

Listening Barriers encountered by Sudanese students at Cambridge International School in Sudan

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Abstract

This paper attempted to throw the light upon Cambridge International School in Sudan (Bahry Branch) and to investigate the barriers that contribute to the problems of Cambridge International School students come across in English listening activities. It evaluates whether the barriers are joined with the listening text or not. It determines which exact barrier poses the most difficult for CIS students. The study adopted a descriptive method. The subject of the study was eighty students from the primary stage at KS4, CIS in Sudan. The study sample consists of eighty students who took the listening activities. Data was gathered by a questionnaire. The researcher used a statistical package for social studies (SPSS package), by using frequencies, percentages, tables, figures, descriptive statistics, standard deviation, one sample T-test, and one-way analysis of variance. The results of the study proved that Cambridge International School students face listening barriers whenever they are engaged in listening activities. Furthermore, the current study determined the students' listening barriers that came out from the recognition of words in their written form, length of and quality of the spoken text. The study showed that recognition of words in their written form, and the difficulty whenever they hear the words in a stream of speech was posed the most difficult for the students when

they are engaged in listening activities. The researcher recommended that teachers should familiarize their students to the normal feature of spoken English by listening to authentic passages. They should choose activities that are appropriate to the students' actual language capability. Moreover; they should concentrate on training the students not on testing them in listening comprehension.

Keywords: EFL students; barriers; listening comprehension.

Overview of CIS

Cambridge International Schools in Sudan is approved from Cambridge International Examinations as Cambridge Associate School. It operates through five branches, three of which in Khartoum and one in Bahry and the other in Omdurman offering the study of the British curriculum from Kindergarten to the Secondary School under the umbrella of the of Cambridge International Examination CIE, UK. This paper concerns the branch located in Bahry region.

Cambridge International School is offering a Cambridge International Primary Program and Cambridge Lower and Secondary programs. The Cambridge International Programs from Cambridge International Examinations develops English, Mathematics and Science skills in young children across the world. It provides a natural progression through the stages of primary and secondary education and focuses on what students should be able to do at each of the primary stages.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sudanese students do not learn listening skills during the earlier stages of English language learning. The students in these stages are not exposed to English educational media programs that can improve their listening skills. These students have listening comprehension barriers when they engage in listening activities as the researcher observed them. Some of them think that listening activity is a problematic subject for learning English. Understanding students' listening difficulties will permit the teachers to modify their teaching style and strategies.

There are possible barriers of listening which the L2 listeners face in EFL listening that L1 listeners do not experience (e.g., not easily understanding what is said in L2, unlike in the L1). However, there is an expectation among teachers that such problems can be avoided or at least minimized through continuous English language listening practices. The awareness of the barriers that contribute to the problems of students at Cambridge International School face in learning English listening would benefit both the students and the teachers. After this study is completed, the finding may help teachers to become aware of the barriers and problematic areas of listening skill so that they can take fundamental treatment measures, which are suggested as an implication of the study. More specifically, it will give an account of the obstacles that Sudanese English language learners face in listening activities. These particular students, as the researcher observed them, have listening comprehension barriers when they engage in listening activities.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The researcher has been teaching English for thirteen years. He has taught English listening to the primary stage at KS4 in Cambridge International School (Bahry Branch) in Sudan. He has observed that most of the students have serious deficiencies in listening comprehension. The researcher observed that many students performed poorly in listening skill. Particularly, in the mid-term and final-term Exams. This paper will, therefore, undertake the listening barriers relevant to students at Cambridge International School in Sudan

3. THE OBJECTIVE OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This paper aims to find out the barriers met by the students in listening activities from the perspective of Cambridge International School students.

4. STUDY QUESTION

This paper intends to answer the question of what listening barriers do Cambridge International School students meet in listening activities?

5. THE ASSUMPTION OF THE STUDY

The researcher prepared the following assumption that based on the paper question: There are many listening barriers that Cambridge International School students meet in listening activities.

6. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is expected to help Sudanese students to identify their barriers of listening comprehension to find out what additional learning strategies are necessary.

Students will be aware of the barriers which contribute to their difficulties in listening; when students know something about their problems, they will be able to improve their listening practices. It will also encourage material designers to conduct analysis and to revise modules in order to adjust the materials in a way that they address the students' listening deficiencies.

This study will inspire the decision makers to incorporate listening skills in the earlier stages of learning English in Sudan. Listening skills additional materials may be appropriate for Basic and Secondary schools.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

English syllabuses of basic and secondary schools of the Sudanese educational system do not incorporate listening skills. Therefore, this study will be restricted to the Cambridge International School students, the primary stage at KS4 in Sudan (Bahry Branch) for the academic year 2018/19.

8. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section reviews the prospective factors that are claimed to affect the students' listening, and a previous study that conducted on listening in general.

It provides a concise summary of the barriers that were mentioned in books, articles, and forums about listening comprehension. These barriers base their ground on insights derived from the experience of teaching the English language for many years. Some of them conducted from the works on reading comprehension and the other from studies conducted on native language listening comprehension.

8.1 Recognition of written words

Samuels (1984) states that listening comprehension is a process in which the listener builds meaning out of the information provided by the speaker. According to (Howett and Dakin, 1974). This entails understanding a speaker's pronunciation, his grammar, vocabulary, and grasping his meaning. He points out that, sometimes the target language differs from the listener's language in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. These differences add more demands on the listener's processing which can interfere with comprehension. He further points out that the differences between the spoken features of the learners' mother-tongue and the target language can be another obstacle that makes the students listening performance difficult. Teng (1998) provides a border definition of listening which contains the process of reauthorizing, extracting necessary information, remembering it and relating it to form meaning.

8.2 Length of spoken text

The selection of the text plays an essential role in language learning. One of the main reasons why the students can't understand most of the talk is the length of the listening text. Ur (1984) asserts that the challenge in listening comprehension is caused by the length of the listening text. It distracts the learners' attention and affects their listening comprehension negatively.

Many learners work much harder than necessary aiming for correct perception and interpretation of every word they hear when

they are learning a foreign language. Therefore, listening and interpreting unfamiliar sounds, lexis, and syntax for long stretches of time are very exhausting. In listening comprehension activities, learners understand the message is much better at the beginning and they get worse as they go on. This may be related to the tiredness. The listener may run out of the energy that essential to absorb and interpret the unusual sounds. Because of this reason, many writers prescribe a short listening text. For example, Atkins (2001) states clearly that a short listening text makes the complexity of comprehension less by reducing tiredness and lapse of concentration. Of course, EFL students find a short simple passage with a minimum of important information easier to follow; this gives them more chances to grasp the information.

8.3 Quality of spoken text

Perfetti, (2007) states clearly that the quality of the word representations affects listening comprehension. However, the acquisition of vocabulary and its usefulness depends on the quality of word representations and the way in which they are encoded and linked in working memory (Perfetti, 2007; Van der Schoot, Vasbinder, Reijntjes Horsley, & Lieshout, 2009).

In listening comprehension, the quality of the text plays as an essential role to generate interest in L2 listening and during selecting listening materials learners' interest should be taken into consideration. Thus, it is necessary to choose topics that will be interesting for the students. When the topic is attracting the attention, it generates enjoyment which contributes to motivation. Underwood (1989) puts the contribution of "interest" too careful listening in terms of "concentration". "If students find the topic interesting they will find concentration easier". This makes clear that when the listening topic is attractive, students find listening exercise very interesting because they are motivated to follow what they listen to. To the contrary, if the topic is stimulating, the listening activity cannot be tedious, and this can interfere with their concentration which is the main problem in a listening activity. Underwood (1989) claims that the shortest breaks inattention can have an effect on listening comprehension.

An experiment indicates that “the relationships between text quality and syntactic complexity are dependent both on the genre of the text and the measure of syntactic complexity used” (Beers & Nagy, 2009). This supports the need for controlling the genre so that the listener will react intellectually and emotionally to the text.

In schools, we may have various students with different interests and needs. However, it is important for the teachers to choose listening activities that address the interest of the students. When the students listen to compelling information, it motivates the students by making the listening task enjoyable; it catches the attention of the students and also encourages the students to actively engage in the listening task.

8.4. Previous Study

The researcher has presented a previous study which is important for having a clear picture, which helps in giving suggestions and assistance. The details of the study are the following:

- **Title:** The difficulties encountered by EFL Learners in Listening Comprehension as Perceived by ELC Students at the Arab American University
- **Date:** 2015.
- **Place:** An - Najah National University, Nablus, Palestine.
- **Main question:** What listening difficulties do EFL learners face when they listen to spoken English?
- **Methodology:** The researcher used a questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was developed and given to a sample of 189 EFL students studying at the English Language Centre. The interview was held with 12 students chosen randomly from the sample of the study.
- **Main findings:** The study shows that there are many obstacles that contribute to the difficulties in listening comprehension. Not recognizing words, the unfamiliarity of topics, noises, and quality of equipment, fast rate of speech are the top factors that impair listening comprehension.

This study tries to find out what students think of the difficulties and obstacles they face while listening to the English language. It discovered that students are not only bad at listening comprehension, but also they lack lots of vocabulary and they were

not taught how to use what they learn. It recommends providing courses for teachers on how to teach listening strategies.

The difference between the previous study above and the present paper is that: This paper tries to draw the attention of the readers that instructors need to encourage the students to develop their interests in the cultures of other parts of the world, particularly the culture of English language to foster their understanding in English Language Comprehension.

9. METHODOLOGY

This paper has adopted a descriptive method. The instrument has been used is the questionnaire. The researcher wants to get information about the barriers that Sudanese students faced in English language listening while taking the listening activities at Cambridge International School in Sudan.

The questionnaire consisted of close-open ended questions. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to eighty students and he used a five-point scale when 1-represents the lowest and 5-represents the highest scale of the listening obstacles. The numbers from 1 to 5 were designated by the adverbs of frequency: 'Never', 'Seldom', 'Sometimes', 'Often', and 'Always'. These adverbs of frequency used in the same order as they already mentioned. Finally, the data obtained from the questionnaire was presented, calculated and analyzed qualitatively.

10. QUESTIONNAIRE'S ANALYSIS

The researcher has presented and discussed the results of the questionnaire according to its hypothesis.

Hypothesis One

There are many listening barriers that Cambridge International School students face in listening comprehension skills.

Statement (1):

The students knew the words in their written form but they found it difficult whenever he/she heard the words in a stream of speech.

Table (1): The recognition of the written words by One-Sample Test

Statement	Test Value = 3			Mean Difference
	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	
I knew the words in their written form but I found it difficult whenever I hear the words in a stream of speech.	7.695	79	.000	.963

From the above table (1) there was a difference of statistical significance in the recognition of the words in their written form, but the students found it difficult whenever they hear the words in a stream of speech, where sig (2-tailed) equal 0.000 which is less than 0.05. While the mean difference is 0.963, and t statistic is 7.695 with the degree of freedom 79.

The result in the table (1) above indicates that students always found it hard to identify between the words which they hear in a stream of speech and their written form. We can say that most of the students know the words in their written form, but they find difficulty whenever they hear the words in a stream of speech. It is believed that most of the students learn unfamiliar words in terms of the written and spoken form. If the students are not aware of the words' sounds when they are said quickly that may affect their pronunciation. This point agrees with Ur's view (1984) which indicates the listeners' confusion in listening comprehension connected with the emerge of two words in a stream of speech in which one of the sounds is assimilated with the other. As a result of this, the students fail to identify the joining words.

Table (1.1): The recognition of the written words

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	3	3.8%
	Seldom	7	8.8%
	Sometimes	12	15.0%
	Often	26	32.5%
	Always	32	40.0%
	Total	80	100.0%

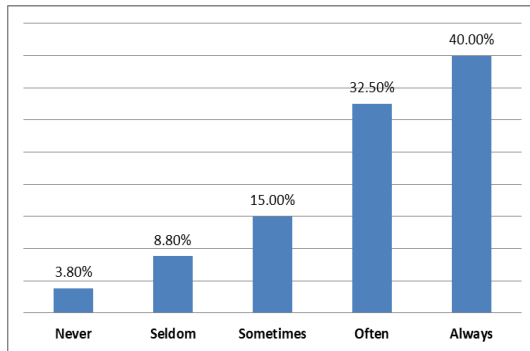


Figure (1.2): The recognition of the written words

Statement (2):

The length of oral text interfered with my listening performance.

Table (2): The length of oral text by One-Sample Test

Statement	Test Value = 3			
	t	df	Sig. (2tailed)	Mean Difference
The length of oral text interfered with the students' listening performance.	1.471	79	.145	.200

The above table (2) shows that there was a difference of statistical significance in the length of oral text interfered with the students' listening performance, where sig (2-tailed) equals 0.145 which is greater than 0.05. While the mean difference is 0.200, and t statistic is 1.471 with the degree of freedom 79.

The outcome from the above table (2) shows that the length of the spoken text can be one of the crucial barriers which affect the students' listening comprehension. This point agrees with Ur's claim (1984). He justifies; the length of the listening text can distract the learners' concentration. Thus, it is possible to say the length of the spoken text can interfere with the students' listening comprehension.

Table (2.1): The length of oral text

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	10	12.5%
Seldom	12	15.0%
Sometimes	20	25.0%
Often	28	35.0%
Always	10	12.5%
Total	80	100.0%

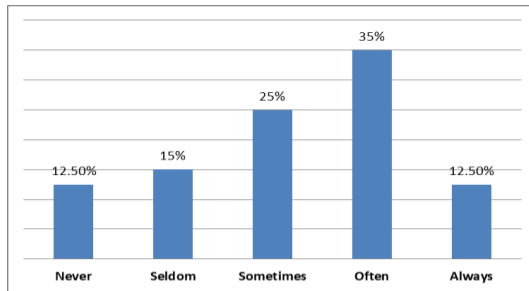


Figure (2.2): The length of oral text

Statement (3): Three

Uninteresting information which did not motivate me to keep on listening.

Table (3): Uninteresting information did not motivate students by One-Sample Test

Statement	Test Value = 3			
	t	df	Sig.(2tailed)	Mean Difference
Un interesting information which did not motivate the students to keep on listening.	6.878	79	.000	.813

The above table (3) shows that there was a difference of statistical significance in uninteresting information which did not motivate the students to keep on listening, where sig (2-tailed) equals 0.000. This is less than 0.05. While the mean difference is 0.813, and t statistic is 6.878 with the degree of freedom 79.

The result of the table (3) agrees with Underwood's statement (1989). It reveals if the subject is uninteresting; it can make the students inattentive which interferes with their concentration.

Table (3.1): The un interesting information did not motivate students

Response		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Never	3	3.8%
	Seldom	5	6.3%
	Sometimes	20	25.0%
	Often	28	35.0%
	Always	24	30.0%
Total		80	100.0%

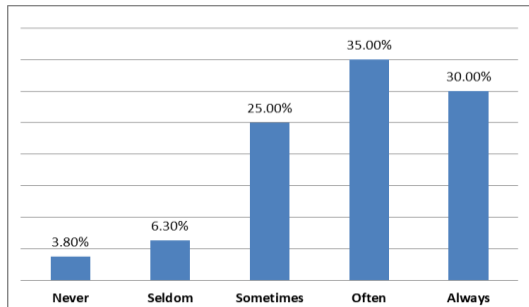


Figure (3.2): The un interesting information did not motivate students

Table (4): Barriers affect students' performance by One-Sample Test

Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 42			
		T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
52.4625	4.32228	21.650	79	.000	10.46250

The above table (4) shows that there was a difference of statistical significance in students' despondences, where sig (2-tailed) equal 0.000 which is less than 0.05 .While the mean difference is 10.46250, and t statistic is 21.650 with the degree of freedom 79.

Table (5): Chi-Squared Test

No	Statement	Chi-Square(a)	df	Sig.	Decision
1	The recognition of the words in their written form but finding the difficulty whenever hearing them in a stream of speech.	38.88	4.00	0.000	significance
2	The length of complicated grammatical structures interfered with the students' listening comprehension.	37.88	4.00	0.000	Significance
3	Uninteresting information which did not motivate the students to keep on listening.	32.13	4.00	0.000	Significance

From the above table, the value of the significance level is equal to 0.000 for all the statements which are less than 0.05. That means; there are statistically significant differences for all statements.

11. TESTING THE HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis (1): There are many listening barriers that Cambridge International School students face in listening comprehension.

Cambridge International School students were asked to mention other listening barriers which were different from those presented in close-ended questions. Students wrote some additional barriers. These barriers presented as points.

- Overlap of speech in a conversation. (Some students reported that there were many speakers in the listening activity, it was hard for us to distinguish which speaker was talking at a moment.)
- Unfamiliar listening activities in the final exam. (Some students reported that the listening tasks in the normal classroom were totally different from the tasks in the final exam.)
- Unclear instruction of the listening activity. (Some students reported that they didn't fully understand the questions in some listening activities.)
- The number of desktop computers and malfunction-headphones were not enough to handle the listening process. (Students reported that some playing equipment did not work appropriately. In particular, the headphones.)

Table (6): Students' replies which refer to the listening barriers that poses the most challenging

Item NO.	Statements	Students %	Mean	Question Direction
1	I knew the words in their written form but I found it difficult whenever I hear the words in a stream of speech.	32.5%	3.96	Often
2	The length of oral text interfered with my listening performance.	25.0%	3.20	Sometimes
3	Uninteresting information which did not motivate me to keep on listening.	35.0%	3.81	Often

Table (6) shows that the main sources of the students' listening barriers are connected with the recognition of words. They were related to the speech style, the pronunciation and the fast speech of the native speakers. We can deduce from the table (6) that, the recognition of words in their written forms was the main barrier that

posed the most difficult for the Cambridge International School students in Sudan.

12. SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS

The primary stage students at KS4 in Cambridge International School (Bahry Branch) in Sudan were the subject of this paper. The researcher has accumulated the data by using a questionnaire.

The most important aim of the paper is to find the curial barriers which students come across in listening comprehension and to evaluate whether these barriers are connected with the spoken text or not. In addition, the study wants to determine which specific barrier that poses the most challenged for Cambridge International School students in Sudan. After the data has been analyzed, the researcher pins down the following points:

- According to the students' judgment, the recognition of words in their written forms was the main barriers that pose the most challenging for them.
- The students reported that the unfamiliar words and subject which contains uninteresting information were not creating motivation for learning listening. In addition, the length of the spoken passage with complex grammatical structures.

These above findings will help teachers to train the students in promoting curial listening strategies so that they can get rid of the problems in understanding the authentic listening text.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper states that Cambridge International School students faced listening barriers whenever they are involved in listening activities. Regarding the findings of the study, the researcher has reached some recommendations which should be taken into consideration by authorities, teachers, and students.

1- Teachers should familiarize their students to the normal feature of spoken English by listening to authentic passages. They should choose activities that are suitable to the students' actual language capability. Moreover; they should concentrate on training the students not on testing them in listening comprehension.

2- Basic and secondary English teachers should expose the students to different kinds of recordings which support the students with exercises of word level and sentence level.

3- English teachers should assist their students to predict what speakers are going to say by providing them with sufficient background information about the topic and about the content of the listening passage before starting the listening comprehension activity.

14. CONCLUSION

Based on the data presented in this paper and within the limitation, the following conclusion is drawn.

Students are generally unfamiliar to the recognition of words in their written forms. According to the students' judgment, it was the main barrier that poses the most challenging for them, because of the students should not expose to different kinds of recordings which support them with exercises of word level and sentence level.

15. SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The researcher suggests further studies should be done on listening comprehension so as to increase the standard of the student's language competence. The following suggestions are made.

1- Further study should be conducted on teaching listening strategies carried out by English teachers of Cambridge International School. They may consider to design and promote listening activities to help willing students to enhance their listening skills.

2- Future research should include studies designed to investigate the effect that the previous background material has on listening comprehension. This material should be more inspiring than the material used in this study.

3- Further studies should be conducted on learners' listening strategies in order to learn more about how students apply these strategies when facing listening barriers.

It is hoped that more researches are carried out with a large sample on how to improve listening skills. The researcher did not use a large sample to generalize an overall conclusion applying to the majority of English learners in Sudan.

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APPENDIX

Cambridge International School in Sudan (Bahry Branch)

Student's Questionnaire

The researcher would be extremely grateful if you read and respond to the following statements.

- ✓ **Direction:** Tick () **5** if you always come across the barrier.
 Tick () **4** if you **often** come across the barrier.
 Tick () **3** if you **sometimes** come across the barrier.
 Tick () **2** if you **seldom** come across the barrier.
 Tick () **1** if you **never** come across the barrier.

Item No.	Statements	Standard of Difficulty				
		Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
1	I knew the words in their written form but I found it difficult whenever I hear the words in a stream of speech.	5	4	3	2	1
2	The length of oral text interfered with my listening performance.	5	4	3	2	1
3	Uninteresting information which did not	5	4	3	2	1

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	motivate me to keep on listening.					
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