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**An Investigation on Listening Challenges  
facing EFL Learners  
A Case Study of Second Year English Students at Biskra  
University**

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
the Master Degree in Sciences of Language**

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**Dedication**

*To*

*My great parents*

*My lovely brothers and their children*

*My lovely sisters and their children*

*All the family of BENGLIA*

*All people who know me*

*I dedicate this work*

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to determine the listening problems and challenges which face foreign language students at their age studying English in Mohammed Khaider University of Biskra. The present dissertation includes three chapters, the first chapter gives a deep overview and background of listening skill, also introduces the listening process, kinds, models, types, and some strategies of listening skill. The second chapter focuses on the most challenges, difficulties, and problems in listening comprehension in foreign language for the learners. The final chapter in this dissertation is a student's questionnaire that contains two parts, the first part is about listening comprehension as a skill taught in the classrooms. In the second part we question the student towards the listening factors that summarize the several listening problems, also the analysis and discussion will be provided. Finally, listening skill will be treated as the important skill in English language in our context.

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## **GENERAL INTRODUCTION:**

Listening skill is essential in the workplace, the family, Careers in communications, management, planning, sales, and fund raising, to name a few, rely on good listening skills. Listening, however, is more than just being able to hear and understand what someone else says. Listening skills involve etiquette, asking for clarification, showing empathy and providing an appropriate response. In the past, listening was considered as secondary after speaking comprehension. The more recent studies of four skills have resulted as the final; 45%listening, 30%speaking, 16%reading, and 9%writing. As in everyday life listening is the most important skill.

We may think of listening as something that requires no thought or effort, but there is a vast difference between hearing someone and actually listening to him. It is natural for a person to daydream or think of a rebuttal while someone else is speaking, doing so can result in strained relationships, failure to absorb important information and a general disconnect between people who are trying to work toward common goals. This is why active listening is important and why we're often told that there's a reason we each have one mouth and two ears.

Moreover, English language students should have a prior knowledge about the listening skill by taking it in consideration as an essential process to improve, and the most thoughtful activity that must mastered. Unfortunately, ESL/EFL students want to develop their oral language but they are facing problems and difficulties to reach their goals. However, many students reach advanced levels unconsciously because they sufficient smart. As in this dissertation, basing on our context exactly on university level to investigate the probably problems also highlight the available challenges that face students of second year. In addition, the role of teacher is more interesting than the programme itself.

Furthermore, in this study the determination of listening complexity summarize the limits that enrich the chosen theme to be more scientific, logical, and useful for students and teachers that are specialized in English as foreign language. As another reason, study listening skill from the nature to the university context. In other words, the nature of listening skill introduces a general background provided by the most linguists and psychologists citations. The listening processes and procedures should known by the

teachers to teach the skill through different strategies and methods. Most of students in second year LMD do not have most knowledge about listening techniques and approaches, this why most of them suffer exactly when they wants to share ideas and discuss; i.e. oral expression module. Certainly, the less of learning in laboratories and time issue leads students' achievement to be weak.

In conclusion, listening matter must acquired by students according to its importance in learning English as Foreign Language. In the same time teachers are responsible to facilitate the curriculum by adds this approach to the learning process in EFL/ESL courses.

### **Statement of the problem**

It is common in every EFL classes that students seek to master the four skills. Frequently, they are concentrating on speaking, reading, and writing and ignoring the listening skill .Without a doubt, listening is an activity that most of EFL students are not really taught how to do effectively. They tend to be concerned with the outgoing sounds, rather than the incoming signals. Listening is important, maybe even more important, than speaking. Without proper listening skills it is difficult to communicate effectively with others. The students who only are talking and never tried to listen carefully to others, they thought themselves communicating but in fact they are not. If they do all of the talking and never listen, they will never really communicate very well with others. EFL students face many difficulties in listening, they do not know even how to listen that's what weaknesses their communicative skill. In this study we will investigate EFL listening skills difficulties.

### **Purpose of the study**

The aim behind conducting this study lies in my strong desire to fulfil my interest in the field of mastering the four skills by the investigation with the listening difficulties in our context according to the EFL learners to enhancing their communication. To study listening skill in our context through the investigation of the listening challenges that face second year students. The origins of listening difficulties should mentioned by the factors that are affecting listening skill proficiency on the context. Finally, there are some strategies which feed this weakness, must mentioned.

## **Research questions and hypothesis**

This theme is familiar with several questions to pose, the targeted questions that always have relation with listening nature and listening complexity. The following suggested questions are:

- What is listening as a skill its model, kinds, and types?
- What is listening comprehension, and how the process work?
- Are there listening difficulties face EFL learners in Biskra University?
- What are the listening strategies that help student to enhance their proficiency in listening skill?

We hypothesis that:

Second year English student are facing many problems in listening comprehension, this can reflex their weakness in oral expression and decrease participation in classrooms.

## **Research Methodology**

We intended to use descriptive analysis design as an approach. Moreover, the researcher plan to derive information from any material relevant to their field of interest which is a new and a fresh area in English Department as far as we are concerned. In addition, we intended to use questionnaire for students, also the final analysis of results lead us to deduce if our hypothesis more reliable and well constructed as future source in the issue.

## **Population of the study**

This research proposal represents an academic study to determine and investigate listening difficulties to be sure that EFL learners' mastery of writing skills in Algeria, specifically full-time second year LMD system students enrolled at Biskra University (Department of English). We have chosen Biskra University to conduct our study because it is where we are studying and it is familiar to us. The population of the study will be second year student of English language as sample of study, the total number of second year students are around 400 students .The sample is going to be chosen randomly to include 40 students who will participate in the questionnaire.

## **Data Collection**

For answering the research questions, quantitative data from students' questionnaires be collected. Students' questionnaire could help us to have a global view about students' knowledge and their intentions. Questionnaire is leading to results in quantitative method.

## **The significance of the study**

This study is an interesting as well as the listening skill in teaching EFL in the Algerian context. More than that, to make a procedure for determines the listening difficulties and assumed challenges that affecting in the EFL learners capacity to speak a proper, authentic and enable them to raise listening techniques knowledge. As known listening and speaking are integrating one to another in the ESL/EFL language system, the results will enrich listening tasks and gives more reliable information which for similar issues. A present study will determine new marks of weakness to avoid them in the future, by student to raising their proficiency in listening in general.

## **Structure of the study**

The present study consists of three chapters. In chapter one, we present a review of some theoretical approaches of listening skill in EFL classes. The second chapter treats the basic challenges in listening skills that occur in our English classrooms. Chapter three deals with data analysis, it contains a detailed analysis of students' questionnaire.

## **Literature review**

In the past, listening was considered secondary after speaking comprehension mentioned by G.H.Bower and R.K.Girclo in 1985 and G.Brown and G.Yule in 1983. The more recent studies of the four skills have resulted as the final ;45%listening, 30%speaking, 16%reading, and 9%writingFor that in everyday life listening is most important skill, it was after the experimental work from River and Temperley in 1987 also Celce Mrucia ,the year of 1995, Lund studies the listening from its function of the message, listeners' response, Text type, topic and method of presentation. Fumiko Nazikian and Kumi Omoto have worked about listening in the Japan context.

The U.S. Government administers the Defence Language Proficiency Test(DLPT) to military linguists and other government personnel to assess their listening and reading comprehension in a number of foreign languages, including critical languages such as

Mandarin, Modern Standard Arabic, Egyptian Arabic, and Persian Farsi. The DLPT is updated every 10 to 15 years, and the most recent transition—from DLPT IV to DLPT5— included a greater emphasis on testing listening comprehension with authentic materials. In turn, this has led to a growing interest in the factors that make second language (L2) listening difficult.

Masayuki Morimoto, Hiroshi Sato and Masaaki Kobayashi (Japan, 2004). Was worked on “Listening difficulty as a subjective measure for evaluation speech transmission performance in public spaces” is a theme of an experimental contains two tests for people listening proficiency in public to determine the most problems facing the listener according to his setting (place).

Radia Bouache deals with the impact of listening to short stories on comprehension. She makes an experimental study in the middle school by teaching pupils short stories to enhance the listening comprehension in 2010. The studies are the more recent and famous studies that dealing with our theme is determine the challenges that facing learners to enhance their listening skill as an important to learn languages or specially English language.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**LISTENING SKILL**

## **Introduction**

Students often find a tremendous amount of challenges while they are listening to the language they are learning. Gass (1997) cited that there is no model of second language acquisition that avail itself of input in trying to explain how learners create second language grammar.

It has been claimed that over 50 percent of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening (Nunan, 1998). Despite this, we often take the importance of listening for granted, and it is arguably the least understood and most overlooked of the four skills; listening, speaking, reading and writing, in the language classroom.

It is established that listening is a basic language skill prior to the other language skills. It is a prerequisite to and more useful than speaking. Rivers (1988) suggested that listening is more useful than speaking English for specific purposes, because the listening activity seems to require more recognition vocabulary from the foreign language learners for a rapid comprehension than a sophisticated and complex knowledge of syntax. Moreover, Ingram (1974) considers the fact "that comprehension is ahead of production a linguistic universal of acquisition ". Krashen (1984) asserts that "speaking is the result of acquisition. The ability to speak a second language emerges or develops on its own after the acquirer has built up enough competence listening and reading." Krashen here goes far to focus on the speaking as a productive skill in regardless listening and reading to carry this development on with receptive skills.

Lund (1991: 2002) goes even further to suggest listening after reading: "Listening after reading helps learners recognize acoustically what they can already comprehend in print and in stills satisfaction and confidence in listening." Lund goes through reading than put its benefits that contains all acoustic knowledge in enhancing and develop listening comprehension; build a confidence in which student after reading they will be satisfy between the print, utter words and what they listen.

In this chapter, we will discuss some main principles of listening comprehension including background, definition, and significance of listening process. Moreover, we find it is important to mention some other elements such as, models, kinds and strategies of listening comprehension process.

## **1. Background of Listening**

Although language learning depends on listening since it provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication, listening has long been the neglected skill in second language acquisition, research, teaching, and assessment as Mandelson (1994) cited.

However, in recent years there has been an increased focus on L2 listening ability because of its perceived importance in language learning and teaching and it is now regarded as much more important in both EFL classrooms and SLA research.

In the early 70's, work by Asher, Postovsky, Winitz and, later, Krashen, brought attention to the role of listening as a tool for understanding and emphasized it as a key factor in facilitating language learning. Thus, listening has emerged as an important component in the process of second language acquisition (Feyten, 1991).

A study by Wilt (1950), found that people listen 45 % of the time they spend communicating. He found that 30 % of communication time was spent speaking, 16 % reading, and 9 % writing. That finding confirmed what Rankin discovered in 1928, that people spent 70 % of their waking time communicating and those three-fourths of this time was spent listening and speaking. From the above findings, the importance of listening skill it is necessary to mention the most available definitions according to what this chapter need.

## **2. Definition of Listening**

Listening is the first language mode that children acquire. It provides the foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development, and it plays a life-long role in the processes of communication. In general, we do respond overtly, because speaking is a subsequent behavior to listening. Listening for Brownell (1986) is "a process involving six skill areas, or components: hearing messages, understanding messages, remembering messages, interpreting messages, evaluating messages, responding to messages." Hyslop and Tone (1989) define listening as the first language mode that children acquire. It provides a foundation for all aspects of language and cognitive development, and it plays a life-long role in the process of learning and communication essential to productive participation in life.

Listening is a complex and difficult issue to be investigated which means that it is not easy to provide an easy and quick definition of listening. For Rost (1994)." listening is

less directly observed and less noticeable in both its development and its everyday use”, Rost wants to point us that listening is important as much as its implicit skill. Rivers (1968), Widdowson (1978), McCarthy (1991) consider listening comprehension as a solid basis, a foundation and a prerequisite for oral proficiency. Therefore, the teaching of comprehension of spoken language has become of major importance based, more particularly, on what learners should most usefully be able to communicate in the foreign language (Wilkins 1976).

Moreover, Underwood (1989) simply defined listening as the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear and Mandelson (1994) defined listening comprehension as the ability to understand the spoken language of the native speakers. Purdy (1997) defined it as "the active and dynamic process of attending, perceiving, interpreting, remembering, and responding to the expressed (verbal and nonverbal), needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings».

Rost (2002) defines listening, in its broadest sense, as a process of receiving what the speaker actually says (receptive orientation); constructing and representing meaning (constructive orientation); negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding (collaborative orientation); and, creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy (transformative orientation). Listening, then, is a complex, active processes of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know.

Additionally, listening has been defined as an active process which has taken place between various situations. It requires concentration to understand the message. Tucker (1925) define listening as”... an analysis of the impressions resulting from concentration where an effort of will is required.”In effect this definition attracts our attention on concentration.

Hooks (1950) definition, however, depicts listening as: “... the conscious, purposeful registration of sounds upon the mind ... leads to further mental activity ...all true listening is creative.” In fact, what is genuine about Hook’s definition is the creative aspect in listening. As an example, when the learner listens to a native speaker narrating a story in T.V this enables the learner to generate new ideas and concepts related to this story. Wolff et al., (1983) suggest that listening is: "a unitary-receptive communication process of hearing and selecting, assimilating and organizing, and retaining and covertly responding to aural and non-verbal stimuli"

When one listens he takes on information which can be thought of as signals in his mind related to ideas and relationships between different things. As a result, the language

provides the signal and the listener provides the image, so, information is a possibility for having access to ones images, ideas, and memories. The whole process of language understanding is the integration of new incoming information into already existing knowledge. That is how previous knowledge or schemata stored in memory plays an important role in the listening comprehension process. (ibid)

Finally, the previous definitions of listening states that listening is multifunction skill, or it is a combination of many systems both physical and behavioural. From the listening integration, significance is an important part here.

### **3. Significance of Listening**

Listening plays a significant role in daily communication and educational process. Most students want to be able to understand what other people are saying to them in English, either face to face, on TV or on the radio, on tapes or other recorded media (Harmer: 2007).

According to Bulletin (1952), listening is the fundamental language skill. It is the medium through which people gain a large portion of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and of human affairs, their ideals, sense of values, and their appreciation. In this day of mass communication, much of it oral, it is of vital importance that students are taught to listen effectively and critically. Harmer (2007) suggests that listening is good for the pronunciation of the learners, i.e. the more they hear and understand English being spoken, the more they absorb appropriate pitch and intonation, stress and the sounds of individual words and those that are blend together in connected speech .As an example: listening to the news reader on TV reading the news in highly voice could be more beneficial to the learners of second language.

Moreover, Harmer (2007) suggested that: "listening texts are good pronunciation models, in other words, and the more students listen, the better they get, not only at understanding speech, but also at speaking themselves. Indeed, it is worth remembering that successful spoken communication depends not just on our ability to speak, but also on the effectiveness of the way we listen."

Krashen (1984) argues that people acquire language by understanding the linguistic information they hear. Thus language acquisition is achieved mainly through receiving understandable input and listening ability is the critical component in achieving understandable language input. Given the importance of listening in language learning and

teaching, it is essential for language teachers to help students become effective listeners. In the communicative approach to language teaching, this means modelling listening strategies and providing listening practice inauthentic situations: precisely those that learners are likely to encounter when they use the language outside the classroom.

#### **4. Listening comprehension**

Listening comprehension requires a fast understanding from the part of the listener. Many factors must be taken into the account of the listener to insure a right understanding. Context and facial expressions, for instance, are aids that must be exploited by the listener to pave his way to the speaker's intended meaning. In addition to that, the background knowledge helps the learner to choose the right interpretation. Rost points out:

*“At a further removes from the physics of sound and the linguistic level of texts we arrive at listening comprehension. Definitions of L2 listening comprehension tell us as much about the definer as they do about listening. Characterization of listening -- both first and second language listening – may be explicit or implicit, and they have varied with their times. Listening has been seen as arising from habit formation, as a function of innate cognitive language abilities, as akin to computation, as a quality related to psychology or self awareness, as cultural awareness, or information processing.” (2002)*

In the same vein Lynch (2009) states that while assessing the student's ability as a listener, we have to bear in mind that listening as a mental process can take several forms in relation not to the attitude, but to the aim behind listening. He comes up with the idea that when we listen to someone whether in our mother tongue or in a FL; there are four main types of listening:

- Appreciative listening: for pleasure and relaxation, such as listening to music, a joke, a story.
- Informational listening: to gain knowledge, such as watching a documentary,
- Critical listening: to assess the validity or the credibility of what is being said, such as seminars, politicians' speeches.
- Empathic listening: to understand someone's feelings, such as when we listen to a friend talking about emotional problems.

## 5. The Listening Process

Theoretically, listening comprehension is regarded as an active process in which individuals concentrate on selected aspects of aural input, form meaning from passages, and associate what they hear with existing knowledge. Cognitive psychology defines comprehension as information processing. (Rumelhart 1980)

Listening is an invisible mental process, making it difficult to describe. However, it is recognised by Wipf (1984) that listeners must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, understand intention and retain and interpret this within the immediate as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance.

According to Ellis (2000), Understanding L2 spoken language is adequately important to communicate in it, listening comprehension process can be described as an inferential process based on the perception of several cues rather than a simple match between sounds and meaning. Thus, this process is a combination of other four sub-processes: hearing, categorisation of sounds, word recognition, and, then, comprehension.

**5.1. Hearing:** the auditory reception of an acoustic signal (perception), as is also performed on non-speech sounds,

**5.2. Sounds' Categorisation:** categorising incoming sounds in terms of the sound categories of the language

**5.3. Word Recognition:** breaking up the stream of sounds into linguistic units (morphemes, words) and retrieving their meaning from long term memory, and

**5.4. Comprehension:** integrating the meanings of the words in their sequence into an interpretation of the entire utterance, i.e., a reconstruction of the speaker's communicative intention.

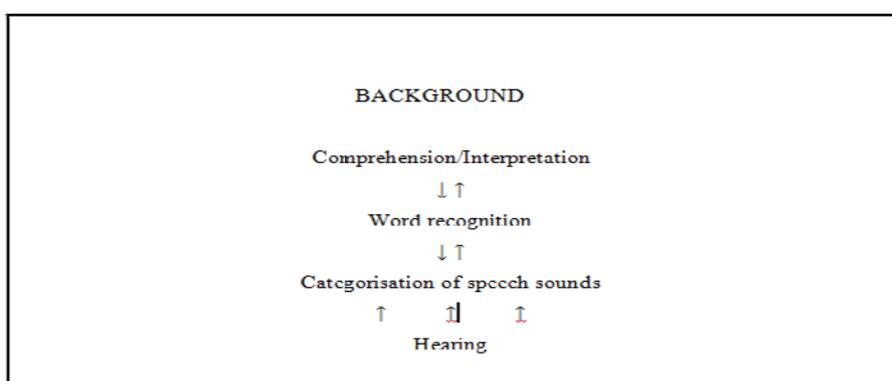


Figure 1: Simplified overview of the sub-processes of the listening comprehension process.

To clarify, the figure below shows the different sub-processes of the listening comprehension process. Each of the sub-processes can be a source of listening comprehension problems.

The first sub-process of the listening skill is hearing. We define hearing as the relatively peripheral process of filtering the relevant speech signal from the multitude of acoustic events that simultaneously strike the ear. The linguistic processing of the output of the hearing stage is the focus of this thesis. As a first language-specific transformation listeners categorise incoming sounds in terms of the sound categories of their language, this is the second sub-process of listening. The third sub-process of the listening skill is word recognition. The process of word recognition has been the object of phonetic and psycholinguistic research for years; the extensive body of research has resulted in several word recognition models. The fourth sub-process of the listening skill is the comprehension and interpretation of the stream of sounds that uttered by the speaker. These fourth sub-processes lead us to wonder about the listening process in L2.

## **6. The L2 Listening Process**

In fact listening comprehension in the first language differs from the other that is in the second language learning. Actually, the acquisition of the L1 listening comprehension skill happens largely at the same time that the child develops its general cognitive abilities. The development of the L2 listening processes occurs after the learner's cognitive development is more or less completed.

When acquiring a foreign language, learners have to learn mainly what the L2-words and grammatical forms refer to (Gathercole & Thorn 1998); they have to acquire the differences between their L1 and the L2. In this light the idea of 'conceptual redeployment' has to be mentioned (Churchland 1999). In the case of L2 learning, adults must reorganize semantic knowledge of words and concepts into a new domain of language use, namely in their L2. The L2 learners already have cognitive frameworks but these have to be filled out with new (L2) language forms. The fact that new references (of known concepts) have to be learned and the change of conceptual frameworks while the cognitive development of

the learner has already been developed makes learning a second language a more conscious process than L1 acquisition.

Second language learning can be occurred effectively when there is enough correct language input. The kind of input that second language learners receive has been the object of research for several years. The speech input directed by L1 speakers towards L2 learners, which is often referred to as 'foreigner talk' shows some similarities with the modified input of child-directed speech; adjustments are noted at several linguistic levels.

## **7. Roles of Teachers and Students in Listening Process**

The planning committee at SUFE found that changing the curriculum demanded considerable changes in attitude from both teachers and learners. Teachers were no longer able to take their previously dominant positions as the privileged speakers at the front of the class; neither could they continue to consider themselves as the holders of all wisdom. And of course students, too, could not shelter behind the quiet façade of their previous role as the passive receivers of information.

The changes in teacher's roles and students' roles were introduced to the students from the beginning. Teachers first provided students with appropriate tools and opportunities to practice using them, i.e. teachers facilitated the changes. The presupposition was that teachers were willing to change and shift their roles in the classroom from information providers to facilitators, shifting from 'teaching knowledge-based' to 'supervising students learning-based', from 'a protagonist' on the stage, to becoming 'a director' behind the scenes. Teachers were no longer the only source of information, but acted as mentors who helped students to actively interpret and organize the information they were given, fitting it into prior knowledge (Dole, et al., 1991). Students became active participants in learning and were encouraged to be explorers and creators of language, rather than passive recipients of it (Brown, 1991).

According to constructivist learning theory, language learners become active constructors of knowledge by recognizing problems, producing hypotheses, confirming hypotheses and solving problems; and then finding new problems. In the process of recycling, learners build up knowledge structures. Students who are active constructors of knowledge through experience and opportunities are more prone to discover and enquire.

This implies that students are co-learners, using available knowledge through interaction with others in socially significant tasks of collaborative work.

## **8. Listeners and Listening**

Concentrating on the listener itself, in fact, there are different ‘listenings’, so to speak in different ways and for different purposes of listening; there are also countless individuals doing those listening; and the same individual will listen in different ways under various circumstances. So that, we should discuss how we listen to a second language. Invisibility and complexity are two main challenges which we, as second language learners, face during the listening process.

### **8.1. Invisibility**

Hawkins (1985) pointed: “We cannot base our analysis completely on what we judge, from the discourse, to be comprehended by the non-native speaker. The determination of comprehension is, in fact, quite elusive.” This, and as many authors have pointed out, listening is a largely hidden process and may have no observable product or outcome. Sometimes, the listener may not even realize whether s/he has grasped the point or not.

### **8.2. Complexity**

According to Lynch (2009), listening process comprises several dimensions of complexity. Firstly, the listening process itself can be complex, even if we manage it well. Second, with the increasingly sophisticated twenty-first century computer technology, the language teachers need professional and technical skills to access and use certain technology.

## **9. Models of Listening**

Listening was traditionally seen as a passive process by which the listener receives information sent by a speaker. More recent models view listening as a much more active and interpretive process in which the message is not fixed but is created in the interactional space between participants. Meanings are shaped by context and constructed by the listener through the act of interpreting meaning rather than receiving it intact (Lynch and Mendelsohn, (2002).

From what was Lynch and Mendelson(2002) stated about models of listening, the listener focuses on the utterances decoded and the interpreting meaning rather than the receiving intact argued the two types of listening. The next figure is adopting from the Wolvin’s figure (2009) about Listening, Understanding, and Misunderstanding.

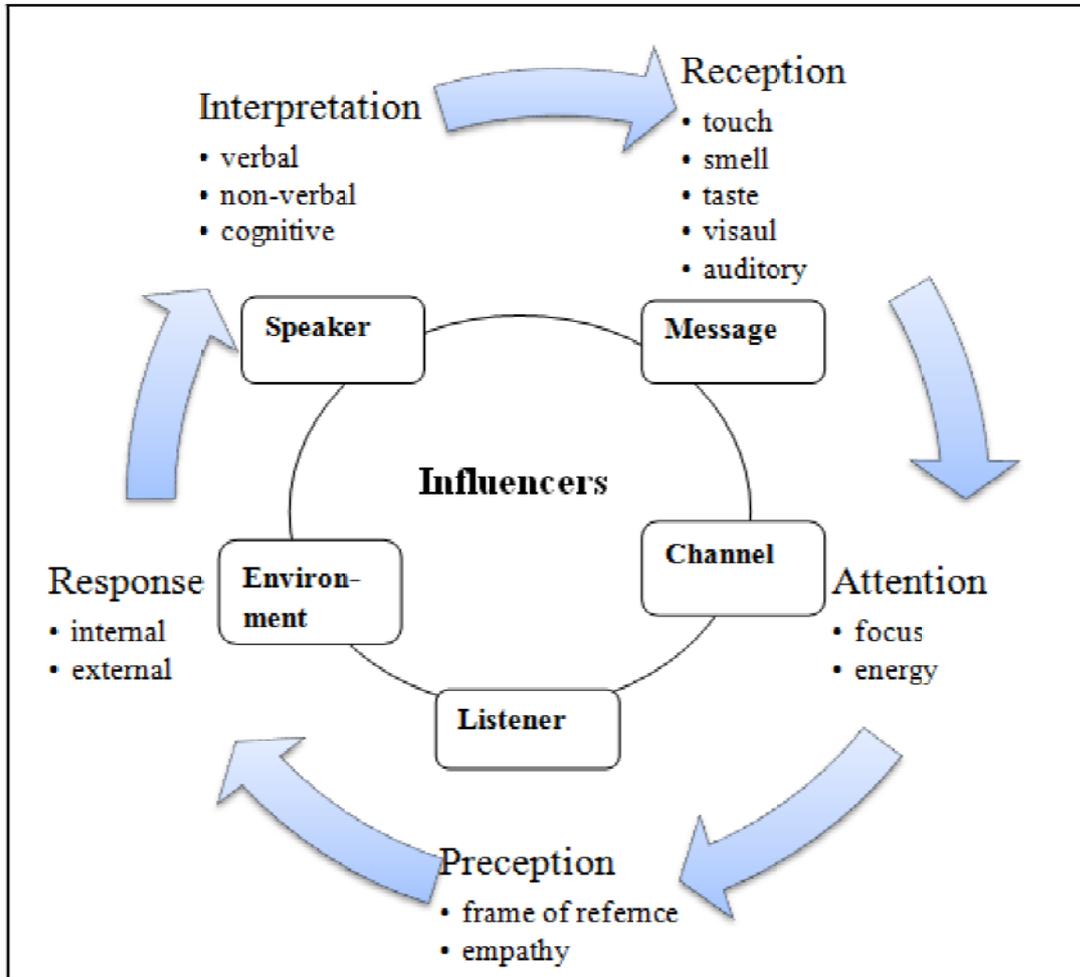


Figure 2: Listening model.

## 10. Kinds of Listening

Learners can improve their listening skills and gain valuable language input through a combination of extensive and intensive listening material and procedures. Listening of both kinds is important since it provides the perfect opportunity to hear voices.

### 10.1. Extensive Listening

Extensive listening refers to listening which the students often do away from the classroom, for pleasure or some other reasons. The audio material they consume in this

way should consist of texts that they can enjoy listening to, because they more or less understand them without the intervention of a teacher or course materials to help them. Students can also use tapes and CDs to listen to their course book dialogues again after they have studied them in class. Another way of getting students involved in a form of extensive listening is to encourage them to go to English language films with subtitles; as they hear the English dialogue, the subtitles help them understand; as they understand, they will, to some extent, absorb the language they hear (Harmer 2007).

## **10.2. Intensive Listening**

Intensive listening is different from extensive listening, in that students listen specifically in order to work on listening skill, and in order to study the way in which English is spoken. It usually takes place in classrooms or language laboratories, and typically occurs when teachers are present to guide students through any listening difficulties, and points them to areas of interest (ibid).

The two kinds of listening differ from student to student also from place to another place. Here kinds of listening should be recommended by several strategies to enable students to apply the techniques in L2.

## **11. Strategies of Listening**

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the comprehension and recall of listening input. Listening strategies can be classified by how the listener processes the input.

Top-down strategies are listener based; the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences, and summarizing.

Bottom-up strategies are text based in which the listener relies on the language in the message, that is, the combination of sounds, words, and grammar that creates meaning. Bottom-up strategies include listening for specific details, recognizing cognates, and recognizing word-order patterns.

Listening comprehension tends to be an interactive, interpretive process in which listeners use prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge in understanding messages. Listeners use metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies to facilitate

comprehension and to make their learning more effective. Metacognitive strategies are important because they regulate and direct the language learning process. Research shows that skilled listeners use more metacognitive strategies than their less-skilled counterparts (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, Vandergrift, 1997). The use of cognitive strategies helps students to manipulate learning materials and apply specific techniques to a listening task. Socio-affective strategies describe the techniques listeners use to collaborate with others, to verify understanding or to lower anxiety.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have tried to provide the main principles of listening comprehension process as an important skill in the second language teaching-learning process. This was done on purpose to highlight the complexity of this covert process. Knowledge of the characteristics of variables as well as processing skills involved in listening is very important. Once having an account of these, one may have a critical look at how listening is taught, and formulate a suggestive view as to how listening ought to be taught effectively and successfully.

Although everything, there are some difficulties and challenges can be present while listening process, mainly, because listening remain something hidden in teaching-learning second language process. Thus, this study was created to discover these difficulties and, then, to find the appropriate strategies to solve the challenges.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**LISTENING DIFFICULTIES AND RELATED FACTORS**

## **Introduction**

All the definition of listening stated that listening is a complex skill, from this complexity; it is clear that when listening has some ambiguity in its nature. Most of students are facing these difficulties in the classes.

In most cases, only a handful of studies have explored the role of these factors in second language listening. As a result, this review distinguishes between areas that have received enough attention to justify firm conclusions about their role in L2 listening comprehension, and those that have not. The review further highlights connections between the described factors. Furthermore, the research literature suggests that during test development and the selection of spoken passages, it is possible to anticipate some of the ways in which listener, passage, and auditory features such as, speech rate, accent, and hesitation condition factors are likely to influence L2 listening comprehension.

These factors include familiarity with and ability to understand the phonology of the non-native language, vocabulary size, and background knowledge about the topic, text, structure, schema, and culture. The mental state of listeners can also have an impact on their ability to understand what has been said. That is, if a listener is anxious or in some other way distracted and unable to pay attention, it will be more difficult to process what was said. These factors are described in more detail below.

### **1. Characteristics of the Listener**

The factors targeted here include working memory capacity, proficiency and experience with the foreign language (L2), the use of metacognitive strategies, and anxiety. Understanding a foreign language taps general cognitive abilities, as well as knowledge acquired as the result of dedicated study and exposure to the non-native language (L2).

General cognitive abilities known to affect L2 comprehension include working memory and metacognitive strategies such as planning, prediction, monitoring, evaluation, mental translation, personal knowledge, and directed attention. Working memory is correlated with, and maybe even central to language learning aptitude Bowles, et al. (2009), if we hope to measure language proficiency as separate from aptitude, it may be important to understand the interaction between working memory and passage difficulty. In addition, researchers generally assume that listeners use metacognitive strategies when listening to their non-native language; Vandergrift (2006) offered this explanation when he

found that native language listening ability accounted for 14% of the variance in L2 listening ability, with L2 proficiency accounting for 25% of the variance.

In addition to the metacognitive strategies determined by Vandergrift and his colleagues, Rubin and Roberts (1987) considered that L2 listening comprehension scores were influenced by exposure to literary works in the L2, critical thinking, and recall abilities.

Moreover, to general cognitive abilities, a number of linguistic factors influence listening skill. These factors include familiarity with and ability to understand the phonology of the non-native language, vocabulary size, and background knowledge about the topic, text, structure, schema, and culture. The mental state of listeners can also have an impact on their ability to understand what has been said. That is, if a listener is anxious or in some other way distracted and unable to pay attention, it will be more difficult to process what was said. These factors are described in more detail below.

### **1.1 Working memory**

Working memory refers to a limited capacity system of temporary storage and manipulation of input that is necessary for complex tasks such as comprehension and reasoning (Baddeley, Hitch 1974). According to Brown (2006), listeners must hear words (bottom-up processing), and then interpret what has been heard before hearing a new input. Meanwhile, they need to use their background knowledge (top-down processing) to make sense of the input: derive meaning concerning prior knowledge and schemata. According to Hedge (2000), during these processes, because listeners try to keep numerous elements of message in mind while they are inferring the meaning and determining what to store, the load on the short-term memory is heavy.

Baddeley stated that:

*“is assumed to be a limited capacity attentional system, aided by a newly postulated fourth system, the episodic buffer. Current interest focuses most strongly on the link between working memory and long-term memory and on the processes allowing the integration of information from the component subsystems. The model has proved valuable in accounting for data from a wide range of participant groups under a rich array of task conditions. Working memory does still appear to be working”.* (2002).(85)

Working Memory (WM) is a set of cognitive processes that all listeners use with varying degrees of efficiency as they attend to, temporarily store, and process incoming speech in L1 or L2.

McDonald (2006) used a measure of working memory presented in the L2 of the participants and found that performance on this L2 working memory measure correlated

significantly with the accurate grammatical sentences of spoken L2. In a second experiment, McDonald imposed a high working memory load on L1 listeners by requiring participants to maintain 7-digit numbers in memory. After The study explored that, when L1 listeners with an influenced working memory load were asked to make grammaticality judgments about L1 sentences, they showed selective impairments in their judgments. The effect directly paralleled the performance of L2 learners on the same task (in the absence of an induced working memory load), suggesting that processing in the L2 imposes a load on working memory resources.

## **1.2. Proficiency and experience with the L2**

According to Anderson and Lynch (1988), the word schema or this term integrating in listening context which mainly abstract and general mental relevant knowledge , memory, and experience that allow us use what we hear into what we know. Although language proficiency is a different from student to another because the L2 knowledge varies according the awareness about practices in proposition ‘textbase’ as stated by van Djik and Kintsch(1983).

### **1.2.1. Vocabulary**

Vocabulary plays a key role in listening, especially for a foreign language learner. In the listening skill, we must pay attention to the size of the new vocabulary to which learners are confronted. Brown and Yule (1983) mention that, learners start looking for the meaning of a word and loose the thread of speech. That is why they should train to go on listening and to accept the fact that it is not necessary to understand every word because good listeners, according to Brown and Yule, encourage speakers and liberate the conversation. Hence, when teaching the listening skill, it is useful to devise sessions aimed at practicing to sub-skills of reaching the meaning of unknown words from the context using the appropriate strategy.

### **1.2.2. Background knowledge**

We can simply make a boring topic an interesting one for the learner. In listening tasks interest and motivation should be present. The problem here is a great one because the teacher must keep silent while his students are listening to the records or to any speaker. The beginning would be a best time to put his learner in a comfortable atmosphere and to provide them with the necessary knowledge to interpret correctly the ideas to be communicated. This introduction will play the role of reference and the clear and strong reference is, the less time and energy you’ll spend at the end of the listening task,

Sometimes it is too hard to change interpretations already done by the learner taking into account many factors and especially psychological ones (hesitation, introverts learners).

As Moses said:

*“Students learn and remember new information best when it is linked to relevant prior Knowledge. Teachers who link classroom activities and instruction to prior knowledge build on their students’ familiarity with a topic and enable students to connect the curriculum content to their own culture and experience”* (2003).

Background knowledge is a source of information. Basics of this typical knowledge are our academic learning and especially on our everyday life experience. The importance of that knowledge in FL acquisition makes it affect the students’ interaction with the learning material. If teachers succeed in drawing a link between new information and the students’ prior knowledge, the learning will be better.

Gho (2002) , mentioned that listeners with rich background knowledge use it to cover and feed their weakness in misunderstandings, unclear speech, and a lack of local or specific context from earlier parts of the passage. This use of background knowledge can be detrimental, however, because listeners that rely too heavily on prior knowledge, prior conversational units, and relational history with the speaker may be unduly biased by this information (Bodie et al., 2008). The advantages likely outweigh the disadvantages; using background knowledge to help understand a passage frees up attentional resources to be devoted to other aspects of the listening task (Tyler, 2001).

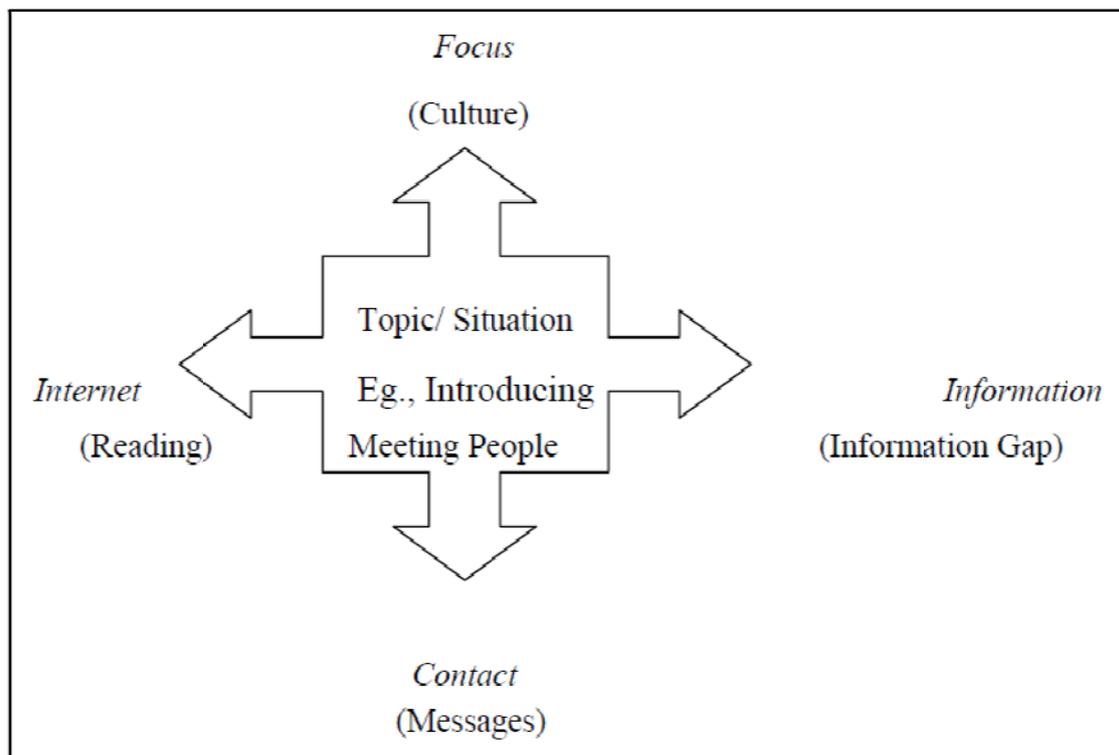


Figure 3: video material for proficiency listening activities. (ACTFL. 1988)

According to the American Council for Teaching Foreign Language (ACTFL) This figure clarifies how to gain the different sources of knowledge especially when we deal with students who are not native speakers. In addition, the four components of the figure below; contact means that foreigner students can listen to natural conversation from native speakers (young, old, man or women...). Information is about how students are engaging in its performance from several information gaps. Then internet is the first source to meet the foreigner culture indeed tourists and other. Finally, focus means all knowledge gathered from the three above is need concentration, and culture and social aspect of each topic presented.

### **1.3. Metacognitive strategies**

Learning strategies for listening comprehension has been an interest of many researchers, in first Chamot (1995) defines learning strategies as “the steps, plans, insights, and reflections that learners employ to learn more effectively”. The listening strategies can be divided into two groups bottom-up strategies and top-down. Bottom-up which depends on the speech itself and the language clues in it; these strategies based linguistic features and encourage learners to analyze individual words for their meaning or grammatical structures before constructing the meanings to form propositions (bottom-up processing); and top-down strategies referring to the listener and her/his use of mental processing; these strategies focus on the overall meaning of phrases and sentences and encourage learners to make use of real world schematic knowledge to develop expectations of text meaning (top-down processing).

As well as, Vandergrift (1999) summarizes listening strategies in three categories as metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and socioaffective strategies. According to Vandergrift (1997), metacognitive strategies are defined as “mental activities for directing language learning” which include planning, monitoring, and evaluating one’s comprehension. These strategies refer to the thinking about the learning process such as selective attention and comprehension monitoring Goh (1997, 1998).

For example, Schoonen et al. (1998) described the positive effect of three types of metacognitive knowledge, including self-knowledge, task knowledge, and strategic knowledge, on the L2 reading comprehension of 6th, 8th, and 10th grade students. They found that the 8th and 10<sup>th</sup> grade students who reported using more metacognitive strategies had better L2 reading comprehension scores.

Goh, Mareschal, Tafaghodtari, and Vandergrift (2006) developed and validated a listening questionnaire (the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire or MALQ) that assesses the metacognitive awareness of second language listeners as well as their (reported) use of metacognitive strategies when listening to a spoken passage. Their work revealed five distinct factors that predicted listening comprehension scores on the University of Ottawa's Placement Test (Wesche, Paribakht, & Ready, 1996):

- Problem-solving strategies: Strategies listeners use to make inferences and monitor them (e.g., using known words to infer the meanings of unknown words, using experience and general knowledge when interpreting the text; Rubin & Roberts, 1987).
- Planning and evaluation strategies: Strategies listeners use to prepare themselves for listening, and for evaluating whether their efforts are paying off (e.g., having a plan for listening, keeping a goal in mind while listening; Hinkel, 2006; Richards, 1990; Vandergrift, 2003).
- Avoiding mental translation: Beginning-level listeners often will mentally translate a passage as they hear it (Eastman, 1991), but they must overcome this strategy in order to become skilled L2 listeners (Vandergrift, 2003).
- Self-knowledge: These strategies involve understanding the difficulty of the L2 listening task and being aware of one's confidence levels and anxiety level when listening to the second language (Chemers, Hu, & Garcia, 2001; Sparks & Ganschow, 2001; Wenden, 1991; Yang, 1999; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001).
- Directed attention: Strategies that listeners use to stay on task. These include recovering concentration when one's mind wanders, focusing more when understanding falters, and not giving up (Rost, 2002)

#### **1.4. Anxiety**

Clark, et al. (1989) found that listener anxiety can have a profound effect on comprehension abilities. When listeners are concerned that the message is too complex or that they will not be able to understand it, their ability to concentrate falters, and comprehension declines; this is true even in the mother tongue language. Listeners became more anxious when in a new situation, listening to new information, trying to sort conflicting information, listening to seemingly illogical passages, or when they think their performance reflects their abilities or intelligence.

Hussey, et al (2010) stated that anxiety affected on listeners' abilities to resolve ambiguities in their native language in real time, directly. (Chang, and Read, 2008), found the ability to take notes may decrease anxiety during L2 listening comprehension, in other words factors are related to the testing conditions.

## **2. Characteristics of the passage**

Many listening difficulties also represented when treat passage features that cover each of the authenticity, redundancy, information density, and complexity of the passage. These factors determined in the sake of identifying listening difficulties in L2.

The authenticity becomes the first factor that lay down on the listeners in listening comprehension. Redundancy also is the second factor from the five below, it refers to how repetitions of words reflex the passive act of the listener. Than the information density presents the absolute factor which can be dynamically differing between listeners one by one and his/her degree in language as more as knowledge.

Complexity comes to highlight and focus on listening skill as a complex system, its importance as first skill from which technically not easy system to practice. Finally, the vocabulary is stand as necessary condition and its relationship with the background knowledge; it is also difacilitate the system dynamically.

### **2.1. Authenticity**

Authenticity of aural materials can be defined in many ways, involving the speaker, the listener, the context, and the message (Breen1985). Many students feel a huge gap between listening activities in the classroom (or homework) and actual situations when they interact and sharing ideas in oral expression. This is because most listening materials, including dialogues in textbooks, are very grammar-oriented script with perfectly controlled speed, voice tone, accent, and correct grammar. However, this is far different from real life conversation. Thus, there is a wide distinction between controlled listening materials and real life listening and controlled in many ways with a few professional speakers. The speakers read.

A piece of real language that is created by a real speaker for a real audience in order to convey a message of some sort (Gilmore, 2007). In other words this means speaker guides the conversation to be sure that the sending message is according to the listener's needs, such as looking for a degree of formality.

However, there are some arguments against using authentic materials in listening tasks, especially at basic and first level. Authentic materials are too difficult and may discourage learners, and also there is skepticism about exposing the learners to error in grammar usage, particularly at the initial stages of language study. Penny Ur (1984) considered that certain difficulties may surface which cause listener frustration and annoyance when using nonscripted, authentic language tapes, and specifically difficult for the beginning-level students to disentangle the thread of discourse, to identify different voices, and to cope with frequent overlaps in segments of authentic language presented via audiotapes.

## **2.2 Redundancy**

Redundancy refers to the repeating terms through exact repetition, paraphrase, and elaboration (Chaudron, 1983). Across a variety of passage types (e.g., both conversations and lectures), speakers will circle back to previously introduced points to check for comprehension in their listeners, or simply to reiterate information they believe is most important (Field, 2008). Perhaps counterintuitively, redundancy is often classified as a form of simplification of input because it involves re-presenting information, thus giving the listener another chance to comprehend the information, sometimes in a form that is easier to process or retain (Chaudron, 1983) and (Parker, 1987).

Further, redundancy is argued to be a superior manner of simplification compared with syntactic simplification, which involves modifications like restricting the passage to canonical word order (e.g., Subject-Verb-Object is the canonical word order in English; Crystal, 2003) or using simpler syntactic forms (Cobb, 2004; Parker & Chaudron, 1987; Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1986).

### **2.3. Information density**

Aiken, et al. (1975) stated that sometimes measures of density only include those pieces of information that have not been previously given in the passage in the numerator that they control for redundancy, and so these measures directly capture the density of unique information in a passage.

### **2.4. Complexity**

The passage information process in special way and challenging between each other to let the listener acquires a new meaning. Number of dependent clauses, the degree of subordination, the number of negatives, and the number of references in the passage are measuring this complexity.

According to Blau(1990), the simplifying sentences are not necessary to improving L2 comprehension. Furthermore, recent results imply that modifying sentences structure does not affect second language learners listening comprehension.

Nissan et al. (1996) found that when the number of negatives is more than one impact an item's difficulty amount in the corresponding passage. Kostin (2004) also discovered that no relationship between referentials and dependent clauses in her examined dialogues. Other similar analysis was failed to explore the relation between negation and items difficulty.

We concluded that negatives in the passage may increase item difficulty, but the effect is unlikely to be strong. While the results from Nissan et al. (1996) and Kostin (2004) imply that the presence of two or more negatives may increase item difficulty, and those of Yanagawa and Green (2008) expect that negatives may increase the difficulty of particular kinds of items, Ying-hui (2006) failed to find any effect of negatives on difficulty. None of the studies investigating referentials or dependent clauses found a relationship between these factors and item difficulty, so there is no evidence to date that these factors will impact L2 listening comprehension.

### **2.5. Culturally specific vocabulary and idioms**

Culturally vocabulary and idioms should be available for listeners to interpret the passage pragmatically, facilitating the passage complexity. Several studies have investigated this factor, by either considering the number of culturally unfamiliar words or the number of idioms in a passage.

Sasaki (2000) found after L2 readers tests containing culturally familiar words (names more common in the culture of the L1) showed correct understanding of the key terms more often, tried to solve more items, and generally understood the text better than readers completing cloze texts with culturally unfamiliar words (names more common in the culture of the L2). Sasaki's test result showed that replacing culturally unfamiliar words in a text with culturally familiar words increases examinees' understanding of within-sentence information.

Moreover Nissan et al. (1996) found that the difficulty of associated items did not the result of presence of culturally specific vocabulary in a listening passage. However, only a few items required comprehension of culturally specific vocabulary.

Kostin (2004) explored the effect of idioms in the passage on listening comprehension. The American Heritage Dictionary (2000) defines idiom as "an expression consisting of two or more words having a meaning that cannot be deduced from the meanings of its constituent parts." An example would be "snake in the grass" an expression that cannot be understood even if the L2 listener is familiar with the meanings of grass, in, and snake. Nevertheless, he/she should know about how the snake is defined in the target society.

### **3. Auditory features**

In this part, treating the speech is common and important to describe the factor of auditory in the sake to determine listening difficulty. The speaker's status, gender, the situation, and context (where and when) are the most variables that effect on the message receiving by listener.

For reaching our aim we should deal with, the speaker accent that sometimes uses different varieties of language as reason to confuse the listener or annoying the listener from all sides. The second factor is both of noise and distortions which related to external angels to deal with listener. The external means both contextuality and situationality that affect the expressions understanding, unfamiliar words and difficult items.

Next, is the hesitation and pauses those are differently useful for listeners in L2 because a lot of pauses and hesitation help the listener to receive the message slowly and enable him to succeed to send his/her message and engaging in the conversation.

Finally, the left factor is about the speech rate, the fast language heard by the L2 listeners that decrease his/her degree of understanding also sending the message in common conversations.

### **3.1. Speaker accent**

Understanding the spoken language means concerning and controlling a speech rate or the pitch voice (adaptation of idiosyncrasies). Listeners become more competent in the skill but challenges presented when trying to adopt the difference accents of the speaker, than listener less more accents (Weil, 2003). In this case of a speaker with a different accent, a listener must cope with variation arising from both the speaker's own idiosyncrasies and additional variation the speaker shares with others from the same linguistic background.

Furthermore, Floccia et al. (2009) cite that accented speech affects immediately the listener to recover and retrieve the speaker's message than identify particular words of this message. Balasubramanian, and Bunta (2005) investigated how accents of varying degrees of familiarity affected the listening comprehension of native and non-native listeners. So the parameter of adaptation standing as challenger to all people, we support by new unfamiliar accented words, in L1 or L2.

From above the adaptation difficulty it is up to knowledge that feed the language exactly with unfamiliar items, or even can evolve the low proficiency in language itself so difficulty accent differed from non- native and native speakers.

### **3.2. Distortion and noise**

Distortion also noise exist when ideal condition are absent. Recorded conversations mostly mixed with noise and distortions that illustrated in T.V and radio according to many known reasons, in turn-taking real life model noise suffering seems when listener tries to understand non-native language.

Indeed, these acoustic distortions can have a deep effect on a listener's ability to understand what they are hearing. When listening to sentences in a unfavourable conditions, even people listening to their native language struggle to understand what was said (Payton, Uchanski, Braid, 1994; Adank et al., 2009). Field (2003) considers these

phonological processes include reduction, assimilation, elision, and resyllabification, among others and all of them degrade the input from the citation form.

When the competing noise shares phonological characteristics with the non-native language in the target passage, as when the passage is presented against a background of babble noise, it is harder for L2 listeners to determine which parts of the signal are from the target passage and which are from the competing noise (Carhart, Tillman, Greetis, 1969; Brungart, 2001; Freyman, Balakrishnan, Helfer, 2004).

In addition, Field (2004) argues that listeners, and especially beginning-level listeners, do not even try to understand each and every word. Instead, they use background knowledge, co-text (information relevant to passage topic from sources like pictures, headlines, etc.), analogy, and/or knowledge about the speaker to construct a schema into which they can integrate incomplete acoustic information. Field describes this process in the context of Forster's (1989) description of cross-word processing, where top-down information is used to compensate for incompletely or incorrectly perceived lexical information.

### **3.3. Hesitation and pause**

Speech is an unconscious action that we all speak informally with a spontaneous thinking, particularly. As Fox Tree (1995) states that conversational speech in American English 6% of words are disfluent. While hesitation markers as *ano* make about 6% in Japanese language,(Watanabe, Hirose, Den, Minematsu, 2008). These argued that even the less percentage of disfluent and hesitation makes allow speech makes problems for listeners in general.

However, the majority of research on disfluencies in L2 listening comprehension has determines that pauses can be helpful to non-native listeners, though this effect rely on the listener's proficiency level and whether the pause is filled or silent. Some evidence assumes that knowledge of filled pauses such as *um* must be learned like other features of a language, and until this knowledge is complete, these disfluencies may be misinterpreted (Voss, 1979; Watanabe et al., 2008). The avoidance of disfluencies in the form of filled pauses in listening passages is likely to be desirable by the lower proficiency listeners. Though, Rose (1998) pointed out that knowledge of an L2's hesitation and pause

phenomena is important to L2 listening proficiency, particularly given their familiarity in authentic speech.

### **3.4. Speech rate**

Speech rate may refer to distinction between the faster and slower speaker entirely. Word pre-minute is a definition common by (Brindley, and Slatyer, 2002; Griffiths, 1990, 1992; Jacobs et al., 1988; Zhao, 1997). Other one, according to Robb, Maclagan, and Chen (2004), states that it is critically includes silent intervals in its duration calculation.

Given the experimental findings that faster speech rates can lead to lower comprehension, it is clear that L2 learners sometimes openly indicate that speech rate is a source of difficulty. For example, Flowerdew and Miller (1992) interviewed a small group of eight language learners taking a university class taught exclusively in their L2. When the researchers asked the learners whether the lecturer spoke too fast, all but one responded in the affirmative. In addition, diary entries from the larger group of 30 learners mentioned lecturer speed as an issue. Consistent with these self-reports Zhao (1997) found that L2 learners took advantage of the opportunity to modify the speaking rate of a passage as part of a listening experiment: 14 of the 15 listeners reduced the speed rate of 194 words per minute, and none of them increased it.

Griffiths (1990) observed that native speakers perceived non-existent differences in rate while pre-testing materials that varied in text length and difficulty. Native speakers in a study by Anderson-Hsieh and Koehler (1988) perceived heavily accented speech as faster than less accented speech.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to provide the main sources of what makes listening difficult. The difficulty of listening is contextually proved more integration about the main sources above with each other to reach a reliable result that can be make useful this study or even other researches interested in the challenges of listening to L2learners.

In general, there some factor related to three characteristics above we do not mentioned them. For example, the overall length in the passage which refer to the loner length increase the listening comprehension as kostin (2004), stated the against proof that no significant effect of the total number of words in the passage on listening comprehension difficulty. The studies proved weak effect on this factor.

Pragmatic information is also means, idioms and cultural expressions can decrease the listener's ability to understand the conveying message. This inclusion of idioms and culturally words affect the comprehension degree of L2 listener.

Third, this factor named orality clearly depends on the oral non the cognitive aspect. Orality becomes the first factor related to the passage in the sake of adopting the authenticity; it is easier to understand the passage with high orality more than less oralty.

Coherence as an independent factor related to passage features not mention previously. Just few studies have dealt with coherence in the passage and find a low effect on L2 listening comprehension. Yung hui(2006) find that higher coherence in the passage was associated with easier test items. These results suggest that the overall coherence of the passage must play a role of listening comprehension in L2. Moreover, the other left factor is related to the directness and concreteness of the text. The studies state that the important element is about implicitness and concert items in the text can affect L2 listening comprehension. Nissan, et al. (1996) suggests that texts with concert items can be more difficult to L2 learners. Passages with implied meaning can be more difficult to understand. Research in reading comprehension suggests that texts with more concrete objects or entities may be easier to comprehend, but little research has examined this factor in L2 listening.

Furthermore, position of relevant information means; Information is most easily recalled when it occurs near the beginning or at the end of a passage. The studies related to these factors as Freedle and Kostin (1996, 1999) found that when the information needed

by comprehension items occurred either early in the passage or in the last sentence of the passage, the item was generally easier.

In addition, the final left factor is about discourse markers and its effect on L2 listening comprehension. Jung (2003) found that L2 listeners who heard a passage containing discourse markers recalled more information than participants who listened to a passage in which most of these markers were removed. However, other research finds different effects for different types of markers. Words and phrases that signal the relationship between adjacent propositions and the overall structure of the passage improve comprehension. However, this effect depends on the type of marker.

In conclusion, the next chapter will present our work field which is the student's questionnaire. The third chapter provides the analysis and discussion of each question included plus the graphic results.

The next final chapter is about the student's questionnaire that appears our obtained results. Through the planned selected questions students answer them briefly that each question has no more three probabilities, to facilitate our study in a good way to make students interact in enjoyable attitude.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

## **Introduction**

This chapter presents the study in which we have focused mainly on the students' knowledge, fact and opinions about listening challenges that face them as students' background knowledge in listening skill. This study has been conducted at the English Department of Biskra University. In this chapter we shall discuss the description of students' questionnaire, students' responses, and finally the findings

## **Students' Questionnaire**

To investigate students' opinions and problems of being studying oral expression as the first field to practice listening skill, we have prepared a questionnaire directed to the students. Hence, the sample population includes forty (40) second year students at the English Department of Biskra University, aged between seventeen (17) and twenty-four (24) years.

### **. Administration**

The questionnaire has been administered during the second semester of the academic year 2012-2013, precisely at the end of the second semester. The students' questionnaire has not been administered until the students have discovered the atmosphere of the class well. A total of three sections (25) minutes has been sufficient for students to answer all the questions.

### **Description**

The questionnaire is divided into three sections: section one is about the students' general information, section two aims at getting information about students' opinions and attitudes about listening skill, and section three makes a survey about students' problems and challenges while studying listening skill or the oral expression module as the first context to illustrate the listening processes.

Section one includes two questions, Question one and two are about gender and age. Section two comprises eight questions with no more than three options answers. Whereas, section three, as a main part, is shows the main factors that makes listening skill difficult without forgetting to include the main characteristics related which are "listener", "passage", and "speech rate".

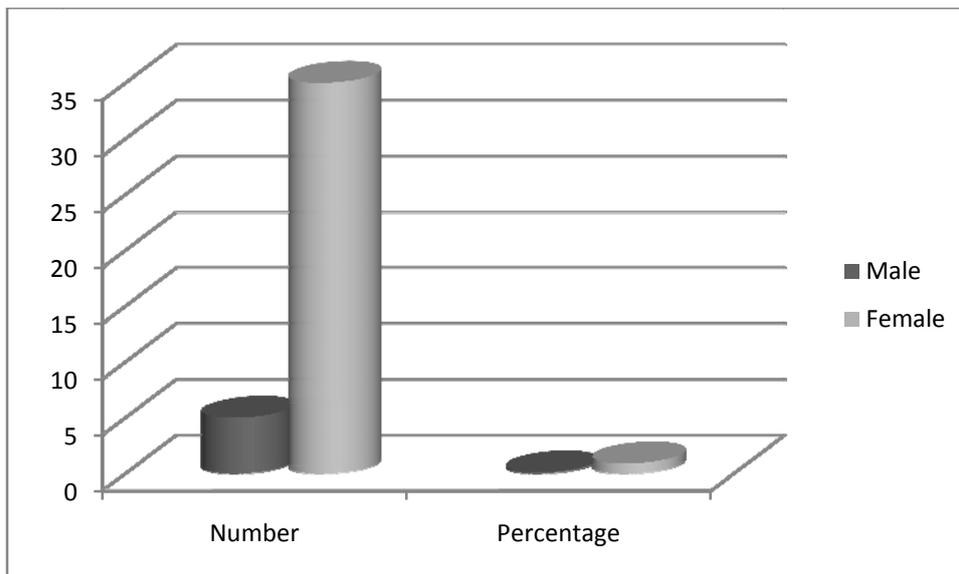
## Student's responses:

### Section one: General information

#### Item one: gender

Gender	Number	Female
Male	5	10%
Female	35	90%
Total	40	100%

**Table1 : Student's gender.**



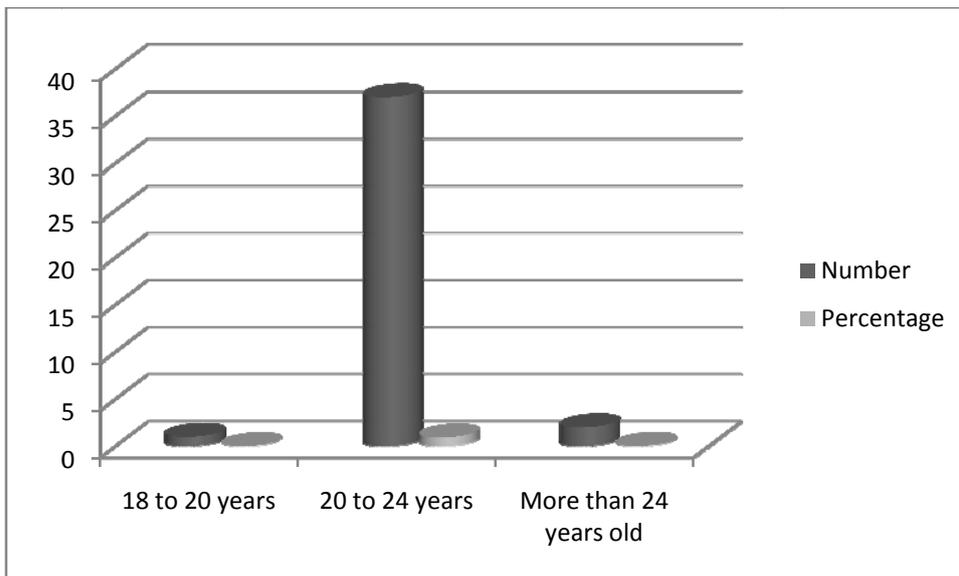
**Figure4: Student's gender.**

The sample we choose is highly constituents of female gender with the big percentage. The male gender as it seems less than female gender. Five males in thirty five females, in other words equal one eightieth exactly. The gender variable is eliminated from our study because the tow percentages are not near.

**Item tow: Age**

Age	Number	Percentage
18 to 20 years	1	2%
20 to 24 years	37	93%
More than 24 years old	2	5%
Total	40	100%

**Table2: Student’s age.**



**Figure5: Student’s age.**

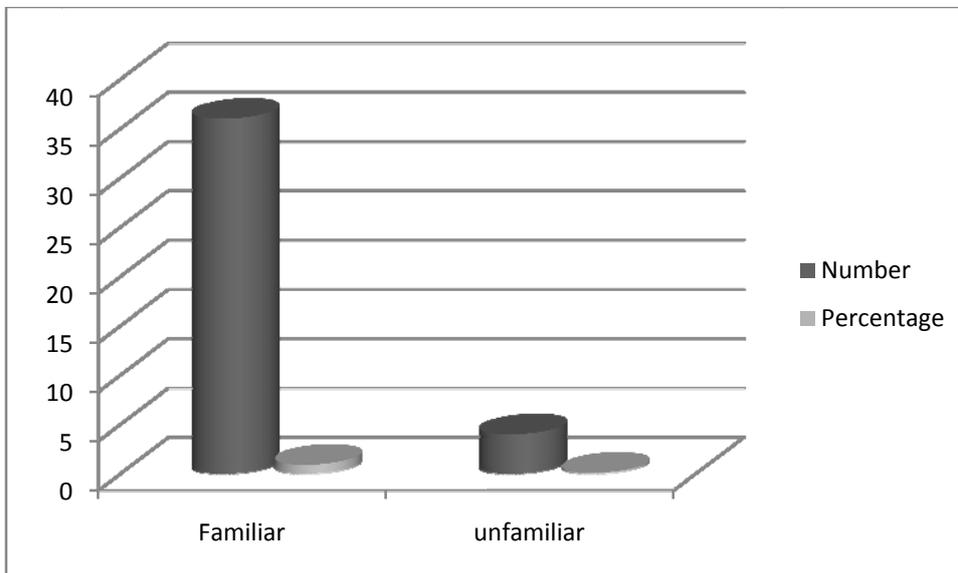
We have forty students in this sample one of them is less than twenty years old, tow are more than twenty-four years old. The rest group is between twenty and twenty-four years old includes 37 students. This means that our sample age is about twenty to twenty-four; it is acceptable data according to the population of study which is second year English LMD.

## Section tow: Listening Skill

### Item one: Listening familiarity towards students:

	Familiar	unfamiliar
Number	36	4
Percentage	90%	10%

**Table3: Listening familiarity.**



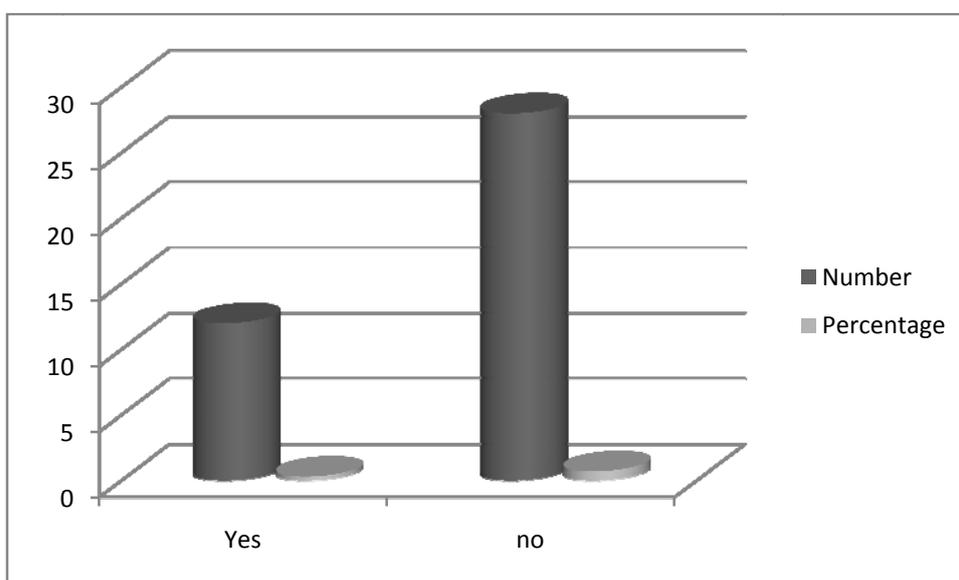
**Figure6: Listening familiarity towards students.**

Here the listening familiarity seems that is in high level from the question of; is listening skill familiar? Also students know what listening skill is, even with no techniques studied or direct sessions in listening as skill included in the programme of teaching. Moreover, these results prove that students are always having listening experience through watching to audiovisual documents, and engaging in conversations with a kind of passion to improve their proficiency in English.

**Item two: English listening experiences in laboratories towards students:**

	Yes	no
Number	12	28
Percentage	30%	70%

**Table4: English listening experiences in laboratories towards students.**



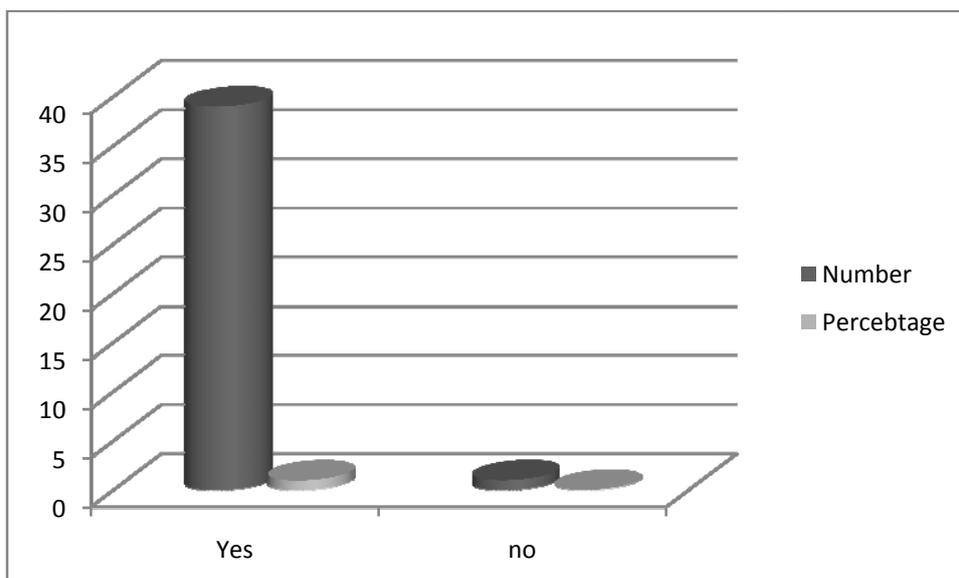
**Figure7: English listening experiences in laboratories towards students.**

From the recent above we can deduce that students are even they do not know language laboratories or few sessions in laboratory are not sufficient to improve their language level. The less of laboratories in the university was proved by students in their responses with a high percentage because 70% they do not study even one session in laboratories. The others 12 students study in laboratories but it is a weak percentage to generalize it. As final analysis this ignorance of students for laboratories depends on many problems; the pedagogical problem is at high level than the time included especially in phonetics and oral expression modules.

### Item three: The importance of oral expression session

	Yes	no
Number	39	1
Percebtage	97,50%	2,50%

**Table5: The importance of oral expression session.**



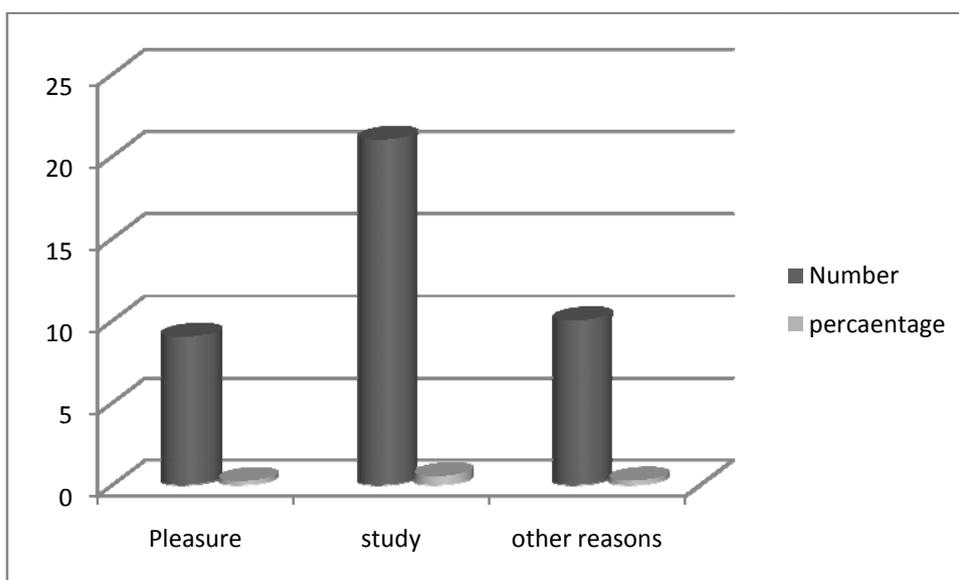
**Figure8: The importance of oral expression session.**

Most of students are aware about listening in oral expression sessions. From the responses above that represent in table and its graph the high percentage prove that students are fully concentrated while the teacher or their classmates presenting works in oral expression lectures. Also we can obtain another advantage which is the ability to be good listeners that positively affect on the speaking skill of them. Our study focuses on the psychological side of the students too, so the students are glad to study oral expression may this result depends on the teacher's advices and guides.

#### Item four: Kinds of listening

	Pleasure	study	other reasons
Number	9	21	10
percaentage	22,50%	52,50%	25%

**Table6: Kinds of listening.**



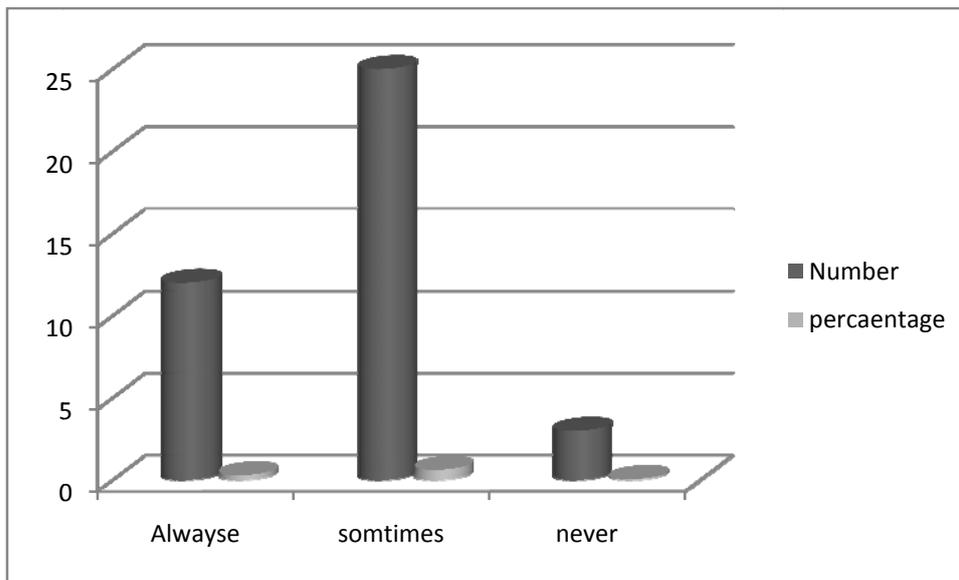
**Figure9: Kinds of listening.**

In this item we intent to explore if students use a different aims to listen or not. Form the above table and graph students are interested in study more than the other reason in listening because they are students. The study option is in high level as it seems by 52.5% whereas listening for pleasure is 22.5% and 25% listen for other reasons. In addition, when students listen to listening documents they are leaning or focusing what is useful in study like the related and academic items. Most students feed their knowledge in language especially when they are foreigners and using watched and audio aids in this development.

**Item five: Teacher advices in oral expression to read, to watch listening documents, and discussing in session.**

	Alwayse	somtimes	never
Number	12	25	3
percaentage	30%	63%	7%

**Table6: Teacher advices.**



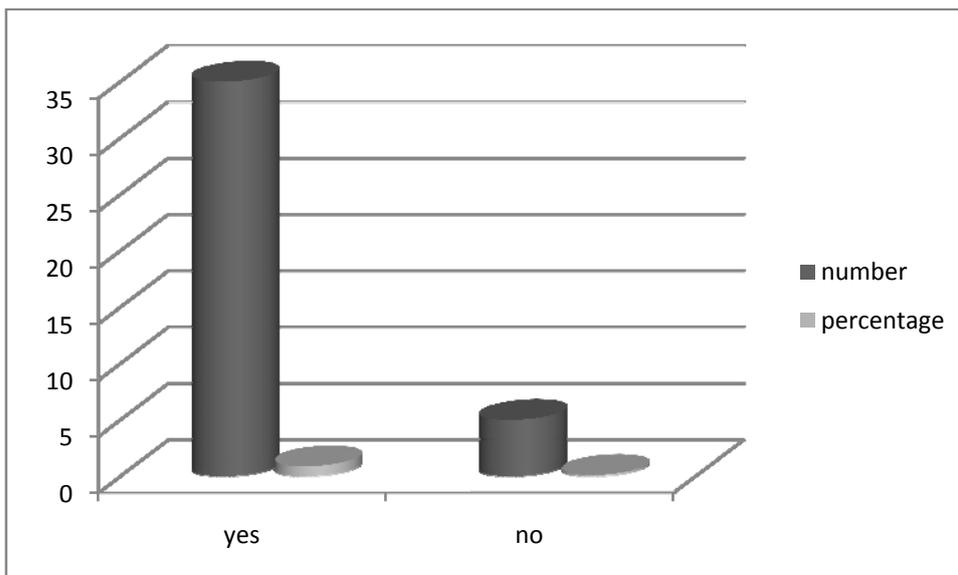
**Figure10: Teacher advices.**

Now the role of teachers as they are leaders not bosses. From the recent results we remarque that teachers role in guiding students and advise them is not always and weak of being the first helper in class and outside.

**Item six: Understanding a non-native speaker ( teacher, classmate...)**

	yes	no
Number	35	5
Percentage	88%	12%

**Table7: Understanding a non-native speaker (teacher, classmate...).**



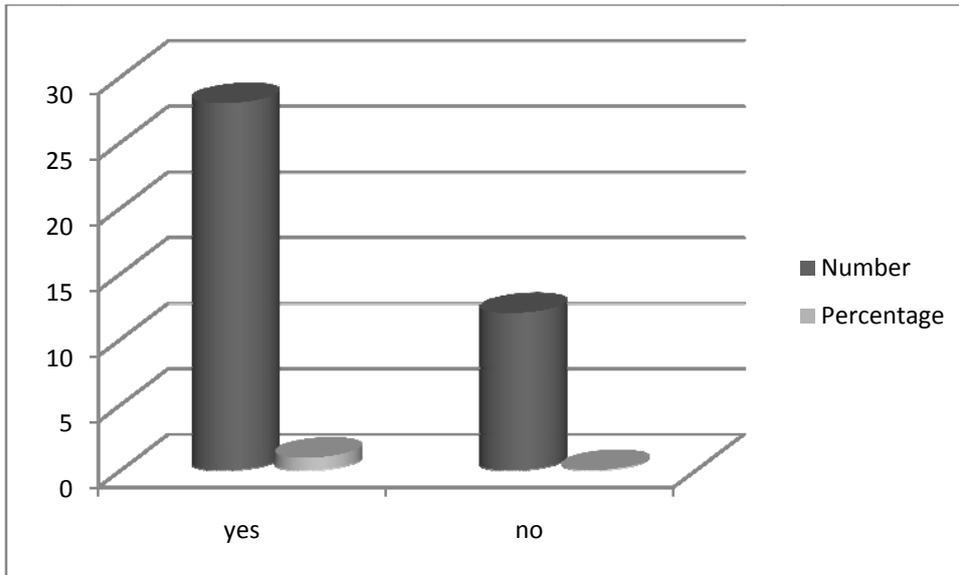
**Figure11: Understanding a non-native speaker (teacher, classmate...).**

Here the results are clear that 88% is proving our needs from the planned question which is about the ability to understand a speaker from the same degree of language like classmate or the teacher. This high percentage clarify that there is no difficulty to understand and receive the message while listening task from the students. Students engage in speech at university exactly in classrooms which is the first setting interact between each other effectively so no problem that students suffer when they interact in their setting or our context in general.

**Item seven: Oral expression interaction and effective atmosphere**

	yes	no
Number	28	12
Percentage	97%	3%

**Table8: Oral expression interaction and effective atmosphere.**



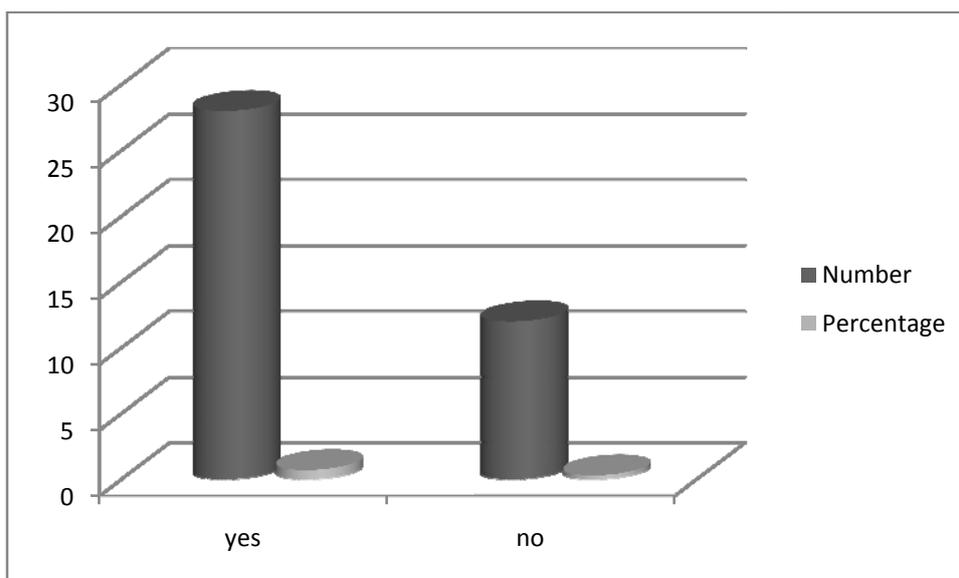
**Figure12: Oral expression interaction and effective atmosphere.**

The oral expression effective atmosphere is created. The percentage 97% and answer “yes” from 28 students that represent the majority of our sample proves that at list half of students are always participating in each group. Furthermore, the effective atmosphere created by the students negates the difficulty which is an obstacle in their way to learning.

**Item eight: Oral expression teacher and his usage of different methods while teaching**

	yes	no
Number	28	12
Percentage	70%	30%

**Table9: Oral expression teacher and his usage of different methods while teaching.**



**Figure13: Oral expression teacher and his usage of different methods while teaching.**

The recent result indicates that students are satisfied; they study oral expression with their teacher in a very interesting teaching method. The 70% shows that this good percentage allows us to generalize the pervious aimed question, though a 30% of students pick “no” option; they are not satisfied with the teacher method. But the majority of students prove the result by adding some of these items that come below:

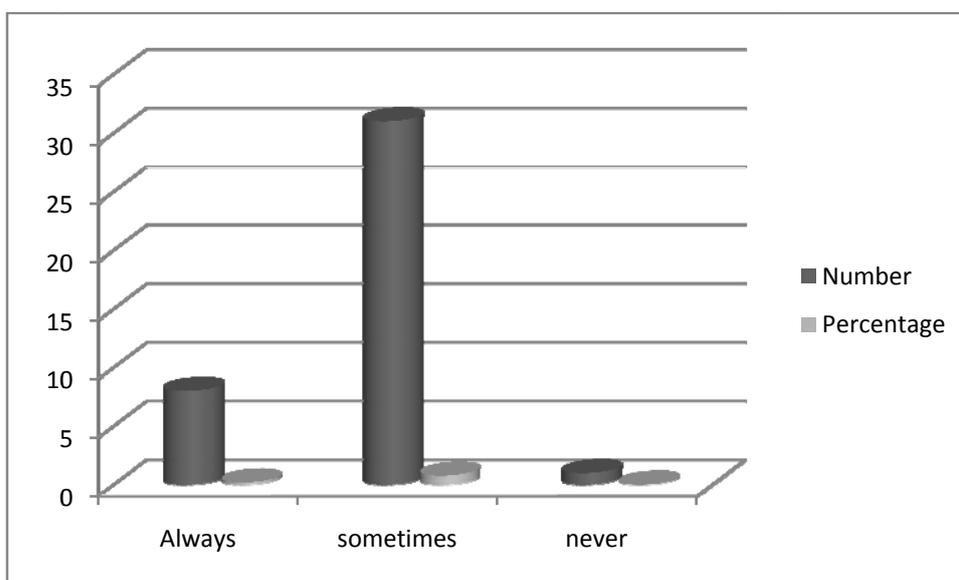
- playing games
- listening to music
- doing plays
- competition
- discussing issues
- Monologues
- To pronounce a special word in different accents

## Section two: Listening Complexity

### Item one: Ability to remember watching documents after a listening

	Always	sometimes	never
Number	8	31	1
Percentage	20%	78%	2%

**Table10: Ability to remember watching documents after a listening task.**



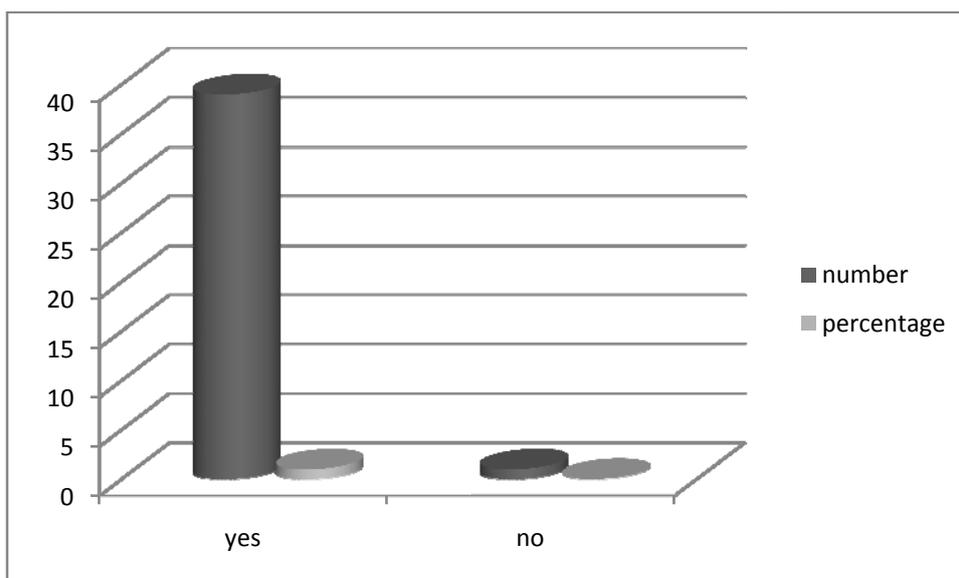
**Figure14: Ability to remember watching documents after a listening task.**

In regarding to the table results obtained above, 31 students pick “sometimes” option which indicates 78% as high percentage appeared in the graph. Here the aim from this question and responses is to test the students working memory model whether the model work correctly or not. The working memory model saves and helps the student to multiply his system to control the speaker message appropriately. The results and high percentage is the proof to deduce that students are keeping the listening task items, but some of them suffering when try to use the listening tasks items.

### Item two: The usefulness of watching documents

	yes	no
Number	39	1
Percentage	98%	2%

**Table11: The usefulness of watching documents.**



**Figure15: The usefulness of watching documents.**

The majority pick the “yes” option; we resulted the 98% as the high percentage in the table and represented in the graph. Students use the watching documents to enrich their language knowledge according to their interests. Also the aim from this question is the student’s answers which are in relation to students attitudes towards any audiovisual documents. After they answer the yes/ no question, we intent to provide another probability to fulfil our needs as these usefulness interns of:

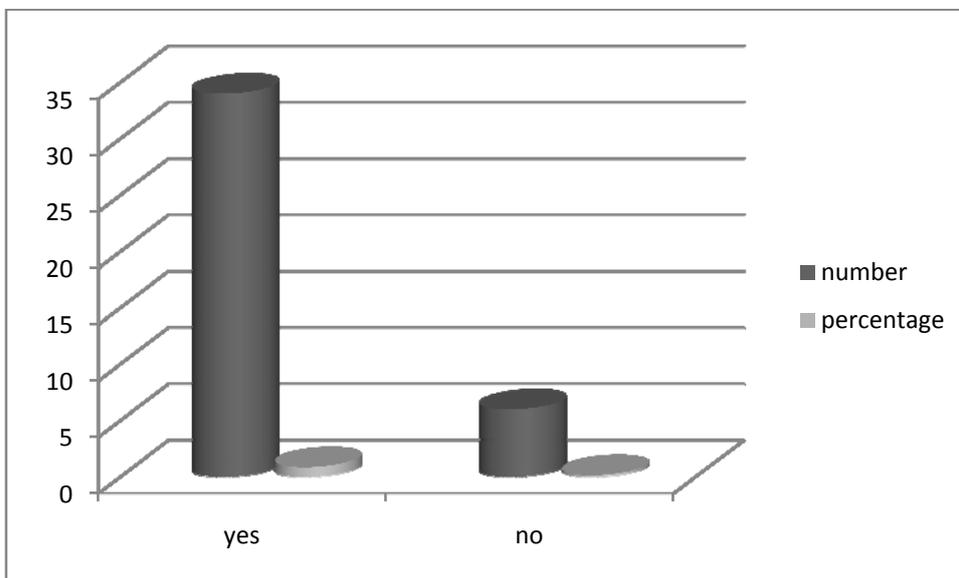
- culture
- vocabulary
- fluency
- speaking language

After gathering the answers, it shows that the majority of students pick the speaking language and culture options. But finally we find that speaking language option has the high percentage. Students and their level reflex the needs of them as speaking language is the first skill that should master.

**Item three: Student’s ability to receive the message after listening task**

	yes	no
number	34	6
percentage	85%	15%

**Table12: Student’s ability to receive the message after listening task.**



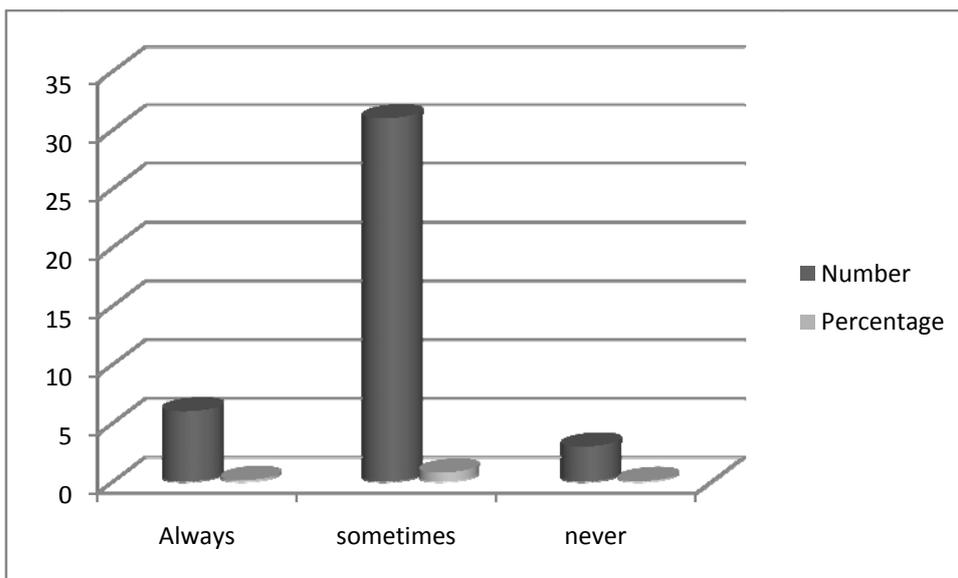
**Figure16: Student’s ability to receive the message after listening task.**

The above 85% is the resulted high percentage, shows that most of students are able to receive their message when they speaking. But six students in this sample picked the “no” option which is 15% which is eliminated from the study.

**Item four: Degree of understanding foreign students in casual conversations**

	Always	sometimes	never
Number	6	31	3
Percentage	15%	78%	7%

**Table13: Degree of understanding foreign students in casual conversations.**



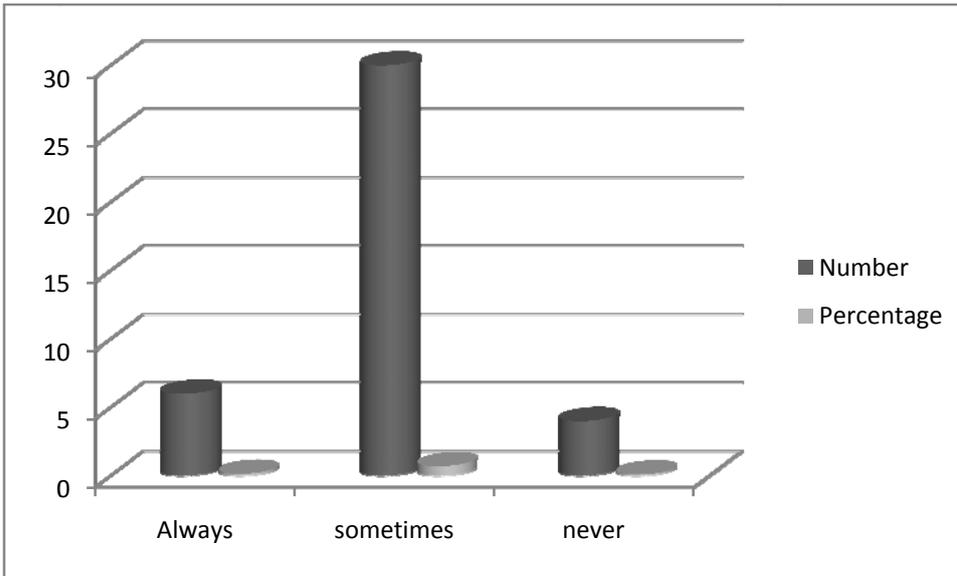
**Figure17: Degree of understanding foreign students in casual conversations.**

Understanding a foreign speaker is quite easy where the appropriate context. "sometimes" option takes the high percentage which is 78% as top. From the table and the graph we obtain that most of students have the passion to interact between each other inside the classroom or outside. Different settings and contexts which the speech occurs are the first reason to make these part responses various.

**Item five: Degree of hardness to understand a show, song, or any watched document**

	Always	sometimes	never
Number	6	30	4
Percentage	15%	70%	10%

**Table14: Degree of hardness to understand a show, song, or any watched document.**



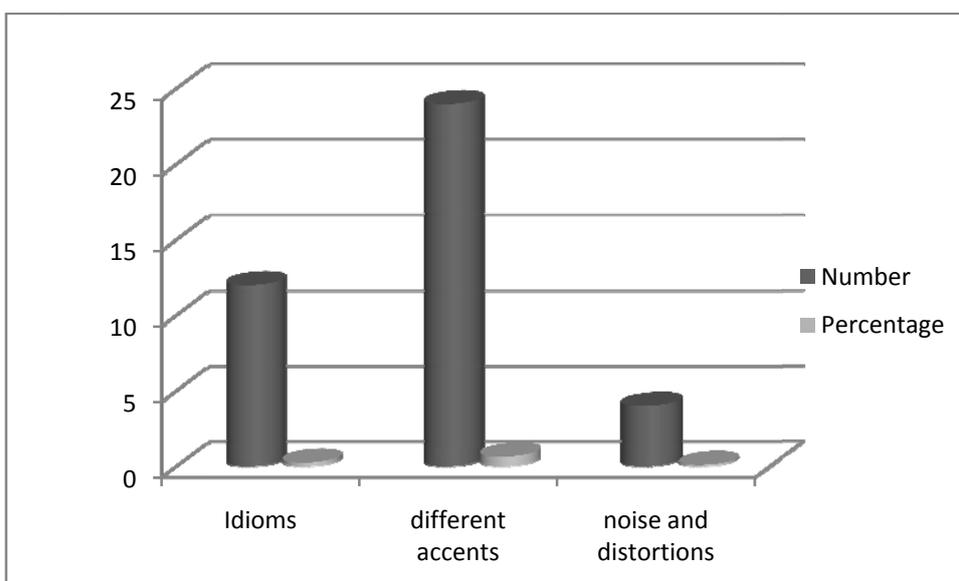
**Figure18: degree of hardness to understand a show, song, or any watched document.**

The high percentage shows that there is a hardness or difficulty when students listen to any TV show or listening document. The students pick “sometimes” option which is 70% from the total, three fourth of the majority. Indeed, this high percentage proves that the difficulty of grasping the listening documents meaning by students.

**Item six: Reasons of the listening misunderstanding**

	Idioms	different accents	noise and distortions
Number	12	24	4
Percentage	25%	65%	10%

**Table15: Reasons of the listening misunderstanding.**



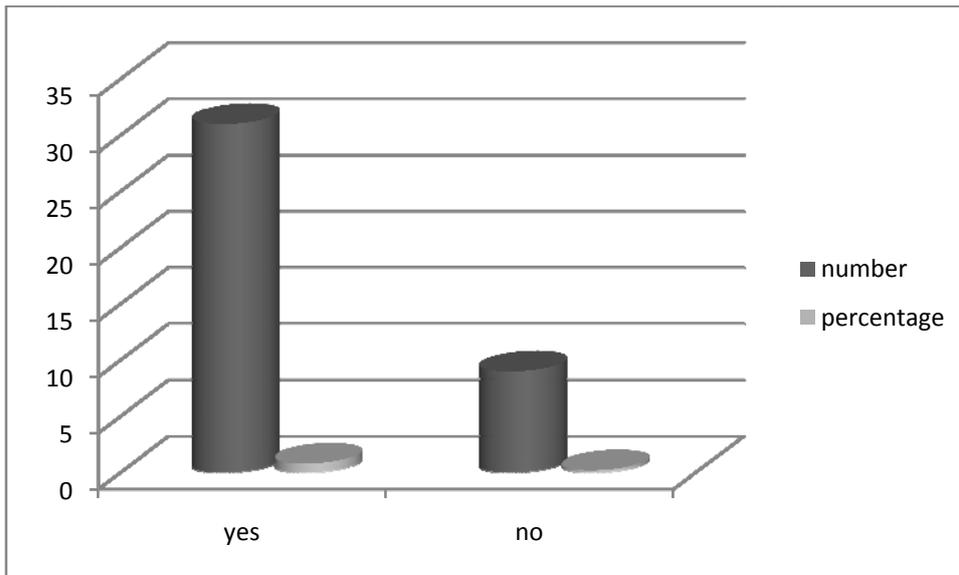
**Figure19: Reasons of the listening misunderstanding.**

The aim of this question is to determine the several reasons that lead to meaning grasping difficulty towards listening documents and student's degree of understanding. Students' opinions go to "the different accents" option with a percentage of 65% from the whole results. Picking this option from students refers to "the language shock" that depends on the various varieties of language (as accents, dialects, jargons, and may be slangs).

**Item seven: The usefulness of pauses in understanding listening tasks**

	yes	no
Number	31	9
Percentage	80%	20%

**Table16: the usefulness of pauses in understanding listening tasks.**



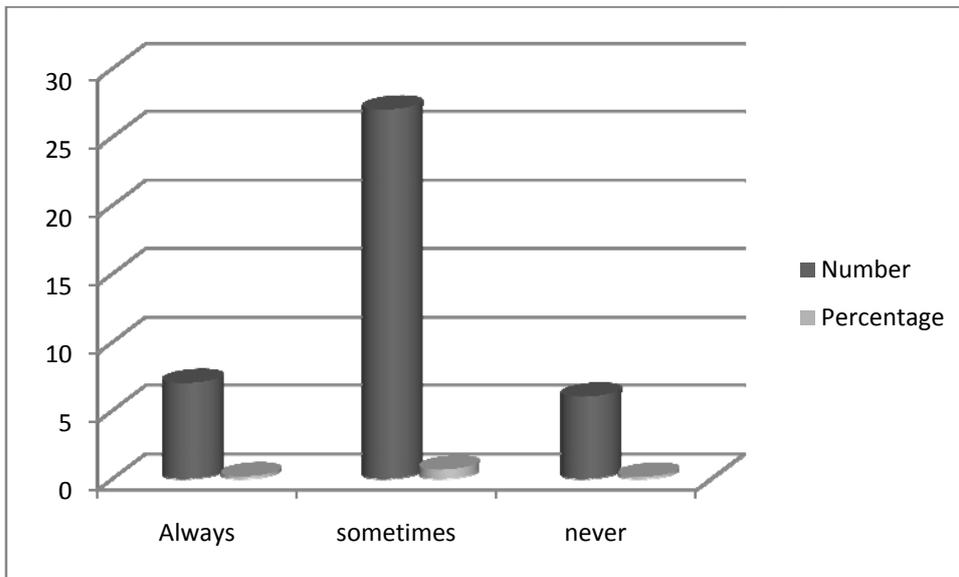
**Figure20: The usefulness of pauses in understanding listening tasks.**

As above students understand how “pauses” increase the ability to grasp meaning and interact appropriately in the context which is full of pauses. The 80% lead us that students find easy to understand the speaker message when he/she use pauses in speech; this also proves that students have no difficulty with the same person level in the foreign language. Hence, one third of students are not satisfied that pauses in speech have no benefits to attain the proper meaning to receive the message.

**Item eight: The negative influence of listener-students in understanding a message by the speed of the speech**

	Always	sometimes	never
Number	7	27	6
Percentage	18%	67%	15%

**Table17: The negative influence of listener students in understanding a message by the speed of the speech.**



**Figure21: The negative influence of listener students in understanding a message by the speed of the speech.**

We notice here that the students have chosen the option "sometimes", as a reflection to their problem of getting to grips with a rapid speech. And the other way around, there is an easy understanding when the speaker is slow in the speech. The percentage of 70% shows that students have a difficulty to understand a rapid speaker directly reflex their weakness to receive the message especially when they try to engage in a conversation.

## Discussion

The participant students are from both males and females. We have five males whereas thirty-five are from female gender as majority. The gender is not a variable that will feed our study about the listening challenges. So we can eliminate this factor than assume that students are just learners of English as a foreign language in the university exactly second year LMD.

The students' average age is from twenty to twenty-four that represent the majority of them. We have just three students, their age is different from the majority (as one student is less than twenty years old, and two are more than twenty-four years old). Also the age factor does not affect on the recent study at all.

The experience of learning English is closely equal, two years of learning English in the university as the same in previous levels by all students. Moreover, from the resulted percentages that we obtained before, the listening problems axed on factors related to the listener-students, the released passage, and the speech rate.

All most of students have aware that listening is an important as much as the speaking skill itself. From questionnaire answers about 90% as an acceptable percentage of the students agree with both the listening skill familiarity and the role of listening skill in oral expression module as considered the first context to practice our goaled skill by students. Indeed, oral expression teachers also contribute by great effort in the classrooms through creating a positive and effective atmosphere such as; discussing, listen to music, and request students to do plays and monologues. So the role in the classroom is full aimed and perfect also gives them advices at the end of the session, this has been revealed in the available percentage of 93%.

For instance, students are engaging in speech with a great passion but they did not use the knowledge background. In other words, both students and teacher do not appreciate the value of language laboratories in the university. We found that that 70% of the students in our sample they do not study oral expression and phonetics in the lab even a once in two years of studying English at university.

However, many students are interested in study and academic items more than pleasure and the other kinds of listening. This great interesting is only to grasp and earn the

academic expressions and items, as a reason they will be weak in pragmatic and cultural knowledge to interpret the correct meaning.

From the obtained results we find, students have a problem to save items after the listening documents this is a reflexion of ignorance about techniques that lead the listening process work for each students effectively. The 78% from random sample students pick “sometimes” option when they are questioned, which refer to lack of some difficult and non-familiar items such as; foreign proper nouns.

The students interests show that 98% are able to enrich their knowledge in the language after listen to any audiovisual documents. Most of them pick “yes” option that poses to explore the students’ focuses after the listening document, than after comparing the answers it appeared that culture and speaking language are the most pointed from students. Hence, now it is the first proof that students needs axed on the problem of the speaking language and grasping the culture terms, more than vocabulary and fluency.

Also students’ opinions prove that their misunderstanding is caused by the different accents as high percentage. We can deduce that noise and distortions stand as an obstacle in front of students’ understanding when try to grasp meaning and receive the message; as the external factor with representation of 10%. Idioms and informal expression make students express the difficulty that illustrated in the lake of the foreign language knowledge by 25%, so idioms and informal expressions are main factor to make listening difficult without any adopt.

We know that pauses facilitate the speaker message towards the listener-student in on hand, in other hand we found that speed in speech was represented by 85%. The distinction proves that students influenced by the speech rate factor with various variable though, students pick “sometimes” option in the matter of the speed in speech and its effects on them. But as the result without regarding to some variables, students have a problem in speech rate with high percentage proved in their responses through our questionnaire.

## **Conclusion:**

In this chapter, the obtained results from the students responses show that the main challenges face them are both in the tow external factors. In the case of the passage students prove that their foreign language is weak to receive the message after listening tasks in general. In addition, the speech rate is an obstacle in front of student's developmental level in great degree even when they are answered tows last questions in the second section from our questionnaire.

## **General conclusion**

The aim behind this dissertation is to do a deep investigation on listening difficulty that faces students in second English LMD in the university. From the obtained results in student's questionnaire, we have a general idea about the problems of listening skill in English language towards students' developmental proficiency to enhance their speaking language. The majority of students contribute by provide the appropriate responses to reach the goal of this study, our sample includes 40 students.

After the statistical analysis of the students' responses, we found that students have the lack of the foreign language knowledge, this weakness prove that students are obliged to enrich their own knowledge in the English culture and items. The next foundation is the pedagogical organization to manage the practical sessions in oral expression and phonetics modules in language laboratories to raise listening and speaking proficiency as tow integral skills. Also the speech rate factor stands as obstacle in front of students when they mastering listening skill in the sake to raise speaking skill development.

English second year students must raise their knowledge in English as a foreign language studied from early levels. As pervious information of the four skills integration listening and reading represents as receptive skills, from this we suggest that mastering the reading skill techniques can raise the student's lack in the foreign language items and cultural disciplines. However, teachers are the fist guide to supervise, advise, and encourage students to engage in reading. Reading is the main source to earn language items especially with beginners and early levels.

The second factor axed that listening proficiency of students of second year English LMD, is about the ignorance of language laboratories that aid the students for raising listening skill such as; doing activities which are used to raise students listening skill. Also from the students' responses we found that students are not motivated enough to learn and understand what mean by the fourth skill importance to develop the language fluency. More than the great role that teachers play to motivate students, but the importance of the lab in learning the language is greater. The lab encourages students also to be always present in the class, indeed it is the place where board and other annexes of study are absents. Consistently, as we know that the learner psychological side is important to

achieve the best results in his learning trip of course the pedagogical responsibility should take in consideration the students needs.

The third problem that faces students to raise their listening skill to master speaking skill is when they want to receive the message in interaction with speakers. The speech rate stand as an obstacle to students, it is difficult to grasp a meaning than receive the appropriate message. This problem proves that students should select specific listening documents through drill and enforce their system of working memory by systematic-aimed practices. Oral expression teacher being him/her the responsible to supervise students in the sake of achieve their goals to be a good listeners.

The reason to say that our hypothesis is acceptable especially, when the recent investigation resulted that three main problem mentioned above and each problem represent also included in one of three contributory factors in listening difficulty. Though this investigation is not sufficient to cover or spot the light on listening problem that face English language learners. In addition, this theme is wide as more as the large of the skill we dealt with, so the listening problems should be discover in all educational levels.

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Students' questionnaire**

*Dear Student,*

*“An Investigation of listening challenges: A case study of second year LMD students at university of BISKRA” is the title of the Master’s degree dissertation I am preparing. Would you kindly allow me to benefit of your knowledge and by completing the attached questionnaire.*

### **Section One: General Information**

Gender: 1. Male   
2. Female

Age: 1. less than 20 years  2. 20 to 24 years  3. More than 24 years

Level: 2<sup>ed</sup> year LMD

## **Section Two: Listening Skill**

1. Is listening to oral English?

Familiar  unfamiliar

2. Have you studied English before at university in the laboratory?

Yes  no

-how often:

Many times

Few times

3. Is listening important when you study oral expression?

Yes  no

4. Do you listen for?

Pleasure  study  other reason

5. How often does your teacher advise you to read, to watch movies, and share ideas in oral expression lectures?

Always  sometimes  never

6. Do you understand a non-native speaker (teacher, classmate...)?

Yes  no

7. Do you discuss and share ideas in the oral expression lecture?

Yes  no

8. Does your oral expression teacher teach you listening comprehension through different methods?

Yes  no

-If yes can you mention them briefly?

-

-

-

-

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### **Section Three: Listening complexity**

1. Do you remember the words and items after watching an audiovisual document?

Always  sometimes  never

2. Are the watched documents useful to enrich your knowledge in English?

Yes  no

- In terms of:

A. culture

B. vocabulary

C. fluency

D. speaking language

3. Do you think after a listening task you have succeeded to receive the message?

Yes  no

4. Do you understand English foreign student in a casual conversation?

Always  sometimes  never

5. Do you find it hard to understand a TV show, radio news headlines, or even songs?

Always  sometimes  never

6. Is this misunderstanding related to?

A. Idioms and informal expressions

B. Different accents

C. Noise and distortion

7. Do pauses help you to understand what you hear?

Yes  no

8. Is the speed in speech decrease your capacity to understand the speaker message?

Always  sometimes  never