

The Role of Listening Skills in Improving Second Language Learners' Performance in Learning English Language

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Abstract: This study conducted to find out to what extent listening is important in gaining communicative competence to the students at university level. It aims at showing the importance of listening skills in EFL classes. It aims also at increasing EFL students' motivation by using visual aids to improve their listening skills. The study adopted the descriptive analytical method. The data of the study were collected by means of listening test, consist of (1) listening topic, its questions was distributed (50 copies) to students. The data were analyzed by SPSS program by using T-test. As the result of the analysis, it was found that: Teachers should use CDs - room, projectors and flash card in teaching listening in EFL classes to help students in understanding ability. Crowded classes don't allow teacher to evaluate the techniques used in listening class. In the light of these findings the study recommends Learners need more practice to develop listening skills, Teachers need to use visual aids to teach English language as a foreign language.

دور مهارة الاستماع في تطوير اداء دارسي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية
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ملخص الدراسة

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى معرفة اهمية مهارة الاستماع في تطوير اللغة الانجليزية لدى طلاب المستوى الجامعي ، كما اهتمت هذه الورقة بتسليط الضوء على اهمية مهارة الاستماع لدارسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. كما اهتمت ايضا بتشجيع الطلاب علي استخدام الادوات المشاهدة والمسموعة في تطوير مهارة الاستماع لديهم. استخدم الباحث في هذه الورقة المنهج التحليلي الوصفي. تم جمع بيانات هذه الدراسة عن طريق الاختبار. اشتمل علي موضوع واحد تم توزيع اسئلته على عدد(50) طالب وطالبة. تم تحليل البيانات بواسطة برنامج SPSS باستخدام اختبار (T) وتوصلت الدراسة الي نتائج اهمها. يجب علي الاستاذ استخدام الاسطوانات والاقراص والماصح الضوئي في تدريس مهارة الاستماع لتحسين مستوي الفهم لدي الطلاب، القاعات المزدهمة لا تمكن الاستاذ من تقييم التقنيات واداء الطلاب في فصول مهارة الاستماع. وعلى ضوء هذه النتائج ، توصي الدراسة بأن الطلاب يحتاجون الي الكثير من الممارسة لتطوير مهارة الاستماع. يحتاج الاستاذ لاستخدام الادوات المسموعة والمشاهدة لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية.

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Introduction

Language teaching means teaching people how to communicate, and express their feelings and attitudes, and exchange facts to live in groups. In the target language clearly, student need and interest play an important role in communicative approach. Teacher must develop learning activities, that provide the language necessary to communicate this need and interest for this reason, the activities employ will often be the result of careful analysis of the language students will need.

Statement of the Problem

This study will concern with the investigating the listening skills at third year students at department of English language at University of Sudan, Faculty of Arts.

The problem of listening comprehension in foreign language lies primarily in identifying segments, word stress and intonation. It also studies the case of authentic materials and the nature of authentic answers in addition to the notion that language is inferred from and understood in context. Many people in reading are similar to those who accrue in listening. But there are other problems that we can consider such as:

- 1- The absence of relevant knowledge structure to make use of top-down processing without technical knowledge.
- 2- A break down in a bi-directional processing may also accrue when available schemata are not activated in those texts that do not contain enough textual cues to signal the suitable schemata to be activated.
- 3- Conception about reading may also interfere with interactive processing. Some students simply do not know that they are allowed to use information not stated in the text in order to interpret or explain it. Therefore the researchers' concern is to focus on these types of problems committed by students or learners of the Faculty of Arts.

The Significance of the Study

This research is intended to investigate English language students' performance in listening skill in order to identify and analyse the performance in the listening skill. Hoping to help students, their teachers to develop the process of teaching and learning English language.

The findings may contribute in planning English programs and focus on classroom performance in listening skills and how to improve this in Faculty of Arts, University of Sudan.

The study also learns the most problematic area in listening and the features that influence English language learning process. In addition, it may help designing remedial materials on the basis of the most types to improve classroom receptive skills, which the researcher considered as scope of difficulty.

The Objectives of the Study

This study is going to inquire and examine students' performance in listening skill among the students at Faculty of Arts who are learning English as second language. Accordingly, this study attempts to propose students' performance in listening skills in certain areas as follows:-

- 1- Listening is an important skill.
- 2- Problems those facing English language students in listening skill specially Students at faculty of Arts at Sennar University.
- 3- Improving classroom performance in listening skill in an environment where the lack of reference Books for teacher of English is a problem.
- 4- The use of teaching aids such as flashcards, cassettes, overhead projectors, films, radio, magazines, computer, etc, and their importance in teaching listening skill.
- 5- Highlight the role of pair-work and group-work in improving classroom performance.

The Questions of the Study

The research is expected to answer the following questions:

- 1- Is listening in the language program in the Faculty of Arts neglected skill?
- 2- What extent listening is ignored in English Program?
- 3- Do University students find it difficult to listen properly?
- 4- Should listening be taught as separated skills or as a part of integrated program?
- 5- What is the role of the teacher in a listening class?
- 6- What is the role of the learner in a listening class?

The Hypotheses of the Study

H₁- The usage of the listening skill in learning are effectively carried out-side the classroom.

H₂- There is some effects (habits and attitudes) of the learners may be negative in learning listening skills.

H₃- There is some effects of using teaching aids such as, (computer, Cassettes, Recorder ,etc in teaching listening skills.

H₄- Most of the second language students, who learn English language, face difficulties in understanding native English speakers.

The methodology of the study

The researcher adopts the analytical descriptive method to conduct the data. The researcher uses listening test for collecting data.

Literature Review

Listening, the very basic language skill is consistently interrelated and intervened with the other language skills - speaking, reading and writing. Until the late nineteenth century written mode is predominant in language learning and then onwards listening began to gain its significance in language teaching. The challenges towards teaching listening are now better understood because of the new strategies contributing to effective listening and moreover the widespread availability of technology supports the language learners in enhancing their listening skills. Still, the assessment of their listening skills, remain far behind the current views of listening and hence innovations to be made to renovate the teaching or learning of listening. This paper deals with the prime importance of listening in language acquisition and the challenges in attaining listening competence and suggests some strategies to overcome it.

Listening Skill in Language Learning:

Listening has an important place in learning as it is one of the four major skills in language acquisition. Even though the other skills such as reading, speaking and writing are essential to develop language proficiency, listening contributes primarily for language expertise. Listening awakens awareness of the language as it is a receptive skill that first develops in a human being. Learning to listen to the target language improves language ability. The sound, rhythm, intonation, and stress of the language can only be perfectly adapted through listening. To understand the nuances in a particular language, one must be able to listen. As we get to understand spoken language by listening it is easier to improve the other skills and gain confidence. Other than being the primary form of communication, listening helps the language learner to understand the beauty of the language. Especially in terms of communicative language teaching it is said that the basis for communicative competence is listening as it provides the aural input and enables learners to interact in spoken communication and hence language learning largely depends on listening. Thus listening forms the concrete basis for the complete language proficiency.

The Importance of Listening in Communicative Language Teaching:

Listening is the most significant part of communication as it is pivotal in providing a substantial and meaningful response. Especially in learning a language for communicative purpose, listening plays a vital role, as it helps the language learner to acquire pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary, and syntax and the comprehension of messages conveyed can be based solely on tone of voice, pitch and accent; and it is only possible when we listen. Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement. In addition, without listening skill, no communication can be achieved. Also, every study conducted regarding the language skills acquisition has proved that when we communicate, we gain 45% of language competence from listening, 30% from speaking, 15% from reading and 10% from writing. With the highest percentage of involvement in the exchange of information in effective communication, listening has to be considered a language forerunner. Listening, unlike the other language skills, is felt comparatively much difficult by the learners, as it has all its interrelated sub-skills such as receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. But with the advent of communicative language-teaching and the focus on proficiency, the learning and teaching of listening started to receive more attention. However, listening is not yet fully integrated into the curriculum and needs to be given more attention in a language learning setting.

Teaching Listening-The Challenges:

According to Yagang (1994) [2], the problems in listening were accompanied with the four following factors: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. The problems were believed to cause by the speech rate, vocabulary and pronunciation.

As Flowerdew & Miller (1996) assumed that the problems of the students were for the speed of delivery, new terminology and concept, difficulty in focusing and the physical environment. The main reasons why the learners feel listening difficult are:

i. Lack of effort to understand each and every word while listening. Especially in L2 acquisition they are unable transfer their L1 skill easily to a second language.

- ii. Failure or laziness to build up their vocabulary gradually and this greatly reflects in their listening and keeps them low spirited in acquiring the language skills.
- iii. Listeners problem with different pronunciation, accents as they stick to one particular articulation.
- iv. Listener's concentration power or listening stamina greatly influences their listening skills, which is not so in the case of acquiring the other language skills (reading, speaking and writing) even when they are carried for a longer period of time.
- v. Distraction by the physical setting or the environment in which listening is to be carried out. This becomes an added challenge for an average learner and a main confront even for good listeners.

Listening activities generally induces the anxiety and stress among the learners as it involves the interpersonal and interpretive modes of communication in which he/she has to actively participate. Mainly, unlike other language skills it is not at learner's control and may be done at variable speeds as it is not at the complete control of the listener at all settings.

Strategies For Effective Teaching Of Listening:

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that contribute directly to the recall of listening input. In the recent days, a number of listening strategies have been formulated to match with every different listening situation and because of this, in teaching listening skills, the language learners are facilitated in getting adjusted to their listening behavior to deal with a variety of situations, types of input, and listening purposes. Listening strategies can be broadly classified as Top-down strategies and Bottom-up strategies. Top-down strategies are listener based; the listener relies on the background knowledge of the topic, the listening context, the text type, and the language and they help the listener to interpret the ideas he has listened.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted to promote communicative competence. This study is also aimed to find out to what extend listening is important in gaining communicative competence. The learners' attitude and satisfaction towards the tow activities were also determined. The following research elements procedure was included in carrying out to obtain the research objectives.

Population of the study

The population of this study include students at third level were chosen from Sinnar University, faculty of Arts department of English language.

Sample of the Study

This includes the samples who responded to the tests. A random sample of fifty (50) students at third level was chosen from Sinnar University, faculty of Arts department of English language. The researcher teach them course (listening-1) through ten lectures he taught them 8 topics with paying extra attention to listening activities to improve their pronunciation ability and vocabulary knowledge. Then the researcher gives them the test. The test was administered to measure the subject's pronunciation ability. They were assigned into two groups of 25 based on the scores sought from the test of listening administered prior to the experiment, their age ranges between 23and25 years.

Tools of Data Collection

The tool was used for collecting data, is a test.

The Test

The listening test constructed specifically for the present study consisted of 1 listening topic. The test was administered to measure the subject's listening ability. The subjects will finish the test within 40 minutes. The researcher chosed simple and clear language in order to help the students to express themselves and provide the data required.

Validity of the Test

The test was checked by a number of expert lecturers at Sinnar University in departments of English Language- Faculty of Arts Sinnar and faculty of education Singaa. The face validity was checked. All the teachers agree that the test is valid.

Reliability of the Test

The split half method was used to measure the reliability of the test, in which the items of the test are divided into two halves for scoring purposes. For this purpose, the even numbered items and the odd numbered ones are scored separately to obtain corresponding scores. The researcher has used correlation coefficient of Pearson's equation, which is stated as follows:

$$R = \frac{N \sum XY - \sum X \sum Y}{\sqrt{N \sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2} \sqrt{N \sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2}}$$

Where:

- R = reliability of the test
- N = Number of all items in the test.
- X, y = Parallel lists of candidates scores.

$$\sum = \text{Sum}$$

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The primary concern of this chapter is to analyze and discuss the results of the Test. The Test was administered to students of English language at university level. The questions will be analyzed in percentage.

Frequency Table

The Analysis of the Test results.

In which,(yes) for correct response, and (no) for incorrect response.

Table (1): *What is Hiroshige famous for?*

options	Frequency	Percent
No	14	70.0
Yes	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0

The first question of the listening test shows that (70%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (30%) were correct. This indicates that there is a problem in listening skills.

q1

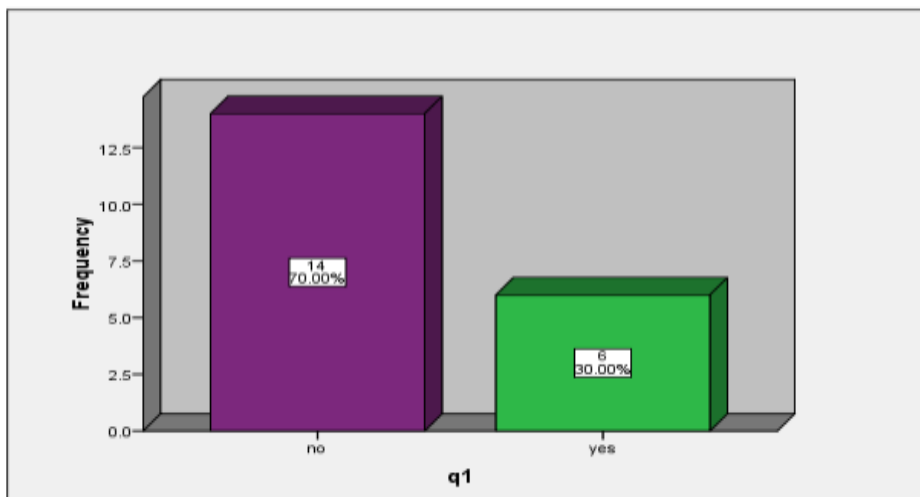


Figure (1) *What is Hiroshige famous for?*

Table (2): **Where and when Hiroshige was born?**

options	Frequency
No	8
Yes	12
Total	20

The second question of the listening test shows that (40%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (60%) were correct. This indicates that there are little problems in listening skills.

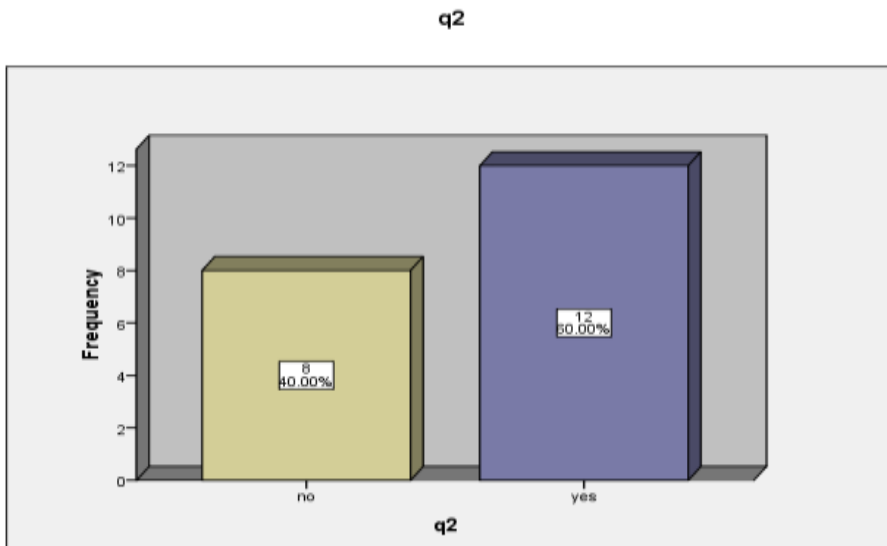


Figure (2) where and when Hiroshige was born?

Table (3): Where and when Frida Kahlo was born?

Options	Frequency	Percent
No	7	35.0
Yes	13	65.0
Total	20	100.0

The third question of the listening test shows that (35%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (65%) were correct. This indicates that there are little problems in listening skills.

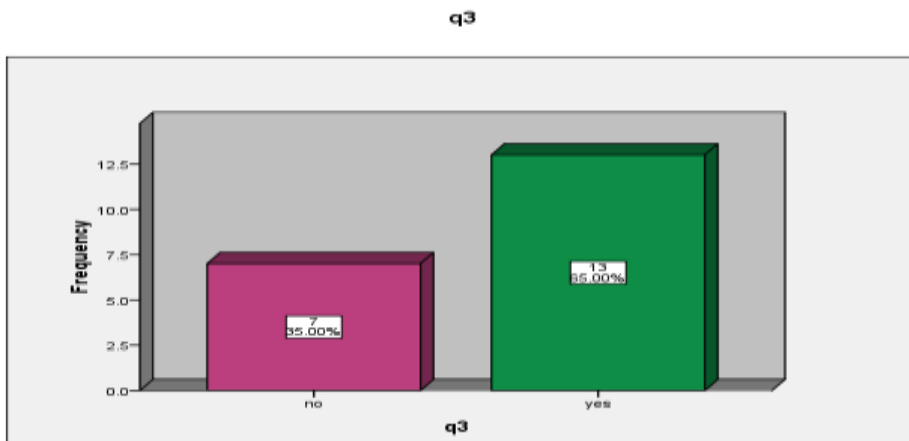


Figure (3) where and when Frida Kahlo was born?

Table (4): What is Frida Kahlo famous for?

Options	Frequency	Percent
No	18	90.0
Yes	2	10.0
Total	20	100.0

The fourth question of the listening test shows that (90%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (10%) were correct. This indicates that there is problem in listening skills.

q4

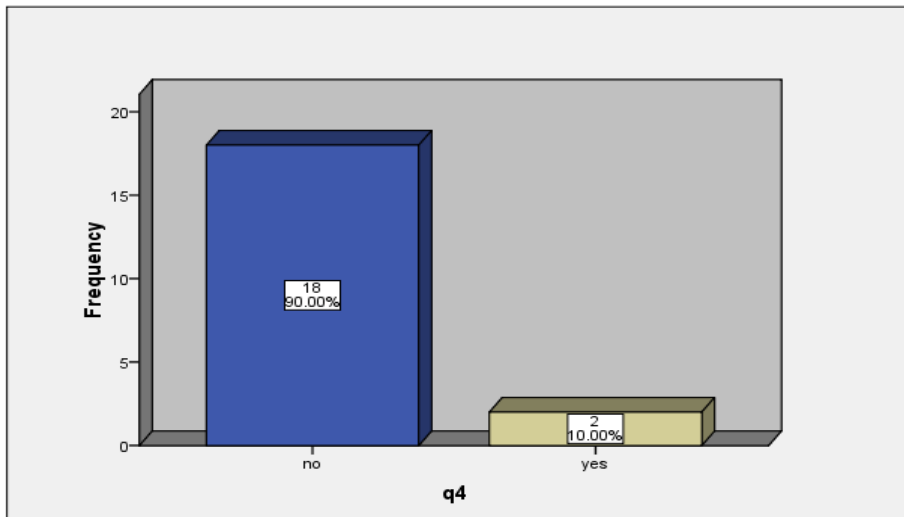


Figure (4) what is Frida Kahlo famous for?

Options	Frequency	Percent
No	3	15.0
Yes	17	85.0
Total	20	100.0

The fifth question of the listening test shows that (15%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (85%) were correct. This indicates that there are few problems in listening skills.

q5

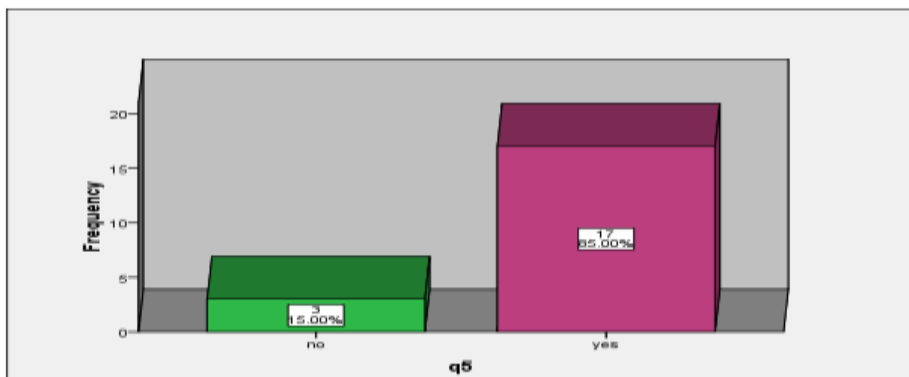


Figure (5) what is reason behind Frida's death?

Option	Frequency	Percent
No	14	70.0
Yes	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0

The sixth question of the listening test shows that (70%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (30%) were correct. This indicates that there is problem in listening skills.

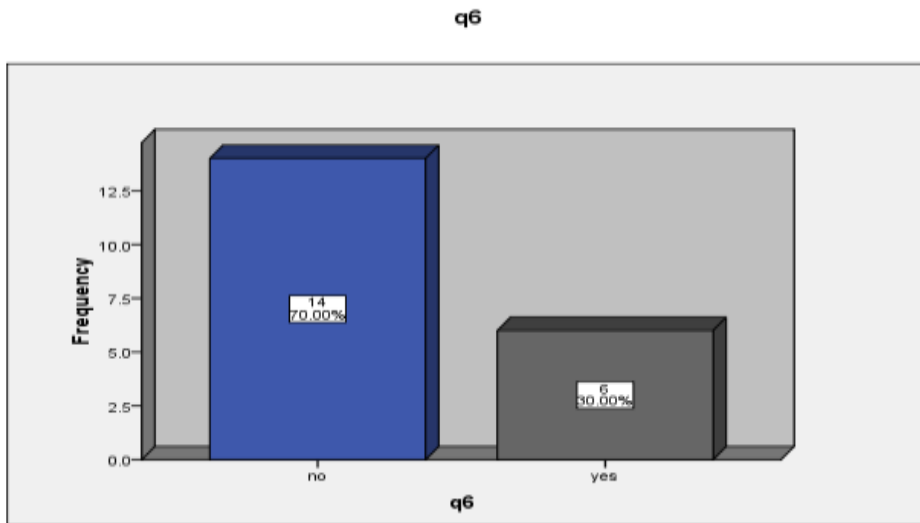


Figure (6) what are things that Frida use to show her feelings?

Options	Frequency	Percent
No	14	70.0
Yes	6	30.0
Total	20	100.0

The seventh question of the listening test shows that (70%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (30%) were correct. This indicates that there is problem in listening skills.

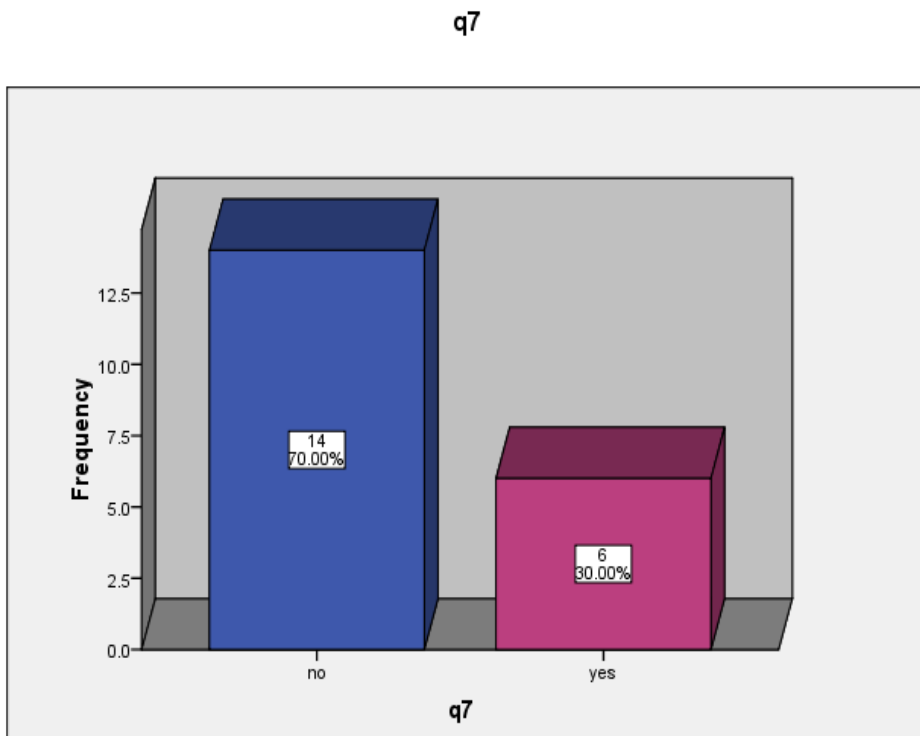


Figure (7) Where Alexander Calder was born?

Table (8): What about Alexander’s studies?

Options	Frequency	Percent
no	15	75.0
yes	5	25.0
Total	20	100.0

The eighth question of the listening test shows that (75%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (25%) were correct. This indicates that there is a problem in listening skills.

q8

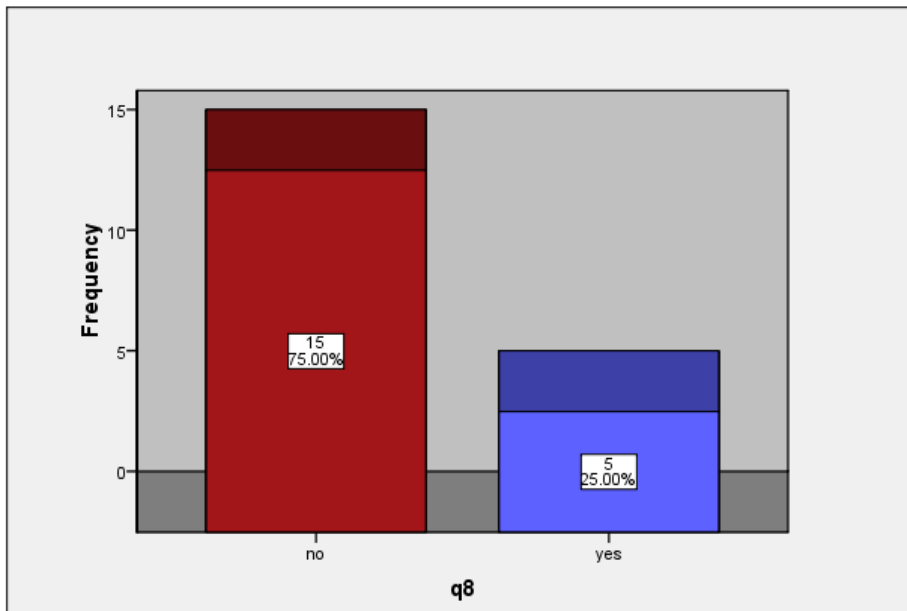


Figure (8) what about Alexander’s studies?

Table (9): What is Alexander famous for?

options	Frequency	Percent
Valid No	17	85.0
Yes	3	15.0
Total	20	100.0

The ninth question of the listening test shows that (85%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (15%) were correct. This indicates that there is a problem in listening skills.

q9

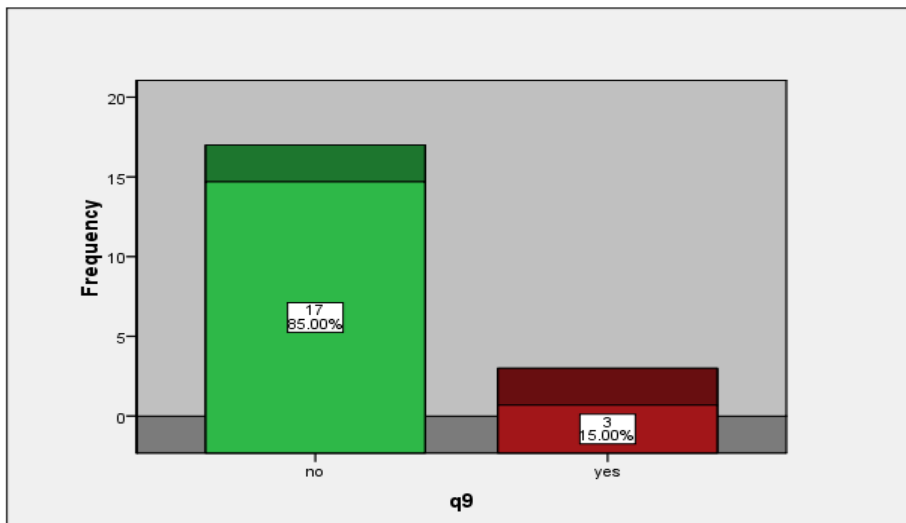


Figure (9) what is Alexander famous for?

Table (10):When Alexander Calder was born?

options	Frequency	Percent
No	13	65.0
Yes	7	35.0
Total	20	100.0

Regarding the last question of the listening test shows that (65%) of the responses were incorrect, whereas, (35%) were correct. This indicates that there is a problem in listening skills.

q10

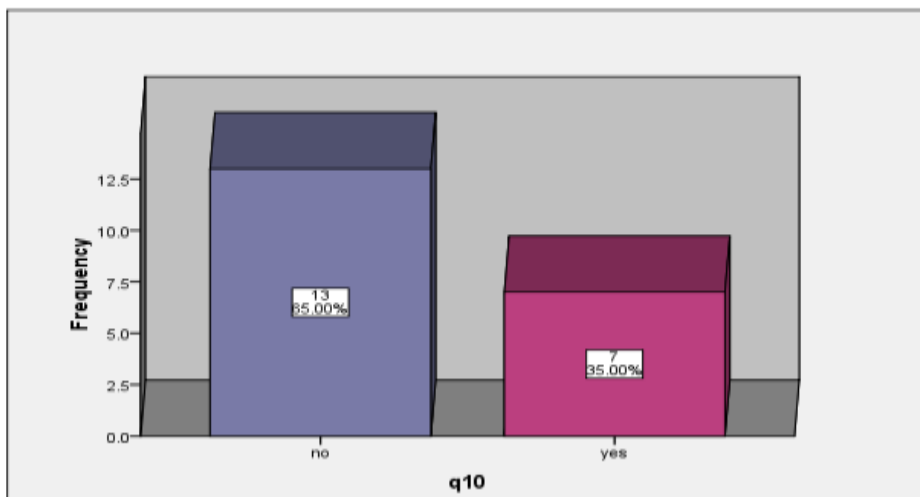


Figure (10) when Alexander Calder was born?

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Findings:

On the basis of the data analysis, the following findings are revealed:

- 1- Presenting language aurally is helpful tools for university students to know English language through listening skills.
- 2- Most students at university level face difficulties to understand English language through recorded materials for the first time, and this is due to the fact that, more listening to recorded materials may fix this problems.
- 3- Limited vocabulary retards the role of students' participation in listening skills.
- 4- Few students are ready to participate in listening skills, and this due to the fact that there is no fixed rules to avoid this problems, so the teachers need to buy extra attention to what is called psychological factors inside the classroom.
- 5- Visual aids such as Computers, Cassettes, Taps, Videos, and Recorders are helpful in teaching and learning English language as a foreign language, through listening skills.
- 6- Adequate practice by the students is an essential in teaching and learning listening skills.

Recommendations:

- 1- In teaching listening skills the students talking time (STT) must be maximum, and teacher talking time (TTT) minimum.
- 2- Teaching listening skills by native teachers may solve students' problems in understanding through listening to recorded materials.
- 3- Teachers must give their students a chance to practice language more and more when they deal with listening skills.
- 4- Pair work and group work by the students may avoid the students' shying to participate in listening skills.
- 5- Learners need more practice to develop listening skills.
- 6- Teachers need to use visual aids to teach English language as a foreign language.

Conclusion:

The researcher has discussed how listening skills can improve the students' performance in the class room. However the research highlighted that, listening skills is very necessary to be known by both second language teachers and students. Thus, a test has been conducted to collect data of how second language learners can improve their performance through listening skills inside the class room, and the importance of recorded materials in teaching listening skills. Also buy extra attention to psychological factors and its' affects in teaching and learning listening skills.

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