

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC AND REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA
MINISTRY OF HIGH EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF TLEMCCEN

FACULTY OF ARTS AND LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SECTION OF ENGLISH



**LISTENING COMPREHENSION STRATEGIES AND
DIFFICULTIES**
**THE CASE OF FIRST-YEAR EFL LEARNERS AT THE
UNIVERSITY OF TLEMCCEN**

*Dissertation Submitted to the Department of English as a Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirement for the Master Degree in Language Studies.*

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Academic Year: 2014-2015

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to:

My lovely mother

The memory of my father

My sisters and brother

The children: Mohamed; Kheira; Ismail; Chaimae.

My fiancé and his family

My friends

AKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr KHALDI Anissa for her guidance and valuable comments. I extend my gratitude to the teachers who helped me in this study and the members of examiners for having accepted to read and examine my dissertation. Last but not least, great thanks go to all who helped me with encouragement and support which have never ceased all along the preparation of my work.

Abstract

The present work is devoted to an assessment of EFL students' difficulties and strategy use in listening comprehension. It undertakes a classroom investigation at the level of first year students in the department of English at Abou Bakr BELKAID university, Tlemcen. Different research instruments were administered to first- year EFL learners and some of their teachers. After analyzing the data quantitatively and qualitatively the main findings clearly showed that listening is the most difficult and complex skill to learners. The results also showed that learners face some obstacles related to: speech rate, memory limitation, lack of prior knowledge and other difficulties. Furthermore, listening is far more complicated, which requires the use of appropriate strategies in order to improve the learners' achievement. However, first year EFL learners lack using sound strategies.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EFL: English as a foreign language

ELT: English language teaching

FL: Foreign learners

L1: Mother tongue

L2: Second language

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General Introduction

Within the field of EFL education, various investigations have been carried out for the purpose of revealing the pedagogical issues that learners encounter throughout their studies, the results gathered from those experiments have shown that learners' weaknesses are mainly due to learners' and ineffective strategy use.

This research tends to look for the main difficulties encountered by first year EFL students in listening comprehension, and the strategies they use in order to improve their achievement.

For this purpose the following general research question is put forward:

❖ What are the difficulties and the strategies of first year EFL students in listening comprehension? From this general question the three following secondary research questions are derived:

- 1- Are first year EFL students aware of the importance of listening comprehension?
- 2- What are the main difficulties encountered by first year EFL learners in listening comprehension?
- 3- Do first EFL students use any strategies in order to improve their achievement in listening comprehension?

These questions led to formulate the following hypotheses:

- 1- First year EFL students may not be aware of the importance of listening comprehension.
- 2- First year EFL learners may encounter difficulties related to
 - Speech rate
 - Lack of prior knowledge of the target language

- Short-term memory

3- First year EFL students may use a number of strategies in order to improve their listening comprehension achievement.

To confirm or reject, the above hypotheses, a case study was conducted at Abou Bakr Belkaid university.

The present work is divided into three chapters, the first chapter which is a review of literature consists of different items. It begins with the difference between speech and writing, moving to the definition of listening comprehension, followed by the importance of this skill. Then, it deals with listening strategies and it ends with some listening difficulties.

The second chapter is more practical and aims to analyse the role of the listening skill in EFL learning / teaching at the university level using a questionnaire and an interview addressed to first year EFL learners and their teachers. The chapter also deals with data analysis and the presentation of the main results.

The third chapter aims to offer some suggestions and recommendations to improve teaching listening comprehension.

CHAPTER ONE
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1. INTRODUCTION

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1.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is review of literature of the listening skill. It first deals with the difference between speech and writing, which is followed by a definition of listening comprehension. Then the researcher aims at presenting the importance of this skill, and it sheds light on some listening strategies. Finally, the chapter ends with the main problems and difficulties that EFL listeners may encounter in listening comprehension.

1.2. THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SPEECH AND WRITING

In order to plan a listening comprehension course, the teacher needs to make a clear division between spoken and written language; not only in form but also in purpose. The comparison between spoken and written texts reveals that the written text is integrated and detached (lacking in interaction with the listener). While, the spoken text is fragmented (loosing structured) and involved (interactive with the listener) (Flowerdew & Miller 2005). A good example of this is small talk in which speech is a form of social interaction. In this respect Tannen points out, that spoken discourse **“establishes cohesion through paralinguistic features”** (1982:41).

Paralinguistic features are important aspects of oral communication that take place outside the formal linguistic system of language (sounds, grammar, ect). They include: body language, gestures, facial expression, pausing, speed of speech, loudness and softness, and more. EFL learners need to be made aware of such differences, and the listening materials must be spoken English, and not oral rendition of what is essentially written English (Mendelsohn 1994).

Buck (2001), Chafe (1985) and Tannen (1987) summarize major linguistic differences between spoken and written language as follows:

- Spoken idea units tend to be shorter, with simpler syntax, whereas written ideas tend to be denser, often using complex syntax, such as dependent and subordinate clauses to convey more information;
- In spoken language idea units tend to be strung together by coordinating conjunctions (and, or, but...) , whereas written ideas tend to be joined in more complex ways;
- Spoken language usually has hesitations such as: fillers, pauses and repetitions that give the speaker more thinking time, as well as repairs such as false starts, correction in grammar or vocabulary;
- There are more non-standard features in spoken language such as dialect, slangs and colloquialism, whereas written language tends to be far more formal, conservative and correct;
- Spoken language tends to be for personal, with more emotional involvement and much less precision. Speakers tend to indicate their feelings more, with expressions such as ‘I think’ or ‘I mean’ or by making direct reference to the listener. They also tend to content with the over use of statements and exaggerations.

To sum up, the differences between speech and writing seem likely to be important in most, if not all languages, although the extent and significance of the differences may vary.

1.3. DEFINITION OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Listening implies more than just hearing and perceiving speech sounds. There are many definitions of listening as a skill. Those are ranging from simple to the more complex. For instance, Mendelsohn (1984:64)

defines listening comprehension as **“the ability to understand the spoken language of native speakers”**.

O’malley. Chamot and Kupper offer a useful, and much more extensive definition :

Listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the listener constructs meaning by using cues from contextual information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon multiple resources to fulfill the task requirements

(1989: 434).

The definition of listening comprehension becomes an important area of research, and several definitions have been proposed, among them that of Thompson and Rubin (1996:331) in which listening comprehension is considered as **“an active process in which listeners select and interpret information that comes from auditory and visual clues in order to define what is going on and what the speakers are trying to express”**. For Purdy’s, listening comprehension refers to **“the active and dynamic process attending ,perceiving ,interpreting, remembering ,and responding to the expressed (verbal and non-verbal) needs, concerns, and information offered by other human beings”**(1997:8). One of the recent definitions is suggested by Rost that listening comprehension is a complex **“process that helps the speaker understand spoken language”**(2005:305).

To sum up, listening comprehension is not simply hearing speech. Rather, it is an active process whereby listener receives oral stimuli, attends

as spoken input, attaches meaning to oral symbols, comprehend and interpret the message.

1.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION

Listening is gaining greater and greater importance in foreign language classrooms, and becomes the most essential skill in foreign language learning. There are a number of reasons for this growth, among them the two following reasons can be mentioned: first, because it internalizes the rules of language; and the second, because it facilitates the emergence of other language skills (Vandergrift 2011). By emphasizing the role of comprehensible input, EFL learning research has given a major boost to listening. As Rost (1994) points out, listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for the learner. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot occur. Listening is thus fundamental in language learning.

The importance of listening in language learning can hardly be overestimated. Through reception, the learners internalize linguistic information without which they could not produce language. According to Devine (1982:74) **“listening is the primary means by which incoming ideas and information are taken in”**. Rivers (1981) ,Oxford (1993) conducted a study which confirmed the primacy of listening and showed that the portion of verbal communication time spent by English students was as follows : listening : 40-50%, speaking : 25-30% , reading: 11-16%,writing about 9%.What is more, a survey done by Yorio (1982) of four hundred fifty four students in an intensive EFL program showed that the students themselves clearly recognized the importance of listening, and expressed the desire that more of it should be taught. Wolvin and Coakley (1988) concluded that both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes

more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication.

1.5. THE STATUS OF LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN EFL INSTRUCTION

In spite of its importance, the teaching of listening comprehension had long been a neglected aspect of English in many EFL programs. There are three main reasons for neglected listening, the first is that until a few decades ago there was a great agreement that listening comprehension should not be taught explicitly. The prove for this is what Mendelsohn (1984) calls “osmosis”. i.e., learners improve their listening comprehension through listening to the teacher all day in any case, without explicit instruction into listening.

The second reason for poorly taught listening comprehension is that average classroom teachers do not feel confident and at ease in teaching listening. In fact they provide lot of exposure to listening but do not teach their students how to go about it .i.e., learners listen and answer without being taught how to listen. (Mendelsohn1994).

The third reason why listening comprehension is neglected is the traditional listening materials which are unsuitable for teaching listening comprehension. The listening materials in most courses are not representative of the spoken English of real world. Either it is written language that has been read out loud and recorded, or it is a clearly scripted simulation of spoken language; which sounds artificial. (Mendelsohn 1994)

1.6. LEARNING STRATEGIES AND LISTENING STRATEGIES

Learning strategies are steps taken by students to enhance their own learning, and they are **“especially important for language learning because they are tools for active, self –directed involvement”**. They facilitate learning to become easy, enjoyable and transferable to new situations. Besides, when they are used effectively they help in developing overall proficiency and greater self-confidence (Oxford 1990).

Chamot (1987:71) provides a basic definition of learning strategies: **“Learning strategies are techniques, approaches, or deliberate actions that students take in order to facilitate the learning and recall of both linguistic and content area information”**. In a different article, Willing (1988:142) emphasizes the active role of learners in the use of learning strategies, he goes on to state that **“the term ‘strategy’ also contains the idea of struggle or difficulty ...the difficulty can only be coped with if an appropriate mode of attack is used”**.

A number of scholars are employing language learning strategies-specific actions, behaviors, steps or techniques that students often use to improve their progress in developing L2 skills. These strategies can facilitate the internalization, storage, retrieval, or use of new language.

To identify the number of language learning strategies that more skilled learners use at different levels of language proficiency on a wide range of language tasks including listening, O’malley *et al.* (1985) looked for the strategies of high school learners of English as a second language. The results found by the researchers reveal that both the general learning strategies reported by EFL learners in their study and the learning strategies reported by students engaged in general learning tasks were similar. They concluded that strategy processing appears to be a generic activity common

to all areas of learning, they proposed a frame work of metacognitive, cognitive, socio-affective strategies grounded in the work of cognitive psychology as a productive frame work for classifying EFL learning strategies(Vandergrift 1997).

Murphy was the first who employed a think-aloud procedure for L2 listening research in order to examine the strategies used by adult EFL learners in academic lectures. According to Murphy (1985:40) listening strategies, should be seen as “**interweaving component to a single animated language process**”. Then, O’malley, Chamot(1989) and their colleagues used a think-aloud methodology to examine strategy development over time on a variety of language tasks. Later on, Chamot and Kupper (1989) conducted a study to uncover more distinct metacognitive strategies related to listening like: advance organization, selective attention, monitoring, problem identification, and self-evaluation.The researchers came with a result that more skilled listeners were more successful in monitoring their task performance to measure their effectiveness of using prior linguistic knowledge while listening. i.e., they used the written listening comprehension questions to establish a topic frame work by relating what they hear to what they already know about the topic (elaboration) in order to predict possibilities (inferencing) (Vandergrift 1997).

To support the same idea of O’malley and Chamot, Vandergrift investigated the relationship between listening strategy use and language proficiency .Think –aloud protocols (Vandergrift 1997) revealed that novice-level listeners emphasize more on using elaboration, inferencing, and transfer and overcome their limited knowledge by relying on the effect of sounds on constructing the meaning of a text. The researchers argued that novice –level learners are less aware of matecognitive strategies such

as monitoring. While, intermediate level listeners are more aware of metacognitive strategies and they use them over twice as many as the novice – level learners do (Vandergrift 1997).

Building on the O'malley and Chamot (1990) strategy taxonomy, Vandergrift (1997) outlined a taxonomy of strategies specific to listening comprehension. Using the same taxonomy, Peters (1999) traced the L2 listening strategies development. She discovered that, although both more skilled listeners and less skilled listeners used the same cognitive strategies, the more skilled listeners used more metacognitive strategies overtime particularly monitoring and evaluation (Vandergrift 1997).

To sum up, the taxonomy is divided into three main categories: metacognitive strategies (mental activities for directing language learning), cognitive strategies (mental activities for manipulating the language to accomplish a task), and socio-affective strategies (activities involving interaction or affective control in language learning).

What can be concluded is most of the strategies are not only be used by language learners to succeed in doing listening tasks inside the classroom , but they are as well strategies that they can carry out of the classroom context to help them be better listeners of the language they learn in real life situation.

Strategy	Description
Metacognitive Advance organization	Clarifying the objectives of the lecture listening and /or proposing strategies for handling it.
Directed attention	Attending to the main points of the lecture ignoring irrelevant distractions maintaining attention while listening.
Selective attention	Paying attention to details.
Comprehension monitoring	Checking one's understanding.
Problem identification	Deciding what problems hinder comprehension.
Evaluation	Judging overall execution of the task and of one's strategy use.
Cognitive Inferencing	Using information within the spoken message to guess the meaning of unfamiliar language items, predict outcomes fill in information.
Elaboration	Using content and formal schemata already stored in memory to predict outcomes of fill in missing information.
Note taking	Writing notes during the lecture listening.
Summarizing	Making a summary.

Resourcing	Using available reference resources of information like books, articles.
Socio-affective Questioning for clarification	Asking for explanation, verification, rephrasing.
Cooperation	Learners working together.
Lowering anxiety	Trying to relax.
Self-encouragement	Positive self –talk.

Table 1.1 : listening comprehension strategies (adapted from Flowerdew and Miller 2005, Vandergrift 1997).

Because of time constraints, this study focuses on the following strategies: advance organization; selective attention; inferencing; elaboration; questioning for clarification; self-encouragement and self-evaluation.

1.7. LISTENING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES

A big issue facing syllabus designers and curriculum specialists is to determine the difficulties of the learning process, especially when planning a task (Nunan 1989). In recent years, several researches have been done to investigate the factors which create difficulty for listeners.

1.7.1. The Level of Difficulty

Determining the level at which to pitch a listening course, relative to the level of the students, is not a simple matter. In the audiolingual paradigm, listening was less for comprehension, and more to provide the

basis for pattern practice. The level was to be low enough that students would be able to make the necessary responses correctly. Virtually all of the time, as they were going through the process of habit formation, and one had to ensure that the habits being formed were correct. While the goal of listening course is, as Mendelsohn (1984) suggested “**to help the students comprehend spoken English for real communication**”, then a different approach to leveling has to be taken. He proposed following the principle advocated by Krashen (1983): that the course be pitched at level of “i+1” where “i” is the level at which the students stand. In other words, the material should be one notch above the students’ comfort level so that they are suitably challenged, and so that they can learn to comprehend at this level by means of the prudent use of strategies. (Mendelsohn 1994)

When designing a listening course, is important to bear in mind that the level of difficulty can also be varied by raising or lowering the level of task assigned on the same piece of listening (Anderson and Lynch 1988).

1.7.2. The Variables That Affect the Difficulty

There are many variables to be taken into consideration:

- ✓ The Length of The Listening Passage: the longer the passage, the more difficult it is for foreign- language learners to hold it together. Along passage is often over- whelming to them, largely because they are using strategies that guide them as to what is of major and what is of minor importance (Mendelsohn 1994).
- ✓ How well or poorly the passage is organized: a major factor that affects the difficulty level of a listening text is its rhetorical organization. Anderson and Armbruster (1984) make the distinction between considerate and inconsiderate text. Considerate text; when its structure and genre fit the speaker’s purpose, and it is appropriate in terms of content and vocabulary. While inconsiderate text is

somehow difficult to understand because it is poorly organized and written, it may be also incoherent and have inappropriate vocabulary (Mendelsohn 1994).

- ✓ Familiarity with the speaker's dialect: students have difficulty with the dialects of English which they are unfamiliar with.

1.7.2.1. Speech Rate

All foreign language listeners have probably had experience of listening to something and not quite understand it, because it seemed too fast that they could have understood if only it has been a little slower. Listener's perceptions that speech is too fast are often due to the lack of automaticity in processing. For them when speech becomes slower, listeners process the language easily. There is an evidence which suggests that the faster the speech, the more difficult is to comprehend (Buck 2001).

Spoken English language come into numerous forms. For example; in monologues, the speaker uses spoken language for any length of time and the stream of speech will continue whether or not the hearer comprehends. The level of difficulty of comprehension changes from planned to unplanned monologues. i.e., planned monologues usually manifest little redundancy which is relatively difficult to comprehend, while unplanned monologues exhibit more redundancy which makes for ease in comprehension.

To sum up, the number and the length of pauses used by the speaker play an important role in comprehension, because the learners will need to be able to comprehend language delivered at varying rates of speed and at times, delivered with few pauses, Unlike reading when a person can stop and go back to reread (Brown 2000).

1.7.2.1.1. Problematic Features of Fast Speech

Second language learners have a great deal of difficulty with comprehending the spoken language, because spoken English has been presented to them in the form of “correct” written English.

Mainly most EFL learners could not understand what a native speaker says, unless they could see it written down. Below are some features that might cause real problems for EFL learners (Mendelsohn 1994).

1. Distortion of Word Boundries: In rapid speech, words and syllable boundries often do not occur in the same place as in the equivalent citation form or written form poses a serious problem for EFL learners.

For example:

“Why +choose vs white +shoes” (Brown 1977:65)

The two utterances are very similar and this is very difficult for EFL learners to process.

2. Weak Forms :Another serious difficulty that EFL learners have in processing spoken language is the “weak forms” the phonetic reality that vowels in unstressed position move to the center of the mouth to the position of the tongue ‘schwa’ /ə/ sound. For instance, a sentence like “I want to leave” it would be realized /I wɒnt tə li: v/.

3. Elision: Brown defines elision as ‘**the omission of a consonant or a vowel**’ (1990:66). For example: because >BCAUSE

Lost of money > los v moni.

4. Assimilation: It is a phonological process in which a segment is realized in a more or less similar way as a neighbouring sound. Local assimilation occurs much more often than long distance assimilation because the segments are stricktely adjuced and in direct contact.

Assimilation might be regressive or progressive. For instance: that
 person >/ ððpp3:sðn /

5. Intonation: The pitch of the voice plays an important role in speaking. The pitch of the voice is constantly changing and it is considered as low and high. A falling tone at the end of an utterance indicates that the speaker has finished his point, whereas a raising tone suggests that he wishes to keep going. Intonation is a notoriously tricky area since many students find it difficult to hear changes in pitch direction, it might be difficult especially for beginners to infer from a speaker's intonation what the native speaker intends to convey.

6. Stress: Stress is the term that is used to describe the point in a word or phrase where pitch changes, vowels lengthen and the volume increases. In one- syllable word like 'dance', we know which syllable is stressed since there is only one, while a word with more than one syllable is more complex. However, learners might stress the word (export) on the second syllable (ex PORT) if they are using it as a verb. But if, on the contrary, we stress the first syllable (EXport), the verb is now a noun. This can cause a problem for EFL listeners since they could not distinguish between the verb and the Noun (Harmer 2005).

1.7.3. Cultural Background Knowledge

According to Trugill (1983) language is like a mirror that reflects the national culture of its speakers. The American linguist Sapir maintains that, **“language cannot exist without culture ...culture can be explained as what the society thinks and does, and the language is the expression of the ideas of the society.”** Sapir (1921:60-90). Consequently language carries knowledge and cultural information, thus culture is embedded in even the simplest act of language.

As found by O'malley and Chamot (1989), the effective listener is the one who is able to draw on a knowledge of the world, on personal experiences and by asking questions of themselves. Consequently, there is now an emphasis in modern language teaching on cultural knowledge as a basis for language learning.

1.7.4. Memory and Listening Comprehension

The relationship between memory and listening comprehension is very complex. Since, memory interacts with speech rate and decoding fast and/or long speech requires a great deal of cognitive load for EFL learners' memory. Thus, the memory of EFL learners plays an important role in listening comprehension. Call's study (1985) indicated some degree of relationship between short- memory and listening comprehension. It had been found that the memory span for target language input for EFL learners is shorter than that for native speakers. According to Call, the capacity for retention in short-term memory of native speakers of English is about seven units plus or minus two (a unit is a meaningful chunk such as words, phrases, or a short sentence)

Memory is closely related to processing time and amount of information for EFL learners, which may be major causes of difficulties with listening. In this respect Anderson and Lynch (1988:56) argue that “**two important factors of difficulty are the amount of information that has to be processed and the amount of time available.**” For example, it is easily conceivable that retention of information would increase when listeners process a lesser amount of information for a longer time.

1.8. CONCLUSION

From the literature review, one can deduce that listening is a difficult and complex skill that requires an understanding of how that process works, and its role in second language learning. In this chapter, the researcher has discussed some listening strategies that can enable EFL learners to cope with the spoken language, it also talks about the difficulties that EFL listeners encounter in their learning process. The next chapter, will describe the methodology and procedures used in the study which consists of research instruments, data collection, data analysis.

CHAPTER TWO

CASE STUDY

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2.2. ELT IN ALGERIA

2.3. TEACHING ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

2.4. THE LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

2.5. RESEARCH DESIGN

2.6. SAMPLE POPULATION

2.6.1. Teachers' Profile

2.6.2. Learners' Profile

2.7. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

2.7.1. Students' Questionnaire

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2.8. DATA ANALYSIS

2.8.1. Students' Questionnaire

2.8.2. Teachers' Interview

2.9. DATA INTERPRETATION

2.10. CONCLUSION

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The present chapter is devoted to the empirical phase of the study. Its purpose is to provide a clear analysis of the teaching / learning situation as far as the listening skill is concerned. The aim is to describe ELT in Algeria. In addition, it seeks to display the different problems behind learners' low achievement in listening and their strategies. For this purpose two research instruments are designed. First, a questionnaire is to first year EFL students, and the second is semi- structured interview addressed to EFL teachers at the university of Tlemcen.

The data collection procedure will be described and the results will be discussed. They will pave the way to relate the main findings to the hypotheses formulated previously.

2.2. ELT IN ALGERIA

English as a foreign language started to gain ground in Algeria and it is regarded as a '**means to facilitate a constant communication with the world**' (Naouel 2013). This interest in English began after the independence, especially when the Algerian government adopted an eradication policy of the French rule and culture, which was the first language spoken during the French colonization. To avoid a contradiction with the Arabic and the Islamic Algerian identity, the arabisation process came to give the Arabic language back her real status in the Algerian society. Thanks to this process, Arabic was declared as the national language and the language of instruction for all subjects except sciences and medical courses, in primary, middle, and secondary schools in the 1970's, and after in university by the 1980's

From 1971 onwards Arabic replaced French as the medium of instruction in primary schools; by 1976 all middle school education was conducted in Arabic; by 1984 all secondary education, and by 1986 most university education ...had undergone this change .

(Benmoussat's unpublished doctoral dissertation 2003:106)

Later on, the policy decision makers felt the need for educational reforms, which include the reintroduction of French as a first foreign language, and the introduction of English as a second foreign language at an early stage, exactly at the first year middle school, for a period of seven years, i.e, till the last year of secondary school, this considerable space of English is gained because of the rapid development of information and communication and because of the globalization process.

2.3. TEACHING ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS

In Algeria, ELT text books and curriculum guidelines are government –prescribed. The changing needs of the Algerian school made it imperative that ELT methodologies be revised and updated.

Since the 1980, Algeria has been involved in a large scale text book – design program for middle and secondary schools. Attempts were made to revise the national curricula on the basis of functional – notional and skill –based objectives.

In speaking about the teaching of English in schools, in Algeria, two approaches have been adopted since its inception. The first one being the communicative approach which focused on communication which is the first and the easiest way to learn a language, especially when the learners get in touch with native the culture of the people speaking that language. But this was not practical considering difficulties of time and space, which led the Algerian educationalists to look for another approach.

The second approach adopted was the competency-based approach which help the learners acquire a communicative competency by centralizing on the learner as the target of the learning process. The focus in this approach was on the meaning conveyed by the context rather than the grammatical forms used in it.

2.4. THE LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

In the department of English, listening is not considered as a modular course, but instead is taught within the oral production module by some teachers, this shows that listening skill remains neglected aspect of English in many EFL programs.

The aim behind the department curriculum, is to expose learners to more listening, to be able to hear and distinguish sounds and relate them to their exact meanings, the ability to comprehend the whole message without understanding every word, to be familiar with the cultural rules and forms of English, to guess the speaker's attitudes and feelings.

Such a curriculum seems to neglect listening as a process and focus more on the materials used to expose listening, on the other

hand learners listen and answer to question but without being taught how to listen, i.e., they lack using strategies or they use some of them, but they are not aware of. What is important, even there is a sufficient time to teach listening, still it remains a big issue in the educational EFL program.

2.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study aims at investigating the problems that hinder the teaching/ learning of the listening skill. For this purpose a case study of first year EFL university students is carried out using a questionnaire to students, and an interview to EFL teachers.

The research instruments ask about students' problems encountered in the teaching / learning of listening skill, and the listening strategies used by learners.

2.6. THE SAMPLE POPULATION

This investigation has required the contribution of the two main actors in the teaching /learning scene: first year English university students of Abou bakr BELKAID of TLEMCEN, and their EFL teachers.

2.6.1. Teachers' Profile

The five teachers, to whom the interview was addressed, were selected as stratified sampling, they work in Abou Baker BELKAID university in Tlemcen, some teachers have 'doctorate degree' in English and others have 'magister degree'. Their teaching experience ranges from five to fifteen years.

2.6.2. Learners' Profile

The twenty informants were first year EFL students from the university of Tlemcen, selected randomly. The age of these students ranged from ninety to twenty -two years old. They have thirteen years of schooling during which standard Arabic has been the language of instruction for all aspects. In addition, they studied French for at least ten years since the third year primary school, and English for eight years since the first year of the middle school.

2.7. RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Two research instruments are chosen; a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview because they are less time consuming, as they allow questioning a large number of informants in a relatively short period of time anonymously (Wallace1998)

2.7.1. Students' Questionnaire

Brown (2001:6) defined questionnaires as **“any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to reach either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers”**. Questionnaires allow researchers to gather information that learners are able to report about themselves, such as their beliefs and motivations about their learning or their reactions to learning and classroom instruction and activities – information that is typically not available from production data alone (Mackey & Gass 2005).

The questionnaire is distributed in the university of Tlemcen, to first year EFL students, the research hypotheses were translated into two types: closed question and open question. The aim of this

questionnaire is to finding out the difficulties that they may encounter in their learning process, and deducing the main strategies used to improve their listening level. It contained six questions, each one of them has its own objective.

- Question one inquired about the skill they prefer better;
- Question two explored learners' self-assessment in listening proficiency, by evaluating their levels;
- Question three asked the learners to select the main difficulties they may encounter when engaging in listening activities and giving them opportunity to propose other difficulties;
- Question four attempted to know the learner's point of view about what they do before listening;
- Question five aimed at asking the learners about the strategies they may use when listening and giving them chance to deduce other strategies;
- Question six aimed at finding out whether learners evaluate themselves after listening.

2.7.2. Teachers' Interview

A number of different interview types can be employed to gather data. Interviews are often associated with survey – based approach, as well as being a technique used by many qualitative researchers. In structured interviews, researchers usually asked an identical set of questions for all respondents. Structured interviews resemble verbal questionnaires and allow researchers to compare answers from different participants. Less rigid are semi structured interviews, in

which the researcher uses a written list of questions as a guide, while still having the freedom to digress probe for more information. In unstructured interviews, on the other hand, no list of questions is used, instead, interviews develop and adopt their own questions, unstructured interviews are more similar to natural conversations. (Mackey&Gass2005)

The interview was addressed to the teachers of oral comprehension in Abou Bakr BELKAID university of Tlemcen as a selective sampling. It aims at asking them some questions about their students' level in listening comprehension, it contains five questions:

- Question one asked the teachers about their teaching experience;
- Question two required the teachers to state their learners' level in listening comprehension;
- Question three asked the teachers whether their learners follow any strategies in order to improve their listening comprehension;
- Question four inquired about the learners' difficulties in listening comprehension;
- Question five asked the teachers to express their ideas about their suggestions to their learners concerning listening comprehension.

2.8. DATA ANALYSIS

This section will analyse the data gathered previously from teachers' interview and learners' questionnaire quantitatively and qualitatively.

2.8.1. Students' Questionnaire

1- The skills that students prefer

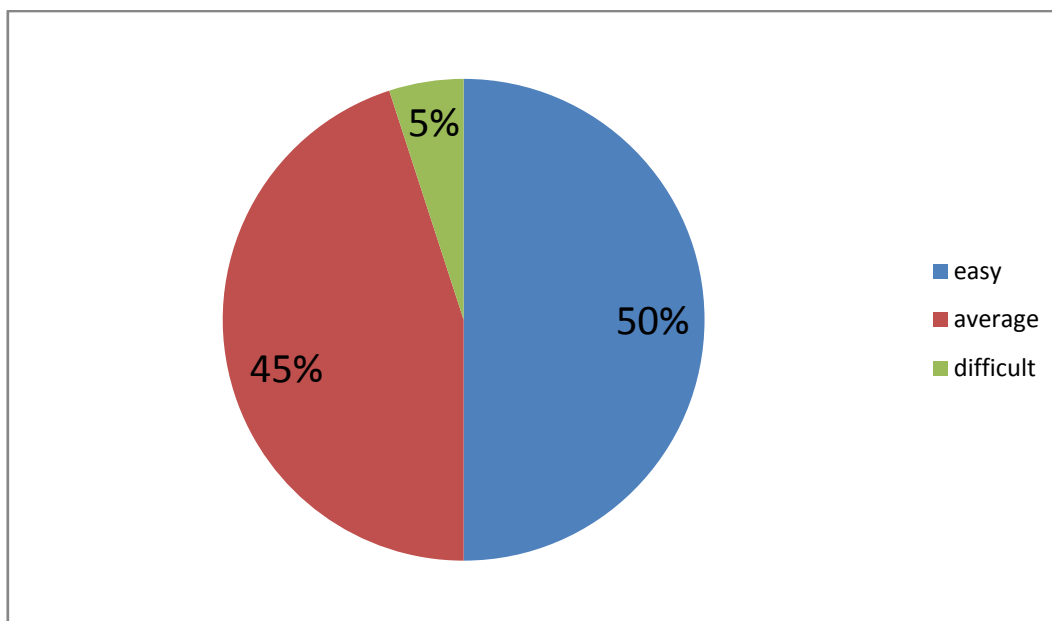
Nearly half of the students (45%) prefer the speaking skill, and five students (25%) prefer the listening skill better than the other skills, and only three students (15%) chose the reading skill while the other three students (15%) like the writing skill.

	Absolute Frequency	Relative frequency
Speaking	9	45%
Writing	3	15%
Reading	3	15%
Listening	5	25%

Table 2.1. The Learners' Preferable Skills.

2- Students' perception of listening compared to the others.

Half of the students (50%) find that the listening skill is easier than the other skills, and nearly half of them (45%) find that listening is average when compared with other skills, while only one student out of ten (5%) find that listening is difficult



Graph 2.1. Comparing Listening with Other Skills.

3- Students' difficulties in listening

More than half of the students (65%) think that the speed of speech is the main problem encountered when listening, Nearly half (45%) of the students state that unfamiliarity with speakers' dialect is the main problem they encounter when listening, and thirty per cent of them mention that the main difficulty in listening comprehension is the lack of knowledge related to the topic they are listening to, while ten per cent of them view that the length of listening text and memory limitation are the main problems they face.

	A.F	R.F
Speed of speech is too fast	13	65%
Lack of knowledge related to the topic you are listening to	6	30%
Memory limitation	2	10%
Length of the listening text	2	10%
Unfamiliarity with speakers' dialect	9	45%

Table.2.2. The Difficulties Encountered by the Learners' in Listening Comprehension.

➤ Concerning the other difficulties, the students cited: overcrowded classrooms, the noise made by learners, the topic chosen are not related to the students' interest, sometimes the students focus on the individual words rather than the whole text, time constraints, the text used contain new and difficult words.

4- Pre-listening strategies

- Some students replay saying that: they prepare themselves to listen to the topic.
- Other students maintain that they try to relax by keeping quiet.
- Others state that they think of the objectives of the lecture.
- Others say that they try to guess what will be the topic listening.

5-While- listening strategies

More than half of the students (55%) view that paying attention to details is the most strategy used when listening, forty five per cent of students relate what they hear to what they know about the topic you are listening to (elaboration), thirty five of them try to guess the

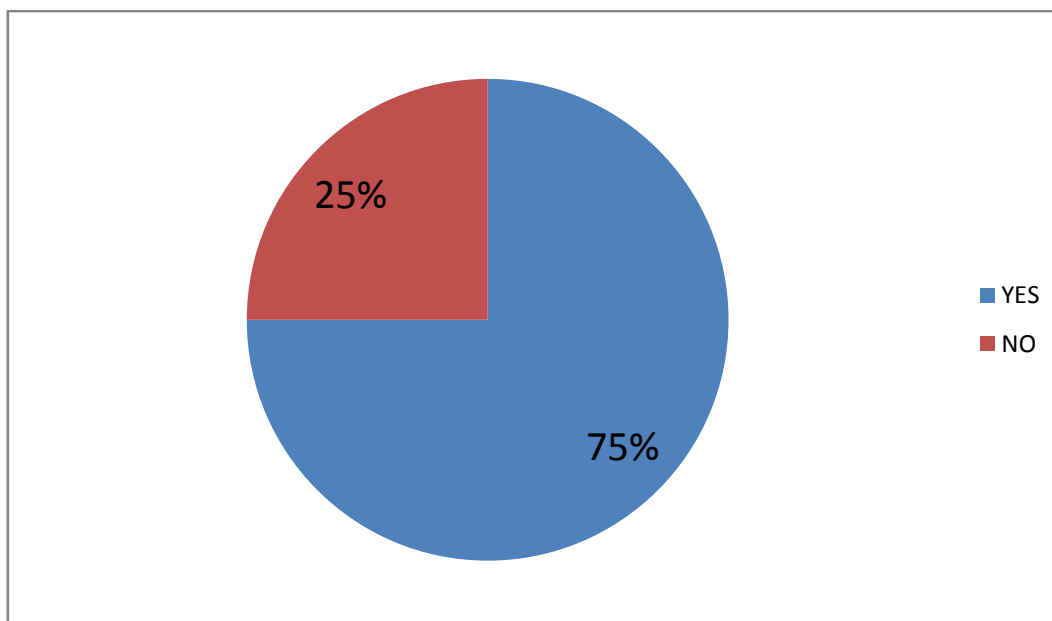
meaning of new information (inferencing), twenty five per cent make summaries and encourage themselves when they find difficulties, ten per cent of the students ask the teacher for more information.

	A.F	R.F
You pay attention to details	11	55%
You relate what you hear to what you know about the topic you are listening to	9	45%
You try to guess the meaning of new information	7	35%
Make summaries	5	25%
Ask the teacher for more information	2	10%
Encourage yourself when you find difficulties	5	25%

Table 2.3. The Strategies Used by the Learners when Listening

6- Post- listening strategies

The majority of the students (75%) evaluate themselves after listening while only five per cent do not evaluate themselves.



Graph 2.2.Evaluating the Students' Comprehension

➤ For other strategies that they use, the students listed: taking notes, trying to listen to the text lot of times, cooperating with peers, concentrating during the lecture, focusing on the words/ sentences they do not understand, checking the meaning of difficult words using dictionaries.

2.8.2. Teachers' Interview

This section will report the results of the teachers' interview qualitatively, and will discuss the main results concerning learners' difficulties and the strategies they use.

1- The level of learners in listening comprehension:

Teacher1 mentions that the level of his learners is rather average.

Teacher2 says that the level of his learners in listening comprehension is quiet good.

Teacher3 views that most of her learners are good in listening comprehension, because they listen more to songs and watch lot of movies.

Teacher4 maintains that her learners' level in listening comprehension is average, because they sometimes ask for clarification or formulating the style.

Teacher5 believes that the level of learners in listening comprehension changes progressively, i.e, in the first months they ask for repetitions of the recording and it consumes lot of attention but through time they become accustomed, and can understand from the first time.

2- The strategies used by students:

Teacher1 states that learners use some strategies like: making a link with sounds and meaning relating to previous knowledge of the words.

Teacher2 cites that learners use strategies such as: using what is called context analysis.

Teacher3 says that learners may use some strategies, but they are not aware of them, among these strategies she lists:

- Asking for repetitions
- Asking for more explanation
- Asking for how they can use the authentic materials like the head phone.

Teacher4 mentions that learners use some strategies like: taking notes and making summaries.

Teacher5 states that among the strategies that her learners use is focusing on familiar vocabulary.

3- The difficulties encountered by the learners in LC:

Teacher1 sees that from the difficulties that the learners may encounter is the non-possibility to relate sound to meaning, especially with new words.

Teacher2 believes that the main difficulties encountered by the learners in listening comprehension are lack of comprehension, and how to analyse what they are listening.

Teacher3 lists that from the learners difficulties there are: the unfamiliarity with the native accent, the difficulty of connected speech, they find it difficult to repeat what they had listen, they do not memorize, anxiety (they know the answers but they confuse), lack of motivation.

Teacher4 maintains that the difficulties encountered by her learners are: unfamiliarity of the vocabulary, lack of the knowledge of the weak form rules and stress.

Teacher5 cites that the main difficulty encountered by her learners is speech rate.

4- The suggestions to help learners overcome such difficulties.

Teacher1 proposes that learners should practise listening intensively in and outside the classroom.

Teacher2 suggests that the learners have to try to listen as much as possible and he preferred to start with simple recordings.

Teacher3 offers the following suggestions: to be good manger, to be self-confidence, to expose them to extensive listening, to encourage themselves, to reduce anxiety, to develop their listening outside the classroom.

Teacher4 suggests learning some phonetics like stress and weak forms, listening to songs and watching movies especially with scripts, linking what they listen to what they read, listening to one piece for many times.

Teacher5 proposes listening to native speakers in order to be familiar with their accents, listening a lot outside the classrooms.

2.9. DATA INTERPRETATION

First year EFL students classified listening as the second skill in terms of importance, and they considered it as an easy skill when compared with other skills. These results confirm the first hypothesis which views that the students are not aware of the importance of listening comprehension.

First year EFL students encounter a number of difficulties when engaging in the listening activities such as: speech rate, short-memory, lack of background knowledge, unfamiliarity with the speakers' dialect, the length of the listening text and other difficulties that they mentioned including: crowded classrooms, the topics chosen are not of the students' interest, the unfamiliarity of the vocabulary and the non possibility to relate sounds to meaning. The reason behind such difficulties may be that untutored students use strategies any way, but they do not always choose wisely. This means that the hypothesis which says that first year EFL students may encounter problems in listening comprehension is valid.

First year EFL learners use some listening strategies before, while and after listening, and they focused more on paying attention, elaboration, inferencing in addition to other strategies. This result shows that the hypothesis which says that the students may use some listening strategies is valid.

The level of learners in listening comprehension ranges between average and good, according to their EFL teachers and the reason behind this may be because they listen outside the classrooms to songs and watch lot of movies.

EFL teachers mentioned that their learners use some strategies like: asking for repetition and clarification, making summaries and taking notes, but sometimes they are not aware of such strategies.

EFL teachers cited a number of difficulties that their learners may encounter when listening such as: anxiety, lack of motivation, memory limitation, and they offered some suggestions to overcome such difficulties including: practicing listening intensively and extensively in and outside the classroom, encouraging themselves, reducing anxiety and others.

2.10. CONCLUSION

The chapter was devoted to a description of the empirical phase, two research instruments were addressed to first year EFL students and their EFL teachers of Abou Bakr BELKAID university of Tlemcen. The results were discussed and showed that the learners use some strategies but they still have difficulties may be because the strategies used are ineffective, these results were related to the hypotheses put forward before.

The next chapter will present some suggestions and recommendations concerning teaching listening comprehension depending on the results found.

CHAPTER THREE
SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. INTRODUCTION

3.2. TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LISTENING

3.3. TEACHING LISTENING STRATEGIES

3.4. EXPLICIT STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

3.5. DEVELOPING LEARNERS' LINGUISTIC PROFICIENCY

3.6. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

3.7. THE IMPACT OF LISTENING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

3.8. CONCLUSION

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The present chapter revolves around suggestions for EFL teachers depending on the results found previously. It first deals with teaching foreign language listening, then it takes teaching listening strategies. It also highlights explicit strategy instruction. Finally it discusses the impact of teaching listening strategy instruction.

3.2. TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LISTENING

Since comprehension is the overriding desired outcome, foreign language teaching typically focuses on the product of listening: the correct answer. While an exclusive focus on the product of listening allows teachers to verify comprehension, the answer (correct or incorrect) does not help listeners gain an insight into the processes underlying successful comprehension, which is a characteristic of successful listeners (Vandergrift 2011). Furthermore an exclusive interest in the right answer often creates a high level of anxiety, since an interest in the correct answer is often associated with evaluation. Therefore, focusing on a growing body of research that examines a process approach to the teaching of EFL listening, it will be argued that an emphasis on the process of listening through regular classroom practice, unencumbered by the threat of evaluation, can better enable EFL listeners to control comprehension process (Vandergrift 2011).

3.3. TEACHING LISTENING STRATEGIES

Listening strategies are operations which the learner chooses to use to direct or check his or her own comprehension (Peterson 1997). Competent listeners tend to monitor their comprehension rather steadily, when necessary, to select appropriate strategies for the task at hand. Field (1998) points out to the compensatory nature of strategies in that they make up for a lack of linguistic knowledge.

Students may not immediately see the benefits of strategy use or they may feel that strategy instruction take time away from the practice of language skills. According to Macintyre and Noels (1996), teachers can motivate students by showing them how and when to use strategies. Teachers must also show students how effective strategy use can be through successful experiences. Mendelsohn (1995) calls for strategy instruction to be delivered gradually, over an extended period of time, and in a manner appropriate to learners' proficiency level. Strategy training does not replace language practice, rather but is interspersed with practice throughout a course.

In fact, untutored students use strategies any way, but they do not always choose wisely. Eastman (1991) points out that students sometimes use ineffective strategies such as on-line translation. Translation of single words may be the only strategy that beginning listeners think to use. But it restricts listeners to the surface features of the language and uses up all of their concentration .i.e., when learners concentrate on translating individual words they become incapable of comprehending the whole meaning of the text. It is so natural at lower proficiency levels that students must be explicitly encouraged to avoid it.

3.4. EXPLICIT STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

The general model of strategy training that has evolved accords importance to the explicit teaching of different strategies, i.e., making learners intellectually aware of the functions that each performs (Cohen 1998). The model has some or all of the following characteristics:

- Strategies are introduced individually;
- Strategies are explained explicitly to learners and even sometimes named;
- Strategies are modeled for learners to emulate;

- Strategies are practiced in controlled tasks;
- Learners evaluate their own use of the strategies in less focused listening tasks (Field 2009).

Strategy training teaches the learners about the way, the time, and the reason of selecting the appropriate strategies in order to facilitate learning a foreign language more effectively. Thus strategy training is most effective **“when students learn why and when specific strategies are important, how to use these strategies and how to transfer them to new situations”** (Oxford 1990:12).

The first step in this process is to raise the learners’ awareness about the strategies they already use, and then to develop a wide range of strategies, so that they can select appropriate and effective strategies within the context of particular language tasks. In this respect (Carell 1996 cited in Cohen 1998) emphasizes that teachers need to be explicit about what the strategy consists of, how, when and why it might be used, and how its effectiveness can be evaluated.

Once the learners want to make the implementation of explicit strategy instruction more successful, they need to inculcate themselves with the necessary linguistic proficiency.

3.5. DEVELOPING THE LEARNERS’ LINGUISTIC PROFICIENCY

The success of the explicit strategy instruction is strongly related to the learners’ linguistic proficiency .i.e., the knowledge of the crucial features of the spoken language including: phoneme discrimination, word- recognition, intonation and paralinguistic features, they comprise the level of linguistic proficiency required in order to handle listening comprehension.

a- Phoneme discrimination

It should not be taken for granted that students are able to distinguish between all the sound differences in connected speech. Identifying these distinctions is very important because several vowels sound so very similar but belong to different phonemes (Mendelsohn 1994).

b- Word – recognition

Word –recognition plays an important role in spoken English, since it is more concerned with the phonological modification, that takes the form of elision, assimilation, which presents a difficulty for EFL learners, learners may be familiar with the written forms of words, but they do not recognize them in a listening text, because of such phonological modifications. For this reason teachers need to expose their learners to the rapid and daily speech in order to be familiar with the English weak forms.

c- Intonation

Intonation is a very powerful meaning-carrier in English that students should be familiarized with. Examples of the power of intonation are the way meaning changes when an utterance like ‘I’m really happy’ is said with a ‘high fall’ signaling excitement, and then the same utterance is said with a ‘low fall’ signaling disinterest (Mendelsohn 1994). In other words, the learners’ attention is drawn to the fact that a rising tune and a falling tune may reflect a change in meaning.

d- Paralinguistic features

Foreign language learners need to be aware of paralinguistic features, which will help them know about the speakers’ mood, feeling, and attitude. For instance, through the loudness and the softness, the listener can understand whether the speaker is happy, sad, or angry. And through the

quality of voice the learner can identify whether the speaker is a man, woman, or a child.

3.6. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

A time before, the focus was on the learners and their selection of strategies and how they can benefit from them in order to learn a second or a foreign language effectively, but what about their teacher? Now, the teacher is no more seen just as a controller and instructor, but also as a facilitator of learning who helps his learners to become more independent and responsible of their own learning. In strategy instruction the teacher has new roles: he can actually be a diagnostician, a language trainer, a coach, a language learner, a researcher (Cohen 1998).

a- Teacher as diagnostician

The teacher helps students identify current strategies and learning style, by raising the learner's awareness of such strategies and styles.

b- Teacher as language trainer

The teacher trains the students to use learning strategies explicitly, by showing them which strategies suit their learning best, and making them aware of the effective ones to apply them in their learning process. In addition, the teacher makes his learners aware of the ineffective strategies: online translation.

c- Teacher as a coach

The instructor provides ongoing guidance on students' progress either through periodic conferencing about aspects of the learners' oral or written work, or through responding to queries in dialogue journals which are kept by the learners (Cohen 1998).

d- Teacher as language learner

An additional and most useful role is that of language learner, which implies that the teacher shares his own learning experiences with their students. For instance, if the teacher is a non- native speaker of the target language and have mastered it, he could demonstrate the strategies that he has used to his learners in order to develop proficiency.

e- Teacher as researcher

Finally, the teacher can assume the role of researcher who analyses the learning process and searching whether the learners are experiencing success or failure (cohen 1998).

3.7. THE IMPACT OF LISTENING STRATEGY INSTRUCTION

A speaking study was conducted with a number of under graduated in a compulsory English for art students course by Nunan (1996). There were a low motivation to learn English because the students focus on Puntonghua, which was the official language. The subjects were assigned to four classes, two experimental and two control groups, the experimental received key learning and study skills strategies, all subjects were administered to measure their motivation. The study found that motivation improved over duration of the semester, for significantly more experimental groups than control group students.

What is more, strategy training helps the learners to be autonomous and self-directed ones, by giving them the opportunity to choose their own strategies far from the influence of their teachers, i.e, this strategy lead the learner to participate in the learning process, since it focuses on the way of learning rather than the product.

Thanks to strategy training, the learners become:

- Responsible for their selection, use, and evaluation of their learning strategies;
- More successful language learners;
- More aware of their individual learning needs;
- Taking more responsibility for their own learning;
- Empowering students by allowing them to take control of the language learning process (Cohen 1998).

The effects of this type of strategy instruction were investigated by many researchers. For example, Graham (1997) who investigated the difficulties of advanced-level learners of French and German in listening and the other listening skills, suggested the teaching of strategies through explicit training. This strategy is favoured because when the learners are given a sufficient time for practicing strategies, they recognize its effectiveness and they become more capable of comprehending when and how to apply them in their learning process.

Another study which supports the same idea was conducted by Carrier (2003), in the university of Northern Illinois, USA. After conducting an explicit strategy in listening, she concluded that the participants showed statistically significant improvement.

Strategy instruction is vital in the early stages of listening development. It enables the learner to inlock the code of speech and achieve some minimal understanding despite limitations of the language. The ability to make sense of what speaker says is an important motivating factor for the early language learner. It also ensures that the learner does not become impatient with a progressive learning program of the type proposed.

3.8. CONCLUSION

Teachers who want to provide the most effective classroom experience for their foreign language learners should consider that they are more than just teachers who give information to their students, but they play different roles in the classroom. It is up to them to make their learners motivated or demotivated.

General Conclusion

Algerian EFL learners encounter a lot of difficulties at different levels. This study was concerned with the difficulties encountered by first year EFL learners in listening comprehension and looked whether they use some listening strategies in order to improve their proficiency in this skill.

Three research questions put forward to investigate the above cited issue were:

- 1- Are first year EFL students aware of the importance of listening comprehension?
- 2- What are the main difficulties encountered by first year EFL learners in listening comprehension?
- 3- Do first year EFL learners use any strategies in order to improve their achievement in listening comprehension?

The above questions led to formulate the following hypotheses:

- 1- First year EFL students may not be aware of the importance of listening comprehension.
- 2- First year EFL learners may encounter difficulties like:
 - Speech rate
 - Lack of prior knowledge the target language
 - Short- term memory
- 3- First year EFL learners may use a number of listening strategies in order to improve their listening comprehension achievement.

This work was divided into three chapters: the review of literature consisting of the definition of the key concepts, listening is an active process that implies lot of efforts from the side of learners, in order to achieve the level of linguistic proficiency. EFL listeners still find difficulties related to speech

rate, memory limitation, lack of prior knowledge and others. To overcome such difficulties learners use some strategies like cognitive, metacognitive, and socioaffective ones, but sometimes they do not use them effectively since they do not select them wisely. The second chapter was concerned with the practical part, describing the research instruments, data collection, analysis of the main results. The third chapter aims at offering some suggestions and recommendations in order to improve teaching listening comprehension.

The main results revealed that first year EFL learners are not aware of the importance of listening comprehension since they consider it as an easy skill which requires just hearing sounds. In addition, first year EFL learners encounter difficulties in terms of speech rate, memory limitation, lack of cultural background knowledge, further more first year EFL learners use some strategies like taking notes, making summaries and others, but probably not effectively as they face difficulties.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the researcher has some limitations. For example this work focused only on some strategies like: inferencing, elaboration, evaluation, and did not include all the listening strategies, because of time constraints. Further research should explore the way of selecting the appropriate listening strategies for advanced EFL learners.

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Students' Questionnaire

You are kindly requested to fill in the present questionnaire, by putting a cross in the appropriate box, and giving your comment when it is necessary.

1- Which skill do you prefer better? (put them in order)

Speaking writing reading listening

2- How do you find the listening skill when compared to other skills?

Easy average difficult

3- What are the difficulties you encounter when engaging in the listening activities?

a) Speed of speech is too fast

b) Lack of knowledge related to the topic you are listening to

c) Memory limitation

d) Length of the listening text

e) Unfamiliarity with the speaker's dialect

❖ Other difficulties.....

4- What do you usually do before listening?

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5- Which strategies do you use when you are listening?

a) You pay attention to details

b) You relate what you hear to what you know about the topic you are listening to

c) You try to guess the meaning of new information

d) Make summaries

e) Ask the teacher for more information

f) Encourage yourself when you find difficulties

6- Do you evaluate yourself (your comprehension and the way you used to listen and answer) after listening?

Yes no

❖ Other strategies.....

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Teachers' Interview

- 1- How long have you been teaching English?
- 2- How do you find your learners' level in listening comprehension? Why?
- 3- Do you think that your learners follow any strategies in order to improve their listening comprehension achievement? What are these strategies?
- 4- What are your learners' difficulties in listening comprehension?
- 5- What do you suggest to help your learners overcome such difficulties?