

## Moroccan Tertiary Students' Ability in Comprehending Listening and Reading in Argumentative Discourse



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**ABSTRACT:** Listening and reading are indisputably receptive skills that provide learners with language input through the discourse they see or hear. Teaching them separately at the University level has many benefits as well as stumbling blocks in the learning process. Thus, many researchers argue for integrating listening into reading since there is a significant positive correlation between them. Admittedly, the present research is a plea for the idea of integrating the two skills to enhance a high level of learners' comprehension. To attain this objective, this study is an attempt to determine whether there is a significant relationship between listening and reading in argumentative discourse. To test this hypothesis, 92 Semester 4 participants studying at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Moulay Ismail in Meknes, ENS (Ecole Normale Supérieure) in Meknes, as well as the Faculty of Language, Letters, and Arts, Ibn Tofail in Kenitra were administered listening and reading proficiency tests to examine their abilities in comprehending listening and reading texts in the argumentative mode of discourse. To this end, two types of instruments namely Pearson product-moment correlation and simple linear regression have been used to analyze the data collected. The results revealed that there is a positive correlation between listening and reading ( $r = .60$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, given this positive correlation, several pedagogical recommendations related to its pedagogical implications have been put forwards for practitioners and syllabus designers to reflect on and draw on to strengthen students' listening and reading abilities in argumentative discourse.

**KEYWORDS:** listening comprehension, reading comprehension, argumentative discourse, correlation, abilities.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Being a competent English learner requires mastering the four basic skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. Listening and reading are set as receptive language skills since learners receive information, whereas speaking and writing are productive language skills as learners produce an output. Receptive skills require reading, listening, and comprehending a foreign language. Both of them are acquired skills since they necessitate comprehension and meaning storage as Nunan (2003) profess. Therefore, teaching receptive skills, listening and reading, requires a "basic methodology for teaching" (Harmer, 2001, p.270). After the listening or the reading task, learners need to understand the general idea of the text and look for the required information. Yet, both skills are different and need to be practiced equally. Subsequently, a detailed investigation of the relationship between listening and reading in descriptive and argumentative discourse is dealt with in this research. This study is concerned with the Moroccan semester four students studying an education professional BA degree at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Moulay Ismail in Meknes, ENS in Meknes, and the Faculty of Languages, Letters, and Arts Ibn Tofail in Kénitra. These students were administered listening and reading proficiency tests to investigate whether there is a correlation between listening and reading abilities in descriptive and argumentative discourse. To this end, two research questions are guiding this study:

- 1- Are S4 Moroccan Tertiary students studying in the education BA program able to comprehend argumentative listening and argumentative reading discourses?
- 2- Is there a relationship between listening and reading in argumentative discourse among those students?

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Listening comprehension:

O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) remark that listening comprehension is an active process in which the listener builds meaning by using cues from various contextual information and existing knowledge while relying upon legion strategic sources to perform the required task. The active contribution of the listeners' comprehension process comes from using their linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge.

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### 2.2. Reading comprehension

Reading comprehension consists of two words: reading and comprehension. Sheng (2000) maintains that "Reading may be considered as the process of recognition and perception of the written or printed material; whereas, comprehension is the understanding of the meaning of the written material and covers the conscious strategies that lead to understanding" (p. 77-87).

### 2.3. Listening and reading processes:

Most of the related literature refers to the bottom-up and top-down processes as well as the interactive reading model. In the bottom-up process, learners begin with the tiny unit of speech to phrases to merge them to attain comprehension. As for the top-down process, comprehension starts from the "top", the learner, to the "down" printed material. This approach emphasizes learners' comprehension of the text based on their experience and background, and interpretation of the text based on their prior knowledge (whole language). The interactive reading model then emphasizes the interaction of bottom-up and top-down processes throughout the learning process. The learner uses suitable knowledge to decipher the information.

### 2.4. The position of listening and reading in the Moroccan Educational context in higher education:

Listening is not given much importance as it is taught through the « oral communication » module and the focus is given to other subjects in which listening is an integral part of it. Nevertheless, reading is deeply taught as a subject. According to *the English course description in higher education*, namely the education BA program, four modules of reading are taught to learners over three years (6 semesters).

- ▶ Reading comprehension and précis 1
- ▶ guided reading
- ▶ Reading comprehension and précis2
- ▶ extensive reading

### 2.5. Listening and reading difficulties encountered by EFL students:

The listener is engaged in many challenging processes while listening such as « differentiating between sounds, understanding vocabulary, and grammatical structures, interpreting this within the immediate, as well as the larger socio-cultural context of the utterance » (Vandergrift, 2007; Wipf, 1984, p. 346). Furthermore, Dubin (1982) assumes that reading is considered the most complex language skill as it requires the interaction of multifold cognitive, meta-cognitive, linguistic, and sociolinguistic aspects and some other sub-skills that all operate to perform the task.

### 2.6. Argumentative discourse:

Argumentative reading or listening text starts from the presupposition that the reader's or listener's beliefs must be changed. However, learners find it difficult to master advanced reading comprehension and critical literacy skills in core disciplines associated with engaging in and critiquing effective arguments, especially in science, history, and literature (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009). Learners also face difficulties recognizing and applying argumentative text structures (Chambliss & Murphy, 2002), generating evidence (Kulm, 1991), and offering relevant reasons, counterarguments, and rebuttals (Mc Cann et al, 1988).

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample of this current study is based on 92 semester four university students studying in the BA education program at the faculty of letters and Human Sciences, Moulay Ismail Meknes, ENS (Ecole Nationale Supérieure) in Meknes, as well as the faculty of Languages, Arts, and Letters, Ibn Tofail, Kenitra during 2020-2021 academic year. This study aims to measure the students' ability in comprehending argumentative Listening and reading texts and whether there is a correlation between the two skills. To collect data, two listening and reading proficiency tests, were selected to include similar testing items like vocabulary, true/false questions, open-ended questions, sentence completion questions, multiple-Choice questions, paraphrasing, outlining, and summarizing. To analyze data, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and simple linear regression analysis were used for statistical analysis to measure the students' ability in comprehending reading texts and to see whether there is a correlation between argumentative listening and argumentative reading to enhance comprehension among these students.

## 4. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The present study is based on the following research questions: (1) Are S4 Moroccan Tertiary students studying in the English Department (B.A. program in education) able to comprehend argumentative listening and argumentative reading discourses? And (2) Is there a relationship between listening and reading in argumentative discourse among those students? To measure students' reading and listening abilities, descriptive statistics are displayed after calculating Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient together with regression analysis to determine whether the two modalities are related.

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### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics:

The standard deviation values revealed that there is more variance in argumentative listening abilities scores since (SD=3,17) is smaller than (SD=3,50). Table 1 below illustrates information about the means, the standard deviations, the minimum, and the maximum of these statistics.

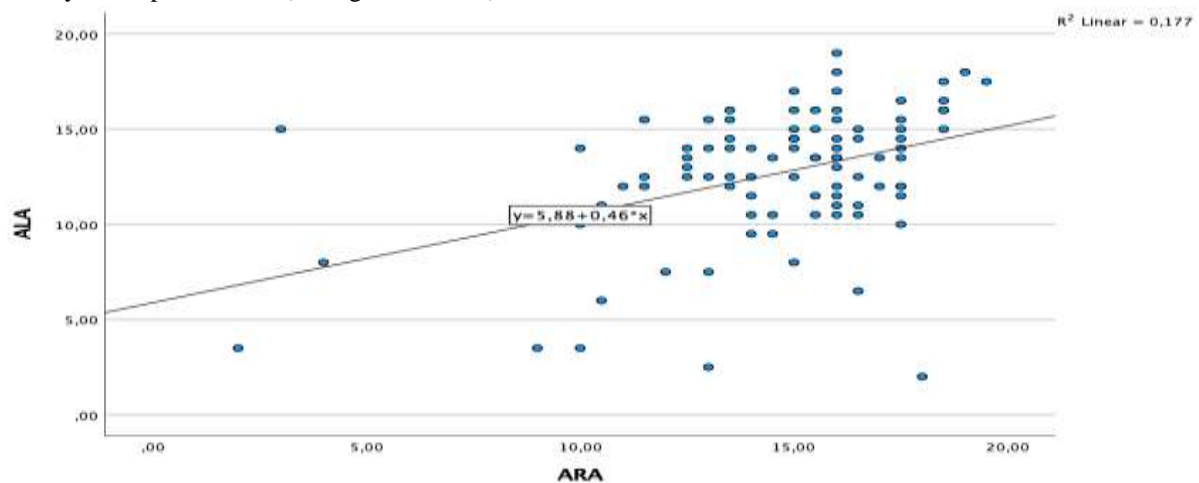
**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Argumentative Listening and Argumentative Reading**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
ALA	92	2,00	19,00	12,6576	3,50583
ARA	92	2,00	19,50	14,5761	3,17436
Valid N (listwise)	92				

The descriptive statistics showed that since the reading mean is higher than the listening mean, learners' argumentative reading abilities are better than their argumentative listening abilities.

### 4.2. Results of correlation:

The assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were checked by scatter plotting the relationship between Argumentative Listening Ability (ALA) and Argumentative Reading Ability (ARA). A straight line went through the bulk of the dots which looked randomly scattered around the line as demonstrated in figure 1 below. Thus, this inspection suggested a linear relationship between ALA and ARA. Furthermore, the spread of the data is similar along the line; the distance between the points from the line is fairly similar as we move from the left to the right despite some variation. The dots are not cone-shaped or curved. As a result, the homoscedasticity assumption is met (see figure 1 below).



**Figure 1. Scatter plot of Argumentative Listening and Argumentative Reading**

The correlational results showed that there is a positive statistical correlation at the level of 0.01 between ALA and ARA. Pearson's correlation coefficient is determined ( $r = 0,48$ ), and ( $p < .001$ ). That is to say, the two abilities are positively related to each other. When argumentative listening abilities increase, argumentative reading abilities increase too, and vice versa. These results are displayed in table 2:

**Table 2. Pearson r Correlation of Argumentative Listening and Argumentative Reading**

		DRA	ARA
DRA	Pearson Correlation	1	,486**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<,001
	N	92	92
ARA	Pearson Correlation	,486**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<,001	
	N	92	92

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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### 4.3. Regression Analysis:

A simple linear regression was run to examine how well argumentative listening ability could predict the level of argumentative reading ability. Based on these results, it was concluded that argumentative listening can predict 17 percent of S4 learners' argumentative reading ( $R = .42$ ,  $R^2 = .17$ ). the adjusted  $R^2$ - value was .168. Thus, these results are shown in Table 3 below:

**Table 3. Model Summary (ALA and ARA)**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.421 <sup>a</sup>	.177	.168	2,89559

a. a. Predictors: (Constant), Argumentative Listening ability.

b. Dependent variable: Argumentative Reading ability

For the statistical significance of the regression model, the results  $F(1, 90) = 19,36$ ,  $P < .001$  indicated that argumentative listening predicted argumentative reading in a significant way. These results are clarified in Table 4 below:

**Table 4. ANOVA (ALA and ARA)**

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	162,366	1	162,366	19,365	<,001 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	754,601	90	8,384		
	Total	916,967	91			

a. Dependent Variable: ARA

b. Predictors: (Constant), ALA

In addition, the regression equation for predicting argumentative listening from argumentative reading was  $y = 5,88 + 0,46 * x$ . The beta value of  $B = .42$  indicated that one full standard deviation changes in argumentative listening resulted in .42 standard deviation change in argumentative reading. The results of the t-test showed that the beta value enjoyed statistical significance. These results are displayed in table 5:

**Table 5. Coefficient (ALA and ARA)**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	9,753	1,137		8,580	<,001
	ALA	,381	,087	,421	4,401	<,001

a. Dependent Variable: ARA

To conclude, the finding revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between argumentative listening and argumentative reading along with a significant positive correlation between the two modalities in argumentative discourse. The significant difference between listening and reading in argumentative discourse shows that students comprehend argumentative reading texts more than argumentative listening ones which could be traced to various reasons.

Students may have trouble in listening which is more cognitively demanding than reading (Buck, 2001) as it requires more attention to sounds and prosodic features. Learners also may have less control over the input, and do not have the chance to check their information as listening occurs in real time. Also, speech is shorter than written units with ambiguous and more colloquial language (i.e., there are more pronouns, redundancies, fillers, self-corrections, less standard grammar in speech, and conjunctions are used instead of subordination), and meaning is expressed by gestures and body language in speech (Brown, 2011).

Furthermore, both modalities are receptive skills and both of them share a set of sub-skills such as using similar cognitive processes and abilities. Also, they share common elements such as vocabulary, sentence patterns, idea organization, adjustment to the language function, and others that enhance the quality of listening as well as reading (Hollingsworth, 1968). If learners master these skills and sub-skills in one modality, their ability in the other modality will be predicted automatically.

Additionally, argumentative texts deal with problems and controversial ideas, and reasons for or against some topics at issue. In this case, learners who have the ability to master these argumentative discourse attributes are likely to comprehend better

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argumentative texts in both modalities. Therefore, the ability to argue well in reading can be a predictor of the ability to do the same in listening.

### 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

There are many conclusions to draw from the statistical analysis of the current data but the most important ones are:

The study shows a statistically significant relationship between argumentative listening and argumentative reading as there is a positive correlation between the two modalities.

Listening enhances reading comprehension, and reading can also enhance listening comprehension among students. However, some students' grades in listening were below their grades in reading due to the absence of a listening course in the S4 education BA program. Admittedly, their comprehension of listening texts was not satisfactory and below their reading comprehension. Subsequently, students who have good reading ability can use their cognitive and linguistic skills to ameliorate their listening.

The findings derived from this study enhance several implications and recommendations that can help teachers, syllabus designers, also the pedagogical staff in the department of English studies to ameliorate the teaching of reading and listening comprehension skills. They can be summarized as follows:

(1) Teachers need to stimulate and arouse students' interest and motivation in listening. They need to show them clips of public speaking contests, introduce them to communicating with foreign guests dealing with up-to-date subjects, and make the listening practice as lively as possible to ensure student interest and motivation.

(2) Listening can support reading in the sense that teachers can use a listening task as a pre-reading activity to motivate students to ensure a better understanding of the reading text. By doing so, students can have an idea about the text and may overcome the difficulties they might face before the reading process.

(3) Teachers and syllabus designers are recommended to design new EFL programs related to cognitive and metacognitive strategies for better development and enhancement of reading and listening comprehension.

Eventually, listening and reading are proven to correlate together and they can be both integrated into one single subject to enhance perfect results.

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