
**An investigation into the poor performance of Red
Sea University students in listening comprehension
skill:
A Case Study at Red Sea University in Port Sudan
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Abstract:

This study attempted to explore the factors that contribute to the problems of Red Sea University students come across in English listening comprehension. It evaluates whether the factors are connected with the text, the speaker, the listener, the environment, or the listening materials. It determines which specific factor poses the most difficulty for the students. The study adopted the descriptive method. The subject of the study was a group of first year English major college students of Red Sea University. The study sample consists of 80 students who took the listening course at Faculty of Education Arts. Data was gathered by means of questionnaire, interview, observation, and material analysis. The results of the study confirmed that Red Sea University students face listening problems whenever they are engaged in listening exercises. The study determined twenty four factors that affected the students in their listening comprehension. Furthermore, the current study determined the learners' listening difficulties that came out from the inconvenient listening environment, from the defective listening materials used in the course, and from the

students' lack of exposure to native speakers. The study showed that the fast speech of native speaker and his / her pronunciation were posed the most difficulties for the students when they are engaged in listening exercises. The researcher recommended that this problem needs to draw teachers' attention to train the students on listening learning strategies to improve their language skills.

Key words: Investigation, Poor Performance, factors, Listening comprehension skill.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is a fundamental language skill, and it is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1991; Vogely, 1998). Both instructors (Ferris & Tagg, 1996) and students (Ferris, 1998) accept the significance of listening comprehension for success in academic environments. Furthermore, it is obvious that listening plays as a meaningful function in the lives of people. It is even more significant for the lives of students since listening is used as a mainly medium of learning at all levels of education. One of the most significant methods to help learners attain successful listening is to show them the way, so as to raise their awareness on their listening problems and they can use effective listening strategies. Krashen, Terrell, Ehrman, & Herzog (1984) assert that acquisition takes place only when students absorb enough comprehensible input. The same assertion was supported by Rost (1994) who confirmed that listening is necessary in language classrooms because it provides input for learners. Krashen (1985) argues that people acquire language by understanding the linguistic information they hear. As Hasan (2000) mentioned, "listening comprehension provides the right conditions for language acquisition and development of other

language skills” (p.138). Therefore, Listening plays as an important role in developing the spoken language proficiency. Rost (2002) also states that developing proficiency in listening is the key to achieving proficiency in speaking.

There were many changes that have taken place in the area of second language education, one of which is the rising importance of listening comprehension (Morley, 2001).). Vandergrift (2007) proposes that listening has taken willingly as the heart of the language; and Richards (2005) declares clearly that “the position of listening in language programs has undergone considerable change in most recent years. From being a neglected skill relegated to passing treatment as a minor strand within a speaking course it now appears as most important course in many language programs” (p. 85). According to what I have read, Listening skill plays as an essential role in effective communication and the importance of listening in Language learning has been known recently (Nunan, 1998; Celce-Murcia, 2001). At the present time, some researchers have taken care of listening comprehension in language learning and teaching. For example, Nunan (1998) thinks that: listening is the basic skill in language learning. Without listening skill, learners will never learn to communicate effectively. In fact over 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening.... (p. 1). Listening is a vital skill of language learning as children learn their first language. Just as the basic role listening plays in L1 acquisition, it is by no means less important in second language learning (Rost, 2011).

There are potential problems 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 factors that contribute to the problems of EFL students at Red Sea University encounter in learning English listening would benefit both the students and the instructors.

In fact English syllabuses of basic and secondary schools of Sudanese education system do not incorporated Listening skills. Therefore, students do not learn listening skills at the earlier stages of English language learning. The students in these stages are not exposed to English educational media programs in which native speakers of the target language present English lessons that can improve students listening skills. When these students join the tertiary levels they find the listening skills as a new and problematic subject for learning English.

There are potential problems 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 factors that contribute to the problems of EFL students at Red Sea University encounter in learning English listening would benefit both the students and the instructors. After this study is completed, the finding may help instructors to become aware of the factors and problematic areas of listening skill so that they can take essential treatment measures, which are suggested as an implication of the study. More specifically, it will give an account of the difficulties English language learners of Sudanese Universities encounter in listening classes. These particular learners, as the researcher observed them. They have listening comprehension problems when they engage in listening activities. Understanding their listening difficulties will permit the instructors to modify their teaching practices.

The purpose of the study

The purpose is to find out the specific listening problems of first year English language students at Red Sea University encounter in listening comprehension.

Statement of the Problem

From the researcher's experience of teaching the English language listening skills, most of the students who enroll in the English Department of Sudanese Universities have serious deficiencies in listening comprehension. This is especially observable when the students take the listening courses at first year. The researcher observed that many students performed poorly in "listening skills" courses.

The study discussed the factors that contribute to the listening problems. On the other hand, are these factors connected to the listening text, speaker, listener, or listening environment of the first year English Language learners at Red Sea University.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1- To find out the obstacles encountered by the students in listening comprehension skills from the perspective of Red Sea University students and instructors.
- 2- To identify the obstacles that contribute to the problems of Red Sea University students in listening comprehension skills.
- 3- To find out which particular obstacle poses more difficulty for the Red Sea University students in listening comprehension skills.

Questions of the Study

The researcher has formulated the following questions to be answered in the course of the study:

- 1- What listening obstacles do Red Sea University students face in listening comprehension skills?
- 2- To what extent are these obstacles connected with a listening text, a speaker , a listener , or with an environment?
- 3- Which particular obstacle poses the most difficulty for the Red Sea University students ?

Hypotheses of the Study

Based on the research questions the researcher formulated the following assumptions:

- 1- There are many listening obstacles that Red Sea University students face in listening comprehension skills.
- 2- The obstacles are connected with a listening text, a speaker , a listener, and with environment.
- 3- Many of these obstacles pose the most difficulty for the Red Sea University students in listening comprehension skills.

Significance of the Study

The study is expected to help students to identify their difficulties of listening comprehension to ascertain what further learning strategies are necessary.

Students will be aware of the obstacles which contribute to their difficulties in listening; when listeners know something about their own problems, they will be able to improve their listening practices and become better listeners.

It will also encourage material designers and instructors to conduct needs analysis, and to revise modules or course contents in order to adjust the materials in a way that they address the students' listening deficiencies.

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

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Function of Listening in Language Learning

There were many studies on listening which they draw the attention to the process of first and second language acquisition. As a result, listening is known as vital language skill for the learner of EFL. Thus, listening has started to exist as an essential component in the process of second language acquisition (Feyten, 1991). He indicated that listening plays as a potential role in student's academic success and it is a key component to successful learning. He mentioned that the total time devoted in communication is 45% spent on listening.

Yagang (1994) further points out that listening are the most important part of communication. It awakens awareness of the language. Especially in learning a language for communicative purpose, listening plays a vital role, as it helps the language learner to acquire pronunciation word stress, vocabulary and the comprehension of messages conveyed can be based on tone of voice, pitch and accent; and it is only possible when we listen. Also, every study conducted regarding the language skills acquisition has proved that when we communicate, we gain 45% of language competence from listening. It can be said, without listening skills, language learning is impossible because there is no communication where there is no human interaction. Also listening is crucial not only in language learning but also for learning other subjects.

Vandergrift (1999) stated that listening is a highly integrative skill which plays an important role in the process of language learning and facilitates the emergence of other language skills. It plays apart in bridging gaps for context meanings as we make use of gestures, facial expressions and body language when we speak to others. Mastering this skill is crucial to understanding messages we encounter every day. As

we get to understand spoken language by listening, it is easier to improve the other skills and gain confidence.

Listening plays as an essential role in communicating with others. According to L.Miller (2003), more than forty percent of our daily communication is spent on listening, thirty-five percent on speaking, about sixteen percent on reading, and only nine percent on writing. There was an article on the webpage of International Listening Association (Beard, 2005) indicated that listening is an essential language skill, it is the medium through which people can gain their different knowledge. Similarly, listening has important roles in second language acquisition as well as in communication; it has been the neglected skill in assessment and classroom teaching (Rubin, 1994; Richards and Renandaya, 2002).

Recently, there has been an increased effort on developing listening ability because of its importance. Particularly these days, there have been increasing emphases on listening comprehension in second language teaching, and this is also reflected in many methodologies and in the gradual growth of many listening materials for example: textbooks, audiotapes, videotapes, and CD-ROMs (Tang, 1998; Richards and Renandaya, 2002).

Weiler (2012) indicated that listening skills have direct impact on your ability to learn a new language. Improving listening skills must be a top priority for anyone who wants to become really good at speaking. Our general listening skills depends upon our interests. They are critical for language learning. The better you are with these general skills the better will you be at language learning.

Scholars have started giving their attention to second language listening comprehension. They indicate its vital importance in language acquisition(e.g., Ur,1984; Krashen, 1985; Underwood, 1989; Rost, 1994). Some of their ideas that have been of focus in the insights are the factors that affect

listening comprehension. Therefore, this study aims to identify the factors that contribute to the problems of first year English language learners at Red Sea University encounter when listening to a spoken text.

PROSPECTIVE FACTORS IN EFL LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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 (Howatt 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 factor that makes the students listening performance difficult. Teng (1998) provides a boarder definition of listening which contains the process of reauditorizing, extracting necessary information, remembering it and relating it to form meaning.

According to Underwood's study (2004, p.62) described one of the factors in listening problems being that listeners don't have enough vocabulary. When learners come across an unknown word, they may stop and think of the meaning and this will cause them to miss the next part of the speech. Furthermore, Underwood (1989) sees the major problems as being connected to learner's different backgrounds, such as culture and education.

He states the major listening problems as follows:

- In ability to build learning habits.
- In ability to concentrate.
- Lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak.
- The listener's limited vocabulary.
- Failure to know the "signals".
- The listener is not able to get things repeated.
- Problems of interpretation.

In addition to these ideas, Yagang (1994) attributes the difficulty of listening comprehension to four essential points: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. There were some studies on the effect of particular factors on the learner's listening comprehension have been mentioned (e.g. Boyle, 1984; Brown, 1995; Chang and Roehl, 2011; Chang and Dunel, 1992; Lotfi, 2012; Rubin, 1994; Rubin and Thompson, 1994; Teng, 2002, Yagang, 1993). Rubin has tried to offer a complete and systematic survey of all the links constituting the listening process, entailing listening content, the characteristics of the speaker and the listener, what the students do in this process, and how the speaking-listening communication proceeds. He was the first one who mentioned the factors that affect listening comprehension. These factors are: text characteristics, interlocutor characteristics, listener characteristics and process characteristics. The coming part discusses each characteristic.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The scope of the study is intended to cover some of the tertiary students at Red Sea University, Faculty of Education Arts. The rationale for this choice is due to the great failure of the first year English Language students in listening comprehension

skill. Therefore, the researcher intends to check out where the problem lies.

Descriptive approach was adopted to check the objectives of the study. A combination of a quantitative analysis and a qualitative analysis were used to increase the reliability and validity of this study. A questionnaire was used for the students to check the obstacle of the situation that lead to the students' failure in listening comprehension skill.

The Sample:

The population for the study was comprised of students at Red Sea University.

The researcher took a sample of 80 students to respond to the questionnaire.

Questionnaire

This instrument is designed for the first year of Red Sea University students; Faculty of Education Arts in Port Sudan. The questionnaire is planned to collect facts and details about the listening obstacles that students encounter while they are involved in the listening comprehension course. These obstacles are presented and organized under four categories. They are text, speaker, listener, and environment. The researcher used the open and close-ended items in the questionnaire. The responses to the questionnaire and the data that obtained were gathered. Then, analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively.

The data collection procedures started when the researcher obtained an approval letter from the authorities to conduct the study. The next step was to design the instrument of data collection and hence handed it to research experts for assessment. The following step was to undergo some changes to the mentioned tool based on the suggestions received. The fourth step was to do the piloting to test the validity and the

reliability of the instruments. The fifth step was the administration of the instruments.

Questionnaire in terms of Analysis and Results

The researcher identified fourteen factors that affected the students' listening comprehension. The factors have been classified into four classes according to their common features. These classes are text, speaker, listener and environment. Some factors are interrelated and associated with each other. The researcher used the existing system in the literature to make the analysis easily and to provide a classification scheme which proposed by Rubin and Yagang in 1994. He divided the obtained data into four sections. They are listener, text, speaker, and environmental factors. The questions which referred to these factors were put together under their classes.

The listening text

The length of the text is considered as a principal source of listening problem. Especially, the difficulty of grammatical structure, and unfamiliar words. They were tabulated as follows. Table -1, Factors connected with listening texts. This table shows the factors related to listening text.

Table (4.2) Factors connected with listening texts

| Item No | Statements |
|---------|---|
| 1 | Unfamiliar subject interfered with listening comprehension. |
| 2 | The length of oral text interfered with listening comprehension. |
| 3 | Un interesting information which did not motivate the students to keep listening. |
| 4 | Length of complicated grammatical structures interfered with listening comprehension. |
| 5 | Unfamiliar words interfered with listening comprehension. |

The following five tables show these items in detail.

Table (4.2.1) Students' replies which refer to unfamiliar subject interfered with listening comprehension.

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 1 | 32 | 22.13 | 48 | 32.87 | 50 | 43.21 | 126 | 85.21 | 8 | 6.02 | 21 | 14.75 | 27 | 18.76 |

Table 4.2.1 shows that more than half of the learners (64%) have replied that unfamiliar subject interfered with listening comprehension. In addition, 126 out of 151 learners (84%) have replied that unfamiliar subject (sometimes, often, always) interfered with listening comprehension. The above result indicates that unfamiliar subject interfered with listening comprehension to the majority of the learners. The result agrees with Nuttall's statement (1996) that shows the students have to share definite assumptions about the subject that helps the learners to build their understanding which depends on the basis of their experiences. Problems occur when there is a mismatch between the subject and the learners' past experience.

Table (4.2.2) Students' replies that refer to the length of oral text interfered with listening comprehension.

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 2 | 40 | 27.21 | 42 | 28.86 | 26 | 18.11 | 104 | 88.15 | 26 | 18.12 | 25 | 17.45 | 49 | 33.54 |

Table 4.2.2 shows that 104 out of 151 students (70%) have replied that the length of the oral text (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension. The outcome above reveals that the length of the spoken text can be one of the crucial factors 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 students' concentration. Thus, it is possible to say the length of the spoken text can interfere with the students' listening comprehension.

Table (4.2.3) Students' replies that refer to un interesting information which did not motivate them to keep on listening.

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 3 | 42 | 28.85 | 51 | 34.89 | 46 | 32.54 | 135 | 91.26 | 9 | 6.70 | 11 | 8.05 | 18 | 12.74 |

Table 4.2.3 shows that 135 out of 151 learners (91.26%) have replied that uninteresting information in the listening text which did not motivate the students to keep on listening interfered with their listening comprehension. In addition, more than half of the students (64.42) have also replied that, this problem always or often interfered with their listening comprehension. This point agrees with Underwood's statement (1989) that reveals if the subject is uninteresting; it can make the students inattentive which interferes with their concentration.

Table (4.2.4) Students' replies which refer to the length of complicated grammatical structures interfered with listening comprehension.

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 4 | 35 | 24.15 | 51 | 34.89 | 53 | 36.23 | 135 | 91.25 | 6 | 4.69 | 14 | 10.06 | 18 | 12.74 |

Table 4.2.4: reveals that, the great majority of 135 out of 151 students(91.25%) have replied that , the length of complicated grammatical structures (sometimes, often, always) interfered with listening comprehension, and more than half of the students (68%) have also replied that the complex grammatical structure of sentences interfered with their listening comprehension. This point agrees with Rubin's point of view (1998) which shows that, the difficulty in listening is referring to the structural component of the text.

Table (4.2.5) Students' replies which refer to unfamiliar words interfered with listening comprehension.

| Item No | Level of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 5 | 46 | 31.54 | 50 | 34.22 | 39 | 26.84 | 131 | 88.58 | 9 | 6.71 | 15 | 10.73 | 22 | 15.42 |

Table 4.2.5 shows that, the great majority of 131 out of 151 students (88.89%) have replied that unfamiliar words (sometimes, often, and always) interfered with their listening comprehension. In particularly, idioms and jargon words. More than half (87) of the learners (58%) have also replied that the problem always or often interfered with their listening comprehension. From the result which obtained above, it is possible to say that unfamiliar words interfered with the learners' listening comprehension. This confirms Rubin's statement which shows that, the difficulty in listening relying on the bottom-up processing strategy in which the students make use of the analysis of words to enhance their understanding of the spoken text.

In general, all the tables mentioned above show that, the listening text can be one of the major sources of listening obstacles. In particular, unfamiliar subject, the length of oral text , the length of complicated grammatical structures, unfamiliar words and un interesting information which did not motivate the student to keep on listening.

Factors of the speaker

The pronunciation, varied accent and natural speech of the speaker are factors which can be sources of listening problems. Table 4.3 shows the factors which related to speaker.

Table (4.3) Factors connected with speaker

| Item No | Statement |
|---------|---|
| 6 | Native speakers with different accent and speaking style interfered with listening comprehension. |
| 7 | Fast speech interfered with listening comprehension. |

Table (4.3.1) Students' replies which refer to the listening obstacles that emerge from the native speaker s' speech.

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 6 | 27 | 18.78 | 46 | 31.54 | 71 | 48.4 | 140 | 94.7 | 5 | 4.02 | 10 | 7.37 | 13 | 9.38 |

Table 4.3.1 shows, the majority of the students (78%) have replied that the different speaking style of native speakers always or often interfered with their listening comprehension. This result agrees with the previous research that indicates pauses and hesitation in natural speech cause comprehension mistakes for non-native speakers (Voss, 1979).

In general, Sudanese students are familiar to their teacher's accent. When they come across the pronunciation of native speaker which characterized by incomplete sentences, unstructured language and fast rate of delivery; it is

challenging for the learners to understand the listening text (Underwood, 1989; Yagang 1994).

Table (4.3.2) Students' replies which refer to the fast speech interfered with listening comprehension.

| Item No | Level of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 7 | 13 | 9.39 | 31 | 21.47 | 108 | 73.15 | 148 | 98.99 | 4 | 3.35 | 3 | 2.25 | 5 | 4.02 |

Table 4.3.2 reveals that almost of the students (93%) have replied that the fast speech of native speaker always or often interfered with their listening comprehension. We can understand from the result obtained above that , the natural speech of native speaker which the students consider it as fast speech interfere with the listening comprehension of all most of the students.

Factors of listener

Inability of listener to use suitable listening strategies such as to grip_pronunciation, to listen without seeing the speaker's body language may arise different problems to the listener. Table 3 reveals factors_related to listeners. It shows these items in detail.

Table (4.4) Factors connected with listeners

| Item No | Statement |
|---------|--|
| 8 | Different pronunciation of native speaker interfered with my listening comprehension. |
| 9 | I found it difficult to comprehend the spoken text and to answer Wh-questions. |
| 10 | It is difficult to predict and obtain common understanding of the spoken text from the first time. |
| 11 | It is difficult to comprehend the spoken text without seeing the speaker's facial expressions. |
| 12 | It is difficult for me to differentiate where one word finishes and another begins, when I heard them in a stream of speech. |

The following five tables show us the factors in more details.

Table (4.4.1) Students' replies that refer to listening obstacles connected with native speakers' pronunciations

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 8 | 18 | 12.74 | 41 | 28.18 | 92 | 62.41 | 174 | 98.67 | 4 | 2.35 | 4 | 2.35 | 6 | 4.69 |

Table 4.4.1 reveals that the majority of the students (89%), 131 out of 151 have replied that they always or often meet difficulty to know the words in listening comprehension because of the way they were pronounced. On the other hand, 60% of the students under the study have replied that, they always faced such problems. This result indicates that, most of the students encountered difficulty to know the word because of the pronunciation. This result agrees with Ur's view (1984) which states that, the learner may not know the word, if it is

pronounced differently or may even miss the word completely in terms of its existence.

Table (4.4.2) Students' replied that refer to listening obstacles related to inability to cope with the listening activities

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 9 | 53 | 36.24 | 44 | 30.19 | 37 | 25.49 | 130 | 87.90 | 11 | 8.05 | 14 | 10.06 | 23 | 16.09 |

Some of the students fail to achieve the listening activities which demand the skill of writing. This failure leaves the learners frustrated and depressed.

Table 4.4.2 shows that, the great majority of the students (87%) have replies that they sometimes, often, always feel demotivated when they don't comprehend the spoken text in the listening comprehension. Therefore, many scholars prefer to use a simple text with minimum of essential information which provides learners more chances to grasp the information. This point agrees with Ur (1984) when he says, when the learner gets a simple text his / her understanding of the message will be much better. On the other hand, the majority of the students (87%) have replied that they (sometimes, often, always) found it difficult to answer questions in listening comprehension which require them to write longer answers. This point agrees with Hughes's view (1989) which indicates especially, if the intention of the activity is to improve

the listening skills, the response of the activity should demand only responses that help to check the students' listening skills.

Table (4.4.3) Students' replies that refer to listening obstacles connected with the skills of getting general idea of a spoken text

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 10 | 51 | 34.89 | 53 | 36.23 | 38 | 26.17 | 138 | 93.27 | 6 | 4.69 | 11 | 8.05 | 15 | 10.73 |

Table 4.4.3 proves almost all of the students (93%) have replied that, it is difficult for them from the first time to predict and to get a general idea. In addition, more than half of the students (60%) have replied that they always or often found it challenging to use the listening strategies. This result indicates that almost all of the students had difficulty in using the skills of getting general information from the text and in using the predictive skills. This point agrees with Harmer's view (1991) that shows listener's success at understanding the content of what they hear depends largely on their expertise in the listening strategies. On the other hand, there is evidence that shows employing listening strategies promote listening comprehension.

Table (4.4.4) Students' replies that refer to listening obstacles connected with the facial expressions of the speaker

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 11 | 43 | 29.52 | 34 | 23.48 | 43 | 29.52 | 116 | 78.49 | 16 | 11.39 | 23 | 15.11 | 37 | 25.49 |

Table 4.4.4 shows that more than half of the students (51%) always or often found it difficult to comprehend the spoken text without non-verbal clues, i.e. gesture and facial expression. The lack of non-verbal clues can interfere with learners' listening comprehension. This problem can affect the learners whose cognitive style of learning a language is visual (Kolb, 1984 cited in Spinney & Jordan, 2004).

Table (4.4.5) Students' replies that refer to listening obstacles caused by the difference between written and spoken language

| Item No | Level of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 12 | 27 | 18.78 | 51 | 34.89 | 68 | 45.63 | 141 | 93.62 | 4 | 3.35 | 11 | 8.05 | 13 | 9.39 |

Table 4.4.5 shows that the majority of the students (78%) have replied that they always or often 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 the unfamiliar words in terms of 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_word.

In general, these tables reveal that, the listening text without non-verbal clues can interfere with the students' listening comprehension. In addition, the inability of the students to grip pronunciation, to use the listening strategies, to deal with challenging activities, and frustration_considered as listeners' factors which can interfered with the students listening comprehension.

The environmental Factors

Environmental factors regarded as source of listening problems such as, the poor -quality of listening equipment and shortage of enough time for the students to achieve their listening activities may affect the learners' performance. The tables below show these factors in details.

Table (4.6) Factors connected with listening environment

| Item No | Statements |
|---------|---|
| 13 | Shortage of enough time for achieving the activity interfered with my listening performance. |
| 14 | Non obvious sounds produced from poor quality tape-recorder interfered with my listening comprehension. |

Table (4.6.1) Students' replies that refer to listening obstacles related to shortage of time to achieve the activity

| Item No | Standard of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 13 | 29 | 20.13 | 46 | 31.54 | 68 | 46.24 | 138 | 93.95 | 9 | 6.70 | 7 | 5.36 | 14 | 10.05 |

Table 4.6.1 shows that the majority of the students (75%) have replied that, they didn't have enough time to finish the listening activity often interfered with their listening performance. From the result which obtained above, there were too many students didn't get enough time to complete their listening activity.

Mainly, Table 4.6.1 and Table 4.6.2 showed that the poor recording industry and the shortage of enough time to accomplish the listening activity can interfere with learners' listening comprehension.

Table (4.6.2) Students' replies that refer to listening obstacles connected with the recording equipment

| Item No | Level of Difficulty | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| | Sometime | | Often | | Always | | Total Negative | | Never | | Seldom | | Total Positive | |
| | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No. | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % | Students' No | Students' % |
| 14 | 43 | 29.52 | 45 | 30.86 | 36 | 24.82 | 120 | 81.18 | 15 | 11 | 20 | 14.09 | 33 | 22.9 |

Table 4.6.2 reveals that the great majority of the students (81%) have replied that the sound that produced from the poor quality tape-recorder was unclear and it seemed to distort the voice. The unclear sound (sometimes, often, always) interfered with their listening comprehension. In addition, 52% of the students have replied that they often came across such difficulties. From the result above, we can say the poor -quality of the recorded listening materials interferes with the students' listening comprehension. This result agrees with Yagang's declaration (1994) that shows the difficulty in listening comprehension is partly due to unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment.

DISCUSSION

The responses of the instructors and students indicate that students have weak listening ability. They are unable to deal with listening activities, to use the strategies, and to grasp pronunciation. Moreover, they do not have an inborn quality of understanding of what effective listeners do. Therefore, it is the responsibility of instructors to share the knowledge with

the students. They are generally unfamiliar to the spoken features of native speakers. According to the students' judgment, the fast speech of native speakers and pronunciation were the main factors that pose the most challenge for them. This due to the unfamiliarity of students to the normal feature of the spoken language. Besides, the overlap between speakers in listening activities interfered with the students' listening comprehension.

The listening materials in the course were considered as a source of the listening problems such as unfamiliar subjects, abstract concepts that required a wide variety of linguistic abilities. In addition, the density of information and difficulty of grammatical structure in the listening text were essential part of the problem which influenced the students' listening comprehension.

The main source of students' problem is the defect of the listening equipments such as English laboratory did not provide enough space for the large number of students to get the chance to practice listening. Moreover, the headphones are too old. Therefore, some of the students prefer to listen without headphones, but also there is a noise from the near places.

Distractions in the listening surroundings and insufficient time to carry out listening activities affect the listening comprehension of the students to a significant level. Therefore, Instructors should diagnose the students' obstacles in listening activity. Then, they can provide many chances for students to practice listening activities that involve progress from basic to more complex as the students obtain in language ability.

RESULTS

This study has been conducted with the purpose of finding the curial obstacles which contribute to the problems of Red Sea

University students come across in listening comprehension. At the end of the study the researcher has come up with the following results:

1- The listening surroundings reveals that disturbing sounds which emerge from the neighboring places, unclear sounds which caused by the poor quality equipments, the number of desktop computers and malfunctioned headphones played a bad role on the students' listening performance.

2 - The listening materials of the course are not suitable for the training of essential strategies of listening. For instance, some activities are challenging; the module includes passages that are not appropriate for the teaching of listening. In addition, the text book was not planned for teaching listening, but was planned for testing purposes.

3- The documentary analysis which was prepared by the researcher showed that the students' overall achievement in the listening course was poor.

4- This findings give instructors information to train learners developing appropriate listening strategies to get rid of the problems in understanding the authentic listening.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study stated that Red Sea University students faced listening obstacles whenever they are involved in listening activities on their listening course. Regarding the results of the study, the researcher has reached some recommendations which should be taken into consideration by authorities, instructors, and students.

1- Instructors should familiarize their students to the normal feature of spoken English by listening to authentic passages.

2- Teachers should depend on the theoretical basis in their teaching in order to raise students' listening ability. They

should change the listening classroom from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom.

3- There should be more hours to practice listening in teaching timetable, and the curriculum designers should include more listening activities while setting the educational objectives of English curriculum in Sudan.

4- There should be a usual repairing of the defective laboratory equipments, and the admin of the university should widen the area of the lab so as to accommodate a considerable number of students.

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

6- 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.

7- Students should visit the language laboratory to practice listening skill in their spare time and to apply appropriate strategies to each kind of listening passage in order to get the most suitable result.

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