

**Listening: The Ignored Skill in EFL Context**

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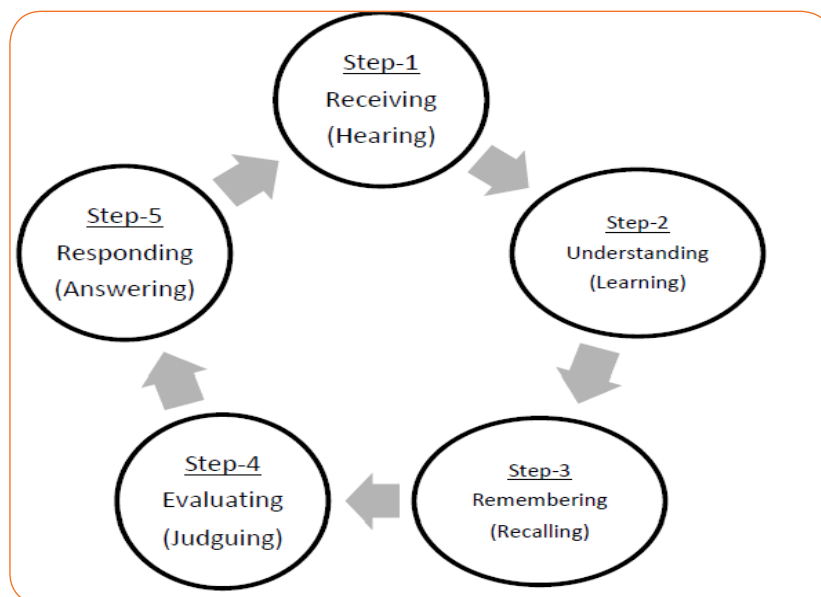
**Abstract**

Listening is clearly the weakest skill of EFL students who encounter different kinds of listening problems. It is the most underestimated skill in EFL context, though. This study seeks to examine the listening problems faced by a group of first year university students whose English proficiency level is elementary. 50 EFL students from three different classes were voluntarily selected for the study. The data was gathered by means of a questionnaire and an interview. The results of the study showed some problematic issues in that the EFL students find it difficult to understand the listening text when speakers speak with varied and unfamiliar accents. Besides, they are not able to comprehend the meanings of words which are not pronounced clearly. Furthermore, they are not able to quickly remember the words or phrases they have just heard. Either in high school or university education process, listening skill was a pain in the necks of the EFL students who participated in the study. Finding out EFL students' listening comprehension problems may help EFL teachers assist students improve their listening comprehension skills. As a result, students develop their listening competency. The results of the study may also be beneficial for the researchers having interest in listening skill.

**Keywords:** Listening, Listening Skill, Listening Problems, Listening Comprehension.

**INTRODUCTION**

Listening is a concept that is both complicated and hard to be analysed. It means that it is difficult to make a clear and quick definition of listening (Hichem, 2013). However, it can be referred as one of the four key skills through which a language is taught and it is one of the two language skills that is employed when communicating orally, according to what Andrade (2006) puts forward. Besides, listening as a pedagogical term refers to 'speech recognition', 'speech perception', 'speech understanding' and 'spoken language understanding' (Huei-Chun, 1998). That listening is a very active process means that when we listen not only we deal with what we listen or hear but also we combine it with other information that are already familiar. As a consequence, by means of this active process, we create the meaning by integrating what we hear or experience with the data in our minds (Helgesen, 2003). Listening process takes place in five stages of hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding (Tyagi, 2013).



**Figure 1.** The Listening Process. Reprinted from "Listening: An Important Skill and Its Various Aspects," by B. Tyagi, 2013, *The Criterion*, 12, 2.

Tyagi (2013) states that *hearing* is the perception of sound waves; you must initially hear to listen, but you don't need to listen in order to hear, *understanding* means the comprehension of symbols we have seen and heard, we must examine the meaning of the stimuli we have perceived, *remembering* means that a person has not only received and clarified a message but has also added it to the brain's stockpile, *evaluating* necessitates the active listener to weigh evidence or sort fact from opinion, and specify the presence or absence of bias in a message, *responding* requires that the receiver completes the process by means of verbal or nonverbal feedback.

Having the four essential language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking is highly necessary to be accepted as an efficient language learner (Yıldırım, 2013). EFL listening skill has been ignored for a long time in lieu of the theory that listening is learnt automatically and once for all, though (Huei-Chun, 1998). People have named listening skill as the 'Cinderella Skill' which is disregarded by its big sister speaking skill in language learning as Solak and Altay (2014) called the term like many other researchers. However, there has been rising prominence on listening comprehension skill in second or foreign language pedagogy, mirrored in various methods such as Total Physical Response, Silent Way, Suggestopedia, etc., and also in many listening course books, video materials and CDs (Huei-Chun, 1998). Listening is seemingly the slightest accurate of the four language skills, causing it to be the hardest skill to acquire, as Ghaderpanahi (2012) refers. It is one of the most key scopes of communication skills and language progress (Stepanovienè, 2012). Furthermore, it has evolved into a crucial segment for a lot of foreign language programs (Lotfi, 2012). This skill is vital both in language learning and in daily communication (Hamouda, 2013).

EFL listening skill is regarded as a problematic language skill especially in a foreign language context where real practice chances are narrow (Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian and Nimehchisalem, 2015). Teaching students listening skill may be difficult for teachers and namely difficult for students to learn as well. For instance, even the students who are adequate in speaking and reading might confront problems with listening skill when facing a record with a quick conversation (Ghaderpanahi, 2012).

In Turkey, English is the most studied foreign language. That's to say, there is no other foreign language being able to compete with English language, in Turkey. Before entering a university, students learn English for the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> years of primary school education; for the 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> years of secondary school education (MEB İlköğretim Kurumları İngilizce Dersi Öğretim Programı, 2013); and also for the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> years of high school education, three echelons of which are obligatory for the students in Turkey (MEB Ortaöğretim Kurumları İngilizce Dersi Öğretim Programı, 2014). The main focus of the English courses which these students in Turkey practise is on language structures, reading comprehension, vocabulary and writing, as well as translation from one language into the other. Unfortunately, listening skill is ignored in the English program. Consequently, when these students unexpectedly face with more developed or complex listening courses or audio listening tools at universities, they find themselves in a big trouble before they form the needed listening skills. This calls for a related research on the listening problems of these students. The aim of this paper is therefore analysing the listening problems of a group of university students studying elementary level - EFL courses at Hakkari University, Turkey.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of listening skill in EFL learning is undeniable since the elixir of acquiring a language is to gain language input (Hamouda, 2013). When we process and decode auditory input, it necessitates knowledge of perception. However, when we encode and generate speech output, it necessitates retrieval knowledge (Vandergrift, 1999). Listening comprehension is an immensely integrative skill and it plays a vital role in the process of language learning, promoting the rise of other language skills. As a result, consciousness and formation of proper listening

comprehension strategies can aid learners to benefit from the language input they are receiving, Vandergrift (1999) clearly mentions. It is a fact that listening is highly necessary in language learning in that it supplies the learner with the required input and learners can't acquire anything without the comprehension of the specific input (Hamouda, 2013). To gain much authentic input of the target language, students can listen to songs, radio channels or watch any video in the target language; however learning may not be achieved totally as sometimes instructions aren't presented appropriately by the materials (Dey, 2014). Teachers won't present brilliant listening classes if there aren't proper elements such as appropriate apparatus, classroom setting and students' motivation and interest. However, it must be recalled that even if the gears are sufficient it is necessary to have entry into listening materials opted according to the grades and needs of the students as well (Andrade, 2006).

In their study, Nowrouzi and others (2015) have found out that distraction and missing sounds or words linked to perception, chunking complications and sentence dismissing from mind in the process of analysis, also bewilderment about the main idea related to utilization are the first coming problems in listening comprehension activities. EFL listening has always been an ignored skill in both research and practice when compared to reading skill; it is crystal clear that listening is weaker in literature when compared to that of reading comprehension (Nunan, 1997).

Al-Thiyabi (2014) formed a need analysis for EFL listening in his study as in the following:

- need to learn how to take effective notes and how to ask for repetition or clarification in English
- need to identify lengthy description in English and instructions as well
- need to recognize the subject matter of a talk
- need to identify different accents and pronunciation due to the variety of students' teachers' background
- need to learn and use new and different vocabularies and terminologies that are related to different areas

Moreover, Al-Thiyabi (2014) puts forward some frequent problems of learners as well as reasons blocking their listening comprehension skill such as hasty speaking, unknown words, and weird pronunciation, adding that such problems are severe and ought to be overcome to enhance learner's listening competency level. Students' prior knowledge of the second or foreign language, motivation and learning strategies, the teachers' teaching methods, classroom environment, classroom facilities all form the most crucial parts of the students' views about the origins of their low listening comprehension performance according to what Bennui (2007) states. It is crucial that EFL instructors boost learners' employment of strategies like individual knowledge and mental translation (Al-Alwan, Asassfeh and Al-Shboul, 2013). According to Tyagi (2013) listening skill contains some essential elements such as:

- discriminating between sounds
- recognizing words and understanding their meaning
- identifying grammatical groupings of words,
- identifying expressions and sets of utterances that act to create meaning,
- connecting linguistic cues to non-linguistic and paralinguistic cues,
- using background knowledge to predict and to confirm meaning and
- recalling important words and ideas.

In her study, Osuka (2008) found out that the most outstanding element that hinders Japanese EFL students' listening comprehension skill appears to be hasty rates of speech and students' incompetence to grasp English sounds. She adds that a slower speech rate could assist learners

to understand better, particularly at lower levels. Besides, further ways of enhancing listening skill contain supplying questions connected to the main ideas, and presenting background info as to the topic. Teaching listening skill, particularly for starters, should concentrate on listening practice initially and gradually include speaking practice based on learners' learning progress. Moreover, teaching listening in EFL context ought to contain some methods or strategies like Suggestopedia making students employ progressive relaxation, deep breathing, or meditation, and also Jazz Chant getting students to employ music (Huei-Chun, 1998). Listening strategies are techniques or activities which supplement the comprehension of listening skill input (Tyagi, 2013).

### **AIM OF THE STUDY**

This study seeks to understand an extensive view and in-depth knowledge as to the comprehension of how elementary level EFL students at Hakkari University perceive listening problems in EFL courses. That's to say, this study aims at identifying the perspectives of elementary level EFL students in terms of pre-determined criteria.

### **Research Question**

What are the elementary level university students' perspectives on the problems they encounter in EFL listening courses in terms of the following criteria?

- a) listening process
- b) input
- c) listener
- d) task
- e) affect
- f) context

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study points out the listening comprehension problems encountered by elementary level EFL students at Hakkari University. The findings will have great value as an exploratory study on factors causing elementary level students listening problems in EFL courses. Furthermore, the findings will stand as a data-base for the Department of Foreign Languages. They may also be used to recommend ways to enhance students' listening ability considering when the students have sufficient listening ability, their second language (English) communication skills will advance. Besides, the findings of the study will be a guide for EFL teachers in their attitude towards teaching listening and also for researchers in their research conduction on EFL listening comprehension.

### **Participants**

The data were collected from Hakkari University elementary level EFL students studying in the 1<sup>st</sup> classes of Child Development Department, First and Emergency Aid Department, and Environmental Health Department (n = 50). The respondents were selected voluntarily from three individual class of the departments mentioned above. The participants were 14 % male and 86 % female students between the ages of 17 and 28. The study took place during the second semester of the 2014/15 school year. The EFL courses the students attended contained a listening section; they sometimes listened to CDs and watched DVDs in English. Before entering the university, all of the students took University Entrance Exam, which included multiple choice test questions based on school subjects except English.

### **INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE**

The study was carried out through quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The instruments employed in this study were: (1) a questionnaire, (2) an interview. The questionnaire and interview were administered to 50 students to specify their listening problems. The data of the interview were evaluated and presented in the paper while the data gathered from the questionnaire were analysed by means of descriptive statistics. Pollak (2009) states that descriptive statistics describes the data gathered from participants. Based upon a descriptive

research design, this study involved the data analysis of descriptive statistics. In this sense, SPSS 20.0, a Statistical Program for Social Sciences was capitalized on to report the perceptions of elementary level EFL students at Hakkari University in numerical data. In order to analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was used as a statistical technique to find out the rate of agreement related to the items about listening problems of the students in EFL classrooms. The scorings below were used in order to compare the *means* ( $\bar{x}$ ) of the perspectives specified.

1. I do not agree at all : 1.00 – 1.49
2. I do not agree : 1.50 – 2.49
3. I am not sure : 2.50 – 3.49
4. I agree : 3.50 – 4.49
5. I totally agree : 4.50 – 5.00

**DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

The results of the study and the findings are described based on the data obtained from the participants by means of the instruments. The results and the findings are described based on the related research questions. They are grouped under the titles of the categories from the questionnaire. Results and discussion related to the listening comprehension problems of elementary level EFL students in such categories as listening process, input, listener, task, affect and context are included. Table 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 show the results pertaining to the aspects mentioned.

**Results pertaining to the problems during the listening process**

In the questionnaire, there are 12 items related to results pertaining to the listening comprehension problems faced during the listening process, the aim of which is to specify the perspectives of the EFL students. Table 1 clarifies the results pertaining to the problems faced during the listening process.

**Table 1:** Results pertaining to the problems during the listening process

ITEMS	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
1. I find it challenging to focus on the text when I have trouble understanding.	3,36	1,306
2. After listening, I find it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension.	3,18	1,273
3. While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words.	3,12	1,350
4. During listening, I have difficulty checking whether I correctly understand the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text.	3,10	1,165
5. When I listen to texts in English, I experience difficulty with listening for the main idea of the text.	3,04	1,324
6. I find it difficult to use the context to guess those parts of a listening text that I cannot hear clearly.	2,96	1,142
7. While listening, I have problems making meaningful personal associations with the new information.	2,76	1,422
8. Before listening, it is difficult for me to predict it from the visuals what I will hear.	2,76	1,349
9. While listening, I have difficulty to check my understanding of the text based on what I already know about the topic.	2,70	1,529
10. I find it difficult to make a mental summary of information gained through listening.	2,60	1,088
11. It is difficult for me to relate what I hear with something from an earlier part of the listening text.	2,52	1,165
12. I have difficulty with finding out what the main purpose of the listening task I am going to do is.	2,48	1,074
Total	2.88	

Note. SD=Standard Deviation



As observed in Table 1, for the 1<sup>st</sup> item, regarding *I find it challenging to focus on the text when I have trouble understanding*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,36. This score indicates that Item 1 is the most agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

As it is shown in Table 1, for the 12<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *I have difficulty with finding out what the main purpose of the listening task I am going to do is*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,48. This score indicates that Item 12 is the least agreed item by the EFL students. The participants do not agree with the item.

For Item 2, regarding *After listening, I find it difficult to evaluate the overall accuracy of my comprehension*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,18. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 3, regarding *While listening, I find it difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,12. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 4, regarding *During listening, I have difficulty checking whether I correctly understand the meaning of the whole chunks of the listening text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,10. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 5, regarding *When I listen to texts in English, I experience difficulty with listening for the main idea of the text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,04. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 6, regarding *I find it difficult to use the context to guess those parts of a listening text that I cannot hear clearly*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,96. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 7, regarding *While listening, I have problems making meaningful personal associations with the new information*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,76. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 8, regarding *Before listening, it is difficult for me to predict it from the visuals what I will hear*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,76. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 9, regarding *While listening, I have difficulty to check my understanding of the text based on what I already know about the topic*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,70. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 10, regarding *I find it difficult to make a mental summary of information gained through listening*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,60. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 11, regarding *It is difficult for me to relate what I hear with something from an earlier part of the listening text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,52. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

Related to the problems during the listening process, the total mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was found 2,88. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the problems they face during the listening process, in total.

Table 2: Results pertaining to the problems related to input

ITEMS	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
13. I find it difficult to understand the listening text when speakers speak with varied accents.	3,80	1,161
14. I have difficulty understanding speakers with unfamiliar accents.	3,75	1,152
15. I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly.	3,64	1,290
16. I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words.	3,46	1,110
17. I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast.	3,42	1,357
18. I find it difficult to understand listening texts which have difficult grammatical structures.	3,26	1,306
19. I find it difficult to understand the listening text when the speaker does not pause long enough.	3,24	1,255
20. Unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of English interfere with my listening comprehension.	3,18	1,155
21. I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long listening text.	3,08	1,496
Total	3.34	

Note. SD=Standard Deviation

As observed in Table 2, for the 13<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *I find it difficult to understand the listening text when speakers speak with varied accents*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,80. This score indicates that Item 13 is the most agreed item by the EFL students. The participants agree with the item.

As it is shown in Table 2, for the 21<sup>st</sup> item, regarding *I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long listening text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,08. This score indicates that Item 21 is the least agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 14, regarding *I have difficulty understanding speakers with unfamiliar accents*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,75. This score indicates that the participants agree with the item.

For Item 15, regarding *I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,64. This score indicates that the participants agree with the item.

For Item 16, regarding *I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,46. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 17, regarding *I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,42. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 18, regarding *I find it difficult to understand listening texts which have difficult grammatical structures*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,26. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 19, regarding *I find it difficult to understand the listening text when the speaker does not pause long enough*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,24. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 20, regarding *Unfamiliar stress and intonation patterns of English interfere with my listening comprehension*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,18. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

Related to the problems related to input, the total mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was found 3,34. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the problems related to input.

**Table 3:** Results pertaining to the problems related to listener

ITEMS	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
22. I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just heard.	3,52	1,474
23. During listening, although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately.	3,22	1,502
24. I am slow to recall the meaning of words that sound familiar.	3,22	1,456
25. I lose the flow of speech because I concentrate very hard on understanding every word or phrase I hear.	3,22	1,447
26. I have difficulty understanding a listening text because I cannot understand every single word I hear.	3,10	1,216
27. I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text.	3,10	1,282
28. I have difficulty comprehending the listening text because I don't know which strategy to use while listening.	3,06	1,420
29. When thinking about meaning of unfamiliar words, I neglect the next part of the listening text.	3,06	1,517
30. I find it difficult to really concentrate on listening.	2,98	1,392
31. When I hear the new words, I forget the content which was mentioned before.	2,84	1,267
Total	3,13	

Note. SD=Standard Deviation

As observed in Table 3, for the 22<sup>nd</sup> item, regarding *I find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases I have just heard*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,52. This score indicates that Item 22 is the most agreed item by the EFL students. The participants agree with the item.

As it is shown in Table 3, for the 31<sup>st</sup> item, regarding *When I hear the new words, I forget the content which was mentioned before*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,84. This score indicates that Item 31 is the least agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 23, regarding *During listening, although some words sound familiar, it is difficult for me to recall their meaning immediately*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,22. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 24, regarding *I am slow to recall the meaning of words that sound familiar*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,22. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 25, regarding *I lose the flow of speech because I concentrate very hard on understanding every word or phrase I hear*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,22. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 26, regarding *I have difficulty understanding a listening text because I cannot understand every single word I hear*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,10. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 27, regarding *I find it difficult to remember the meaning of a long listening text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,10. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.



For Item 28, regarding *I have difficulty comprehending the listening text because I don't know which strategy to use while listening*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,06. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 29, regarding *When thinking about meaning of unfamiliar words, I neglect the next part of the listening text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,06. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 30, regarding *I find it difficult to really concentrate on listening*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,98. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

Related to the problems related to listener, the total mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was found 3,13. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the problems related to listener.

**Table 4:** Results pertaining to the problems related to task

ITEMS	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
32. I find it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which I need to draw on specific information from the text.	3,00	1,309
33. I find it difficult to do listening tasks for which I need to combine information to make generalization while listening to the text.	2,74	1,242
34. I find it difficult to answer Wh-questions in a listening task.	2,72	1,429
Total	2,82	

Note. SD=Standard Deviation

As observed in Table 4, for the 32<sup>nd</sup> item, regarding *I find it difficult to do listening tasks, such as filling a grid, for which I need to draw on specific information from the text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,00. This score indicates that Item 32 is the most agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

As it is shown in Table 4, for the 34<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *I find it difficult to answer Wh-questions in a listening task*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,72. This score indicates that Item 34 is the least agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

For Item 33, regarding *I find it difficult to do listening tasks for which I need to combine information to make generalization while listening to the text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,74. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

Related to the problems related to task, the total mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was found 2,82. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the problems related to task.

**Table 5:** Results pertaining to affect of the problems

ITEMS	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
35. I stop listening when I have problems in understanding a listening text.	3,04	1,195
36. If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed.	2,78	1,314
37. I find it difficult to reduce my anxiety before doing the listening task.	2,70	1,298
38. Before doing listening comprehension tasks, I fear that I cannot understand what I will hear.	2,64	1,241
Total	2,79	

Note. SD=Standard Deviation

As observed in Table 5, for the 35<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *I stop listening when I have problems in understanding a listening text*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,04. This score indicates that Item 35 is the most agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

As it is shown in Table 5, for the 38<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *Before doing listening comprehension tasks, I fear that I cannot understand what I will hear*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,64. This score indicates that Item 38 is the least agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

For Item 36, regarding *If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,78. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

For Item 37, regarding *I find it difficult to reduce my anxiety before doing the listening task*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,70. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the item.

Related to the affect of the listening problems, the total mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was found 2,79. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the affect of the listening comprehension problems.

**Table 6:** Results pertaining to the problems related to context

ITEMS	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	SD
39. Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with my listening comprehension.	3,28	1,341
40. Unclear sounds resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom interfere with my listening comprehension.	2,82	1,224
Total	3,05	

Note. SD=Standard Deviation

As observed in Table 6, for the 39<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player interfere with my listening comprehension*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 3,28. This score indicates that Item 39 is the most agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

As it is shown in Table 6, for the 40<sup>th</sup> item, regarding *Unclear sounds resulting from poor acoustic conditions of the classroom interfere with my listening comprehension*, the mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) score for this part is 2,82. This score indicates that Item 40 is the least agreed item by the EFL students. The participants are not sure about the item, though.

Related to the problems related to context, the total mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) was found 3,05. This score indicates that the participants are not sure about the problems related to context.

## DISCUSSION OF THE INTERVIEW RESULTS

As already discussed in the methodology above, interviews were implemented with 40 volunteer students, who gave extra evidence of the listening comprehension problems they faced. Compared to surveys, the interview can supply more freedom to both the interviewer and the interviewee to present their ideas freely and completely. The discussions were recorded by the interviewer. Forty students volunteered to be interviewed and they were let to use their native language, Turkish when needed. The interviewer tried to stimulate the interviewees to present their ideas properly. To introduce diverse perspectives regarding various topics from

interviewed students, the data were given accordingly under each question in the subsequent section. The questions and some main comments were summed up and introduced.

### **How Do You Rate Your Listening Skills?**

This was the first question that the students were asked to figure out their competence in listening skill. They reported that their proficiency level in listening skill was low. There were just 3 students out of 40 reporting that their proficiency level in listening comprehension was not bad while the rest of them declared a poor level of listening proficiency. The students pointed out that listening was their worst skill among the other language skills. Moreover, most of the students declared that their high school education was based on the preparation for the University Entrance Exam, in which English language proficiency is not tested. English, which is not assessed in the University Entrance Examination in Turkey, isn't regarded important by both teachers and students, according to what the interviewees declare. This factor was a very dominant one in terms of low level of listening skill of English as the students reported.

### **Before you joined the university, what experiences did you have in gaining listening skills?**

#### **1. Did you get opportunities to practise listening skills? If that was so, in what way?**

The number of the participants who didn't have an opportunity to practise listening skills before university is 30. That's to say, a big number of the interviewees declared that they face problems in listening comprehension activities as they didn't get opportunities to practise listening skills before they joined the university. Most of these 30 students claimed that their English teachers just omitted the listening sections in their course books when they were in high school. Namely, the listening skill was not given its deserved significance during both their primary and high school education years. On the other hand, 10 interviewees had the opportunity to practise listening skill through audio-visual listening materials such as CDs, videos, original films and broadcasts.

#### **2. What kind of listening activities did you practice?**

Most of the students, being in a limited number though, experienced listening practice at high school by just being occasionally exposed to teachers' speaking English in the classroom atmosphere. The rest of the students experienced listening practice on their own, only through listening to music and watching movies in English.

#### **3. Were you exposed to the native speaker English?**

Almost all the interviewees were not exposed to a native speaker of English with a number of 37 out of 40. This may be one element causing the students to be unaccustomed to the natural characteristic of spoken English.

### **After you joined a university, particularly at the time you were taking the listening course, when and how much time did you practice listening, in and outside the class?**

After joining the university, those practising listening skill in the classroom atmosphere were only 20 people, according to what they reported. The number of the students stating that they listened to audio-visual materials is 9. The number of the students practising listening skill by means of following their English teachers' reading aloud or speaking to them in English through following the course book is 8. There are 2 students stating that they made daily conversations or dialogues while 1 student reported that they listened to histories in English. The rest of the students didn't declare any data as to practising listening skill or not in their English courses. In terms of practising listening skill outside the classroom, only 2 of the 40 students reported that they practised listening skill through using online audio-visual materials while the rest of the students stated that they didn't do any listening practice outside the class. They stated that they

couldn't do it outside the class as they didn't have any opportunity.

**Were the listening tasks you did in the English courses at the university similar to the ones you had done in the English courses of your high school?**

The number of the students stating that the listening tasks they did in the English courses at the university were similar to the ones they had done in the English courses of their high school was 17. While some of the students reported that they were not similar, the rest of the students didn't respond to this question.

**Do you have any comments that you want to add about the listening comprehension problems you encounter?**

8 students reported that they have to practice listening skill more.

2 students reported that listening texts should be simpler and shorter.

2 students reported that the English teacher should present less information and make the listening activities easier to comprehend.

2 students reported that they are not able to succeed in listening as the class is too crowded.

2 students reported that they are not able to comprehend the listening texts as the speeches in them are too fast to follow.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

1. This study needs to be conducted with a larger sample since the sample size was too small to make a generalization of an overall conclusion. Besides, further research needs to be done with more comprehensive samples including different levels of English to get a total picture of the problem.
2. This study needs to be studied in different English learning contexts.

**CONCLUSION**

If we don't bother to learn how to listen then we never learn how to speak as well. Listening is important in EFL classroom as it supplies the learner with input. If we don't develop strategies to aid the learners to comprehend the needed input, then learning doesn't occur. Listening skill has been ignored in EFL context, as well as being underestimated in research literature when compared to other skills of English. David Nunan explains listening skill as "Cinderella skill" in EFL context. As it is known, the story of Cinderella is about a young girl being obliged to work for her dominant step sisters who are cruel as well. She is behaved as a meritless person without any rights. Namely, she had no right to speak and was a passive listener. Her dominant sisters did all the speech. Hence, listening skill is called Cinderella skill. However, listening is vital in language learning in that it provides input for the learner. Without understanding inputs, students can't learn anything.

Listening comprehension is clearly the weakest skill of EFL students who encounter different kinds of listening problems. This study is conducted with the aim of discovering the elements causing the students' listening problems. The research results have routed us to reach at the following conclusions:

1. Students find it difficult to comprehend the listening text when speakers speak with varied and unfamiliar accents.
2. Students find it difficult to comprehend the meanings of words which are not pronounced clearly.

3. Students find it difficult to quickly remember words or phrases they have just heard.

Furthermore, either in high school or university education process, listening skill was a pain in the necks of the students taking part in the study. It was their worst skill among the other language skills. They encountered various problems in listening comprehension activities as they didn't have the needed opportunities to practise listening skill. Most of the students were not exposed to a native speaker of English, for instance.

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