

تأثير القلق على فهم الاستماع لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية  
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### ملخص البحث :

القلق لدى متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية يضعف بشكل كبير فهم الاستماع عن طريق زيادة العبء المعرفي، وتعطيل الانتباه، وخلق ضغط الأداء. للتخفيف من هذه التأثيرات، من الضروري اتباع استراتيجيات مثل تعزيز بيئة تعليمية داعمة، وزيادة صعوبة المهام تدريجيا، وتعليم تقنيات الاسترخاء، وتعزيز الممارسة المنتظمة، وتقديم التدريب على إستراتيجية الاستماع المستهدفة. الاستماع هو المهارة الأكثر استخداما في الحياة اليومية. يستمع الأشخاص إلى الصوت لعدة أسباب، بما في ذلك التسلية والحصول على المعلومات القيمة بالنسبة لهم. عندما يسعى المتعلمون إلى فهم ما يتم تدريسه باللغة الإنجليزية . إنها تظهر مجموعة واسعة من ضعف السمع . يعد التعامل مع القلق أمرا بالغ الأهمية لتحسين مهارات الاستماع والكفاءة اللغوية بشكل عام، مما يؤدي إلى نتائج تعليمية أفضل لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يستكشف هذا البحث العلاقة بين القلق والاستيعاب الاستماعي ، بالاعتماد على الأدبيات ذات الصلة وتقديم النتائج التجريبية من دراسة أجريت بين متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المرحلة الابتدائية. تبحث هذه الدراسة في مدى تأثيره القلق على أداء الاستماع وتقتراح استراتيجيات للتخفيف من تأثيره السلبي

## The effect of Anxiety on Listening Comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Learners

### Abstract

Anxiety in EFL learners significantly impairs listening comprehension by increasing cognitive load, disrupting attention, and creating performance pressure. To mitigate these effects, strategies such as fostering a supportive learning environment, gradually increasing task difficulty, teaching

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relaxation techniques, promoting regular practice, and offering targeted listening strategy training are essential. Listening is the skill used the most in daily life. People listen to audio for several reasons, including for their amusement, to acquire information that is valuable to them. When learners seek to comprehend what they are taught in English. They display a wide variety of hearing impairments. Addressing anxiety is crucial for improving listening skills and overall language proficiency, leading to better educational outcomes for EFL learners.

This research explores the relationship anxiety and listening comprehension, drawing on relevant literature and presenting empirical findings from a study conducted among elementary EFL learners. This study examines the extent to which anxiety affects listening performance and suggests strategies to mitigate its negative impact.

**Key words:** Anxiety, Listening comprehension, ( EFL) English as a foreign language.

### **Introduction**

Anxiety in English as a foreign language (EFL) learners is the most difficult one among the four skills. Listening anxiety may influence their listening comprehension and the use of strategies, and therefore represent an obstacle to effective listening. Anxiety can affect learners in different ways and to different degree; while some experience high levels of anxiety, others do not find listening stressful at all. Listening comprehension involves the ability to understand and process spoken language in real time. Recognizing the effect of anxiety on listening is the first step; the next is to find out the sources of LC anxiety and propose solution.

Anxiety can exacerbate these challenges by increasing cognitive load, disrupting attention, and affecting emotional responses. As a result, anxiety can severally hinder a learner's a ability to effectively comprehend and respond to spoken English.

Understanding the effects of anxiety on listening comprehension and exploring strategies to alleviate it are essential for educators and learners alike. By understanding this issue, EFL learners can improve their listening comprehension and overall language proficiency.

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The reason of listening anxiety might be attributed to the problematic nature of listening (2), nature of the speech, level of difficulty, lack of clarity, lack of visual support, lack of repetitions spontaneous speech, fast speech, and an unfamiliar accents/topics(18).

According to Vandergrift and(23), listening comprehension is a problem-solving activity where listeners apply their linguistic knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, prior knowledge and discourse listening is among the most essential skills to develop in foreign language learning, but it is a challenge for learners because the listening process is complex. (15)also suggested that listening results are also influenced by affective factors because these variables decide whether learners can maximize efforts in processing listening texts. Affective factors refer to emotional variables, including anxiety, self-efficacy, and motivation. These emotionally relevant factors influence how learners respond to tasks, therefore resulting in different listening outcomes.

In brief, with regards to some studies as illustrated, anxiety can negatively affect listening comprehension by diverting cognitive resources and causing distractions, making it harder to focus and understand spoken information. It heightens self-consciousness and fear of failure, leading to poorer performance in tasks requiring effective listening.

### **Literature Review:**

#### **Anxiety**

Anxiety is a feeling of fear, dread, and uneasiness. It might cause learners to sweat, feel restless and tense, and have a rapid heartbeat. It can be a normal reaction to stress. For example, learners might feel anxious when faced with a difficult problem at work, before taking a test, or before making an important decision. It can help learners to cope. The anxiety may give learners a boost of energy or help learners focus. But for people with anxiety disorders, the fear is not temporary and can be overwhelming.

Anxiety in language learning is often conceptualized through theories such as the Cognitive Model of Anxiety and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. The Cognitive Model Posits that anxiety increases cognitive load, impairing processing. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, proposed by (11), suggests that

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high anxiety creates a “filter” that hinders language acquisitions by affecting learners’ ability to process and retain input.

### **Listening Anxiety**

Listening anxiety refers to the specific type of nervousness or fear that learners experience during listening tasks in a foreign language. This type of anxiety is particularly challenging because listening requires immediate processing of spoken language without the ability to pause and think. According to (12), listening comprehension can trigger significant anxiety because learners must quickly understand and interpret what they hear. Factors such as the speed of speech, unfamiliar accents, complex grammar, and new vocabulary can all contribute to heightened anxiety during listening activities, making it harder for learners to comprehend the material effectively.

### **Effects of anxiety on listening comprehension**

Anxiety in listening comprehension Research in foreign or second language learning has begun to show that anxiety directly undermines motivation and creates a negative affective response to the foreign language being studied (12) noted that anxiety negatively correlates with listening comprehension, attributing this to increased cognitive load and decreased attention. For (21) indicated that anxiety impairs the ability to understand spoken English due to fear of making mistakes and negative self-perceptions.

According to found that high levels of listening anxiety are associated with lower performance in listening comprehension tasks. Anxiety can affect the cognitive processes involved in listening, such as attention, perception, and memory, leading to difficulties in understanding spoken language. For Scarcella and Oxford (13), listening anxiety occurs when students feel they are encountered with a task that is difficult or unfamiliar to them. Krashen (in Young 1992) stated that, although speaking is cited as the most anxiety-producing skill, listening comprehension ( LC) is also “highly anxiety provoking if it is incomprehensible” (168). The most of learners believe that in order to be “good at a language they need perfect pronunciation, massive amounts of vocabulary, extensive grammar knowledge, overseas experience,

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and a natural aptitude for language before they even open their mouths (9). As a result, the anxiety that arises during the listening process often springs from what Joiner (1986) calls a negative “listening self-concept,” that is, a low level of self-confidence in the area of listening.

(19) indicated that Listening Comprehension Anxiety( LCA ) is the fear of misunderstanding, incapacity, or inability to react psychologically to other people's communications. For (1), LCA "blocks the students from achieving the best comprehension they can get in listening" (p. 201). Adnan et al. emphasized that students with higher LCA have lower listening comprehension. According to Susilowati (14) also stated that anxiety usually presents a challenge for non-native students while they study four English language skills, including listening. He added that anxiety could act as a mental block, reducing students' encouragement to have comprehensive input in their learning process.

### **Factors Contributing to Listening Anxiety**

**Speech Rate and Accent:** Fast speech and unfamiliar accents can heighten anxiety and hinder comprehension. Studies by Gonen (7) and Chang (3) have indicated that learners' anxiety levels rise when exposed to accents they are not accustomed to when listening to speakers with rapid speech. These conditions, often faced in authentic listening scenarios, tend to amplify the stress associated with understanding spoken language.

**Lack of Context:** A lack of contextual clues can increase anxiety during listening tasks, which in turns impairs comprehension. When learners are unable to rely on contextual information to help make sense of what they hear, they often feel more stressed . This increased anxiety can interfere with their ability to process and understanding spoken language. According to Goh(6) supports this idea, indicating that when listeners do not have enough context, their anxiety levels increase, making it more difficult for them to accurately interpret and remember what they hear.

**Classroom Environment:** The classroom environment plays an essential role in influencing anxiety levels, particularly in listening comprehension. In a competitive or supportive atmosphere, learners are likely to experience increased anxiety, which can negatively affect their listening abilities. The

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pressure to perform and the fear of negative evaluation from peers or teachers can exacerbate anxiety, making it difficult for learners to focus and comprehend spoken language. For Yah and Horwitz (9) stated that social factors in the classroom, peer pressure and the fear of making mistakes, can greatly contribute to increased anxiety, leading to poorer listening performance.

### **Interventions And Coping Strategies**

Intervention and coping strategies are crucial for addressing anxiety in EFL learners, particularly in the area of listening comprehension. One effective approach involves teaching anxiety-reducing techniques, such as relaxation exercises, positive self-talk, and mindfulness practices. These approaches can help learners manage their anxiety levels, making it easier for them to concentrate and process spoken language. Research by Young (20) indicated the importance of creating a low- anxiety classroom atmosphere.

Another important strategy is training learners in effective listening techniques. By learning how to predict content, listen for the main ideas, and infer meaning from context, this technique can give learners a greater sense of control during listening tasks, which help reduce anxiety. According to Vandergrift (15) points out, strategic listening training can boost learners' confidence and effectiveness.

Additionally, regular exposure to authentic listening materials and a variety of accents also plays an essential role in reducing anxiety. By gradually becoming accustomed to different speaking styles and real-life listening situations, learners can lessen the stress of processing spoken language in real life. Field (4) stated that consistent exposure and practice can significantly reduce anxiety over time. Implementing these strategies in the EFL classroom can significantly alleviate anxiety, leading to better listening comprehension and enhanced language proficiency overall.

### **Implications for Teaching**

**Creative Supportive Environment:** Creating a supportive and low-anxiety classroom environment is crucial for improving listening comprehension in EFL learners. Teachers can foster this kind of atmosphere by providing positive feedback, offering encouragement, and ensuring that listening tasks

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are appropriately challenging without being overwhelming. A classroom where students feel comfortable and supported can significantly reduce anxiety, allowing them to focus better and improve their listening skills.

**Personalized Learning:** Tailoring listening exercises to match learners' proficiency levels and interests can make the content more engaging and manageable, thereby reducing anxiety. Incorporating a variety of listening materials that cater to different skill levels can help build learners' confidence gradually.

**Ongoing Assessment and Feedback:** Regular, formative assessment that focus on progress rather than perfection can help learners recognize their improvement, which can decrease anxiety over time. By receiving continuous feedback, learners can adjust their strategies and build their listening skills in a supportive setting.

To sum up, anxiety plays a crucial role in EFL listening comprehension, affecting learners' ability to process and understanding spoken language. Addressing this issue requires a multifaceted approach, including anxiety management techniques, strategies listening training, and the creation of supportive learning environments.

### Methodology

#### Participants

The study involved 40 elementary EFL learners enrolled at the language center of Zawya. The participants, aged between 20 and 30, had varying levels of exposure to English but were all classified as elementary based on their placement test scores.

#### Instruments

Two primary tools were used in this study to assess anxiety in EFL learners during listening comprehension tasks. The first instrument was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale ( FLCAS), created by Horwitz et al. (22) to measure general language anxiety. The second instrument was the Listening Anxiety Questionnaire (LAQ), designed to specifically evaluate anxiety levels related to listening tasks. To evaluate listening comprehension, participants completed a standardized test that involved

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listening to audio recording and answering multiple-choice questions that tested their understanding.

### **Procedure**

Participants were first asked to complete the FLCAS and LAQ to gauge their anxiety levels. Learners were given the listening comprehension test under timed conditions. The data collected were analyzed using correlation and regression analysis to determine the relationship between anxiety levels and listening comprehension performance.

### **Results**

The analysis of the data showed a greatly negative correlation between anxiety levels and listening comprehension scores ( $r = - 0.62$ ),  $P < 0.01$  . This means that participants who experienced higher levels of anxiety tended to perform worse on the listening comprehension test. Specific factors contributing to anxiety included fast speech rates, unfamiliar vocabulary, and complex sentence structures.

### **Discussion**

The study revealed a clear negative relationship between anxiety and listening comprehension. High anxiety levels can disrupt cognitive process essential for listening, such as attention and memory, leading to poor performance. The results are consists with previous research by Kim and Vogely (18), highlighting the pervasive impact of anxiety on listening tasks. Given these results, it is imperative for EFL teachers to adopt strategies that mitigate the factors contributing to listening anxiety. These strategies might include pre- listening activities that introduce key vocabulary and context can reduce the cognitive load on learners, making them more confident and less anxious during the actual listening task. Moreover, teaching mindfulness techniques can equip learners with tools to manage anxiety in the moment, developing their overall listening performance. By creating a great environment and increasing the difficulty of listening materials, teachers can help learners build resilience against anxiety, ultimately enhancing their listening comprehension and overall language proficiency.



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