

## Investigation of the Interrelationship between Listening and Reading Comprehension in Iraqi the EFL Context

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### Abstract

Listening and reading comprehension are critical skills in language acquisition for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, essential for effective communication and academic success. The current study explores the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension among Iraqi EFL learners, aiming to provide empirical evidence that informs instructional practices. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the research involved 92 Iraqi EFL learners, assessing their listening and reading comprehension through standardized tests, questionnaires, and interviews. The obtained findings reveal a significant positive interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension, supporting the Interactive-Compensatory Model. The study highlights the importance of integrated teaching strategies that enhance both skills simultaneously, suggesting practical applications for EFL education.

**Keywords:** Listening comprehension, Reading comprehension, Interactive-Compensatory Model, Iraqi EFL context.

دراسة العلاقة المتبادلة بين فهم الاستماع وفهم القراءة في سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق

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### المخلص

إن مهارات الاستماع وفهم القراءة من المهارات الأساسية في اكتساب اللغة بالنسبة لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وهي ضرورية للتواصل الفعال والنجاح الأكاديمي. تستكشف الدراسة الحالية العلاقة المتبادلة بين مهارات الاستماع وفهم القراءة بين متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقيين، بهدف تقديم أدلة تجريبية تفيد الممارسات التعليمية. باستخدام نهج الأساليب المختلطة، شمل البحث 92 متعلمًا عراقيًا للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، وتم تقييم مهارات الاستماع وفهم القراءة لديهم من خلال اختبارات موحدة واستبيانات ومقابلات. تكشف النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها عن علاقة متبادلة إيجابية كبيرة بين مهارات الاستماع وفهم القراءة، مما يدعم النموذج التفاعلي التعويضي. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على أهمية استراتيجيات التدريس المتكاملة التي تعزز كلتا مهارتين في وقت واحد، مما يشير إلى تطبيقات عملية لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** مهارات الاستماع وفهم القراءة، النموذج التفاعلي التعويضي، سياق اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية العراقي.

### Introduction

Listening and reading comprehension are considered two fundamental skills in language acquisition, especially in EFL contexts. These skills are not only fundamental for effective communication but also could play a crucial role in the academic success and professional development. Understanding the

interconnection between these two skills can provide insights into more effective teaching strategies and learning approaches for the EFL teachers and especially in Iraqi EFL context.

Listening comprehension involves the ability to understand spoken language, which includes grasping the meaning of words, phrases, sentences, and larger discourse structures. Listening is a very complex process which requires simultaneous engagement of multiple cognitive resources and various strategies, such as working memory, phonological processing, and syntactic parsing (Buck, 2001; Rost, 1994).

Reading comprehension, on the other hand, involves interacting and understanding written texts. It requires decoding words, integrating information across sentences, and making inferences to grasp the overall meaning. Both listening and reading comprehension share several underlying cognitive processes, such as vocabulary knowledge and inferencing skills (Nation & Newton, 2009; Snow, 2002).

Previous research suggests that there is a systematic, deep and constant interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension, and this interrelationship is often explained by the Interactive-Compensatory Model, which posits that proficient readers and listeners use their strengths to compensate for their weaknesses (Stanovich, 1980). For instance, strong vocabulary knowledge can aid in both listening and reading comprehension by facilitating the understanding of spoken and written texts (Carrell et al., 1988; Vandergrift, 2007).

#### Problem statement

Despite the recognized connection between these skills which is conceptualised by enormous theories in teaching and learning second language (L2)/second language acquisition(SLA), there is a lack of comprehensive experimental studies investigating the specific nature of their relationship among Iraqi EFL learners, particularly in contexts such as Iraq, where English is not considered the primary language of instruction. Understanding this deep interrelationship between these two skills can help and prepare teachers to develop integrated teaching strategies as well as techniques that address the needs of Iraqi EFL learners more effectively.

#### Purpose of the Study

The current study aims to explore the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension among Iraqi EFL learners and provide evidence. By investigating the extent to which proficiency in one skill predicts proficiency in the other, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence that can inform instructional practices and curriculum design. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of how these skills interact and support each other in the context of EFL learning.

#### Research Questions

The current study addresses the following questions which are needed to be answered in a scientific and comprehensive way:

1. Do listening and reading comprehension are interrelated skills? To what extent does listening comprehension predict reading comprehension proficiency?
2. What are the specific challenges faced by Iraqi EFL learners in developing listening and reading comprehension skills?

#### Significance of the Study

Understanding the interrelationship among listening and reading comprehension is the ultimate goal behind conducting the current study, and the results about the interrelationship of these two skills has significant implications for EFL education. By identifying the shared cognitive processes and challenges, educators can design more effective teaching interventions that enhance both skills simultaneously. This study also contributes to the broader field of SLA by providing insights into the specific needs and experiences of Iraqi EFL learners.

#### Theoretical Framework

The interrelation between listening and reading comprehension can be better understood through Cummins (1976) ' Threshold Hypothesis, which claims that a certain level of linguistic proficiency must be achieved to ensure effective comprehension in both skills. Listening and reading comprehension depend on a shared foundation of cognitive processes and language skills, such as vocabulary, syntax, and semantic understanding. Thus, once individuals reach this proficiency threshold, they can more effectively comprehend spoken and written texts, as improvements in listening skills reinforce reading comprehension and vice versa. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the Interactive-Compensatory Model of Reading (Stanovich, 1980) and the theories of SLA and comprehension. According to the Interactive-Compensatory Model, various cognitive processes interact dynamically during reading comprehension. When readers encounter difficulties, they compensate by relying on other linguistic cues, such as vocabulary knowledge or contextual understanding, which are equally applicable to listening comprehension. This model highlights the importance of both bottom-up (e.g., decoding words) and top-down processes (e.g., using prior knowledge) in comprehension, suggesting a strong interplay between listening and reading skills .Additionally, theories of SLA, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1985), emphasize the importance of comprehensible input for language learning. Listening provides immediate, contextualized input that can facilitate language acquisition, which in turn enhances reading comprehension. The Cognitive Load Theory (Sweller, 1988) also supports this framework by suggesting that learners can better understand and retain information when cognitive load is optimized through integrated instruction of related skills. Educators can leverage this framework by integrating instruction in listening and reading, focusing on vocabulary and

syntax development, and teaching metacognitive strategies to help students achieve the threshold and enhance their overall language comprehension.

#### The Interrelationship between Listening and Reading Comprehension

Research on the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension has consistently demonstrated that there is an interrelated nature between these two skills. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) claimed that both skills, listening and reading, require similar cognitive processes, such as the ability to predict, infer, and synthesize information. These processes are essential for understanding spoken and written texts, which share common linguistic and cognitive demands.

Field (2008) discussed how listening comprehension contributes to the development of reading skills, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and syntactic processing. He argued that exposure to spoken language helps the learners to internalize language patterns, which facilitates better reading comprehension. Buck (2001) further emphasized that effective listening strategies, such as note-taking and summarizing, can transfer to reading tasks, improving overall comprehension.

Additionally, several studies in SLA have explored the impact of integrated instruction on language skills. For instance, Goh (2000) found conclusive evidence that learners who received combined listening and reading instruction showed significant improvements in both areas compared to those who received isolated skill instruction. This supports the notion that a holistic approach to language teaching can enhance the interdependent skills of listening and reading comprehension.

#### Previous Studies

Numerous studies have investigated the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension in EFL contexts. One significant study by Babayiğit (2014) investigated the role of listening in language acquisition and found that listening comprehension is a strong predictor of reading comprehension success. The study highlighted the importance of listening practice in developing reading skills, suggesting that EFL programs should incorporate ample listening activities.

A study by Zhang and Zhang (2022) focused on the interrelationship between vocabulary knowledge, listening comprehension, and reading comprehension among EFL learners. The findings indicated that vocabulary knowledge significantly mediates the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension. This suggests that vocabulary development should be a central focus in EFL instruction to enhance both listening and reading skills.

In another study, Vandergrift (2007) explored the metacognitive strategies used by successful language learners in listening and reading tasks. The study found that learners who actively monitored their comprehension and employed strategies such as summarizing, predicting, and clarifying achieved higher

proficiency in both listening and reading comprehension. This underscores the importance of teaching metacognitive strategies to improve overall language proficiency.

## Methodology

### Research Design

In order to examine the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension among Iraqi EFL learners, the present study implements a mixed-methods research design that integrates quantitative and qualitative methodologies. By triangulating data from various sources, the mixed-method approach facilitates the provision of comprehensive findings regarding the research problem.

### Participants

The current study includes 92 Iraqi EFL learners from various universities in Iraq. Participants are selected using stratified random sampling to ensure a representative mix of students. All students were undergraduate who have varying proficiency levels in English.

### Instruments

#### 1. Listening Comprehension Test/ Reading Comprehension Test

Firstly, a standardized listening comprehension test is administered to assess the participants' ability to understand spoken English. The test includes multiple-choice questions that could covers different listening skills such as understanding main ideas, details, inferences, and speaker attitudes. Then, a standardized reading comprehension test is used to evaluate the participants' reading abilities. The test comprises passages followed by questions designed to measure comprehension at different levels, including literal, inferential, and evaluative comprehension.

#### 2. Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire is administered to gather demographic information and participants' self-reported data on their language learning background, exposure to English, and attitudes towards listening and reading activities. The questionnaire includes closed-ended questions to obtain more details for data collection.

#### 3. Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are conducted for an important purpose that helps the researcher to gain deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions about challenges regarding listening and reading comprehension. The interviews focus not only on challenges faced, but also strategies used, and the perceived interrelationship between the two skills.

### Procedure

#### 1. Data Collection

The listening and reading comprehension tests are administered in a controlled classroom setting. Participants complete the tests within a specified time frame

under the supervision of the researcher. Following the tests, the questionnaire is distributed and collected. Interviews are scheduled and conducted individually, recorded with participants' consent, and transcribed for analysis.

## 2. Data Analysis

**Quantitative Analysis:** The scores from the listening and reading comprehension tests are analysed using statistical methods. Pearson correlation coefficient is used to determine the interrelationship between the two variables. Regression analysis is performed to identify significant predictors of comprehension proficiency.

**Qualitative Analysis:** The interview transcripts are analysed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns in participants' responses. The qualitative data helps to contextualize and explain the quantitative findings, providing a richer understanding of the interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension.

### Findings and Discussion

#### Interrelation between Listening and Reading Comprehension

The obtained results revealed that the average score for the listening comprehension test was 67%, while the average score for the reading comprehension test was 72%. This indicates that participants generally performed better in reading comprehension than in listening comprehension. The standard deviations were 10% for listening comprehension and 12% for reading comprehension, suggesting a moderate level of variability in scores for both tests. On the other hand, the results obtained showed a significant positive interrelationship between listening and reading comprehension scores ( $r = 0.65$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) (see [Table 1](#)). This indicates a systematic and strong interrelationship between the two skills, suggesting that students who perform well in listening comprehension also tend to perform well in reading comprehension.

Additionally, the linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the predictive power of listening comprehension on reading comprehension. The obtained results from both test showed that listening comprehension significantly predicts reading comprehension ( $\beta = 0.65$ ,  $t = 8.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), explaining 42% of the variance in reading comprehension scores (see [Table 2](#)). This suggests that improving listening skills could have a substantial impact on reading skills.

**Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Listening and Reading Comprehension Scores and Correlation Analysis**

Test	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean	Standard deviation	Correlation Coefficient	Sig.
Listening comprehension test	45	85	67	10%	0.65	0.01
Reading	50	95	72	12%		

comprehension  
test

**Table 2: Regression Analysis**

Predictor Variable	Beta ( $\beta$ )	t- value	p- value	R <sup>2</sup>
Listening Comprehension	0.65	8.50	< 0.01	0.42

The significant correlation between listening and reading comprehension scores supports the hypothesis that these skills are interrelated. This finding is consistent with the Interactive-Compensatory Model, which suggests that strengths in one skill can compensate for weaknesses in another (Stanovich, 1980). It also supports the theories in SLA field which call for integration skills when teaching and learning the L2.

### **Challenges in Listening and Reading Comprehension**

Many participants reported difficulty in understanding different accents and fast speech rates when they were asked about challenges impede them to comprehend the spoken or written text. They also mentioned a lack of exposure to authentic listening materials in their learning environment.

Quotes: "I find it hard to follow and understand when native speakers talk too fast," and "several of accents are a big challenge for me."

Participants preferred reading materials that were interesting and relevant to their personal or academic interests. Common challenges included complex sentence structures and unfamiliar vocabulary.

Quotes: "I enjoy reading articles about technology because it's my field of study," and "Sometimes, long sentences with difficult words make it hard to understand the text."

The results of the interviews are consistent with prior research on the strategies and challenges that English language learners encounter when attempting to comprehend by listening and reading. Vandergrift (2007) and Goh (2000) also identified these difficulties as common obstacles in listening comprehension, similar to the reported difficulties with comprehending various accents and fast speech rates. The feedback from the participants in the current study aligns with the focus on the impact of limited exposure to authentic auditory materials in both studies. Furthermore, the literature extensively documents the barriers to reading comprehension that complex sentence structures and unfamiliar vocabulary present. Research by Grabe and Stoller (2011) has identified these factors as significant obstacles for learners, particularly when the reading material is not engaging or related to their interests.

Conclusion

This study investigated the interrelationship between reading comprehension and listening comprehension among Iraqi EFL learners, revealing a significant positive correlation between the two skills. The data analysis demonstrated that students who performed well in listening comprehension tended to have higher reading comprehension scores as well, underscoring the interconnected nature of these language skills. This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the overlapping cognitive processes involved in both listening and reading comprehension (Stanovich, 1980; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The implications for EFL instruction are substantial, suggesting that integrated teaching approaches that target both listening and reading comprehension can be highly effective. Also, Educators are encouraged to use multimedia resources that combine audio and text, and to provide a diverse range of authentic materials to enhance students' proficiency in both listening and reading skills. Additionally, focusing on vocabulary development and contextual understanding can further support learners in developing these essential skills (Buck, 2001; Snow, 2002).

Directions for Future research should explore this interrelationship further, considering longitudinal studies and diverse participant groups to validate and extend these findings. Moreover, experimental studies implementing specific instructional interventions can provide insights into the most effective methods for teaching listening and reading comprehension simultaneously. Addressing these areas will help in developing comprehensive language education programs that better meet the needs of EFL learners (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

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