Qualitative and Quantitative Study on Listening Anxiety of Jordanian Students Majoring in English Language at Jerash University

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Abstract

Research on second and foreign language acquisition reveals that both cognitive and affective factors have a significant effect on the listening process and strategies employed by students as well as the outcome of their listening. Among the affective and cognitive factors that have played a crucial role in terms of listening is the listening anxiety. Therefore, this study aims to investigate how listening anxiety affects the listening process of EFL students at Jerash University in Jordan. 60 Jordanian undergraduates majoring in English language from Jerash University took part in this research. The research methodology was based on a qualitative as well as quantitative approach. The findings of the study revealed that 43 of them experienced a high level of listening anxiety. The Qualitative findings from the interviews with students corroborate the findings generated from the quantitative part of the study. The findings of this study not only support current opinion regarding the state of EFL teaching in Jordan, but more pertinently, it highlights the fact that remedial action needs to be taken to address the inherent failure of the educationists to produce proficient listeners of English among Jordanian graduates. One way of doing so would be to use the findings of this study to look into the possibility of teaching EFL in a holistic and integrative manner. Finally, this study suggests further research to be conducted based on its findings.

Index Terms: EFL Jordanian students, Jerash University, listening anxiety

Introduction

The importance of English language nowadays enhances foreign language educators and researchers to find new methods to teach English more efficiently due to the increasing numbers of students who are trying to learn English. However, due to the obstacles and challenges in learning English language, many EFL students may feel strained or discouraged, and this will eventually made them to be anxious. The students' strain or discouragement is based on some language learning factors which are addressed by a number of language researchers (i.e., Horwitz et al, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; 1991a; 1994; Liu & Huang, 2011) who concluded that there are many factors that influence foreign language learning, and that language anxiety is one of the major factors affecting language acquisition, performance and achievements inside English language classrooms. Language anxiety is depicted as state in which feelings of worry, fear and uneasiness can be stimulated in human's nerve system (Bouras & Holt, 2007).

Language anxiety is defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284). Horwitz et al., (1986, p.31) also defines foreign language anxiety as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". Language learning anxiety has been hypothesized to be one of the most effective factors in foreign language achievement and performance where low levels of language anxiety lead to better performance in the target language (Horwitz, 2001). Such anxiety may become a personal trait that negatively influences the acquiring and learning of a language. In real life, the degree of anxiety differs from one learner to another. Usually those who suffer high levels of anxiety may suffer in their learning of the language. In comparison, the opposite may also be true for some other language learners. Instead they may be motivated or driven by anxiety to work harder or repeat the attempt in the learning task till they can achieve success.

Among the four basic skills in English (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), listening skills is one of the four basic skills that a foreign language learner should acquire and master. In all learning institutions, listening skills is of utmost importance in the curriculum at any time of the learning or assessment period. In a research on listening skills at university level, researchers discovered that listening skills is very important in determining the success of mastering the curriculum since listening can display the extent of a student's learning progress. According to Richard (1985, p.51) listening is defined as "the process of understanding speech in a second or foreign language".

There are a number of available definitions of listening anxiety in the literature. Given that it is not feasible to provide an exhaustive collection of the definitions or interpretations, this review is intended to selectively examine a number of definitions with an aim to understand the nature of listening anxiety and thus to identify a definition which is pertinent to this study. One definition of anxiety is that of Scarcella and Oxford (1992) who defined it as "listening anxiety occurs when students feel they are faced with a task that is too difficult or unfamiliar to them". Another definition of listening anxiety is that Joiner (1986) who defined it as "a negative listening self-concept" during the listening process.

Kimura (2008), elaborated on the definition by positing it in psychological terms by relating it to a person's tendencies or predisposition to approach or avoid listening situations that are assessed. In others words, listening anxiety refers to the psychological response of a person/student to listening task, which is determined by the effect of feelings, beliefs and behaviors. Given that listening anxiety is overwhelmingly viewed in the literature as a psychological state of being, it is not surprising that in the L2 listening classroom, listening anxiety is often the result of students lacking confidence in their speaking abilities (Golchi, 2012). It might also be added that this situation arises out of the low proficiency level of the students.

Statement of the Problem

In Jordan, the importance of English is limited to the process of university entrance selection purposes and its teaching as a foreign language (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). While, the importance of English is limited to the process of enabling students to pass school exams and university entrance selection purposes, the teaching of EFL in Jordan has also undergone transformation just like in other similar countries that consider the teaching of EFL as an educational and instrumental language. However, while the relevant educational authorities in Jordan are aware of the importance of enhancing literacy skills in English for national and international purposes, in reality, in Jordanian schools, the teaching of EFL focuses on preparing students for the (Tawjihi) examination and also for the Jordanian universities entrance examination. Therefore, they concentrate on testing students' skills such as writing and reading and ignore the other skills like listening. This is because listening in English language is not directly connected to the daily lives of students, resulting in English listening with a secondary importance in comparison with other aspects of language skills. In fact, Jordanian students' use of English language is limited to the classrooms only whereby exposure to English language outside of the language classroom is very minimal or almost non-existent. In addition, the overwhelming majority of Jordanian students come to the universities with varying level of proficiency in English and they graduate from the English Departments from Jordanian universities with approximately the same range variation in English proficiency.

Since the 80s, several studies on the teaching of EFL in Jordan have revealed that most of the Jordanian EFL students had difficulty in learning English language. In fact, all these studies have shown a common weakness experienced by Jordanian EFL students in language skills, especially in writing and speaking. Consequently, this present study will look into the possible reasons why Jordanian EFL students are weak in listening, and in so doing, gain a better understanding of the listening problems. While, other Jordanian researchers look into this issue, they ignore it in terms of listening anxiety. As other researchers in L2 have pointed out, listening anxiety is a problem facing many L2 students.

While extant research have looked at the problems of teaching EFL in Jordan, they have not contextualized the research and findings specifically in relation to the vision of the Ministry of Education on the one hand and the need to investigate the methodology as practiced in the classrooms on the other in order to assess whether the two strands complement each other. This is important because if the vision of the Jordanian government is to produce marketable graduates with the requisite skills in English, then the practices and methodologies adopted in the classroom need to be in line with the vision as spelt out by the government educational departments.

While studies have been conducted to investigate the problems and issues faced by Jordanian students regarding English language, these studies have not specifically looked at issues related to anxiety and their impact on the listening process at Jordanian universities.

As such, this research will study the listening process of a group of university students in the Department of English Language at Jerash University in Jordan. All the subjects are following the English Language degree since the focus of this study is the listening problems related to anxiety faced by Jordanian EFL students. There is a need to examine and pinpoint the reasons for the weakness in listening among Jordanian EFL students and the findings from this research could be utilized to make the necessary changes to the methodologies such as the teaching of EFL in Jordanian universities whether they are in line with the philosophy and vision of the government. For only then, the nation progress and develop in this field can envisioned.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate how listening anxiety affect the listening process of a selected group of English language major students at Jerash University in Jordan. Another objective of this study is to examine students' perceived methods of reducing their level of English listening anxiety and enhance their English listening proficiency**.**

Research Questions:

The following research questions are formulated to achieve the objectives of this study:

1. To what extent do Jordanian EFL university students experience listening anxiety?
2. How does anxiety affect the listening process of English language major students at Jerash University?
3. What are the students' perceived methods of reducing their level of English listening anxiety and enhance their English listening proficiency?

Significance of the Study

For a start, the findings of this study will hopefully highlight areas in the methodology as used in the EFL classroom that need to be revamped or even replaced in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning such that listening in English is enhanced. Secondly, by identifying the difficulties that Jordanian EFL students experience in listening, appropriate strategies or steps could be adopted to help students overcome or minimize these problems. Thirdly, the findings from this study could be used as a point of reference for all Jordanian universities in the planning and designing of English language courses in general and the teaching of listening in English specifically. As a result, this would enable Jordanian students to be competent enough to compete in the international arena where English is often the lingua franca and a major tool for success and development. Fourthly, the findings of this study would prove useful to other universities in the Arab world, that share the same socio-cultural and political values as Jordan and which are also experiencing problems in enhancing the English language skills of their students.

Last but not least, the findings of this study would prove useful to the educational fraternity in general. They would provide useful insight into learning strategies, teaching methods, and learners' inclination towards certain methods of teaching and learning in EFL listening. EFL teachers would be able to use the findings as helpful pointers to improve their students' listening. Besides, it would awaken the teachers' awareness of what was holding back the students in their listening and how to help the students to move forward with the right strategies and teaching methods. This study is expected to raise the level of awareness among EFL teachers, teacher trainers regarding factors that cause problems in listening and possible methods of learning and teaching that could aid in overcoming the obstacles for the EFL students in Jordan. The findings of the current study will also inform EFL teachers regarding the listening problems faced by their students in terms of learning strategies as experienced by the students themselves. The teachers will be better equipped to help their students by selecting suitable teaching methodologies when they are clearer regarding the actual steps of the listening process and the factors that caused listening to be problematic and feared by the students who were trying to acquire any listening in English.

Teachers would also include constructive feedback to help students to improve their listening instead of just identifying all the errors made and scoring the students' effort in listening.

Subsequently, the teachers could also suggest the right types of references or aids based on the type of errors that may help their students to enrich or improve their listening skill. The student could also be given guidance as to how to get more exposure to using their newly learnt language skills in English.

Finally, this study will add to the little available literature in studies related to EFL and language teaching in Jordan specifically and the Arab educational world in general. The data is also useful for filling the lack of knowledge regarding the variables that affect the listening process of Jordanian EFL students, particularly in terms of listening anxiety.

Literature Review

The early studies conducted to investigate the effects of anxiety on language learning performance and achievement found that foreign language anxiety level may reduce a student's capability to convolute on thoughts and thus slow down the practice and use of the target language (Steinberg and Horwitz, 1986). Moreover, students with high levels of language anxiety moved to speak less and say fewer dependent clauses and target structures in contrast to students with low levels of language anxiety (Phillips, 1992). Furthermore, anxiety makes students nervous and afraid and thus leads to low performance and in turn creates poorer performance (Xu, 2011). Moreover, anxious foreign language students may express their feelings through avoiding prepare for language class, or avoiding concentrates with the instructor (Xu, 2013). Similarly, students with high level of anxiety in their foreign language learning may find their study not enjoyable which in turn led to a negative impact on their performance (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

According to MacIntyre (1998) there are many main effects of anxiety on second/foreign language learning and performance. As many researchers, MacIntyre (1998), assured that the performance of high anxiety students in standardized tests of language competency would be very poor with low levels of academic achievement. Due to social effect, students with high level of anxiety are not concerned or interested to engage in communication with others students. Concerning cognitive factor, anxiety is considered as an affective filter that can take place at any stage of language learning. It blocks data from entering student's learning system. Finally, high level of anxiety students would shy away from communication and in the event that they are forced to do so, they would be in a state of great anxiety. In this regard, McCroskey, (1977, p.78), defined communication anxiety as "an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons". Apart from the overriding characteristic which is students with low anxiety produced better quality of communication output than those with high level of anxiety.

Moreover, a number of researchers (Trylong, 1987; Phillips, 1992; Bailey et al., 2000) found that there was a negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and course grades of students in school, college and universities. A negative relationship was also found in the performance during the production of vocabulary and in oral examinations. Beside, students with high levels of foreign language anxiety feel inactive in class or when studying, spend too much time on some subjects while avoiding and skipping other subjects.

Some researchers hold the view that despite the widely acknowledged fact that anxiety is a serious problem that is detrimental to the academic or educational performance of students in L1 and L2 situations, there still exists a dearth in research regarding possible solutions or strategies that could be adopted to mitigate the detrimental effects of anxiety in students. While some researchers have been conducted to look into ways to mitigate the effects of anxiety in the classroom, the majority of these studies have focused on remedies that could be used in the classroom.

According to Horwitz et al., (1986), some of these remedies included; mitigate the effects of anxiety in students by getting them to participate in interactive classroom activities as well as through using clear assessment criteria and through equipping students with meta-cognitive or coping skills. Further, the roles of teachers inside classroom can be helping their students to reduce their anxiety. Teacher can change his teaching methods and the learners themselves must take the initiative to work on their own with the teachers facilitating their study. Such activity like group-work activity consider as a possible activity to reduce students anxiety. In this context, Community Language Learning is example of some methodologies that encourage such activities in which English classroom environment is changed to create a low-stress learning atmosphere (Nosrati et.al, 2013).

Learner training approach which is proposed by Ellis and Sinclair (1989), based on the idea that students should receive training on how to learn not only what to learn can reduce students' foreign language anxiety. Students should be trained how to learn the foreign language and anxiety issues should be addressed honestly and directly in this training (Crookall & Oxford, 1991).

The causes of listening anxiety

A number of studies have been conducted to identify the factors that can contribute to as well as raise the level of listening anxiety among L1 and L2 students. The findings emerging from these studies identified many causes of listening anxiety in students. These causes or factors relate to the experiences of a student in classroom listening instruction and factors relate to the traditional classroom instruction or stressful classroom environment (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Scarcella and Oxford (1992), explained that "listening anxiety occurs when students feel they are faced with a task that is too difficult or unfamiliar to them". Hence, lack of listening skill, lack of English language proficiency and uninteresting listening study are major factors that cause the learners listening anxiety. Beside, factors such as the listening text, lack of clarity, nature of the speech and lack of visual support among other variables increase listening anxiety of students (Gonen, 2009). Moreover, Vogely (1998) have found that characteristics of listening task easily motivate listeners' anxiety because many EFL students may not be familiar with listening task. Kim (2000) also concluded that, characteristics of the text, personal characteristics and process-related characteristics was main factors viewed as causing anxiety. Beside, teaching learning process which based on teacher-centered approach may increase anxiety among students (Xu, 2011).

Some studies on listening anxiety, but this time from a linguistic and cognitive perspective, (Golchi, 2012; Capan & Simsek, 2012; Chang, 2008) listed some of the possible reasons that contribute to listening anxiety among learners. Learners are poor development of requisite skills, a lack of role models, not fully understanding the concept of the listening process. In addition, it was also stressed that self-confidence played a crucial role in determining a student's affective response to listening. Indeed, as some studies have revealed, if students have no confidence in their listening abilities then even if they were proficient in the target language, they would still experience a high level of anxiety and hence do poorly in listening lessons. In other words, students who are proficient in the target language may not necessarily be confident of their listening skills and would therefore be equally subjected to listening anxiety. In short, regardless of proficiency level, when students lack confidence in their listening abilities, this would cause them to experience listening anxiety.

Goh (2008) pointed out that when teachers gave only negative comments to their students it had a corollary effect on their students in that it dented their confidence and sense of self-worth. On the other hand, when students receive positive comments, they were more likely to develop positive attitudes toward listening process. Similarly, Goh (2008) pointed to the correlation between positive comments and confidence and the resulting positive attitude to listening process. While the negative comments of a teacher are a contributory factor to listening anxiety, it is also the case that when the teacher does not provide any comments at all, a student would also be affected negatively. So, teachers who fail to provide any feedback may also be the cause of listening anxiety in their students.

Based on the argument that the phenomena of anxiety considerably impacts listening process, many approaches have been addressed for reducing foreign language listening anxiety. One suggestion is to provide listeners with familiar materials which have meaningful topics and understandable vocabulary (Kim 2000). Students will become more convinced in their listening ability, and their negative feelings towards listening will be reduced.

Concerning a low anxiety environment inside classroom, Sevik (2012) suggests that the climate of listening classroom should be prepared with a comfortable physical environment teacher should use high-quality listening equipment and use fun activities such as games and music, teacher also should replicate the listening lesson several times. These strategies or solutions according to researchers should be used and help students to reduce listening anxiety. It is also the case that in the researches that have been conducted to investigate listening anxiety as well as the behavioral characteristics and psychological make-up of students, most have been carried out on L1 learners that are native speakers in an American and Western setting. According to Sharif and Ferdous (2012), one possible reason for this neglect is to investigate listening anxiety in ESL/EFL contexts could be due to the fact that often in second or foreign language instruction, writing, speaking and reading proficiency in the target language is viewed as a more important skill to master than listening skills in the target language.

Consequently, extant studies in listening anxiety in L2 contexts have reported mixed and confusing results pertaining to listening anxiety. So, the researcher here believes that there is a need to investigate the variable listening anxiety in an Arabic speaking context given that studies investigating listening anxiety of university students in such context, to the best knowledge of researcher, do not exist.

Theoretical Framework

Of all the hypotheses in Krashen's model, (Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, Monitor Hypothesis, Natural Order Hypothesis, Input Hypothesis, Affective Filter Hypothesis) the fifth one, which is the Affective Filter Hypothesis, is of special relevance to the concerns of this current study. While comprehensible input is an important factor in the process of acquiring a language, Krashen, contends that in order for an acquisition to be attained, the comprehensible input must reach the Language Acquisition Device, which refers to an innate built-in system in every individual that facilitates the acquisition of a language.

The crucial thing about the way the Language Acquisition Device works is that it is not an independent entity. Rather according to the Affective Filter Hypothesis, whether comprehensible input successfully arrives at the Language Acquisition Device or not is determined or regulated by the Affective Filter. The affective filter refers to all such affective variables as the learner's motives, needs, attitudes, and emotional states. And it is these affective variables that will determine or regulate which and what input would be allowed into the Language Acquisition Device. Thus, in the context of listening anxiety the affective filter would function as follows: the filter will be activated or functioning in a situation where the "learner is stressed, self-conscious, or unmotivated" and conversely the filter will be inactive or not functioning when the "learner is relaxed and motivated" (Lightbrown & Spada, 1993, p. 28). One of the notable applications of Krashen's notion of the affective filter is in the field of L2 learning and instruction where it could explain why when given the same teaching and learning conditions, some students perform better than others.

As far back as the 1970's teachers as well as researchers have acknowledged that language learning anxiety affects the learning process and success of a learner. Indeed, as MacIntyre and Gardner, (1991, 1989, 1988; Horwitz et al., 1986) have pointed out, the process of learning a language has been considered as one of the most anxiety provoking contexts which brings with it negative effects. As such it is not surprising that the concept of anxiety is a widely researched topic, even though from a psychological perspective, there is no one single definition of anxiety which has given rise to some controversy. Nevertheless, the term anxiety is commonly used as an umbrella term to include fear, stress, phobia and neurosis. In terms of a language learning context, anxiety can be traced to three major sources. They are communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Accordingly, Foss and Reitzel (1988, p. 443) contend that "the symptoms of tension, fear, or panic that accompany some students' efforts to study the new language may render their efforts at learning ineffective".

Similarly, MacIntyre and Garnder (1991) point out that given the likelihood that anxiety can be an obstacle in the process of language acquisition, retention and production of a new language, it follows, therefore, that on account of learning a foreign or second language, L2 learners would experience a higher level of anxiety than others. Indeed, Krashen (1982) posited the notion that anxiety interferes with the learner's ability to acquire a new language. In addition, the learning process can be affected by the interaction among anxiety, learner's ability and task difficulty which work together to hamper the input, processing, retrieval and finally the output level. Thus, if cognitive function is affected by anxiety, then students who are anxious would probably learn less and cannot progress in their learning. This in turn would lead to feelings of frustration. According to Horwitz, et al., (1986) learners of a foreign language are anxious because they have problems expressing their ideas and opinions in the target language and this in turn would lead to them having a sense of low-esteem.

Indeed as Koichi and Rod (2003) indicated, there is an inverse relationship between confidence and anxiety. That is the lower a student's level of anxiety; the greater the sense of self-confidence and when this happens there is the strong possibility that the student will be more proficient in the target language. In addition, another factor that contributes to language learners feeling anxious and frustrated in the classroom is the belief they hold regarding learning a language (Horwitz et al., 1986). As Horwitz (1988) explains, some learners, unfortunately, have unrealistic views of language learning. Some of the more prevalent views are: some learners hold the view that it is more important to be able to use the language correctly rather than being able to communicate in the language even incorrectly. Some learners hold the view that it is important to be able to speak the target language with a native-like accent.

Some believe that guessing an unfamiliar second or foreign language is not correct, some of them hold the view that language learning is nothing more than translating from one language to another language. Some of them hold the view that two years of learning another language is sufficient to attain fluency. Some of them hold the view that the ability to learn a language is a gift that is not available to everyone.

Thus, it is not surprising that by having these unrealistic beliefs regarding language learning, some students end up feeling frustrated and anxious at their lack of progress.

Research Methodology

Subjects

A total of sixty third year students taking the B.A English Language program at Jerash University in Jordan for the academic year 2014/ 2015 were randomly selected from a total of 110 students for this study. Of this number 33 were females and 27 were males. According to Gay and Airasian, (2003, p. 101) "A random sampling process means selecting a number of participants for a study in such a way to represent the larger group from which they are selected". The student population in Jerash University is a reflection of the population of Jordan. They come from different cities and villages in Jordan. In addition, all socio-economic classes are represented in the student population. Thus, in this study the respondents are treated as homogenous in terms of nationality, mother tongue (Arabic) and educational background except for a small difference in age (21-24 years old).The breakdown of the population is summarized in Table (1).

Table 1: Samples for Main Study

University	Population	Sample Group	Students' Major
Jerash University Jordan	110 Students	60 Students (33 females and 27 males)	English Language

Research Instruments

This study used two different research instruments to further enhance the validity and reliability of this study. The two research instruments used in this study were questionnaires and focus group interviews. Such a methodology is in line with the methodology proposed by Jackson (2006) who argues that the use of various research instruments and procedures in a study may increase the internal validity and provide cross validation in the collection of explicit data which would generate precise and reliable conclusions. In other words, the use of a number of research instruments and procedures in a study would ensure that the research question is studied from different viewpoints and thus generate detailed and in-depth data for explicit and reliable conclusions.

Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS)

The first data collection instrument used in this study was The Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) developed by Kim (2000) and cited in Kilic (2007). According to Gay and Airasian (2003), questionnaire are useful survey research tools because they enable a researcher to collect data by asking people about a particular experience or phenomenon and then to reconstruct the details of the phenomenon or experience for the benefit and attention of a wider audience. The questionnaire on listening anxiety contains total of (33) items that evaluate the respondents' perceptions of their listening anxiety. It is important to note that the listening anxiety questionnaire is commonly used by researchers when they want to determine students' level of listening anxiety in studies related to the listening comprehension. In this regard, many researchers have claimed that in their studies, the listening anxiety questionnaire had generated data that was very reliable and valid (Wang, 2010; Kimura, 2008). The listening anxiety questionnaire has been used in studies on college students, adult learners, and ESL and EFL students. However, the listening anxiety is usually adapted rather than merely adopted by researchers.

Focus Group Interview

The second instruments of data collection used in this study are focus group interview. The focus group interview involves face-to-face interaction whereby the interviewer poses questions to respondents in order to obtain answers to the research questions. Unlike the other methods of obtaining qualitative data, focus group interviewing allows the researcher to interact with the respondents and also the respondents to interact among themselves (Patton, 1987). Consequently, it enables the researcher to interpret the answers more accurately since the effect of personal experience is present at the time of conducting the interviews.

A total of 24 students were randomly selected for the focus group interview. The respondents were encouraged to volunteer as participants for the focus group interview. Selection was on a first come first basis whereby the first 24 respondents who volunteered were selected. Then they were divided into four groups with six students in each group. Each of the four groups was interviewed from one hour to two hours on separate days.

This study decided to place six students in each group and limit the interview time to a maximum of two hours based on the recommendations of Patton (1990). In designing the focus group interview, the researcher prepared a list of guide questions and supplementary questions for use in the course of the interview to seek further clarification or explanation from the respondents. These questions were designed to seek answers to the research questions in this study, that is, the listening processes undergone by students and the difficulties they faced in their listening process in relation to listening anxiety. They were also asked to suggest solutions and their perceived methods of reducing their level of listening anxiety and enhancing their listening proficiency.

Findings and Discussion

Introduction

This study set out to investigate how listening anxiety affects the listening process of English Language students at Jerash University in Jordan. In order to do this, this study employed both the quantitative and qualitative method and utilized two instruments, namely, Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) to determine students' listening anxiety levels; and the focus group interview to suggest solutions and perceived methods of reducing students' level of listening anxiety and enhancing their listening proficiency. After the administration of the instruments, the collected data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 17) for Windows computer software, focusing mainly on statistical techniques such as descriptive analysis and ANOVA.

To determine the levels of listening anxiety experienced by the respondents the researcher used descriptive analysis and ANOVA to investigate the anxiety levels. Based on their scores, the respondents were categorized according to high anxious, mid or (moderate) and low anxious listener. Table (2) displays the distribution of respondents based on their anxiety level.

Table (2) Distribution of Respondents according to Anxiety level

Anxiety Levels	Frequency	Percent
High level of anxiety	43	71.7
Mid level of anxiety	3	5.0
low level of anxiety	14	23.3
Total	60	100.0

Table (2) illustrates the categorization of the respondents into three groups according to their level of anxiety which are high, middle and low level. The largest group of 43 or 71.7 % of the respondents experienced a high level of listening anxiety while 14 or 23.3 % of the respondents experienced a low level of listening anxiety. The remaining 3 or 5.0% of the respondents were those who experienced a mid-level of listening anxiety.

Findings of interviews

In order to analyze the interview data that were collected, a content analysis was performed on the data examining topics, categories of topics and patterns across questions. First of all, using interview questions to develop initial coding categories, data from the transcribed focus group interview was coded. Next, an across-group content analysis was conducted and the results were charted in order to discover major themes. Thirdly, all data were analyzed and described according to codes and themes. Finally, the data were interpreted and analyzed by the researcher.

On the whole, most of the students reported that listening anxiety was another problem they experienced with regard to listening in English and learning English language at the university level. The first aspect of anxiety deals with the fear of time constraint and the number of passages that had to be listened to. Generally, the respondents reacted negatively to this aspect as reflected in the following responses:

> "I worry in listening….all students I think have worry especially when the teachers ask us to listen to along passage and answers the following questions… we don't know what to do " **(S5Int2)**

> " I know I have a problem in listening….eh … as what I told you, but I need to concentrate more while listening to passage… he ask us to listen carefully …. But how? I need more than 10 minute to understand what the first passage say" **(S6Int1)**

> "we told you just now, I don't know how to make link while I listening to passages between sentence ….paragraph" **(S3Int2)**

From the above views, it could be deduced that all the respondents who had difficulties in listening displayed a similar problem with regard to listening anxiety as they appear to fear the listening task due to the number of passages that had to be listen within a limited time. Indeed, they were very concerned about time restriction, their own English proficiency, limited vocabulary and other issues related to listening.

The next aspect of listening anxiety involves the fear of negative evaluation by peers or lecturers fear of making mistakes in front of others. They remarked that their lecturers had given less favorable remarks as a result of their poor listening especially with all the pronunciation errors being highlighted. In their opinion, the practice of highlighting their errors and giving less favorable remarks caused a fear of negative evaluation. The following views taken from three respondents illustrate the fear of negative evaluation:

> "I listen to the comment … … teacher comment… he told me I must be at fifth grade not in university" **(S1Int3)**
> "many students like us in listening, six or seven students I think is very good in listening course, all the time they laugh when they ask them to repeat what I listen" **(S2Int4)**

In this regard, some of the feedback from the interviewees about suggestions to reduce listening anxiety and to enhance listening proficiency was to have more listening exercises as a possible activity to reduce their listening anxiety and improve their listening proficiency especially those carried out in their classes could help in reducing their anxiety in listening. Respondents S5, S2 and S5 in interview (1, 2 and 3) attested to more listening exercises to reduce their anxiety in listening.

> "don't forget that in listening course there is many listening exercise but teacher skipped it, he told us no time to do exercise in listening" **(S5Int1)**
> "the teacher know that we don't practice listening in English at home and the book have a lot of exercise ….let him teach us to listen more by answers the listening exercise" **(S2Int2)**
> "If we practice more in listening by..…by listening more through exercise from the first year… you will see us as a good students in listening"**(S5Int3)**

The above views of respondents regarding listening anxiety provide valuable input to reduce listening anxiety and thereby to enhance listening proficiency. Many respondents had admitted to being worried or anxious over their efforts to listen especially in their English classes. They felt that more listening exercise would help in providing more opportunities for them to engage in the listening process actively and positively.

The low level of students listening proficiency is another problem highlighted by the respondents which impacts negatively on their listening. Respondents pointed out that the low proficiency of students hampered their ability to listen. The respondents felt that the listening problem stemmed from the fact that teachers in Jordanian schools were probably not performing up to expectation resulting in so many students facing problems in their listening. Besides that, two respondents pointed out that students should put in more effort in their learning to listen. All these views are expressed in the following:

> "I and most of my friend come from schools with very poor English language. We try the best to improve our language and students should work hard to improve their proficiency." "**(S3Int1)**

The findings of this study show that proficiency levels of students have a significant effect on the listening process which is further compounded by the complexity of acquiring proficiency in a foreign language. More importantly the findings reveal that a low level of EFL proficiency accounted for a considerable portion of the respondents who experienced problems in listening.

In terms of recommendations and suggestions to teachers to help in improving their students' listening, students provided some useful tips. They reminded teachers not to solely use the traditional method of teaching EFL listening. Instead they should consider trying out current methods of teaching listening. The teachers can actually obtain a lot of ideas from their peers or reliable sources on the Internet.

> "I and other students need the listening lesson as a training….so we can listen to a passage many time with pauses after each passage "**(S5Int4)**
> "I think if there any learning games and TV it would better for our listening in English language"**(S1Int3)**
> "I think listening course in Jerash University must four or three course not just two course"**(S3Int1)**

It is obvious that by adopting such teaching techniques in the listening class, students will not only gain more confidence and be more relaxed when approaching listening tasks, but also their proficiency level in the target language itself would be improved. Another possible method proposed by the respondents is to change the manner in which the listening classes are conducted by the instructors.

Conclusion

The results of the study have important implications for the teaching of listening at Jerash University in Jordan. The situation in the Jordanian EFL tertiary classroom is akin to a vicious circle. One the one hand, low proficiency and high anxious levels are seen by students to be factors that affect the listening performance of students, On the other hand, as the discussion on the findings have revealed all these are symptom or effects of a primary cause, which remains unsolved in the Jordanian context. This is the inherent low proficiency level per se, which is the constant factor. The other issues or symptoms, as the discussions above, highlight only feed into or exacerbated the situation. This means a complete if not major overhaul of the education system and policy in Jordan in terms of EFL teaching. However, since such a move would take time, immediate remedial action is recommended to mitigate the effects as revealed by the findings. These recommendations would serve not only as an interim measure while a critical appraisal of the education system vis-a-vis the teaching of EFL in Jordan at pre-tertiary and tertiary levels is carried out but also as practical experiments or applications. The outcome of these practical experiments or applications would hopefully provide the basis for the relevant authorities to open and implement the recommendations of this study and in doing so, it could be argued that the rationale for carrying out this study is endorsed and its significance given its due credit. To begin with EFL teachers, especially those in tertiary education could put into place a number of strategies to mitigate the effects of low proficiency and anxiety in the listening class. Firstly, teachers should introduce more learner-centered activities and allow students more autonomy in classroom activities. In this way the teacher becomes less prescriptive and functions more as a facilitator. And when students are given more autonomy over how they learn and do things, it follows that confidence is boosted and a positive attitude toward word is fostered. When such a situation is encouraged, it would most likely lead to decrease levels of anxiety.

In terms of listening process, it should also be stressed that teachers should focus on teaching listening as a skill rather than for the sake of meeting examination requirements. As highlighted in the introduction of the study, while the objective of EFL teaching in Jordan is to produce proficient marketable graduates in the English Language, in practice the EFL teachers focus on teaching students how to pass the entrance examination. They do this by focusing on product-based teaching which as the findings of this study reveal the status the quo of low proficiency even if the students manage to pass the examination and enter university. Given the right training and encourage teachers would be able to vary their strategies and techniques for teaching the actual process of listening. In order to do this, teachers should be brave and confident enough to experiment with alternative modes of teaching, for instance, using modern technologies. They should keep abreast with the latest developments in pedagogy and methodology. Finally, it is recommended that English language listening clinics be set up in the English department at Jerash University to provide students with help whenever needed. These clinics could also serve as language clinics to students wishing to improve on their proficiency in different areas. These clinics should be stocked with the appropriated teaching and learning materials and be staffed by trained personnel. It is worth mentioning that language clinics are common facilities in countries where English is a second or foreign language, for example, Malaysian universities.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study investigated the effect of listening anxiety on the listening process of third year English language students at Jerash University in Jordan. Other researchers may want to investigate the effect of listening anxiety and proficiency on the English listening process of college and school students in Jordan who are majoring in different subjects. The findings of these researches would add to the present study and provide a broader and more inclusive picture of the effect of anxiety level and proficiency on listening in Jordanian EFL classrooms.

Last but not least, this study focuses on listening. Given that listening is only one of the four essential skills that are needed to be mastered by a student in order to be proficient in the target language, there is ample room for further research into, for example, the effects of anxiety on other skills such as reading and speaking among Jordanian EFL university students.

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