiving meaning. Thus these findings of listening summed up the complex nature of listening act and listener's active participation in it.

Vandergift (1999) reported that within the emergence of the schema theory in the 1980s, memory was seen as an external factor from the text which conducts the comprehension process. In addition to that, sociolinguists in the 1970s came up with a number of theories like the one of Hymes (1971, 1972) with a result that language is used in a social context and its use depends on the norms of appropriateness. Moreover, listening is considered as a complex, social and interactive process that the listener is actively engaged in the construction of meaning.

## **4. Types of listening**

Researches of language identified and classified types of listening according to two criteria: whether or not listeners have a chance to respond or participate in listening communication events which they are engaged in, and the purpose of listening. According to the first criterion, Lynch (1996) has suggested two categories of listening (1) *one-way*

*communication*, where the listener has no opportunity to respond such as listening to a T.V program, and (2) *a two-way conversation*, where the listener has a chance to intervene like a conversation where he can ask or answer questions. Buck (2001) referred to these two criteria (one-way criteria and two-way criteria) as a non-collaborative / collaborative, and as non-reciprocal/ interactive by White (2006). Buck (2001) continues however, to clarify that there is not always a clear distinction between the two criteria. He gave an example of classroom interaction or presentation where a group of people talk together with no one doing the most of the talking while the others are listening and saying very little.

Other researchers have classified listening according to its functions such as Brown and Yule (1983) have identified two functions of language, despite the fact that they were not interested particularly in L2 listening; these functions are; *transactional functions* where the language is used to convey information and to communicate, and the *interactional function* which is achieved when the language is used to maintain and establish relationships in society.

Following L2 researchers like Nation and Newton (2009) who have formulated a categorization of listening according to the purpose of listening as two types: (1) *transactional listening*, such as a lecture that is typically associated with learning a new information. (2) *interactional listening* like face-to-face conversations which is linked most of the time with social relationships maintenance. These categories (*transactional listening* and *interactional listening*) are referred to by Richards (1983) as ‘academic/conversational’.

Rost (2001) classified listening by its functions. This classification comprises six types: (1) *intensive* , the activity of listening is decoding the linguistic input, like when listening to specific details; (2)*selective listening*, it is having in mind a planned purpose by attending to a specific information which needs to only to be heard.(3) *interactive listening*. it is a type of a collaborative conversation when the listeners interact with each other in order to

lead the learner understanding what was not understood before.(4) *extensive listening*, it refers to listening for an extended time period unlike focusing on meaning. It includes both listening for pleasure and academic listening. (5) *responsive listening* that is a kind of practice of listening where the listener's response is the purpose of the activity. (6) *Autonomous listening*, where the listener has no guidance of an instructor, this type refers to independent listening (as cited in Nizigama, 2014).

## **5. The processes of listening comprehension**

There are different views about how listeners apply their linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge to the incoming sound during the process of comprehension. For this purpose, three processes of comprehension models have been developed in order to account for the comprehension of spoken language. These processes are: bottom-up, top down and interactive processing.

### **5.1 Bottom-up processing**

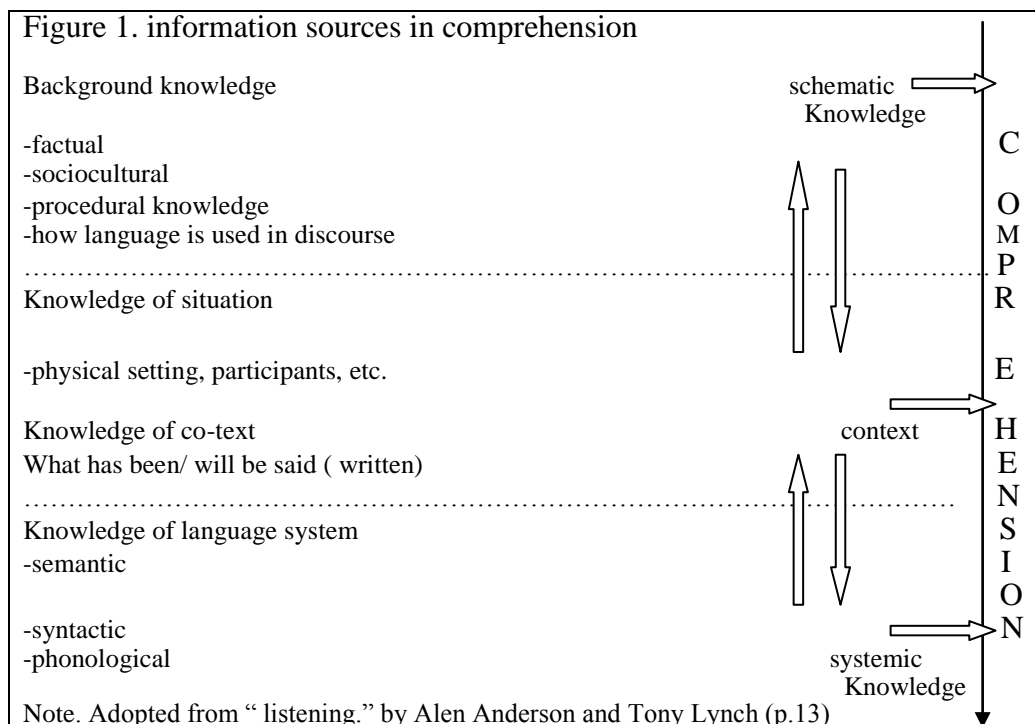
Nehei (2003) claimed that Comprehension is predicted to take place in a definite order, in bottom-up processing starting with the lowest language units and then moving up to the highest level. Listeners make up their understanding starting with phonemes and then they combine them into words which together shape phrases, clauses and so on till they fulfill a literal understanding. The last, is then interpreted depending on relevance of the information at that time to understand what the speaker means. Yet, listening comprehension is achieved piece by piece going from the parts of the whole. According to this idea, expectations which come from the background knowledge are prerequisite for comprehension.

## **5.2 Top down processing**

This process goes in opposite direction of the previous model. The listener comprehends discourse by moving highest unit, schemata, context and culture to the lowest, language knowledge in processing a text, emphasis is on the use previous knowledge rather than relying upon linguistic knowledge. The benefits of this model are that it can compensate to a certain level for the linguistic limitations when the listener's language knowledge is not sufficient for comprehending a spoken input (as cited in Nehie & Koichi, 2003).

## **5.3 Interactive processing**

Comprehension is not a simple matter-either of moving from lower to higher or from higher to lower element-but is an interactive process Nunan (1993). The interactive model involves the previous two processes; it assumes that the application of various types of knowledge does not require a specific order to understand a language. As both Nunan (1993) and Buck(2001) argued that linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge involved in the language understanding can be used simultaneously so that the limitations at one level would be compensated by any another level without looking at its place in the hierarchy. Anderson and Lynch (1988 :13) have presented a figure summarizing the relationship between the different information sources of information with regard to the interactive process of listening comprehension. See Figure 1.



## 6. L1 and L2 listening

According to Anderson and Lynch (1988) researches into the process of L2 language comprehension are few, and so much less is the researches that specifically look at L1 and L2 processing differences. But, both Anderson and Lynch (1988) and Buck (2001) confirm that the provided researches on L1 and L2 processing suggest that both processes are the same. Contrary to what the available work claims both Anderson and Lynch (1988) and Buck (2001) argue that problems in listening arise, when they are generally because of different factors whether the listening activity takes place in L1 or in L2. Problems in L1 arise generally due to attention and motivation degrees; whereas in L2 they are definitely associated with the lack of linguistic knowledge or an insufficient of schematic knowledge required in order to understand the message content. And also, with the different degrees of motivation which L2 listeners bring to the listening matter. Buck (2001) summed up the main difference between L1 and L2 listening as follows:

I believe that the difference between L1 and L2 listening is not that the processes are fundamentally different in any way, but only that the knowledge necessary to understand is often grossly inadequate for the L2 listener. This may often be a double disadvantage, in that they lack both the knowledge of the language and also the background knowledge to compensate for that. (p.51)

Saville-troike (2006) argued that it is predicted that lack of prior linguistic knowledge forcibly and unconsciously exists in L1 and to highly skilled L2 listener for meaning interpretation, but it is knowledge of language of L2 learners that is often not sufficient to comprehend a spoken input that is to say schema or background knowledge is crucial and very important for comprehending whether for L1 or L2 learners.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the related literature of the present study was reviewed. Beginning with the definition of the listening skill in section 1. Section 2 presents briefly the different views which have underlain the different approaches to language teaching and learning. In addition to that, section 3 discusses the types of listening, and section 4 provides description of listening comprehension processes. However, Section 5 presents the relationship between listening in L1 and listening in L2.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

#### **1. Introduction**

The present chapter represents the methodology of the present study. It is divided into six main sections. The first section describes clearly the research methods. Then, the second section deals with the research setting. Next, the third section explains the sample. While, section four describes the questionnaire. Additionally, Section deals with data collection and its analysis. The last section deals with the validity and reliability of the present study.

#### **2. Research methods**

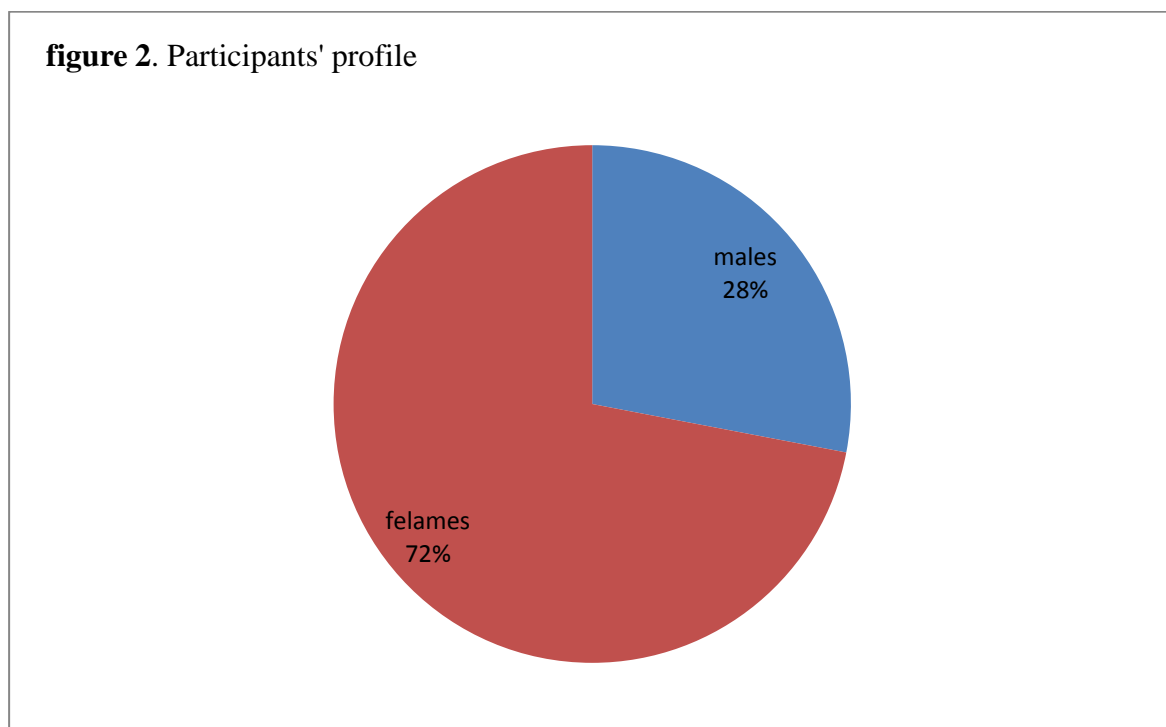
The present study adopts a descriptive research design to collect data in order to answer the research questions that guided this research. Singh (2006) claimed that the descriptive research “is concerned with the present and attempts to determine the status of the phenomenon under investigation” (p.104). This is due to the nature of the problem under investigation in the present study which attempts to investigate the problems that Algerian second year students of English at UKMO encounter when listening to English.

#### **3. Participants and setting**

To achieve the aim set for the present study, a sample of fifty students out of two hundred-fifty registered in the class of second year license of English at UKMO for the academic year 2014/2015 is used to serve as respondent in this research. Cohen, Manion and Morisson (2007) claim that random sampling involves “choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained or those who happen to be available and accessible at the time” (pp.113-114). The

present research takes place at the University of Ouargla (UKMO) Department of Letters and English Language where English is considered as a foreign language.

This sample consists of fifty students. They are mixed 36 female and 14 male. The strategy which the study followed to choose these participants is simple random sampling. That is to say; the study selected the required number 50 of the participants randomly in which all of them have an equal chance to be a chosen. This method is reliable in collecting valid data, because it is widely applied in educational researches. Figure 2 is participants' profile.



#### **4. Description of the questionnaire**

This questionnaire consisted of five sections. Firstly, section one comprises five questions about the participants' personal information such as: gender, age, and mother tongue. Section two comprises one question about students' general self-rating to listening proficiency. Next, section three deals with students' perceptions related to their high school education. Then, section four deals with students' perception to the importance of the listening skill. Finally, section five deals with the listening problems which students encounter according to seven perceptions; listening material (4 items), linguistic aspects (6 items), lack of concentration (3 items), speaker (2 items), listener (5 items), psychological category (4 items) and physical setting (3 items).

#### **5. Data collection and analysis**

The data of the present research was collected in the second semester of the academic year (2014/2015). The students were asked to answer a questionnaire in English as an activity in the amphitheatre during one hour with no previous preparation. The data obtained through this questionnaire was organized and analyzed quantitatively. It was used to get information about the difficulties and problems which Algerian second year students at UKMO encounter in EFL listening. In order to design this questionnaire, the present study referred to Dr Arafat Hamouda (2013) research which relied on the work of (Boyle, 1984; Yagang, 1994; Hasan, 2010; Underwood, 1989; Rubin, 1994; Yagang, 1994; Dunkel, 1991) about factors that influence listening comprehension.

## **6. Validity and reliability**

Buckman, (1990) viewed that validity refers to the scientific soundness of research study. He describes it to the degree in which the gathered data supports the completeness and the appropriateness of the consequences which are made from the final results. In the present research, random selection strategy provides help to insure that the sample is representing the population as a whole. In other words, selecting with no parameters makes the population equal and gives them a chance to participate in the study to increases the validity of study. Marczyk, DeMatteo, and Festinger (2005, p.10) declared that “reliability refers to whether the measurement is consistent”. Judit (2006) mentioned therefore that reliability is another characteristic that is required in the scientific research. It is conducted in a way that the results are the same whenever administered to the same students with the same ability but at a different time.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this chapter, the methodology of the present study was introduced. The research methods were explained. Besides, the research setting, the sample of the study in addition to the data collection and analysis procedures which were all described. Finally, the validity and reliability of the present study were discussed.

## Chapter Four

### Results and Discussion

#### 1. Introduction

This chapter deals with the discussion of results in the present research which aims to investigate the problems faced by Algerian second year students of English at UKMO depending on the analysis of the student's questionnaire. The present chapter consists of four sections; the first section deals with students' self rating to listening proficiency. While, the second section discusses student's general self-rating to English four skills. The third section includes students' perception to the importance of the English listening skill. Finally, the fourth section takes into consideration different listening problems encountered by students.

#### 2. Students' self-rating to listening proficiency

In the second part of the questionnaire, the students were asked to evaluate their proficiency levels in listening skills. 50% of the students rated themselves as "poor" in listening. Only 20% of the students think that their listening skill is 'good' whereas 24% of students stated that their listening performances are 'average' this maybe because of their frustration which is caused by their previous failures to deal with English that they had not received enough training (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

**Table 1: Students' general self-rating to listening proficiency**

	<b>Excellent</b> %	<b>Good</b> %	<b>Average</b> %	<b>Poor</b> %
Q 1: How do you rate your English listening ability when compared to others in class?	6	20	24	50

### 3. Students' self-rating to English four skills

**Table 2: Students' perceptions related to their high school education**

**Question 2: How do you rate your skills in English?**

	Skills	Excellent %	Good %	Average %	Poor %
1	Reading	60	20	20	00
2	Writing	8	40	30	22
3	Speaking	10	24	20	48
4	Listening	6	18	34	42

More than half of the students (60%) were excellent in the reading skill. However, the percentages of the students who were satisfied with the instruction of writing are 40% who were good while, 24% of them were satisfied with instruction of speaking. Therefore, quite half of them were poor in listening. It is noticeable that the majority of the students thought that listening instruction was 'below average' or 'poor'. This means that students assessed their reading and writing abilities as "good", and their speaking and listening as "poor" (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

### 4. Students' perception to the importance of the English listening skill

**Table 3: Students' perception to the importance of the English listening skill**

Items	Statements	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
1	I am more aware of the perceived importance of English listening skill.	4	6	10	80
2	I find that listening comprehension is difficult.	6	10	24	60
3	I find that listening comprehension is boring and not interesting.	24	16	30	30
4	I find that listening comprehension is exciting.	60	10	10	20
5	I receive sufficient training in English listening comprehension during your school.	70	20	2	8
6	I never heard about listening strategy.	60	14	20	6

When students were asked about their own perceptions of how listening skills are taught, they responded in different ways. Table 3 shows that most of the students (80 % always) were aware of the importance of listening skill. While, there were (10%) of students who did not highly evaluate the role of listening skill. When asked about the difficulty of the listening skill, 84% of the learners mentioned that listening comprehension is difficult. In addition to that, a small number of learners (30%) claimed that listening comprehension is boring. Only (24%) of stated that listening comprehension is exciting. This is in line with a common problem that most students are unable to comprehend spoken English which is required at their beginning level (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

For item 5, it is found out that most of the subjects (70%) did not receive sufficient training in English listening comprehension during their school. This may be because of focusing so much on the teaching of reading and writing skills. In fact, most of the subjects did not gain proper training in English listening comprehension. Based on the collected data, 60% of the subjects never heard about listening strategy. The finding partly supports the argument of Bremnar (1998, p.495), “Only by reaching a certain level will a student be likely to use a given strategy”.

## 5. Listening problems encountered by students

**Table 4: 5.1: listening problems related to the content of the listening text**

Item	Statements	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
7	I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words including jargon and idioms.	20	20	30	30
8	Complex grammatical structures interfered with my listening comprehension.	20	22	28	30
9	I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long spoken text.	10	20	30	40
10	I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the spoken text.	4	16	50	30

### **5.1 Statement 7: Problems pertaining to limited English vocabulary**

The first question was asked to know whether unfamiliar words, including jargon and idioms, interfered with the learners' listening comprehension. More than half of the students 60% have responded that unfamiliar words, including jargon and idioms interfered with their listening comprehension. This finding coincides with what most of language researchers who say that the major problem of listening comprehension is because of the students' vocabulary was too limited to understand what is said. The data also support the view of Underwood (1989) that lack of vocabulary is an obstacle against most students in listening comprehension.

### **5.1 Statement 8: problems pertaining to poor grammar**

The second question was asked to know whether complex grammatical structures interfered with the learners' listening comprehension. The great majority of the students 80% have responded that difficult grammatical structures interfered with their listening comprehension. This percentage points out that difficult grammatical structures cause many barriers to students. This goes hand in hand with Vogely's point of view (1998) which shows that the difficulty in listening comprehension is apparently because of the structural component of the text.

### **5. 1 Statement 9: Problems pertaining to fatigue.**

Fatigue may negatively influence L2 learners' listening to English. Especially, in academic listening, the listener may feel tired trying to understand unfamiliar sounds for long periods of time. The majority of participants stated that they felt fatigue and distracted when they listen to a long spoken text. Thus, problems related to memory or even fatigue would distract listeners' attention from getting the meaning of the text, and learners may miss the rest of the text when there is a problem in concentration.

### 5.1 Statement 10: Problems pertaining to basic background knowledge

Background knowledge is also an important variable that can influence listening even if the student masters the skill of analyzing speech automatically. Samuels (1984) asserted that lack of basic schemata can cause problems in listening comprehension. Table 4 shows that 50% of students often use their experiences and schemata to understand the spoken text. This finding goes in parallel with Hasan (2000) point of view which suggested that associating newly heard information with prior knowledge is a powerful and very frequently used way to guess the meaning of a listening passage.

### 5.2: Table.5: Listening problems related to linguistic features

Item	Statements	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
11	I find it difficult to understand reduced forms.	14	10	16	60
12	I find the pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words.	10	24	16	50
13	I do not often pay attention to intonation of the speaker.	8	12	30	50
14	I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another	6	24	20	30
15	I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening.	16	22	24	40
16	When encountering an unknown word, I stop listening and think about the meaning of the word.	10	24	28	38

### 5.2 Statement 11: problems pertaining to the use of reduced forms

Another difficulty comes from spoken English, as in most of languages, students use special reduced forms may cause difficulties, especially to classroom learners who may have only been exposed to the full forms of the English language. Table 5 shows that 60% of the whole number claimed that it is difficult to understand reduced forms.

## **5.2 Statements: 12 and 13: problems pertaining to the "prosodic features" of the English language**

As shown in Table 5, 30% of participants stated that they often relate their incomprehension to intonation pattern and 50% of them always do that. This finding goes in consonance with Brown (1992) point of view who said that: stress, rhythm and intonation are very important for comprehension. As a "stress-timed language, English can be a terror for some ESL learners as mouthfuls of syllables come spilling out between stress points". Additionally, it is noticed that 50% of students cannot recognize the words even when they find pronunciation familiar.

### **5.2 Statement 14: Problems pertaining to the use of signal words**

Signal words help the listener to guess the text's coming point. The listener may predict what may come next by refining to them. If you hear a word that signals more of the same such as 'moreover' 'furthermore', you do not need to worry about the coming idea. If you hear such words as 'but' 'however' that signal a change is about to happen, you have to pay more attention. When you hear words like 'as a result' 'to conclude' that signal the main point of what has been said before is about to be summed (as cited in Hamouda, 2013). Unfortunately, 20% of the whole number stated they often fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another and 30% of them always encounter such problem. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) viewed that in informal situations or spontaneous conversations, signals are vaguer as in pauses, gestures, increased loudness, a clear change of pitch, or different intonation patterns. These signals can be missed especially by less proficient listeners.

## 5.2. Statements 15 and 16: Problems pertaining to the use of unknown words

When encountering an unknown word, the majority of students stops listening and think about the meaning of the word. This interrupts them when they try to follow the speech and the students may miss important information. Underwood (1989) mentions that failure to recognize words can also stem out of students inability 'to segment the word out of connected speech.

### 5.3: Table 6: Problems caused by the failure to concentrate

Item	Statements	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
17	I lose focus of the talk when I have got an expected answer in my mind.	32	30	16	22
18	I lose my concentration if the recording is in a poor quality.	20	26	40	14
19	I lose my concentration when I think about the meaning of new words.	36	30	22	12

### 5. Statement 17 Problems pertaining to focus loss which results from looking for an answer

Learners stated that there are many reasons which make them unable to concentrate during the listening task. 22% stated that they always lose focus of the talk when they have got an expected answer in mind. Whereas 30% think that they face this problem. Yet, 16% stated that when they have got an expected answer in mind, they tend to lose concentration. Additionally, 22% of them claimed that they always encounter such a problem. See table 6.

### 5.3. Statement 18: Problems pertaining to the poor- quality tapes or disks

The majority of the students think that the difficulties they encounter in listening comprehension are due to the bad recording quality. This is due to the recording's noises or the listening tool is used for such a long time so the quality gets affected by that. As a result, poor-quality equipment interferes with the listener's comprehension.

### **5.3. Statement 19: Problems pertaining to focus loss which results from thinking about another question**

When the students think about another question, they lose concentration. 36 % of participants claimed that they lose concentration when they think about the meaning of new words. However, 30% think they sometimes face this problem. Yet, 22% of them have often faced it. But only 12% claimed that they always fail to focus when thinking of new words. They are no more able to concentrate because they search for answers, at the same time when they listen to a dialogue (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

### **5.4: Table 7: Listening problems related to psychological characteristics**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Never %</b>	<b>Sometimes %</b>	<b>Often %</b>	<b>Always %</b>
<b>20</b>	I find it difficult to understand the spoken text which is not of interest to me.	12	40	10	38
<b>21</b>	If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed.	14	18	28	40

### **5.4 Statement 20: Problems pertaining to lack of interest**

Hamouda (2013) asserted that motivation is an important factor in understanding the topic of the spoken text. (10%) often and (38%) say it is difficult to understand the spoken text which is not of interest to them and only 12% stated that they can easily overcome this difficulty. This may be due to the types of listening exercises always which remain the same so that, listeners feel bored because of the repetition of the same exercises.

### **5.4 Statement 21: Problems pertaining to the students' inability of understanding a listening text**

40% of the students claimed that they stop listening when they have problems in understanding a listening text. Harmer (2000) reported that some of his students lose interest in listening and some of them stop it. It is then the teacher's job to help the students get

interested, by providing them with confidence in themselves and make sure that they can achieve success in listening with the limited amount of English the findings of this research go in line with his theory.

### 5.5: Table 8: Listening problems related to listener

Item	Statements	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
22	I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening.	10	26	30	34
23	At the time of listening I found it difficult to predict what would come next.	14	26	30	30
24	I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just heard.	16	30	26	24
25	I find it difficult when listening to English without transcripts.	8	24	18	50
26	I found it difficult to recognize the words I know because of the way they are pronounced.	12	28	40	20

#### 5.5 Statements 22/23: Problems pertaining to what would come next

Almost all of the students in the study have responded that it is difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening that is; 34% said they always for them. However, 30% often and 90% sometimes encounter such problem. Also, 30% of them have responded that they often at the time of listening found it difficult to predict what would come next. Yet, 30% of them claimed that they sometimes find this difficulty.

#### 5.5 Statement 24: Problems pertaining to memory

Memory stands for a problem in remembering the definition of the word after being taught, and immediately forget the word after being said. It is noticed that more than three quarters of students answered that they find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases

they have just heard, the difficulty in bringing back the meaning of familiar words is a common problem which learners usually face as stated by the participants of the present research.

### **5.5 Statements 25 and 26: Problems pertaining to recognition due to pronunciation.**

The fact that learners find it difficult when listening to English without transcripts 50% of them gave this impression. Whereas, only 8% of them indicated that written support in the form of transcripts provided before listening exercises never help them understand the text. This may be due to the fact that transcripts allow listeners to check and make sure that they have listened to everything. For question 26 the researcher noticed that the majority of the students (68%) out of the whole number have responded that they often or always found it difficult to recognize the words they knew because of the way they were pronounced (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

### **5.6: Table 9: Listening problems related to the speaker**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Statements</b>	<b>Never %</b>	<b>Sometimes %</b>	<b>Often %</b>	<b>Always %</b>
<b>27</b>	I find it difficult to understand the natural speech which is full of hesitation and pauses.	28	40	30	2
<b>28</b>	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly.	10	30	14	46
<b>29</b>					
<b>30</b>	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast.	2	26	44	28
	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak with a variety of accents.	6	30	38	26

### **5.6 Statement 27: Problems pertaining to hesitations and pauses**

Natural dialogues are full of hesitations, pauses, and intonation. Table 9 shows that a number of the students (30%) often find it difficult to understand natural speech which is full of hesitations and pauses. This is in line with the findings of previous researches such as the one of Hasan (2000) which indicates that hesitations and pauses in spontaneous speech cause perceptual problems and comprehension errors for non-native speakers.

### **5.6. Statement 28: Problems pertaining to unclear pronunciation**

Many students thought that unclear pronunciation causes much difficulty for them in understanding their English listening tasks. Results show that 30% always find it difficult to understand the meanings of words which are not pronounced clearly. While, only 10% stated that they do not have such a problem. Unclear pronunciation of some speakers is also considered as a source of listening problem (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

### **5.6 Statement 29: Problems pertaining to speed of delivery**

Underwood (1989) claimed that students absolutely encounter certain difficulties in listening comprehension since they lack control over the speed at which the speakers speak. Almost, all students 98% of the whole number point out that when the speaker speaks at a rapid speed, it is difficult for them to comprehend what is being said. On the other hand, only 2% of them stated that they never consider it as a learning obstacle.

### **5.6 Statement 30: Problems pertaining to variety of accents**

Different accents cause difficulties to students in listening comprehension since they do not have much exposure to various accents. Table 9 shows that a number of students; 26% often experienced this problem because they have been exposed to the accent of their own teachers. Whereas 38% of them stated that they always encounter this problem.

### 5.7: Table 10: Listening problems related to the physical setting

Item	Statements	Never %	Sometimes %	Often %	Always %
31	It is difficult for me to concentrate with noises around.	2	18	26	54
32	Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with my listening comprehension.	2	52	30	16
33	Unclear sounds resulting from poor equipment interfere with my listening comprehension.	4	28	38	30

#### 5.7 Statement 31: Problems pertaining to noise

Hamouda (2013) asserted that noise is another environmental barrier to comprehension. Interior as well as exterior class noise is an obstacle to comprehension. Noise, including both background noises on the recording and environmental noises, may take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage. With the noise coming from corridors and other classes some students experience difficulty in listening to the teachers' voices. Because of the noise in classroom and the poor preparation of lab, a great number of students (54%) claim that they cannot concentrate on listening due to the recording material. If the listening task is carried out with noises around, it is difficult to have a good result in listening. First, they are distracted by the noise no matter how hard they try to focus on the task. Otherwise, the noise makes a complex of sounds instead of the clear recording being played. This interrupts the students from hearing and focusing on the task.

### **5.7 Statements 32 and 33: Problems pertaining to the poor- quality tapes or disks**

The majority of the students (38% often and 30% always) think that the difficulties they encounter in listening comprehension are due to the bad recording quality / poor- quality tapes or disks. As a result, poor-quality equipment may interfere with the listener's comprehension (as cited in Hamouda, 2013).

## **6. Conclusion**

The present chapter reported the results of the present study after the analysis of data which were gathered from the students' questionnaire which was analyzed quantitatively according to the information provided by second year students at UKMO.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

#### **1. Introduction**

This chapter is divided into three sections. It begins with the summary of major findings. Then, the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research are proposed. The present chapter ends with pedagogical implication which is based on the results of the present study.

#### **2. Summary of the major findings**

The aim of the current research was to identify the Algerian second year students at UKMO perception to the importance of the listening skill and to investigate the listening comprehension problems encountered by these students. Thus, this research arrived at a point that listening is the weakest skill and second year students at UKMO encounter different problems while listening to EFL. Though they are aware of the importance of the listening skill, they find comprehension difficult, and this is maybe due to the insufficient training in the high school as cited in Hamouda (2013) in his investigation to the problems faced in listening by Saudi students. In addition to that, second year students at UKMO encounter various listening problems which may be related to the content of the listening text such as: complex grammatical structures, or related to the psychological characteristics like the lack of interest. These problems could also be related to the listener or to the speaker like when he faces difficulty to recognize the words which he knows because of the way they are pronounced, or the difficulty to understand a speech which is full of hesitation and pauses as mentioned before.

### **3. Limitations and suggestions**

The present research encountered some limitations when trying to achieve its aims. The first limitation is concerning the sampling method in the present study that is the random sampling method. Though, it is helpful in terms of time and efforts saving, there is no possibility to generalize the findings to the wider population because such a sample represents itself rather than to present a wider population. Therefore findings cannot be generalized to other universities. Thus the future researches should be carried out with a large sample. The second limitation is the time pressure where the researcher has no enough time to organize an interview with the sample in order to know the reasons behind the listening problems. Thus, it is suggested for further studies to organize interviews to support the discussion because the results of the present research were discussed depending on the previous studies assumption. The third limitation is that the study focused on one skill i.e. listening skill. Therefore, the results cannot be generalized on the other three language skills. On the other hand, we suggest that the other skills should be integrated as well.

### **4. Implications of the study**

The results of the present study show that Algerian second year students at UKMO face many problems in listening to EFL so that; these problems need to be taken into consideration and to have solutions. Thus, it is confirmed in this research that the listening skill is the weakest skill in the comprehension among the four skills, and it should be given an importance as much as the one given to the reading skill mentioned previously in this study. On the basis of the results obtained from the present study, there are set recommendations that the researcher suggests to be taken into consideration:

1. Teaching listening in context (active listening) which is based on the recognition, comprehension, and future use of phonological features.

2. Providing authentic material; listening material to criticize learning and better memorization. In addition to providing materials that supplement the process of teaching listening.
3. Using schema theory in teaching listening to EFL students i.e. activating prior knowledge of the learners enhances the listening comprehension; listeners construct meaning according to their prior knowledge as well as their own purposes for listening rather than processing and receiving meaning
4. Adopting task-based approach when teaching listening i.e. (P D P; that is pre listening, during listening, and post listening) or by setting various listening activities in teaching of the listening skill in order to enhance learner's abilities to receive the listening task with no difficulties.
5. Integrating the listening skill with the other language skills to promote learners' communicative competence.
6. Using technology means in teaching the listening skills such as: integrating computers in the process of teaching this skill, because researches showed that computer is an effective mean that helps learners in listening comprehension.

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**Kasdi Merbah University- Ouargla**

**Faculty of Letters and Languages**

**Department of letters and English language**

**Case study: second year students**

**Questionnaire**

Dear students,

My study investigates ‘the problems that Algerian second year students of English at UKMO encounter when listening to EFL’. Your anonymous contribution through this questionnaire will be of a great help to my study. You are kindly invited to answer honestly the following questions. Put a cross(x) in the appropriate box. Use the scale indicated below:

- 1= **Never** true of me
- 2= **Sometimes** true of me
- 3= **Often** true of me
- 4= **Always** true of me

1. **Your gender**

Male  female

2. **How old are you ?**

Below 19  between 18 and 21  over21

3. **What is your mother tongue?**

Arabic  Tamazight  French  Other

4. **How many years have you been studying English in formal education ?**

Years

5. **Have you taken any special courses outside of school or university?**

Yes  No

If yes, how has this course helped you to improve your English?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

	<b>excellent</b>	<b>good</b>	<b>average</b>	<b>poor</b>
Q 6: How do you rate your nglish listening ability when compared to others in class?				

How do you rate your skills in English?

		<b>excellent</b>	<b>good</b>	<b>average</b>	<b>poor</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Reading</b>				
<b>2</b>	<b>Writing</b>				
<b>3</b>	<b>Speaking</b>				
<b>4</b>	<b>listening</b>				

Item	Statements	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I am more aware of the perceived importance of English listening skill.				
2	I find that listening comprehension is difficult.				
3	I find that listening comprehension is boring and not interesting.				
4	I find that listening comprehension is exciting.				
5	I receive sufficient training in English listening comprehension during your school.				
6	I never heard about listening strategy.				

Listening problems related to the content of the listening skill

Item	Statements	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
7	I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words including jargon and idioms.				
8	Complex grammatical structures interfere with my listening comprehension.				
9	I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long spoken text.				
10	I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the spoken text.				

Listening problems related to the linguistic features

11	I find it difficult to understand reduced forms.				
12	I find the pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words.				
13	I do not often pay attention to intonation of the speaker.				
14	I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another				
15	I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening.				
16	When encountering an unknown word, I stop listening and think about the meaning of the word.				

Listening problems caused by failure to concentrate

<b>17</b>	I lose focus on the talk when I have got an expected answer in my mind.				
<b>18</b>	I lose my concentration if the recording is in a poor quality.				
<b>19</b>	I lose my concentration when I think about the meaning of new words.				

Listening problems related to psychological characteristics

<b>20</b>	I find it difficult to understand the spoken text which is not of interest to me.				
<b>21</b>	If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed.				

Problems related to the listener

<b>22</b>	I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening.				
<b>23</b>	At the time of listening I found it difficult to predict what would come next.				
<b>24</b>	I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just heard.				
<b>25</b>	I find it difficult when listening to English without transcripts.				
<b>26</b>	I found it difficult to recognize the words I know because of the way they are pronounced.				

Problems related to the speaker

<b>27</b>	I find it difficult to understand the natural speech which is full of hesitation and pauses.				
<b>28</b>	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly.				
<b>29</b>	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast.				
<b>30</b>	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak with a variety of accents.				

Problems related to the physical setting

<b>31</b>	It is difficult for me to concentrate with noises around.				
<b>32</b>	Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with my listening comprehension.				
<b>33</b>	Unclear sounds resulting from poor equipment interfere with my listening comprehension.				

**Thank you for your time**

## Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the problems that second year EFL learners at UKMO encounter when listening to English. The study took place at UKMO in the academic year 2014/2015. The current research followed a quantitative approach in data collection through a student's questionnaire. Whereas, the study sample is taken from fifty (50) students in the English department at UKMO. Therefore, the study applied a descriptive method for the reason to investigate the relationship between the independent variable that is listening difficulties, and the dependent variable which is listening comprehension. Consequently, the results showed that lack of concentration, insufficient vocabulary, speech speed, pronunciation, bad recording quality, different accents, and anxiety were the major listening comprehension problems faced by EFL learners. In the overall conclusion, the results show obviously that understanding learning difficulties will provide solutions to help students develop effective learning strategies and improve their English listening abilities.

**Keywords:** listening skill, Listening comprehension, listening problems, EFL.

## الملخص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى التقصي في المشاكل التي يواجهها طلبة السنة الثانية للغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية عند السمع. أجريت هذه الدراسة في جامعة قاصدي مرباح ورقلة في السنة الدراسية 2015/2014. لذلك قامت الدراسة بتطبيق منهج كمي من خلال توزيع استبيان للطلبة مع اخذ عينة متمثلة في 50 طالبا للسنة الثانية ليسانس على مستوى قسم اللغة الانجليزية, علما أن نتائج التحاليل و الإحصائيات متمثلة في جداول. إضافة إلى اتباع طريقة وصفية من أجل التحقيق في العلاقة بين المتغير التابع المتمثل في مشاكل السمع, و المتغير المستقل و الذي يشمل الفهم عن طريق السمع. أظهرت النتائج بأن : النبرات المختلفة, قلة التركيز, نقص المفردات, سرعة الخطاب, سوء أجهزة التسجيل بالإضافة إلى القلق هي أهم الأسباب المؤدية إلى مشاكل السمع بالنسبة لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية. نتيجة لذلك توصل الباحث بأن إدراك صعوبات التعلم قد يمكن من إيجاد حلول بغية مساعدة المتعلمين من أجل تطوير طرق فعالة للتعلم بالإضافة إلى تطوير قدرات السمع للغة الانجليزية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** مهارة السمع, مشاكل السمع, الفهم عن طريق السمع, اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية.