

## Improving Listening Skills of Saudi EFL Learners



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**ABSTRACT:** This is an introductory investigation of English listening challenges of Saudi EFL learners. This study attempts to find out the underlying reasons that cause Saudi EFL learners to end up with low English listening performance as it is indicated in the annual reports of ETS educational company. This study follows a qualitative methodology since it seeks in-depth details through implementing a semi-structured interview. The participants were totally four; a) three Saudi EFL learners, and b) one professor. This study founded that the proposed main reasons that can cause Saudi EFL learners to perform poorly in listening performance exams are related to students, English language teachers, curricula, and assessment practices.

**KEY WORDS:** Saudi EFL; English learning; Listening challenges; Improving Listening; Saudi Arabia.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a second language is a must in most of the world countries in order to interact with the rest of the world internationally. Due to some economic and political reasons English language has been the leading and most frequent language in most of the educational systems in non-native English speaking countries. However, Arab English learners, specifically Saudis, encounter increased number of difficulties during their English learning journey (Abker, 2020; Ahmed, 2017; Akhter, 2020; Al-khreshah, 2020). When we look at the four language skills. reading, speaking, listening, and writing, we can easily notice that Saudi EFL learners can be described with a low level (Abker, 2020; Alshammari, 2021). To illustrate, we direct our attention to the standardized language tests such as this operated by ETS educational company TOEFL, we find them describe Saudi test takers with poor language performance (Abahussain et al., 2020; Ahmed, 2017; Khan et al., 2020). More specifically, when we concentrate on oral language skills, and listening specifically, we find Saudi EFL learners face challenging issues prevent them from performing properly in standardized listening exams (Al-khreshah, 2020). Listening is one of the basic language skills that learners need to communicate in English as a foreign language. When Saudi EFL learners lack the fundamental listening strategies he/she would be unable to properly understand the listening materials they exposed to.

This study focuses on the issues that could prevent Saudi EFL learners from being good language listeners as well as investigating the underlying reasons that could play a role in determining their poor listening skills. From a bird eye look, we can observe that listening assessment practices inside classrooms can play a role in causing Saudi EFL learners to have listening problems and challenges (Javid, 2018). So, the meaning of a good listener varies among individual and among English language teachers. Yet, most of the English language teachers think that a good listener is the one who receives high scores in listening tasks and exams (Akhter, 2020; Al-khreshah, 2020; Altuwairesh, 2016; Jamal et al., 2020). However, we may arise a simple question regarding the validity of those given listening tasks and exams, are they valid, reliable, and practical? If those exams and tasks that play a role in determining a good listener, then why when Saudi EFL learners go and have been exposed to standardized language testing, they perform below expectations.

This study is important since it tries to explore and investigate the possible reasons that caused Saudi EFL learners to receive poor listening skills. This study also, tries to shed some light on the proposed recommendations that could help improving listening skills of Saudi EFL learners.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The chapter listed studies that investigated Saudi EFL listening difficulties and challenges in order to propose some valid suggestions and recommendations to improve their listening skills. This study (Al-khreshah, 2020) aimed at knowing and exploring EFL listening comprehension problems. Moreover, Al-khreshah's study tried to investigate whether or not there were cultural background affects have some impact on EFL listening skills. The method he used is triangulation or what can be so-called mixed method approach through implementing two instruments; 1) diagnostic test and 2) a questionnaire. The participants he recruited to approach his study's goal were thirty-one Saudi EFL students and eight EFL teachers. Al-khreshah found that listening is the most

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challenging skill and the cultural background has a huge effect on Saudi EFL students listening skill. Yet, this cultural background can have some impact on preventing or improving listening skills of Saudi EFL learners.

Also this study (El-dali, 2017) explored Saudi EFL listening difficulties through adopting both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The primary instruments of this study were five tasks: pre-test, questionnaire, classroom instruction sessions, post-test, and interviews. This study, as mentioned above, had a quantitative and a qualitative part, so they divided into two groups. The first group (N=23) represents first year students (Beginners). The second group (N=23) represents fourth year students (Advanced). English language is a complex language and it is the most difficult language to learn according to El-dali.

There is another study (Tersta & Novianti, 2016). It aimed at investigating the perception, problems and strategies that have been faced by university students in listening skill. This study collecting data from questionnaires and interviews. Forty students were selected. The method he used is triangulation. The result of this research showed that listening material, psychological characteristic, physical setting, listener, and speaker were the problems that the students' face. Through moving from studies investigated listening problems of Saudi EFL learners, we find it is important to include studies that investigated listening problem of other EFL settings, such as Turkish English language learners. (Genc et al., 2016) focused on listening and speaking skills to reveal the problems of the Turkish EFL learners. The instrument of this study is quantitative. There are 220 participants (n=108) male and (n=124) female, two questionnaires were used mainly to seek information about the listening and speaking problems of the students. The study showed that listening problems that the participants experienced are mostly related to message itself, speaker, strategy, and task problems whereas speaking problems are mainly related to participants' language proficiency, content knowledge, affective and personal factors, and contextual factors.

The study of (Alzamil, 2021) aimed and discover the difficulties that faced learners to listening and speaking English language. "listening is an important part not just of learning a new language but also of day-to-day communication". The method was used is quantitative methodology. The study collecting data from an Online questioner so (n=87) female university students, Participants were asked to respond to a series of statements designed to test four constructs relating to their attitudes to learning English language skills in general (a); learning listening skills specifically (b); their attitudes towards listening activities (c); and (d) their attitudes towards improving their listening skills. The results showed that most of participants felt that speaking and listening were the most important skills to learn, but listening was also the most challenging. Reading was felt to be the most effortless skill to learn, as well as the most commonly used, suggesting that frequency of use contributes to students' perceptions of the ease of learning a skill. Participants' difficulties with learning to listen to English were associated with speech rate, pronunciation, nervousness, limited vocabulary, and lack of background information

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology through collecting interviews.

#### 3.2. Research Questions

This research has two questions; one is primary PRQ and one is secondary research question SRQ as follow:

PRQ: What are the possible reasons that cause Saudi EFL learners to have low listening skills?

SRQ: What recommendations can be given to help improving the listening skills of Saudi EFL learners?

#### 3.3. Participants

There will be 4 participants recruited to collect data for this research. All of the assigned participants were divided into two primary groups as follow: 1 University professor and 3 Saudi EFL learners. All participants were male. All of the three EFL students participating in this research haven't joint any sort of private schools nor studied English abroad and they are currently study BA in English fifth semester at Jouf University.

#### 3.4. Instrument

There are one instruments; interviews. To demonstrate the internal construction of the interviews, look at the following table:

	Number of Questions
1. Students' related issues	3
2. Teachers' related issues	2
3. Curricula related issues	2
4. Assessment related issues	2

### 4. RESULTS.

This section presents the data collected from Saudi EFL learners as well as from the three assigned language teachers through constructing a sort of themes. And we've done this sort of themes because we need to make the results readable concise and clear.

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**Table 1: Interview Responses for Question No. 1**

Interview Question No. 1	Do you revise your listening classroom lesson in home? if yes choose (1-2-3-4-more) hours per day
Participant 1	No.
Participant 2	No.
Participant 3	No.
Participant 4 (Professor)	No.
Theme	According to the responses all of the participants answers in a negative way. That mean they don't practice their listening skills at home.

**Table 2: Interview Responses for Question No. 2**

Interview Question No. 2	Do you like learning English?
Participant 1	No.
Participant 2	Yes.
Participant 3	No.
Participant 4 (Professor)	Yes.
Theme	According to the responses gathered from the learners to this question, 2 students answered with "No" while the other student said "yes". The professor and No.2 all of them like learning English to communicate with other people and in educational life.

**Table 3: Interview Responses for Question No. 3**

Interview Question No. 3	Do you think learning English is important?
Participant 1	Yes, it is important when you travel
Participant 2	Yes,
Participant 3	Yes. English is a worldwide language.
Participant 4 (Professor)	Yes
Theme	All the participants agreed with importance of English language because it is a worldwide language and important when you traveling to entire world.

**Table 4: Interview Responses for Question No. 4**

Interview Question No. 4	Do you think English teachers are responsible for the poor listening skills of the Saudi EFL learners? How?
Participant 1	Yes.
Participant 2	Yes.
Participant 3	Yes.
Participant 4 (Professor)	Yes, some teachers still use the traditional technical methods to teach students.
Theme	When we look at the responses to this question, we see that all of the students said Yes, while the Professor said: "some teachers still use the traditional technical methods to teach students". Other students said that teacher didn't effort all the energy in teaching and learning or give information that relate to the subject.

**Table 5: Interview Responses for Question No. 5**

Interview Question No. 5	Do you think teachers can help improving the listening skills of Saudi EFL learners? Explain?
Participant 1	Yes, when teachers using technology in the class.
Participant 2	Yes. If the teacher uses speakers I can hear very well
Participant 3	Yes.
Participant 4 (Professor)	Yes. By using the CD's that came with textbook.
Theme	Looking at the responses collecting from participants they all agreed that teachers can absolutely help with improving the listening skills of Saudi EFL learners. As we see the professor and students agrees with using technology.

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**Table 6: Interview Responses for Question No**

Interview Question No. 6	Do you think the current listening curricula is difficult for students to understand? How?
Participant 1	No, it is not difficult.
Participant 2	No, it is easy to understand.
Participant 3	No, it is using basic English vocabulary
Participant 4 (Professor)	No, it has simple sentences and words.
Theme	According to the information collected from participants to this question they all agreed that the current listening curricula wasn't difficult for students to understand, and using basic English vocabulary, contain simple sentence and grammar. so, at this point the curricula is very good to teach it to students.

**Table 7: Interview Responses for Question No. 7**

Interview Question No. 7	Do you think we could improve listening curricula? How?
Participant 1	Yes, putting more activity in the course
Participant 2	Yes.
Participant 3	Yes, by putting something from our culture.
Participant 4 (Professor)	Yes, focus on practicing exercise
Theme	As we look at the responses gathered from this question, all participants responded positively. as student No.3 said "It is good idea to putting something from our culture that makes students thinking faster and realizable"

**Table 8: Interview Responses for Question No. 8**

Interview Question No. 8	Do you think the current assessment practices in listening classroom are valid?
Participant 1	Yes.
Participant 2	Yes.
Participant 3	Yes.
Participant 4 (Professor)	Yes.
Theme	According to the information collected from participant to this question all participants agreed on the validity of assessment practices in English classroom.

**Table 9: Interview Responses for Question No. 9**

Interview Question No. 9	How could we improve the assessment practices in order to help improving the Saudi EFL learners?
Participant 1	It's unfair to have 60 marks on final exam.
Participant 2	By putting less grades on tests.
Participant 3	By evaluated in multiple ways
Participant 4 (Professor)	A lot of degrees toke from the mid-term and final exam that's lead to get less grade at end of the semester.
Theme	Looking at the data collected from this question, the responses of the participants were all very similar to each other but the professor said: "A lot of degrees toke from the mid-term and final exam that's lead to get less grade at end of the semester."

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This section discusses the results retrieved from the three Saudi EFL participants as well as the one university professor. For the purpose of clarity, we divided the discussion interpretations into four primary sections based on the internal construction of the instrument used to collect data as follows: 1) discussing questions related to Students (Questions numbers 1,2,3), b) discussing questions related to language teachers (Questions numbers 4,5), c) discussing questions related to curricula (Questions numbers 6, 7), and d) 1) discussing questions related to assessment (Questions numbers 8, 9).

The sample of this study do not revise or study English at home and they only take the listening materials and methods inside classrooms. According to the answers in question 1 Saudi EFL learners do not spend their time or spend some effort on training or practicing at home so, that lead to get poor listening skills which also lead to get poor English skills (Al-khresheh, 2020). Through

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looking at questions two, we can find out that theof the participants had a positive response. Primarily, responders had two justifications for their positive responses toward the importance of listening; a) English language is a world-wide language, people learn English in case they want traveling abroad, learning English can help travelers to effectively communicate with other people. b) learning English important in educational life as we see you can not be a doctor or pharmacist or even a nurse if we do not learn English. The first point shows that learning English language can assist individuals to properly contact others' experiences and thoughts. Also, the second point indicated that learning English is a must in this modernized, technological, and economical world. It is clearly stated that individuals who lack basic English communicative skills and knowledge will not be able to find a job.

This study concluded indicating that most of the English EFL listening challenges were due to the internal motivation of the learners themselves. The Saudi EFL learners had poor listening skills and bad degrees because of the teachers did not used technology and using a traditional old way of assessment. The recommendations of the study can be summarized as follows: 1) increasing the hours of studying at home and not practicing English for a limited time in classroom, 2) increasing the exercising and activities in the curricula and decreasing the mere theoretical practice, 3) Increasing students' knowledge of how to develop listening skills through the use of online technology, 4) Lowering the rate of focusing on formative and summative assessment such as med-terms and final exams, and alternatively increasing focus instead on language practice, 5) Practicing English more intensively both inside and outside of school.

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### Appendix (a)

	Number of Questions	
1. Students' related issues	3	1) Do you revise your listening classroom lesson in home? if yes choose (1-2-3-4-more) hours per day. 2) Do you like learning English? 3) Do you think learning English is important?
2. Teachers' related issues	2	1) Do you think English teachers are responsible for the poor listening skills of the Saudi EFL learners? How? 2) Do you think teacher can help improving the language skills of Saudi EFL learners? Explain?
3. Curricula related issues	2	1) Do you think the current listening curricula is difficult for students to understand? How? 2) do you think we could improve English curricula? How?
4. Assessment related issues	2	1) Do you think the current assessment practices in listening classroom are valid? 2) How could we improve the assessment practices in order to help improving listening the Saudi EFL learners?

### Appendix (b)

#### Interview questions

- 1) Do you revise your listening classroom lesson in home? if yes choose (1-2-3-4-more) hours per day.
- 2) Do you like learning English?
- 3) Do you think learning English is important?
- 4) Do you think English teachers are responsible for the poor listening skills of the Saudi EFL learners? How?
- 5) Do you think teacher can help improving the listening skills of Saudi EFL learners? Explain?
- 6) Do you think the current listening curricula is difficult for students to understand? How?
- 7) Do you think we could improve listening curricula? How?
- 8) Do you think the current assessment practices in listening classroom are valid?
- 9) How could we improve the assessment practices in order to help improving listening the Saudi EFL listening learners?