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# An Investigation into English as a Foreign Language Teacher Adoption of Listening Tasks and EFL Learner Feedback in Iraqi Classrooms context

A B S T R A C T

The variation between the importance of strategic listening training and the utilization as a pedagogy in Iraqi (EFL) class classroom is being debated, this qualitative observational research article.

While the comprehension of listening is the cornerstone of language development, research has shown that it usually ends up being constraint testing rather than conscious skill-acquisition, driven by context-failure boundaries and possibly get learners apprehensive. Two research study analyzed 15 hours of class room observation videotaped of two Iraqi EFL teachers with a descriptive case study design. Instruction episodes and observable student behavior from transcribed data were analyzed, drawing three main conclusions: 1) The teacher enacted more product-oriented than process-oriented instructional strategy that resulted in very little scaffolding, especially in the most relevant pre-listening stage. 2) Student activity was highly polarized, with passive compliance in the form of majority practice standing out in sharp relief to autonomous use of sophisticated strategies by students (e.g., L1 translation and natural note-taking.3) Instructional decision making was highly reactive to system pressures, like extensive technical constraints and pressure to respect content calendars. The study argues that current oriented listening pedagogy is primarily not process-oriented; and there is an immediate need for training practitioners in explicit, metacognitive listening strategy instruction levelled to local resource limitations.

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# دراسة حول تبني معلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لمهام الاستماع وردود أفعال متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في سياق الفصول الدراسية العراقية

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**الملخص**

يُناقش هذا البحث النوعي القائم على الملاحظة التباين بين أهمية تدريب الاستماع الاستراتيجي واستخدامه كأسلوب تربوي في صفوف العراقيين (اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية).

في حين أن فهم الاستماع يُعدّ حجر الزاوية في تطوير اللغة، فقد أظهرت الأبحاث أنه عادةً ما ينتهي به الأمر إلى اختبار القيود بدلاً من اكتساب المهارات بوعي، مدفوعًا بحدود السياق والفشل، وقد يُثير قلق المتعلمين. حللت دراستان بحثيتان ١٥ ساعة من مراقبة الصف، مُسجلة بالفيديو، لمعلمين عراقيين من مُدرّسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، بتصميم دراسة حالة وصفية. حُلّلت حلقات التدريس وسلوك الطلاب الملحوظ من البيانات المُنسوخة، وتوصلت إلى ثلاث استنتاجات رئيسية: ١) اعتمد المعلم استراتيجية تعليمية أكثر تركيزًا على المنتج من العملية، مما أدى إلى ضعف الدعم، خاصةً في مرحلة ما قبل الاستماع الأكثر أهمية. ٢) كان نشاط الطلاب شديد الاستقطاب، حيث برز الامتثال السلبي المتمثل في ممارسة الأغلبية بشكل واضح مقارنةً بالاستخدام الذاتي لاستراتيجيات متطورة من قبل الطلاب (مثل ترجمة اللغة الأولى وتدوين الملاحظات بشكل طبيعي).٣) كان اتخاذ القرارات التعليمية تفاعليًا للغاية مع ضغوط النظام، مثل القيود التقنية الشاملة وضغوط الالتزام بجداول المحتوى. تُجادل الدراسة بأن أسلوب تدريس الاستماع الحالي لا يركز في المقام الأول على العملية؛ وهناك حاجة ملحة لتدريب الممارسين على تدريس استراتيجيات الاستماع الواضحة والمعرفية، بما يتناسب مع محدودية الموارد المحلية

**الكلمات الرئيسية:** فهم الاستماع، أسلوب تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الملاحظة الصفية؛ التحليل الموضوعي، دعم المعلم.

## Chapter One: Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Listening comprehension is commonly acknowledged as the “cornerstone” of language learning, which account for highest percentage of the individuals’ daily lives (Cheung, 2010). Yet, traditionally listening has been described as the "Cinderella skill," the skill that was forgotten or maltaught in language programs where grammar and reading have been focused (Nunan, 1998). In EFL environments, listening is intensified by a number of problematic issues like rapid speed, foreign accents and lack of practice with authentic communication, being thus perhaps the most complex skill that students have to face.

Assumed learners in the Iraqi context face certain exacerbated difficulties due to some problematic issues of context such as high levels of listening anxiety, L1 interference and instruction including large class size, use of traditional exam-oriented methods. It is shown that, although in the Iraqi curriculum, particular listening sub-skills are expected to be developed (i.e., main idea identification and detail extraction), there is a significant gap

between curricular instructions on listening and classroom practices. The purpose of this research is to go beyond reporting on issues to offer a rich, qualitative account of how listening tasks are implemented by EFL teachers and parsed by learners in the naturalistic setting of the classroom.

### 1.2 Statement of the Problem

The issue is lack of insight into the dynamic and interactive nature of listening task presentation and learner response in Iraqi EFL classrooms. While, many of the past studies are based on qualitative materials (such as quantitative data or teacher self-reports) that miss the fine grain into the spontaneous practices and interplay between teachers and students. We address this with a detailed observational analysis in the present study.

### 1.3 Research Questions (RQs)

What are the typical strategies and supports EFL teachers use in relation mandated listening comprehension tasks?

What are EFL learners' reactions and participation in these listening activities, specifically in terms of their use of the observable listening strategies and they're affective responses?

What are the major contextual factors and challenges affecting EFL teachers' instructional decision making while teaching listening tasks?

## Chapter two : literature review

### 2.1.1 Theoretical Bases for Listening Comprehension

The Interactive Model is the foundation with positive {perception, which consists of simultaneous, flexible top-down processing (making meaning of the information based on prior experience and situational context) and bottom-up processing (determining what sounds and words may be heard) (Field, 2008). Both are necessary for effective L2 listening, although research shows that instruction frequently emphasizes one over the other (most frequently comprehension checks) (Flowerdew&Miller, 2005). Due to the large memory load required for both knowledge storage and interpretation/comprehension, listening is a challenging skill for L2 learners (Rubin, 1995).

### 2.2 Pedagogic Application of Listening Tasks

The Process-Oriented Framework (Pre-While-Post) determines IL efficient procedures: According to Ur (1984), pre-listening is crucial for language scaffolding and schemata activation. While-Listening: Task-based exercises that have students perform more significant tasks than passive listening, such as taking notes. After listening, one can engage in strategic contemplation in addition to answer checking. The dichotomy of task implementation is well covered in the literature. Due to curriculum demands, teachers often treat tasks in a Product-oriented manner (concentrating on what is required to produce the "correct" answer), missing crucial phases in the development of a Process-Oriented approach (Richards&Farrell, 2011).

### 2.3 Problems and Background of EFL Listening

**The literature suggests two main problems:**

2.3.1 No Metacognitive Strategy Instruction: Students who are not explicitly taught metacognition (e.g., monitoring, evaluating) often engage in passive behavior or stop listening when they encounter new words (Vandergrift, 2004).

2.3.2 Context Barriers: Research conducted in the Middle East indicates that extreme listening anxiety, over-crowdedness, lack of resources and enforced content coverage frequently prevent teachers from employing authentic process oriented tasks argued for in Western pedagogical model.

### 2.4 Research Gap

Essentially there are acknowledged challenges with listening instruction in the region, comprehensive qualitative observational research examining the dynamic between student reaction and instructor implementation in real time inside the actual Iraqi classroom setting is lacking. The required observational evidence is presented in this work.

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive case study design within an interpretive paradigm. The main objective was to explore how Iraqi EFL teachers implement listening tasks and how learners respond to them in authentic classroom conditions. Meaning-making was prioritized over quantification in this design, which enabled a thorough, contextualized knowledge of human experiences as they naturally occur (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given prominence being given to the emergent character of the teaching and learning processes at the expense of controlled experimentation, the research was structured to explain and interpret actual classroom behavior as experienced lived in life by being located in an interpretive paradigm. Meaning-making at the expense of quantification was given prominence in this structure for facilitating solid contextualized understanding of human life as naturally lived (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With a focus on the development of dynamic processes instead of controlled experiments in instruction and learning, the research aimed to describe and interpret real classroom behavior when it happens in the real world by standing within an interpretive paradigm.

### 3.2 Research Context and Participants

Two Iraqi intermediate EFL classes were where the research took place. Both had approximately 40–45 students, and both teachers had more than five years of experience. The participants were selected by purposive sampling as they represented mainstream English for Iraq curriculum teaching settings.

These classes presented a representative image of the Iraqi EFL setting—large class sizes, few audio-visual facilities, and high examination pressures. The setting was ideal in which to observe actual pedagogical practices and learner participation in listening exercises.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Three weeks analyzing spent in two Iraqi intermediate EFL classrooms for 15 hours. I hoped to see how listening tasks are actually being taught—and what students actually do with them—in the everyday life of these two classrooms. To recreate this in as complete a way as possible, I used three modes of data: video tapes, rich field notes, and reflective memos per session.

Before the observation process, I developed a flexible observation guide based on available literature (Cohen, Manion,&Morrison, 2018; Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 2004). This helped me remember important things without being consecutively stuck. Specifically, I noted:

- Whether and how the teachers implemented pre-, while-, and post-listening activities
- The types of supports (or scaffolding) provided by the teachers on listening activities
- How the students reacted—through their actions, expressions, cooperation, or silence

The videos offered a close-up of classroom discussion and interaction, but my field notes captured things the camera did not: who leaned forward to quietly translate, who seemed puzzled, or what the class did when sound rolled in and out (which it did more than once). The instant each observation was completed, reflective memos were constructed to hold my initial thoughts, questions, and early ideas—recalling myself of my own assumptions in the process of the study.Admmit that a limitation is the lack of teacher or student interviews (talked about in Section 5.5). But due to time and access constraints, this multi-levelled observation approach allowed me to build a grounded, rich picture of listening teaching in practice in real Iraqi classrooms.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

To make sense of the data, I used reflexive thematic analysis (Braun&Clarke, 2019)—a method that places a high premium on the researcher's reflexive working through with the material above rote coding. I hand-coded, a task that gave me the luxury of sitting reflectively with what I'd heard and seen, and claiming the patterns missed in more speedy software-based methods.

The process was built across six inter-connected steps

1. I sat and sat and viewed the videos over and over, replaying them repeatedly, and read my notes over and over again until I felt like I really knew the classrooms.

2. I began writing down initial codes—little descriptions that coded what was happening (e.g., "skipped pre-listening," "student uses Arabic to explain," "teacher reads aloud after tech fails").

3. I began looking for patterns between codes and sorted them into prospective themes.

4. I pitted these themes against all of the information to see if they passed the test—and kept a very keen lookout for places that didn't fit (e.g., the single instance where a teacher briefly asked students what they already knew about a particular subject).

5. I condensed the final themes and titled them according to what I was seeing and what it could meaningfully connect to from a body of existing literature.

6. Last but not least, I integrated those observations into the narrative that you will read in Chapter 4.

Along the way, I discussed my emerging interpretations with a trusted colleague—a process called **peer debriefing** (Lincoln&Guba, 1985)—in an effort to test my thinking and not read too much (or too little) into what I witnessed.

This prudent, reflective process yielded the three overarching themes that are reported in Chapter 4

- Task Sequencing and Scaffolding in Teacher Practices
- Students' Responses and Engagement Strategies
- Contextual Constraints and Teacher Adaptation

### 3.5 Researcher's Role

In observing, the researcher kept in the background as a non-participating observer—did not join in on conversations or take lesson breaks. the aim was to let the pedagogical context of the classroom run along as usual. However, understand that there is no such thing as an uninvolved observer. What we notice, how we interpret an eyebrow raised or silence, and what get our attention are all shaped by our own histories and assumptions. Having also taught English , moreover the most sensitive to moments of unrealized potential or withheld strength—both among students and teachers.

To stay honest in relation to this influence, I kept a reflexive journal during the research (Berger, 2015). In it, I recorded my reactions ("Why didn't the teacher stop here?"), my assumptions ("Is that student disengaged—or just thinking?"), and how my knowledge changed over time. Rather than pretending my perspective didn't matter, I tried to use it mindfully—letting it guide my questions while remaining open to what the data showed me. This aligns with the interpretive stance of the study: knowledge is not "discovered" on an abstract plane but co-constructed** in collaborative, self-reflexive work with real human lives.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

For reliability and validation, a number of strategies were utilized:

Triangulation: Multiple sources of insight were generated through observations, field notes, and reflexive memos. Thick Description: Rich descriptive reporting provides readers with the ability to judge the findings' generalizability (Geertz, 1973). Peer Debriefing: Peer discussion ensured interpret validity. Ethical Compliance: Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study. Consent was received, pseudonyms were applied, and data were kept securely.

### 3.7 Summary

This was a very realistic setting for an Iraqi classroom listening lesson. It allowed the researcher to connect teacher action, learner behavior, and contextual realities using qualitative observation and interpretive analysis.

## Chapter Four: Presentation and Analysis of Results

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter documents results that emerged out of the data compiled by way of field notes, reflective memos, and observations in the classroom. Thematic analysis generated three overarching themes collectively explaining how instruction in listening functions in Iraqi EFL classrooms:

1. Task Sequencing and Scaffolding in Teacher Practices
2. Students' Responses and Engagement Strategies
3. Contextual Constraints and Teacher Adaptation

### 4.2 Theme One: Task Sequencing and Scaffolding in Teacher Practices

Teachers adopted a product-oriented approach, urging task fulfillment and correct answers first and foremost, rather than establishing students' comprehension processes.Pre-listening stages were sometimes omitted, and lessons began immediately with "Listen and answer." Without vocabulary activation and topic discussion, students proceeded to the activity without contextual preparation.

At the while-listening phase, teachers replayed recordings and marked answers but seldom demonstrated listening skills like prediction, note-taking, or working out meaning. Follow-up feedback typically was focused on accuracy rather than comprehension reflection, constraining the possibility of metacognitive development among students.

Example (Observation 1):

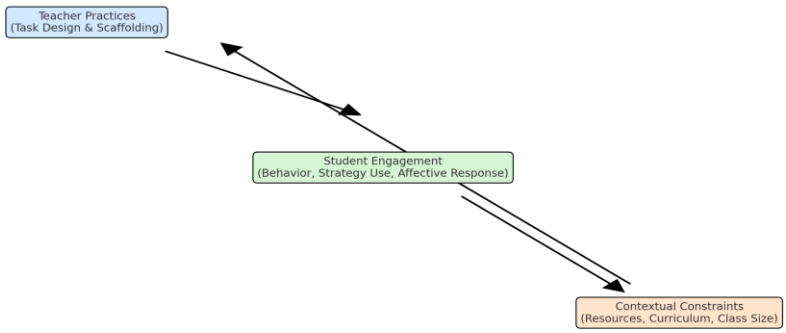
>"Teacher begins lesson: 'Listen carefully and answer the questions.' No introduction. Students appear confused and whisper amongst themselves."

Sample (Observation 2):

"Teacher plays audio twice and then says, 'Yes, number two is right,' before continuing."

These comments are an instructional focus on product, not reason. This is in line with Field's (2008) objection that EFL listening classes are more of the nature of comprehension tests than learning.

Figure 4.2: Interaction Between Teacher Practice, Student Engagement, and Context

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### 4.3 Theme Two: Students' Responses and Engagement Strategies

Students had differential levels of engagement—passive, self-directed. Most students demonstrated passive compliance: they ceased writing when feeling confused or awaited the teacher's response. Some learners demonstrated strategic listening behaviors through the utilization of Arabic translation, recording keywords, or passing short notes to others.

Example (Observation 3):

>"Two students translate key terms and check each other's answers; others remain silent."

Example (Observation 4):

>"A student writes concise notes such as 'travel – car – late,' which indicates active decoding."

Emotional reactions were the rule. Students were upset when activities were too difficult or too rapid. These kinds of behavior indicate limited metacognitive consciousness (Vandergrift, 2004) and confirm that explicit strategy instruction is largely lacking in listening education.

### 4.4 Theme Three: Contextual Constraints and Teacher Adaptation

Institutional and environmental challenges had a strong impact on instruction in the classroom.

Example (Observation 5):

>"Audio system malfunctions; text read aloud by teacher instead."

Example (Observation 6):

"Teacher says, 'We have to get through this unit today; skip the discussion.' Pace significantly increases.".

These limitations — poor equipment, class size, and rigid syllabus requirements — forced teachers to make reactive adjustments instead of anticipatory intentions. Flexible as these choices were, they were upheld at the expense of communicative practice.

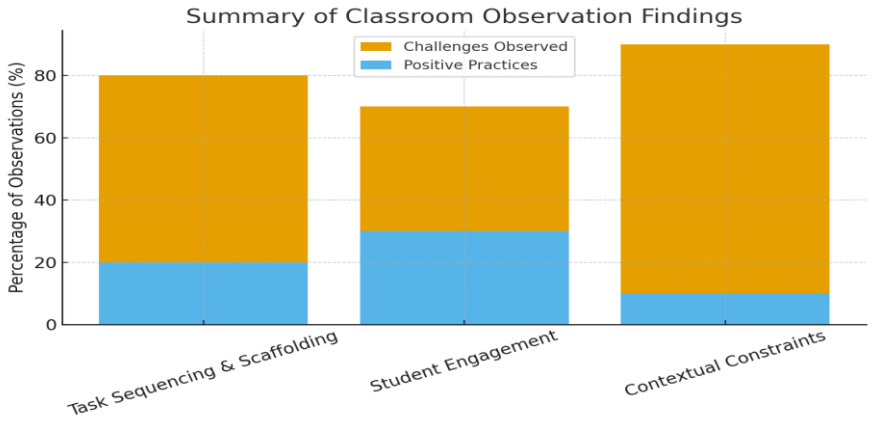
**4.5 Table 4.1: Summary of Thematic Findings**

| Theme | Focus Area | Key Findings |
|---|---|---|
| **Task Sequencing and Scaffolding** | Pre-, while-, and post-listening stages | Teachers skipped pre-listening; feedback focused on correctness. |
| **Student Engagement** | Behavioral and cognitive reactions | Passive compliance with limited strategic listening. |
| **Contextual Constraints** | Institutional and environmental factors | Technical issues and curriculum pressures limit flexibility. |

## 4.6 Visual Representations

Fig. 4.1: Classroom Observation Summary Findings (Bar chart showing proportion of challenges vs. positive practices by themes.)

Figure 4.2: Teacher Practice, Student Engagement, and Context Interaction (Conceptual diagram demonstrating how teacher behavior, student reaction, and contextual restrictions are interlinked.)




4.7 Summary of Results

The results present that Iraqi EFL listening classes tend to be primarily product-oriented and context-driven. Students demonstrate uneven engagement, and teachers tend to react with organizational issues. Despite these restrictions, professional adaptability and individual initiative have been discovered to be cultivated by special training.

## Chapter Five: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### 5.1 Discussion

The findings offer evidence for an ongoing mismatch between classroom practice and models of listening instruction. As Chapter 2 explained, the interactive model of listening (Field, 2008) requires balance between bottom-up decoding and top-down comprehension. However, in this research, speed and accuracy were favored by teachers ahead of strategy and reflection, promoting a culture of testing.

Students' passive action is consistent with Vandergrift's (2004) finding that unless trained explicitly, students seldom self-monitor or repair comprehension breakdowns. Secondly, the overwhelming dominance of contextual barriers aligns with Alhmadi (2014) and Hamouda (2013), who said that teachers of EFL in the region are confronted with systemic barriers that suppress pedagogical innovation.

### 5.2 Conclusions

This research sought to investigate how listening is actually taught—and acquired— in Iraq's EFL classrooms. What we learned is both all too familiar and unsettling: Listening is too often given as an intelligence test rather than as a skill to be acquired.

The teachers, teaching under real conditions (on faulty equipment, in over-sized rooms with full curriculum), were likely to skip the "warm-up" (or pre-listening), proceeding directly to the assignment and with strong emphasis on right-or-wrong answers. There simply wasn't time to provide students with guidance on how they should listen: predicting, taking note or recovering when headaches fogged the presentation. So the vast majority of students would remain quiet, wait to be told an answer was incorrect or stall at the appearance of a more challenging question. There were a few, however, who peeked — scrawling anxious notes in the margin or translating words in Arabic or reading over someone's shoulder. These tiny moments of agency are proof that students want to participate — they're just not entirely sure how.

This is not the teachers' fault. They're stretching to the limit in very demanding circumstances. But the gap between the ideal what listening should be (active, reflective, validating) and what it often becomes (efficient, stressful, answer-finding) is enormous—and it impacts most of the students.

- Teacher's need ?

- First, teachers need experiential (and low-tech!) training on how to teach listening as a process—and not just as an outcome. Such as, "What do you already know about this subject?" or "Write one word you hear" that have that big effect.

- Second, the students must be taught to practice those listening skills — not just once but on an ongoing basis — so they no longer associate confusion with some form of failure and see it as a learning process.

- Finally, the system itself needs to be transformed. That involves a tempo in class that doesn't slow down and some assistance with technology or space or time to facilitate those tests that are replaced by understanding rather than speed.

This study, naturally, only observed two classrooms, so it is not the full picture — but a true snapshot of what occurs on a particular day. And in that world, there exists possibility, resilience and determination. With proper support, listening can no longer be the "forgotten skill" and instead become a space where students actually connect, think and grow.

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## Appendix A: Example of Data Coding Process

| RAW OBSERVATION EXCERPT | INITIAL CODE | CANDIDATE THEME | FINAL THEME |
|---|---|---|---|
| "Teacher begins class: 'Listen carefully…' No intro. Students whisper." | Skipped pre-listening | Absence of prep phase | Task Sequencing and Scaffolding |
| "Teacher replays audio, says 'Number two is correct.'" | Answer-focused feedback | Product-oriented teaching | Task Sequencing and Scaffolding |
| "Two students translate terms in Arabic; others silent." | Peer L1 use | Student-initiated support | Students' Responses |
| "Student writes notes: 'travel - car - late.'" | Keyword note-taking | Strategic behavior | Students' Responses |
| "Audio fails; teacher reads aloud." | Tech failure → adaptation | Reactive shift | Contextual Constraints |
| "'Must finish unit today'—skips discussion." | Syllabus pressure | Time-driven teaching | Contextual Constraints |