

## **THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY UNDERGRADUATE EFL STUDENTS WITH THEIR LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILLS IN PAAET, KUWAIT**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study identifies the difficulties encountered by EFL students with their listening comprehension skills in the English department at the College of Basic Education, Public Authority of Applied Education and Training (PAAET). The study was conducted using the descriptive approach which contained a sample of 357 EFL students. The results found that students encountered moderate difficulties during the three stages of listening: perception, parsing, and utilization. The strongest difficulty was during the first stage, perception, followed by parsing and utilization. These findings can shape classroom policies by constructing an EFL curriculum that emphasizes the role of listening comprehension and integrates listening skills in classroom activities.*

**KEYWORDS:** listening comprehension, perception, utilization, processing

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Listening skills in a second or foreign language classroom are essential for a conducive learning environment. Rost (1994) believed that listening skills foster effective learning because such skills act like a vehicle for providing and understanding input. This complements Hamouda's (2013) finding that listening skills allow for the acquisition of understandable input. Pourhosein and Ahmadi (2011) believed that among listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, listening is listed as the most important because it links understanding with communicating. With listening comprehension, learners attempt to construct meaning as they receive information from a listening source (Goss, 1982).

In Kuwait, English is taught as a foreign language from elementary school until high school. These EFL courses tend to focus on language structure, vocabulary functions, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Listening exercises are not included in classroom activities and are excluded from the English language curriculum. When these learners take university-level English classes, they encounter difficulties because they lack the listening skills required for the courses.

This situation is fairly common in countries that teach English as a second language. According to Hamouda (2013), as stated in Ulum (2015), EFL learners struggle with listening comprehension because schools and universities emphasize grammar, reading, and vocabulary. Listening and speaking skills are not addressed in the curriculum and instructional planning at large and as a result, are neglected in the classroom. Ulum (2015) states that the lack of listening comprehension skills is common among native English students yet strongly evident among non-native English students. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) suggest that the root of the problems lies in the absence of

listening exercises in textbooks, which, instead, focus on structure. Listening skills are unnoticed in English program practices which could be to the detriment of EFL students (Hamuddin, 2016; Sari, Putri, Herdi, & Hamuddin, 2018).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the process of listening itself and its five stages. The second section reviews the available literature that studied L2 learners' listening problems. The last section discusses studies on EFL learners' difficulties with listening comprehension.

### ***The Listening Process***

Listening is a pedagogical term that refers to speech recognition, speech perception, speech understanding, and spoken language understanding (Huei-Chun, 1998). Ulum (2015) describes listening as an active process; when we listen we not only listen to what is heard but connect it to familiar information. The listening process takes place over five stages: hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Tyagi's (2013) research found that (1), hearing is the perception of sound waves; learners must hear to listen, but they do not need to listen to hear, (2), to understand means to comprehend symbols the learners perceived, so, they must examine the meaning of the stimulus they perceived, (3), to remember means that a person has received, clarified, and retains a message, (4), evaluating necessitates the active learner to weigh evidence and sort fact from opinion, and specify the presence or absence of bias in a message, and (5), responding requires that learners complete the process by means of verbal or nonverbal feedback.

In essence, listening skills allow for the accumulation of language input (Hamouda, 2013). As evident in the phases of listening, most phases include recognition of meaning as produced by the sounds. Thus, listening comprehension is an integrative skill that allows for language learning and the acquisition of other language skills (Ulum, 2015). Rost (2002) and Hamouda (2013) define listening comprehension as an interactive process in which listeners construct and develop meaning. Listeners understand the oral input through sound discrimination, previous knowledge, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, and linguistic or non-linguistic clues. Overall, listening comprehension entails the various processes of understanding and making sense of spoken language.

### ***Classification of L2 Learners' Listening Difficulties***

Many researchers find that listening is a common difficulty among foreign language learners due to the complexity involved in successful listening, as well as barriers that learners may encounter, such as material barriers, information processing barriers, English language proficiency barriers, strategic barriers, and affective barriers (Field, 2008; Graham & Macaro, 2008, El-Dali, 2017; Kasriyati, 2019; Syaifullah, 2019). As Graham (2006) explained, "Many learners may find that they are less successful in listening than in other language areas" (p.178). He argued that this may be the case due to uncontrollable factors such as the speaker's speaking space or the speaker's accent. Researchers (Anderson, 1995; Goh, 2000; Vandergrift, 2003) studied L2 learners' listening

comprehension skills, specifically investigating issues that may arise during the three phases of listening: perception, parsing, and utilization.

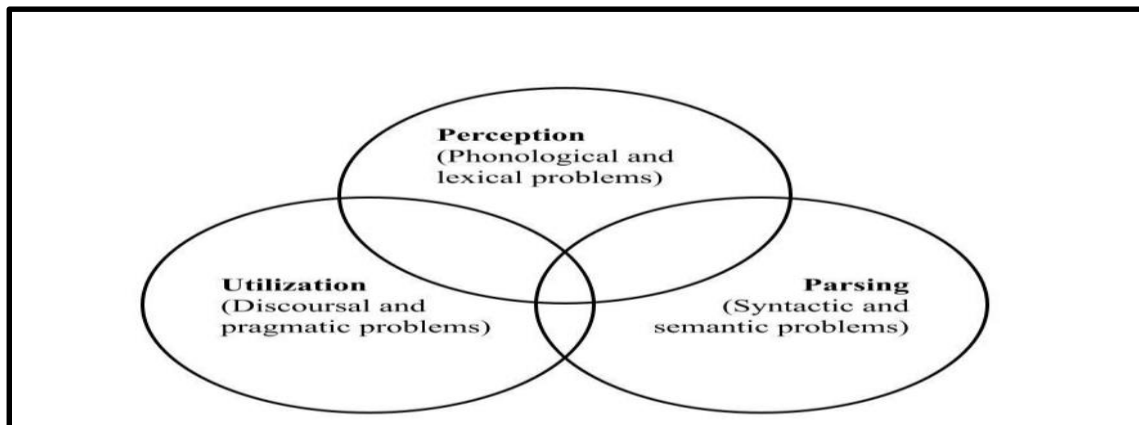


Figure 1. A Taxonomy of Listening Comprehension Problems (Adopted from Anderson, 1995; Goh, 2000; Vandergrift, 2003)

Perception is the first phase of the listening process. At its essence, perception involves maintaining attention to spoken input. Field (2008) explained that problems that arise during the perception stage are due to a listeners' inability to distinguish sounds in a stream of speech. Goh (2000) identified ten L2 learners listening problems, five of which are due to problems during the perception phase. Such problems include not recognizing known words when heard, neglecting the next part of a text while thinking about meaning, missing the beginning of a text, and the inability to concentrate. Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian, and Nimehchisalem (2015) divided perception issues into phonological problems and lexical problems. Regarding phonological problems, Ur (1984) stated that such problems arise due to a listener's inability to discern intonation, stress, and accents. Goh (1999) believed that other phonological problems included hesitations, interruptions, recurrent pauses and overlaps, as well as constant changes in rhythm of speech. As for lexical problems, a shortage of vocabulary is a dominant issue. Paran (1996) claimed that EFL listeners need to recognize 50% of the words in a text in order to understand the meaning of the text. With that in mind, Nation (2006) declared that a learner needs around 6,000 to 7,000 vocabulary items to understand 98% of an authentic text. Brown (2001) raised an important point about a common problem EFL learners tend to struggle with; EFL learners that are exposed to formal language in the classroom may struggle with reduced forms of language such as slang and idioms.

Parsing is the second phase of the listening process. At its essence, parsing involves holding information in one's short-term memory and making sense out of it. Issues with parsing tend to be syntactic and semantic in nature. Goh (2000) specified common syntactic problems, including, (1) quickly forgetting what is heard, (2) failure to format a mental representation from words heard, and (3) not understanding the subsequent parts of input

due to prior problems. Semantic problems occur when learners are preoccupied with the meaning of certain words thus losing the other parts of the text due to a limited processing capacity (Goh, 1999).

Utilization is the third phase of the listening process. At its essence, utilization involves using background knowledge to interpret the input and storing it. Problems during the utilization phase are typically pragmatic and discorsal in nature. Pragmatism refers to the ability to communicate meaning in a socially appropriate manner and interpret explicit and implicit meaning by relying on context (Thomas, 1995). As Taguchi (2008) described it, "A pragmatically competent person is linguistically competent and able to both assess contextual information and use linguistic resources appropriately according to context" (p.425). Discourse problems, according to Nowrouzi et al. (2015), arise when EFL learners cannot understand the flow of ideas in a connected speech, thus failing to recognize the overall organization of ideas. As demonstrated by the figure above, the three phases are nonlinear and interrelated. This means that listeners need to move from one phase to another in order to decode the message (Ulum, 2015).

### ***Studies on EFL Learners' Listening Problems***

In a recent study, Zur (2020) studied the difficulties that EFL learners typically encounter with listening comprehension at Muhammadiyah University of Kendari. She investigated the difficulties during the three phases of listening comprehension: perception, parsing, and utilization. She found while participants struggled during all phases, most difficulties were presented during the first phase, perception. The greatest difficulty during the perception phase was when EFL students missed the beginning of a text thus missing the remainder of the text. In the parsing stage, Zur found that remembering the meaning of a listening text was the greatest challenge. Zur's research suggested that the least amount of difficulties were presented during the utilization phase; a number of studies reported similar findings (Goh, 2000; Gao, 2014; Nurphami, 2015). According to Zur, the greatest challenge during the utilization phase was knowing the words but not the intended meaning. Zur justified this result with the lack of prior knowledge needed before engaging with a listening text. The lack of prior knowledge was also a common difficulty in other researches (Goh, 2000; Gao, 2014).

Norwrouzi et al. (2015) researched the listening comprehension problems of a group of 100 Iranian EFL learners and found that the learners experienced moderate to high levels of difficulties in all three phases of listening comprehension. During the perception stage, learners reported experiencing moderate to high degrees of difficulty in all areas of perception: concentration, speech rate, missing the beginning of a text, too many sounds, too many unfamiliar words, and missing subsequent parts of a text while thinking about an earlier section. Moreover, learners reported moderate to high levels of difficulty during the parsing stage, including topic unfamiliarity, sentential level problems, and a low processing capacity (too much information to process during a short amount of time). Most problems in the utilization stage are related to the general message of the text, the main ideas, supporting ideas, the relationship among main and supporting ideas, and sentence order.

Both Nowrouzi et al. and Zur (2002) found that utilization contained the lowest degree of difficulty compared to perception and parsing.

Hassan (2000) investigated students' self-perceived listening problems and he identified the following major problems: missing the beginning of the text, not recognizing words, unclear pronunciations, and rapid speech rate. Speech rate was a main concern in Goh's study (1999) and Flowerdew & Miller's study (1992). Goh found that 78% of participants believed that a rapid speech rate hindered their understanding. Hayati (2010) and Gilakjani & Sabour (2016) had similar findings claiming that a fast speech rate was a dominant problem during the perception stage. Furthermore, Liu (2002) identified a number of problems in his study: unfamiliarity with vocabulary, sound segmentation, word recognition, and over reliance on phonetic cues. Sa'diyah's study (2016), based on a group of EFL learners at a private university in Kuningan, found that accent pronunciation, speed of speech, and insufficient vocabulary are the main problems encountered during the listening comprehension process. Buck (2001) found that EFL learners tend to struggle with unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, a fast speech rate, and unfamiliar accents.

### **Significance of the Study**

Faculty members in the College of Basic Education notice low academic achievements of students due to their poor listening skills. This necessitates research on the listening problems that students typically encounter. The paper will investigate common listening problems of a group of students in the College of Basic Education, Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. Such research allows students to enhance their listening skills by calling attention to the necessary metacognitive skills needed to be successful learners. This research also uncovers the shortage of listening exercises in the English language curriculum as enacted by planners and administrators. Similarly, Nunan (1997) discussed the shortage of research as well as practice in EFL listening compared to reading comprehension research and practice.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The current research adopted the descriptive approach to examine common listening problems that students in the English department, College of Basic Education may encounter. The descriptive approach, relevant to the nature of the study, describes the phenomenon under study and analyzes its data. It also indicates the relationships between its components, the viewpoints raised on it, the processes included, and its effects. The researchers used a self-report survey methodology with several statistical tools.

#### **The study addressed the following research questions:**

1. What problems with listening comprehension do students in the English department encounter during the stage of perception?
2. What problems with listening comprehension do students in the English department encounter during the stage of parsing?

3. What problems with listening comprehension do students in the English department encounter during the stage of utilization?

### ***A- Participants***

The study sample consisted of students in the College of Basic Education, Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The College of Basic Education is a four year full-time teacher training program. The participants were female students enlisted in the College of Basic Education. The participants were randomly selected to answer the survey online on Microsoft Forms through their instructors. The study sample contained 357 undergraduate full-time students at different levels in terms of their GPA, major GPA, grade in conversation class, year, listening comprehension skill, and high school, as shown in the next table. They are enrolled in a program designed to graduate teachers to teach English as a foreign language in Kuwait's primary schools. The participants are taught by instructors in the Curriculum and Instruction Department and English Language Department.

**Table 1. Distribution of The Study Sample According to Demographic Variables**

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
GPA	1.00-1.99	12	3.4%
	2.00-2.99	153	%42.9
	3.00-3.99	188	%53.2
	4.00	4	%0.6
Major GPA	1.00-1.99	35	%9.8
	2.00-2.99	157	%44.0
	3.00-3.99	159	%44.5
	4.00	6	%1.7
Grade in Conversation Class	A	129	%36.1
	B	159	%44.5
	C	65	%18.2
	D	4	%1.1
Year	Year 1	18	%5.0
	Year 2	152	%42.6
	Year 3	119	%33.3
	Year 4	68	%19.0



Listening Comprehension Skill	Very good	80	%22.4
	Good	213	%59.7
	Fair	58	%16.2
	Poor	6	%1.7

### ***Instrument***

The instrument, Listening Comprehension Processing Problems Questionnaire (LCPPQ) was adopted from Nowrouzi, Tam, Nimehchislaem, and Zareian (2014). They developed the questionnaire based on related literature and theory (e.g., Anderson, 1995; Goh, 2000; and Liu, 2002). The questionnaire has 23 items, scored on a five-point Likert scale. The first ten items cover problems with perception, items 11 through 17 cover problems with parsing, and items 18 through 23 cover problems with utilization. The developers of the instrument reported an acceptable internal reliability of (0.80).

### ***Validity of the Questionnaire***

The validity of the questionnaire was verified using external validity and internal consistency. In regards to external validity, the questionnaire was presented to a group of arbitrators specialized in English. The questionnaire was amended according to their suggestions. The validity and content of the questionnaire was approved by the arbitrators. In regards to internal consistency, the questionnaire was confirmed by calculating the correlation coefficient between each item and the total degree of the dimension it belongs to. The correlation coefficient between each dimension and the total degree of the questionnaire obtained from the pilot study was applied to a sample consisting of 50 female students in the English department. The statistical package (SPSS) was used to calculate correlation coefficients using Pearson Correlation. The following two tables display the results.

**Table 2. Correlations Between each Item and The Total Degree of The Questionnaire**

Items	Correlations	Items	Correlations	Items	Correlations
Perception Problems		9	0.571**	17	0.652**
1	0.685**	10	0.710**	Utilization Problems	
2	0.752**	Parsing Problems		18	0.763**
3	0.546**	11	0.702**	19	0.818**
4	0.476**	12	0.720**	20	0.762**
5	0.702**	13	0.755**	21	0.775**
6	0.674**	14	0.733**	22	0.780**
7	0.658**	15	0.714**	23	0.722**
8	0.688**	16	0.685**		

(\*\*) Correlation is significant at the (0.01) level

The previous table indicates the correlation between each item and the total degree of the dimension it belongs to. It's statistically significant at the level of significance of (0.01). The correlation between perception problems and the total degree of the dimension ranged between (0.476- 0.752). The correlations between parsing problems and the total degree of the dimension ranged between (0.652- 0.755). The correlations between utilization problems and the total degree of the dimension ranged between (0.722- 0.818). This indicates the internal consistency and thus the validity of the construction.

**Table 3. Correlations Between each Dimension and The Total Degree of The Questionnaire**

Dimension	Correlations
Perception Problems	0.897**
Parsing Problems	0.891**
Utilization Problems	0.900**

Correlation is significant at the (0.01) level (\*\*)

The table above indicates that the correlation between each dimension and the total degree of the questionnaire are high, significant at the significance level of (0.01), and ranged between (0.891- 0.900). This asserts the internal consistency and the validity of the construction.



***Reliability of the Questionnaire***

The questionnaire's reliability coefficient was calculated by finding Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for each dimension of the questionnaire through the statistical package (SPSS) after applying it to the pilot sample as displayed in the following table.

**Table 4. Reliability Correlations of the Questionnaire's Dimensions**

Dimension	No. of Items	Alpha
Perception Problems	10	0.80
Parsing Problems	7	0.82
Utilization Problems	6	0.83
Total Questionnaire	23	0.86

Based on the previous table, the dimensions of the questionnaire are characterized by a degree of statistically significant reliability. The reliability correlations of the questionnaire as a whole reached (0.86), and the reliability correlations of the dimensions ranged between (0.80-0.83). Thus, the results obtained when applied to the study sample are credible. To determine the degree of difficulties encountered by students with their listening comprehension, a five-point Likert scale was used. From the five-point scale, the responses were divided into three levels as follows.

$$\text{Category Length} = \text{Range} / \text{Numbers of Levels (high, moderate, low)}$$

$$\text{Range} = \text{greatest value of categories (5)} - \text{smallest value of categories (1)} = 4$$

$$\text{Category Length} = 4/3 = 1.33$$

$$\text{Add 1.33 to the end of each category}$$

$$\text{Minimum} = 1 + 1.33 = 2.33$$

$$\text{Mean} = 2.33 + 1.33 = 3.66$$

$$\text{Maximum} = 3.67 \text{ or more}$$

An arithmetic mean that ranges between (3.67-5) indicates that the degree of difficulty is high. An arithmetic mean that ranges between (2.34-3.66) indicates that the degree of difficulty is moderate. An arithmetic mean that ranges between (1.00-2.33) indicates that the degree of difficulty is low.

***Statistical Treatment***

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to input data to be treated in order to answer the questions of the study, including tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, One Way ANOVA, and the Scheffe Test.

The following section displays the results of the study after conducting the statistical analysis of the data. To answer the study questions, the responses of the study sample were collected and processed statistically using the statistical package (SPSS) to get the arithmetic means and standard

deviations of each item in the questionnaire. The following section presents and discusses the results.

## RESULTS

### First Question: What problems with listening comprehension do students in the English department encounter during the stage of perception?

The frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations were calculated for each item in the first dimension and then arranged in accordance with the arithmetic means, as shown in the following table.

**Table 5. Percentages, Arithmetic Means, and Standard Deviations of Problems During Perception**

Items	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	Std. Deviation	Order According to Mean	Level
I can hear the sounds but not clear words	7.84	38.66	31.09	18.49	3.92	2.72	0.98	6	Moderate
I find it difficult to understand speakers that speak too fast	7.56	32.49	27.73	20.45	11.76	2.96	1.14	3	Moderate
I find it difficult when I miss the beginning of the text	3.92	22.13	42.58	24.37	7.00	3.08	0.95	2	Moderate
I know all the meanings of the words that I see	3.92	20.73	40.06	26.89	8.40	3.15	0.97	1	Moderate
While listening, I am slow in recalling the meaning of familiar words	6.72	34.73	32.77	22.13	3.64	2.81	0.98	5	Moderate
I find it difficult to understand a listening text that contain too many unfamiliar words or expression	5.60	24.37	43.98	21.85	4.20	2.95	0.92	4	Moderate

While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words	10.08	41.18	26.89	18.21	3.64	2.64	1.01	9	Moderate
I find it difficult not recognizing so many sounds and words	9.24	36.41	34.17	17.65	2.52	2.68	0.95	7	Moderate
When thinking about meanings of unfamiliar words, I neglect the next part of the listening text	17.93	31.93	22.41	21.85	5.88	2.66	1.17	8	Moderate
I find it difficult to concentrate on listening	13.73	49.86	25.49	8.40	2.52	2.36	0.91	10	Moderate
The general mean of the dimension						2.80	1.00	-	Moderate

The table above demonstrates the problems during the first phase of listening, perception. The data indicates that difficulties were moderate as demonstrated by an arithmetic mean of (2.80) and standard deviation of (1.00). The dimension includes ten items, all of which scored “moderate” in terms of difficulty. The fourth item, “I know all the meanings of the words that I see” earned the highest mean of (3.15), indicating that students ranked this item as the most difficult. As such, participants recognize written words faster compared to words from a listening text. The third item, “I find it difficult when I miss the beginning of the text” ranked second in terms of difficulty (3.08). The second item, “I find it difficult to understand speakers that speak too fast” ranked third in terms of difficulty (2.96). The sixth item, “I find it difficult to understand a listening text that contains too many unfamiliar words or expressions” ranked fourth in terms of difficulty (2.95). The fifth item, “While listening, I am slow in recalling the meaning of familiar words” earned fifth in terms of difficulty (2.81). The seventh item, “While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words” and the tenth item, “I find it difficult to concentrate on listening” were ranked the least difficult with a value of (2.64) and (2.36), respectively.

### Second Question: What problems with listening comprehension do students in the English department encounter during the stage of parsing?

The frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations were calculated for each item in the second dimension and then arranged in accordance with the arithmetic means, as shown in the following table.

**Table 6. Percentages, Arithmetic Means, and Standard Deviations of Problems During Parsing**

Items	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	Std. Deviation	Order According to Mean	Level
I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just read	11.48	42.86	30.53	13.73	1.40	2.51	0.92	5	Moderate
I find it difficult to understand the meaning of sentences	25.77	49.86	21.57	1.68	1.12	2.03	0.80	7	Moderate
I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text	17.65	50.14	25.21	4.20	2.80	2.24	0.89	6	Moderate
I find it difficult to guess the accurate meaning of words in sentences	10.92	28.57	40.90	18.49	1.12	2.70	0.93	4	Moderate
I find it difficult to follow unfamiliar topics	8.12	29.13	38.94	20.45	3.36	2.82	0.96	2	Moderate
I find it difficult to understand a lot of new information in a short time	7.00	20.17	31.37	31.37	10.08	3.17	1.08	1	Moderate
While listening, I miss the next part because of short-term memory	5.04	38.94	30.81	21.29	3.92	2.80	0.96	3	Moderate
The general mean of the dimension						2.61	0.93	-	Moderate

The table above illustrates the problems during the second phase of listening, parsing. The data indicates that difficulties were moderate as demonstrated by an arithmetic mean of (2.61) and a standard deviation of (0.93). The dimension includes seven items, all of which scored “moderate” in terms of difficulty. The sixteenth item, “I find it difficult to understand a lot of new information in a short time” earned the highest mean of (3.17), indicating that students ranked this item as the

most difficult. The fifteenth item, “I find it difficult to follow unfamiliar topics” ranked second in terms of difficulty (2.82). The seventeenth item, “While listening, I miss the next part of the text because of short-term memory” ranked third in terms of difficulty (2.80). The thirteenth item, “I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text” and the twelfth item, “I find it difficult to understand the meaning of sentences” ranked the least difficult with a value of (2.24) and (2.03), respectively.

### **Third Question: What problems with listening comprehension do students in the English department encounter during the stage of utilization?**

The frequencies, percentages, arithmetic means, and standard deviations were calculated for each item in the third dimension and then arranged in accordance with the arithmetic means, as shown in the following table.

**Table 7. Percentages, Arithmetic Means, and Standard Deviations of Problems During Utilization**

Items	Strongly Agree %	Agree %	Neutral %	Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Mean	Std. Deviation	Order According to Mean	Level
I understand the words but not the intended message of the text	5.04	38.94	30.81	21.29	3.92	2.58	0.98	1	Mode rate
I find it difficult to get the order of ideas in a text	10.36	41.46	32.21	11.48	4.48	2.42	0.86	5	Mode rate
When I listen to texts in English, I get confused as I try to understand the main idea of the text	10.08	50.70	28.29	9.24	1.68	2.23	0.84	6	low
I find it difficult to get detailed information from a text	16.81	51.82	24.09	6.16	1.12	2.48	0.92	4	Mode rate
While listening, I find it difficult to connect all the ideas of a text	10.08	48.18	27.45	11.76	2.52	2.50	0.91	3	Mode rate
I find it difficult to understand the supporting ideas of a text	11.48	43.14	31.09	12.61	1.68	2.57	0.88	2	Mode rate
The general mean of the dimension						2.46	0.90	-	Mode rate

The table above illustrates the problems during the third phase of listening, utilization. The data indicates that difficulties were moderate as demonstrated by an arithmetic mean of (2.46) and a standard deviation of (0.90). The dimension includes six items, all of which scored “moderate” in terms of difficulty except for the twentieth item, “When I listen to texts in English, I get confused as I try to understand the main idea of a text” ranking the lowest in terms of difficulty with a value of (2.23). The eighteenth item, “I understand the words but not the intended message” ranked the most difficult with a value of (2.58). The twenty-third item, “I find it difficult to understand the supporting ideas of a text” ranked second in terms of difficulty with a value of (2.57). The twenty-second item, “While listening, I find it difficult to connect all the ideas of a text” ranked third in terms of difficulty (2.50). Finally, the nineteenth item, “I find it difficult to get the order of ideas in a text” ranked low in terms of difficulty, with a value of (2.42).

## DISCUSSION

A body of studies found that EFL students that encounter difficulties with their listening comprehension skills during the three stages of listening negatively affects their ability to understand dialogue and to communicate. As such, listening is a difficult skill for foreign language learners as confirmed by many researchers studying second language acquisition. Other difficulties include the complexity of knowledge required for successful listening in addition to the many barriers that learners encounter, such as, material barriers, information processing barriers, English language proficiency barriers, strategic barriers, and affective barriers (Graham, 2006; Field, 2008; Graham & Macaro, 2008; El-Dali, 2017; Kasriyati, 2019; Syaifullah, 2019).

In regards to the first research question investigating the perception stage, our participants indicated that difficulties during the perception stage were “moderate.” Such problems include difficulties with understanding words from a listening text, difficulties with understanding the meaning of a text if the beginning was not understood, difficulties with understanding a fast speech rate, difficulties with deciphering too many unfamiliar words or expressions, the inability to recall the meaning of familiar words, the inability to hear clear words, difficulties with linking unfamiliar words with familiar words, difficulties with recognizing so many sounds and words, and difficulties with concentration on listening in general. These problems tend to be phonological or lexical in nature. Researcher Nowrouzi et al. (2015) found that during the perception stage, learners struggle with either phonological or lexical problems. A number of studies found that during the perception stage, the degree of difficulty fluctuates between moderate and high. Nowrouzi et al. believed that the greatest difficulty encountered was the lack of vocabulary needed for successful listening. Zur (2020) found that the greatest difficulty was missing the beginning of the text which affects understanding the remainder of the text. A number of studies reported that a fast speech rate was a significant problem encountered by EFL learners (Goh, 1999; Hassan, 2000; Flowerdew & Miller, 1992; Sa’diyah, 2016). Liu (2002), Hassan (2000), and Buck (2001) pointed to the unfamiliarity of vocabulary as the largest issue during the stage of perception.

In regards to the second research question investigating the parsing stage, our participants indicated that difficulties during the parsing stage were “moderate.” Such problems include difficulties with understanding a lot of new information, difficulties with following unfamiliar

topics, having a short-term memory, and difficulties with recalling the meaning of words. These problems are linked to the development of mental representation of words heard and having a good processing capacity (Goh, 1999). These problems tend to be syntactic or semantic in nature. Nowrouzi et al. (2015) and Zur (2020) found that listening difficulties during the parsing phase fluctuated from moderate to high. In this study, the greatest difficulty during the parsing stage is understanding a lot of information during a short amount of time. However, Zur (2020) found that the strongest difficulty was remembering a long listening text, while Nowrouzi et al. (2015) believed that following unfamiliar topics is the strongest difficulty.

Finally, in regards to the third research question investigating the utilization stage, our participants indicated that difficulties during the utilization stage ranged between low to moderate. Such problems include difficulties understanding the intended message of a text, difficulties obtaining supporting ideas, difficulties connecting all the ideas of a text, and difficulties obtaining detailed information from a text. These problems are concerned with interpreting meaning through context (Thomas, 1995). This result is consistent with other studies that found that the utilization phase scored between low to moderate (Zur, 2020; Nowrouzi et al, 2015). Other studies found that the utilization stage presented the least amount of difficulties compared to perception and parsing. The greatest difficulty during the utilization stage, as reported by the participants, is understanding the words while not understanding the meaning of the words. Similarly, Zur's (2020) study found that learners struggling to understand meaning often lack the background knowledge needed. Gao (2014) believed that the lack of context was a predominant issue. Nurphami (2015) asserts that having background information influences students during the listening process.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study was that it did not include perspectives of college instructors. Having input from students and instructors about the problems students struggle with during the three phases of listening can provide insightful evidence. Another limitation of this study was that all the participants were female. The College of Basic Education segregates classrooms based on gender due to the feminization policy enacted by the Ministry of Education. Including male participants will provide a larger pool of participants, thus diversifying the data. Finally, including the input of teachers is necessary in order to evaluate and compare their perceptions. Because teachers oversee their classrooms and their students, they have a strong understanding of the issues students encounter with their learning.

### **CONCLUSION**

The present study calls attention to listening comprehension problems commonly encountered by students in the College of Basic Education. The study investigates the three stages of listening comprehension: perception, parsing, and utilization. The participants reported experiencing a moderate level of difficulty during the three stages. However, the greatest difficulties were presented in the perception stage, followed by parsing and utilization. The perception stage basically emphasizes the lexical and phonological difficulties that hinder understanding of the listening texts. Goh's study (1999) justified the reason behind most phonological problems



encountered by EFL learners. The problems during the parsing stage are related to the development of mental representation of words heard and having a good processing capacity. Problems during the parsing stage are syntactic and semantic in nature. Finally, utilization problems are mostly related to pragmatic and discoursal problems which rely on understanding the explicit or implicit meaning by absorbing the flow of ideas and context (Thomas, 1995). All the three phases of listening are interrelated; the listeners need to move from one phase to the next by decoding the message and understanding the meaning (Ulum, 2013). As such, educators and curriculum developers are responsible for building an EFL curriculum that utilizes the three phases of listening thereby strengthening the listening skills of EFL learners. In addition, teachers need to be strongly aware of the three phases that EFL learners experience and the challenges presented in each phase.

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