

The Effects of the Physical Setting on Students' Listening Comprehension

Bahzad Ameen Haji

University of Duhok, College of Basic Education, Department of English, Duhok/Iraq
bahzadzameen@yahoo.com

Saaed A. Saaed

University of Duhok, College of Basic Education, Department of English, Duhok/Iraq
saaed.adris@uod.com

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Abstract

Since the physical setting in the listening comprehension process has been proven to be one of the troublesome issues for EFL learners, The current study looks into the possibility that the physical environment impacts students' listening comprehension process. The study aims to find out problems with hearing due to the physical environment. To do this, a questionnaire survey was prepared to serve the aim of the study. The sample of this study consists of 87 participants. Eighteen males and sixty-nine females from 2nd year English department students of the College of Basic Education, University of Duhok, took part in the study. The results of this study show that due to a noisy physical setting (or learning environment) and listening aids, materials, or equipment with volume or sound quality issues, students frequently or often have difficulty listening to aurally presented texts. Finally, according to the literature review, the current study's findings are consistent with those of other studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

Problems arise from the message, the person listening, or the speaker and the students' surroundings. Audience members have a slower perception of what they hear because of noise or the sound sign twisting. Students' listening comprehension can be impacted by classroom disruptions from time to time. Students seated behind the lines may not be able to hear the recording and those seated in front of them in large classrooms. The outside noise affects students who like to stay close to the windows. These perceptions suggest that instructors should consider these circumstances and make an effort to reduce the number of interruptions in the listening environment.

Additionally, the classroom's size makes it difficult for teachers to deal with the entire class in a group setting or receive student feedback. One factor that may contribute to difficulty in listening perception is the classroom temperature. The class without a forced air system may

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be too hot in the summer or too cold on stormy days (or when the air conditioner is too cold), making it harder for them to understand what they are hearing, Calub et al. (2000). Last but not least, one essential factor that affects students' listening comprehension is their actual or physical environment (Yousif, 2006).

Thus, this study investigates the possible effects of the physical setting on the listening comprehension process. The study will answer the following questions:

1-Is it hard to concentrate when there are sounds around?

2-Do the hazy sounds of the recorded speech or text hinder listening comprehension due to the poor quality of the CD player?

1.1.Aims of the Study

Because many students in non-English-speaking countries worldwide believe that listening is a difficult skill at all levels of education (Amir et al., 2019), the students in their second year at the English Department/College of the Basic Education/University of Duhok are the subject of this study, which aims to investigate the possibility of physical setting-related listening difficulties.

1.2.Hypotheses of the Study

This study hypothesizes the following:

1-Second year students might often have listening problems due to the physical setting.

2-Listening aids/materials/equipment with volume or sound quality problems may cause difficulty for the 2nd year students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1.Listening

The four interrelated skills are all part of mastering English; speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Additionally, certain aspects of language, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, contribute to developing these skills. According to Amir et al. (2019), of the four skills, listening merits special attention because it is believed to be a difficult skill for many students in non-English-speaking countries at all levels of education. In addition, you might hear about the "four skills" approach to language learning from time to time. In this instance, "skills" include reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Receptive skills include reading and listening. They provide us with input in the target language. Writing and speaking are useful skills. Listening is the most important of the four (Nunan, 2015).

Given that receiving language input is the only way to acquire a language, no one can deny the significance of listening skills in language acquisition (Toni et al., 2020). Rost in Hamouda (2013) upholds a similar case demonstrating that students benefit from listening in language study halls. Listening plays a significant role in students' language development as an input skill.

Nunan (2015) states:

Some years ago, at a conference, I was asked to describe the place of listening in second language learning. My reply, which seemed somewhat glib at the time, was that listening is the gasoline in the engine of second language acquisition. Later, when I reflected on my answer, I thought that it was reasonably accurate. The engine in a car doesn't run without gasoline.

According to Cauldwell (2013), the components of listening are:

1. Preparation: the activation of language students' prior knowledge and the direction of their consideration of the spoken word.
2. Perception: the significance of recognizing and comprehending speech expressions and sounds.
3. Understanding: determining the significance of the speech's overall message.

As indicated by Richards (2008), listening as comprehension is the conventional perspective about listening. This perspective on listening is based on the realization that the primary purpose of listening in learning a second language is to make it easier to understand what is being said.

To conclude, according to Tyagi (2013), true comprehension requires attentive listening. It combines listening to what another person has to say with mental inclusion with that person. Listening is a language skill. It necessitates a desire to comprehend another person, a disposition of respect and acknowledgement, and an eagerness to open one's mind to attempt to see things from the perspective of another. It necessitates a higher level of energy and concentration. It asks us to put aside our plans and thoughts, put ourselves in another person's shoes, and try to see the world through their eyes.

2.2. The role of listening in foreign language acquisition

Many scholars have assumed the role that listening plays in foreign language acquisition. Gary (1978), Chamot and O'Malley (1987), Rubin (1994) and Renukadevi (2014) proposed diverse ideas about listening's role in foreign language acquisition. According to Renukadevi (2014), listening is the most important part of communication because it helps you respond in a significant and meaningful way. Listening is essential to learning a language for educational purposes because it helps the student acquire pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary, and syntax. Learning can't improve at all if it doesn't properly comprehend input.

Additionally, Renukadevi (2014) emphasized that communication is impossible without the ability to listen. In addition, every study on the acquisition of language skills has shown that listening, speaking, reading, writing, and listening together account for 45%, 30%, and 10% of language competence when communicating. Listening must be considered a language precursor because it is the most important level of association in the exchange of data in effective communication. In contrast to other language skills, students find listening equally challenging due to its typically interrelated subskills, such as receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding. Learning and teaching listening started to get more attention with the rise of communicative language instruction and the emphasis on proficiency.

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Listening is not yet fully integrated into the educational plan, so it should be given more attention when learning a language.

The skill of listening was given negligible thought of the four language skills. This negligence could have gotten from how listening was viewed as a passive skill. Regardless, late second language studies have shown that pushing students to make materials they have not yet taken care of in their memory can over-trouble their short-term memory (Gary, 1978). Also, research on second languages has shown that listening appreciation in a foreign or second language can be affected by a few internal and external factors (Rubin, 1994). According to Chamot and O'Malley (1987), specific student contrasts (convictions, previous learning experiences) and other situational factors (target language, nature of direction, nature of tasks) determine which frameworks students select. Last but not least, many academics agree that learning a foreign language requires extensive listening skills. The topic of the following subsection is understanding the passive or active listening process.

2.3.The significance of listening

A crucial component of language acquisition is listening comprehension. A lot of media, including DVDs and the internet, must be comprehended by students, including native speakers. When learning a second language, listening comprehension is an essential skill (Rost, 2001;2007; Vandergrift, 2012, Kurita). Rost (2001) and Kurita (2012) say that the ability of students to use listening as a learning tool is a big difference between students who do well and those who do poorly. Learning a foreign language requires excellent listening skills because receiving language input is one way to become familiar with the language. According to Hamouda (2013) and Krashen et al. (1984), acquisition occurs when students receive sufficient comprehensible input. According to Rost (1994), listening is important for language learning because it helps students improve their language skills and makes a contribution. According to Krashen (1985) and Hamouda (2013), the ability to listen is an important part of getting justifiable input; In the absence of input, there will be no learning. According to Hasan (2000) and Hamouda (2013), listening comprehension creates the right conditions for developing additional language skills. According to Rost (2002), improving one's listening skills is related to improving one's speaking skills. He adds that listening is the most important skill in language mastery because it is the most commonly used language skill in everyday life.

The process of listening comprehension provides helpful instincts for teaching listening. Students may find it difficult to master listening skills, which may also provide instructors with opportunities to improve their listening techniques. Students with a dominant language learn how to improve comprehensible input by developing their listening comprehension skills. Students will be inspired to approach spoken English-like conversations with native speakers because their confidence in listening will grow (Kurita, 2012).

According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), listening plays a significant role in communication. According to Ferris (1998), Murphy (1991), Vogely (1998), and Hamouda (2013), the skill of listening is the one that is taught the most frequently in language classrooms. As a result, students' lives depend on their listening ability, which is why it is used throughout the learning process. Even though listening instruction is crucial for learning a foreign language, it is often

neglected in many EFL classes. According to Oxford (1990), listening develops faster than the other three language skills and can facilitate their development.

2.4. Teaching the listening skill

Field (2002) suggests three phases for listening lessons to improve language learners' listening comprehension:

1. Activities before listening: These include teaching the students important vocabulary, without which it will be difficult for them to comprehend the text. Other pre-listening activities include examining and planning questions about the subject and examining and planning syntax areas that are relevant to the topic. The purpose of pre-listening activities is to inspire students to pay attention to a text by figuring out the answers to questions that have already been set and increasing their enthusiasm for discussing what they will hear on the sound tape. Pre-listening activities are considered warm-up exercises to prepare students for a particular subject. They typically last about five minutes.

2. Activities performed while listening include "intensive listening," which means looking for specific or detailed data, and "extensive listening," which means looking for general textual data. Additionally, teachers can request that students participate in listening activities by making use of the text's data. For instance, naming buildings on a map or filling in blanks to reflect the situation when checking into a hotel. The students will get a sense of real-world situations from these tasks; Additionally, they will provide teachers with more accurate results regarding students' comprehension of the text.

3. Activities following listening: Activities to follow up are included in this stage. For instance, during two-on-two or small group discussions, teachers allow students to discuss what they have heard, observe potential responses to their pre-listening questions, or construct their versions of the discussions. The students can also write their thoughts and opinions about what they hear. They are then able to share their notes with their other teammates. Additionally, teachers can record specific words on the whiteboard and then recite the sentences that contain those words. After that, they ask the students to speculate on the ramifications. The post-listening activities are very similar to those during discussions outside of study halls because, typically, after listening to a speaker, they are expected to comment on the discussion.

2.5. Potential listening problems related to the physical setting

According to Toni et al. (2020), the following physical setting-related listening issues exist: First, "my listening comprehension is hindered by clear sounds caused by poor equipment." This indicates that not only were the tapes of poor quality interfering with listening comprehension but also that the equipment's poor quality contributed to the hazy sound. Second, "I struggle to comprehend when speakers speak too quickly." Students have difficulty understanding what they are listening to when the speaker speaks too quickly. Even if the words are familiar to them, many students observed that when the speaker speaks too quickly, it is difficult for them to comprehend what is being said. Students sometimes hear all the words as if they were one unit when native speakers speak too quickly. At this point, it's hard to deliver information quickly because I'm not used to listening to native speakers. By listening to native

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speakers, the students need to practice their listening skills. Thirdly, "Noises around make it difficult for me to concentrate." Comprehending is hampered by the background noise of the listening test. The students cannot concentrate on listening to the recording material when there is noise in the room, and the lab is not properly prepared. No doubt surrounding noise will make listening difficult.

According to the findings of Yousif's (2006) study titled "Listening Comprehension Difficulties as Perceived, "First-year FL students' difficulties with listening comprehension were the focus of the study. A brief open-ended questionnaire and interview were used to gather information about these students' difficulties in understanding the lecture. They looked at a few obstacles that can change how people think. These are separated into three main categories: listener, speaker, and text-related elements. They were impacted by various factors, one of which was the actual setting. It is also believed that these issues seriously affect students' listening skills, particularly their inability to think clearly and their fundamental phonetic issues.

Moreover, Hamouda (2013) found in his research entitled "An Investigation of Listening Comprehension Problems Encountered by Saudi Students in the EL Listening Classroom". This study utilizes quantitative and qualitative strategies for information assortment. This study was completed with the interest of 60 first-year student studying English language and interpretation at Qassim University. Their ages range from 20 to 22 years of age. By all accounts, listening is the most vulnerable skill, and students experience different sorts of listening difficulties. Information was assembled through surveys and interviews. The exploration tracked down that bad quality of the recording was of the major listening comprehension difficulties encountered by EFL Saudi learners. Maulida (2018) indicated that paralinguistic features such as noise are another factor affecting students' listening. The students experienced difficulties in getting target words with noise around.

Moreover, Reza et al. (2019) discovered that, at 32%, the physical or technological environment had the greatest effect on students' capacity to respond to listening questions. Remember that the seventh-semester English Department students in Syiah Kuala University's Faculty of Teacher Training and Education served as the study's population. The respondents have either studied English for more than three years or have been learning it since the first semester. They have mastered speaking, listening, reading, and writing as well as the other four language skills, within those three years. It is unsurprising that technical problems were shown to be the most important factor affecting learners' capacity to understand what they are hearing. Technical issues become the most important aspect for students in the English Department of the Teacher Training and Education faculty at Syiah Kuala University since the participants in this study had studied English for more than three and a half years. The study's centrepiece is the physical setting element. It becomes the main element influencing how well students respond to listening questions. There are several potential causes for it. The first is the poor audio.

According to Asriati's study from 2017, students' concentration levels when responding to listening questions are impacted by the low audio quality. According to her study, when participating in listening classroom activities, about 30% of the participants became distracted.

Rarely is a recorded audio file for listening created in a completely quiet environment. Students' ability to focus and comprehend hearing information is affected by situations like these. The evidence for this claim comes from Bloomfield et al. (2010). They claim that noise and disturbance can significantly impact a listener's capacity to comprehend what they are hearing.

Finally, Azmi et al. (2014) assert that there are several challenges that students may face in their listening comprehension processes, and the goal is to be aware of these issues and make an effort to address them. One of these issues is the poorer quality of several recorded materials that instructors utilize in some classes. The clarity of the audio system can affect how well students understand what they are hearing. And Xuyen (2018) found that noise from outside and within classrooms is a major barrier to hearing comprehension. In contrast, participants claimed that bad CD players and a lack of visual accompaniment occasionally hindered their listening understanding.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.1. Sample of the Study

This study has 87 participants in its sample. A questionnaire was used to collect the information. According to table 1, the study included 18 male and 69 female students from the College of Basic Education's second-year English department. Participants in the survey were second-year students in the College of Basic Education's English department. More than one hundred questionnaires were handed out. The researcher was left with 87 completed questionnaires from students in the College of Basic Education's second year of the English department.

Table (1) The Sample Distribution

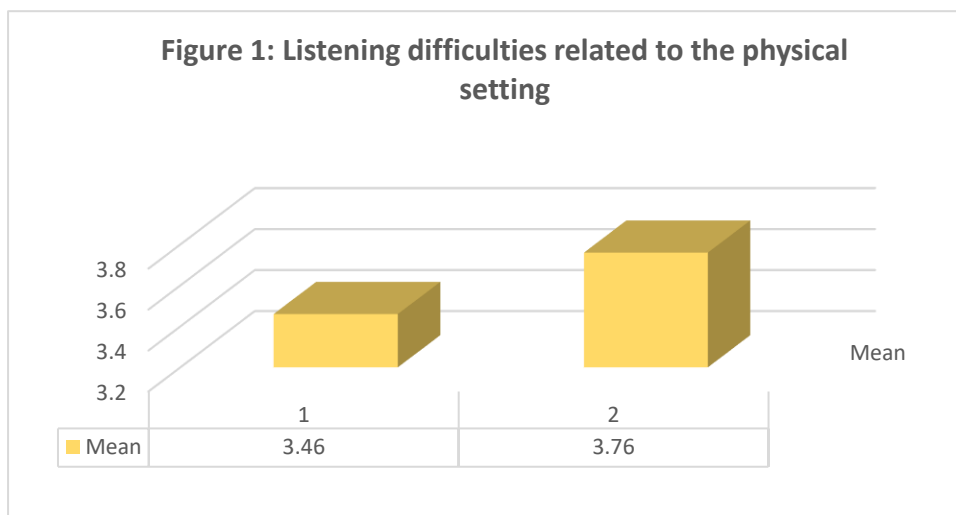
Gender	Frequency	%
Male	18	20.7
Female	69	79.3
Total	87	100.0

3.2. Data Analysis

The researcher conducted a quantitative method (questionnaire survey) to analyze the data. In this study, 87 Kurdish learners were asked two questions about the possible effects of the physical setting on listening comprehension process. Upon their responses, the researcher analyzed and reported the results to find out the listening difficulties related to the physical setting.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, results and discussions about listening difficulties related to the physical setting are presented. The physical setting also can affect the listening comprehension process as claimed by many scholars (see literature review). It is also important to consider that results of two questions or sub-problems are discussed and the discussions are provided with a table and



a figure for a better understanding of the results. Finally, this subsection provides a full understanding of the difficulties related to the physical setting that college students experience. Below are the questions, along with their results and discussions:

1. Is it hard to concentrate when there are sounds around?
2. Do the hazy sounds of the recorded speech or text hinder listening comprehension due to the poor quality of the CD player?

4.1. Answer to Question One

Table 2 and figure 1 show the results on the frequency of difficulties experienced by the students related to question one.

Table (2) Listening difficulties related to the physical setting

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		N	Mean	STD
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%			
X1	7	8.0	13	14.9	20	23.0	27	31.0	20	23.0	87	3.46	1.228
X2	2	2.3	8	9.2	28	32.2	20	23.0	29	33.3	87	3.76	1.089
GRAND MEAN												3.61	-

It can be seen from table 2 that, there were 31.0% of the students often experience difficulty when there is noises around, 23.0% always face this difficulty, 23.0% sometimes, 14.9% rarely, and only 8.0% never. It can be concluded from these results that the majority of the students often find it difficult to concentrate with noises around. In other words, noise is another factor negatively affecting students' listening comprehension process. As mentioned in literature review, Maulida (2018) indicated that paralinguistic features such as noise is another factor affecting students' listening. The students experienced difficulties to get target words with noise around.

In addition, Toni et al. (2020), in their literature review, concluded that noise in the vicinity of a listening test hinders comprehension. The students will be unable to concentrate on listening

to the recording material when there is noise in the room and the lab is not properly prepared. Surrounding noise will certainly hinder listening.

Likewise, as mentioned in literature review, the results of the first question is supported by Xuyen (2018), who found that noise from outside and within classrooms is a major barrier to hearing comprehension and by Bloomfield et al (2010), they claimed that noise and disturbance can have a significant impact on a listener's capacity to comprehend what they are hearing.

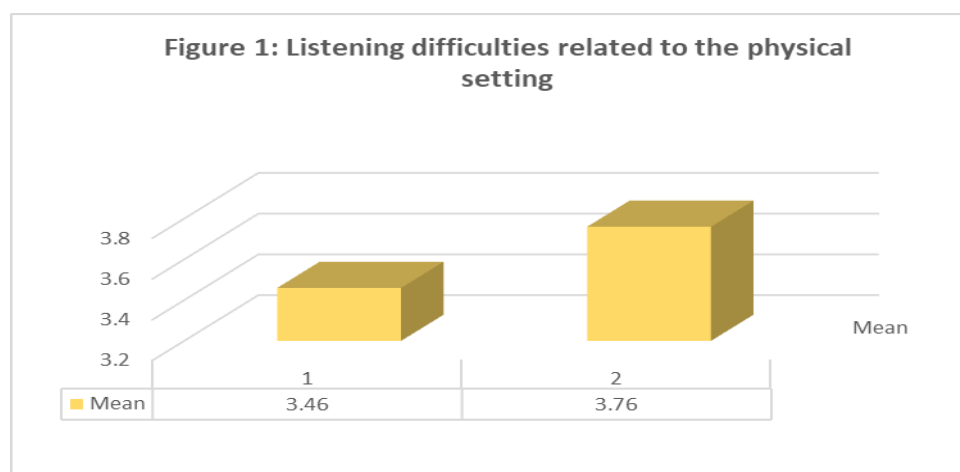
To conclude, noise or disturbance around can lead learners lose their concentration and that is one of the significant barriers to learners understanding the aurally presented texts. This affecting factor is evidenced in many studies as mentioned in the literature review. Thus, it is recommended that teachers must prevent any kind of noise inside or outside the class while students have listening tasks. Because it is proved by many scholars (see literature review) that the physical setting in general can affect the listening comprehension process negatively.

4.2. Answer to Question Two

Table 2 and figure 1 show the findings regarding the number of difficulties that students encountered with question two.

Table (2) Listening difficulties related to the physical setting

Items	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Often		Always		N	Mean	STD
	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%	Fr.	%			
X1	7	8.0	13	14.9	20	23.0	27	31.0	20	23.0	87	3.46	1.228
X2	2	2.3	8	9.2	28	32.2	20	23.0	29	33.3	87	3.76	1.089
GRAND MEAN											3.61	-	



Poor quality of the CD player might negatively interfere with students' listening comprehension process. Table 11 reveals that 33.3% always find difficulty when the CD player of the recorded speech/text is of poor quality, 23.0% often, 32.2% sometimes, 9.2% rarely and only 2.3% never. It can be concluded that CD players of poor quality always interfere with students' listening comprehension process.

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As mentioned in the literature review, Toni et al (2020) supported the claim that poor equipment quality is another difficulty learners experience in the listening process. He indicates in his research entitled "STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT THE THIRD SEMESTER OF ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM OF UNIVERSITY MUHAMMADIYAH" that there were 75% of the students responded "always" to this kind of difficulty, 10% "frequently," and 7.5% "once in a while." The majority of students said that the poor quality of the equipment was to blame for their issues with listening comprehension. Poor equipment quality will cause the speaker's sounds to be unclear and will distract concentration.

Additionally, Toni et al. (2020), as mentioned in the literature review, stated that "unclear sounds resulting from poor equipment interfere with my listening comprehension. This indicates that not only were the tapes of poor quality interfering with listening comprehension but also that the equipment's poor quality contributed to the hazy sound.

Likewise, the results of the second question are evidenced and supported by many other scholars Azmi et al. (2014), Asriati (2017), Xuyen (2018) and Reza et al. (2019). Reza et al. (2019) discovered that, at 32%, the physical or technological environment had the greatest effect on students' capacity to respond to listening questions. The study's respondents have either studied English for more than three years or have been learning it since the first semester. They have mastered speaking, listening, reading, and writing as well as the other four language skills, within those three years. It is unsurprising that technical problems were shown to be the most important factor affecting learners' capacity to understand what they are hearing. Technical issues become the most important aspect for students in the English Department of the Teacher Training and Education faculty at Syiah Kuala University since the participants in this study had studied English for more than three and a half years. The study's centrepiece is the physical setting element. It becomes the main element influencing how well students respond to listening questions. There are several potential causes for it. The first is the poor audio. And, according to Asriati's study (2017), students' concentration levels when responding to listening questions are impacted by the low audio quality. According to her study, when participating in listening classroom activities, about 30% of the participants became distracted. Rarely is a recorded audio file for listening created in a completely quiet environment. Students' ability to focus and comprehend hearing information is affected by situations like these. Finally, Azmi et al. (2014) asserted that there are several challenges that students may face in their listening comprehension processes, and the goal is to be aware of these issues and make an effort to address them. One of these issues is the poorer quality of several recorded materials that instructors utilize in some classes. The clarity of the audio system can affect how well students can understand what they are hearing. Finally, Xuyen (2018) found that bad CD players and a lack of visual accompaniment occasionally hindered their listening understanding.

In conclusion, the current study's findings and the assertions of many other academics in the literature review assert that unclear sounds from recorded speech or text caused by poor CD player quality can hinder listening comprehension. One of the most significant obstacles to students' comprehension of aurally presented texts is inadequate equipment. As a result, teachers should use high-quality equipment when assigning listening tasks to students.

5. CONCLUSION

Issues may arise from the message, the listener, or the speaker and the learners' immediate surroundings. Noise or morphing in the sound signal slows audience members' hearing perception. Discomfort in the classroom may occasionally affect students' listening comprehension. Students seated in the back rows of large classes may not be able to hear the audio as clearly as those seated in the front. Students who choose to sit close to windows are affected by the noise from outside. These impressions suggest that educators should consider the circumstance and try to lessen the number of interruptions in the listening environment.

Consequently, our students frequently face the following challenges:: 1- Is it hard to concentrate when there are sounds around? (3.46). 2- Do the hazy sounds of the recorded speech or text hinder listening comprehension due to the poor quality of the CD player? (3.76). In general, students often have listening problems due to physical setting.

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