

**Evaluating the Impact Short –Term Intensive Courses on Listening Comprehension Skills in First-Year University EFL Students at ULSHB**

تأثير الدورات المكثفة القصيرة الأجل على مهارات فهم الاستماع لدى طلاب السنة الأولى الجامعيين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية باماكو (ULSHB)

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**Abstract:**

This study evaluates the impact of a short-term intensive one-week listening comprehension course on the listening skills of first-year university EFL students. The course aimed to enhance students' abilities to understand and retain vocabulary, correctly interpret true/false statements, and apply phrases in context. The assessment was conducted through an examination that included vocabulary matching, true/false questions, and phrase completion tasks. The results indicate a generally positive outcome, with high correct response rates for commonly used vocabulary terms such as "Bedtime" and "A listener," and phrases like "Welcome" and "Turn off." However, certain terms, including "Low," "Busy," and "Loud," showed lower correct response rates, highlighting areas where students faced difficulties. True/false questions revealed a good overall comprehension, although some detailed questions posed challenges.

The study's findings underscore the effectiveness of the intensive course in improving listening comprehension skills but also point to specific areas needing targeted instructional strategies. Recommendations include enhanced vocabulary instruction, focused listening strategies for detailed comprehension, and more contextual practice for phrase usage. This research contributes to understanding the benefits and limitations of short-term intensive language courses and provides insights for improving EFL instruction to better support students' listening proficiency.

**Keywords:** Intensive Listening Course, EFL Students, Listening Comprehension, Vocabulary Acquisition, Language Proficiency

**ملخص:**

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تقييم تأثير دورة مكثفة قصيرة الأجل لمدة أسبوع واحد على مهارات فهم الاستماع لدى طلاب السنة الأولى الجامعيين في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. استهدفت الدورة تعزيز قدرات الطلاب على فهم واستيعاب المفردات،

وتفسير العبارات الصحيحة/الخاطئة بشكل صحيح، وتطبيق العبارات في السياق. تم إجراء التقييم من خلال امتحان شمل مطابقة المفردات، وأسئلة صح/خطأ، ومهام استكمال العبارات.

تشير النتائج إلى نتيجة إيجابية بشكل عام، مع نسب عالية من الإجابات الصحيحة للمفردات الشائعة الاستخدام مثل "وقت النوم" و"مستمع"، والعبارات مثل "أهلاً وسهلاً" و"أطفئ". ومع ذلك، أظهرت بعض المصطلحات، بما في ذلك "منخفض"، "مشغول"، و"صاحب"، نسب إجابات صحيحة أقل، مما يبرز المجالات التي واجه فيها الطلاب صعوبات. أظهرت أسئلة الصح/خطأ فهماً جيداً بشكل عام، رغم أن بعض الأسئلة التفصيلية شكلت تحديات.

تؤكد نتائج الدراسة فعالية الدورة المكثفة في تحسين مهارات فهم الاستماع، لكنها تشير أيضاً إلى مجالات محددة تحتاج إلى استراتيجيات تعليمية مستهدفة. تشمل التوصيات تعزيز تعليم المفردات، وتركيز الاستراتيجيات الاستماعية على الفهم التفصيلي، والمزيد من الممارسة السياقية لاستخدام العبارات. تساهم هذه الدراسة في فهم فوائد وحدود الدورات اللغوية المكثفة القصيرة الأجل، وتقدم رؤى لتحسين تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لدعم تحسين مهارات الاستماع لدى الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دورة الاستماع المكثفة، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، فهم الاستماع، اكتساب المفردات، الكفاءة اللغوية

## Introduction

Listening comprehension is a critical component of language acquisition and an essential skill for EFL learners. Vandergrift (2007) emphasizes that listening is a complex, active process of interpreting meaning from auditory cues, which involves not only linguistic knowledge but also cognitive skills and strategies. Rost (2011) further explains that listening comprehension requires the integration of various sources of information, including phonetic, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic knowledge.

According to Field (2008), listening is often regarded as the most challenging skill for language learners due to its transient nature and the rapid pace of spoken language. This complexity is compounded for EFL learners, who must navigate unfamiliar sounds, accents, and cultural references (Goh, 2000). Assessing listening comprehension accurately is crucial for understanding students' abilities and guiding instructional strategies. Buck (2001) outlines various methods for evaluating listening skills, including multiple-choice questions, true/false statements, and open-ended responses. He argues that effective assessment should reflect the real-world demands of listening and provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their comprehension in diverse contexts.

Carrier (2003) highlights the importance of using authentic listening materials in assessments to ensure that students are exposed to natural language use. Authentic materials, such as news broadcasts and conversations, can help learners develop the skills needed to understand real-life spoken English. Lynch (2009) suggests that formative assessments, including informal checks and feedback during lessons, are vital for identifying areas where students need additional support and for adjusting instruction accordingly.

Short-term intensive language courses are designed to provide focused instruction over a brief period, aiming to accelerate language learning. Lightbown and Spada (2013) explain that intensive courses can be highly effective because they immerse students in the target language, facilitating rapid progress. However, the success of such courses depends on the quality of instruction and the use of effective teaching methods.

Despite the potential benefits of intensive courses, EFL learners often face persistent challenges in listening comprehension. Rubin (1994) identifies several factors that can hinder listening, including unfamiliar vocabulary, fast speech rates, and lack of contextual knowledge. These challenges can be particularly pronounced for beginners, who may struggle to keep up with the rapid pace of spoken language. Graham (2006) argues that anxiety and lack of confidence also play a significant role in listening comprehension difficulties. Her research indicates that students who experience high levels of anxiety are less likely to take risks in listening and more likely to become overwhelmed by the complexity of the task. To address these issues, she recommends creating a supportive learning environment and providing strategies to help students manage their anxiety.

Case studies provide detailed insights into specific educational contexts and the experiences of individual learners. Yin (2009) advocates for the use of case studies in educational research because they allow for an in-depth examination of complex phenomena and the interplay of various factors. In the context of EFL learning, case studies can reveal how specific teaching methods, materials, and learner characteristics influence language acquisition (Duff, 2008). One notable case study by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explored the listening strategies of EFL learners and found that metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, significantly enhanced listening comprehension. Their findings underscore the importance of teaching learners to be aware of and manage their listening processes.

Several studies have investigated listening comprehension difficulties among EFL learners. Hardiyanto, Tanjung, and Suharjono (2021) conducted a descriptive qualitative study to investigate listening comprehension difficulties among six third-semester EFL students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi. The students were divided into three proficiency levels: low, moderate, and high. The study revealed that low-level students struggled with unfamiliar words, speech speed, and lack of vocabulary. Moderate-level students faced difficulties with speech speed and environmental noise, while high-level students had issues with long texts, various accents, and environmental noise. The study concluded that listening comprehension challenges vary according to proficiency, and educators should tailor their teaching strategies to address these specific difficulties.

Nanning (2014) explored listening comprehension problems among Indonesian EFL learners at the tertiary level. Using a listening test, questionnaire, and interviews, the study identified five main problem categories: processing information (speech speed), native speaker content (pronunciation, everyday language, language forms), English language skills (vocabulary, grammar), learning habits (inconsistent listening practice), and listening disorders (concentration issues). These problems affect learners' ability to comprehend English discourse, highlighting the need for targeted strategies to improve listening skills.

Assaf (2015) examined listening comprehension difficulties faced by EFL students at the Arab American University-Jenin. Using a questionnaire and interviews with 189 students, the study identified major issues such as word recognition disability, lack of background information, environmental noise, poor quality listening equipment, and lack of interest in the listening material. Speed of speech and unclear articulation were also noted. The study found no significant differences in difficulties based on academic level, year, gender, school type, or years studying English. Recommendations included more research on listening comprehension and enhanced focus on teaching listening skills.

The insights from these studies highlight several key implications for EFL teaching. First, there is a need for continuous vocabulary reinforcement to help students build a robust lexicon that supports their listening comprehension (Nation, 2013). Second, incorporating diverse listening materials and activities can expose students to a wide range of linguistic inputs and contexts, enhancing their ability to understand spoken language (Gilmore, 2007).

Finally, combining intensive courses with ongoing practice and formative assessments can provide a balanced approach that supports both immediate and long-term language development (Ellis, 2003).

The research question guiding this study is:

- ✓ What is the current level of listening among first-year EFL students?
- ✓ What specific areas of listening comprehension are most challenging for these students?

The objective is then to assess the listening comprehension skills of first-year university EFL students through a case study approach. This study will contribute to understand the listening comprehension capabilities of first-year EFL students. It will also provide insights for improving teaching strategies and curriculum design.

## **Methodology**

The participants in this study were first-year University students enrolled in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) program at the University of Letters and Human Sciences of Bamako. A total of 26 students participated in the study. These students were selected based on their enrolment in the compulsory listening comprehension course and their willingness to partake in the research.

The listening comprehension course was designed as an intensive, one-week program aimed at improving the students' listening skills through various activities and materials. The course included:

**Listening Activities:** Daily listening exercises were conducted using audio recordings, including conversations, lectures, and media clips.

**Vocabulary Building:** Each session incorporated vocabulary lessons related to the listening materials to enhance understanding and retention.

**Comprehension Exercises:** Students participated in activities such as matching vocabulary with definitions, true/false questions, and sentence completion tasks.

The primary tool for assessing the students' listening comprehension was a structured exam administered at the end of the one-week course. The exam comprised three sections:

**Vocabulary Matching:** Students matched vocabulary words with their correct definitions.

**True/False Questions:** Students determined the accuracy of statements based on a listening passage.

**Sentence Completion:** Students completed sentences using words from a provided box, based on a listening passage.

Each student's performance on the exam was recorded, focusing on their ability to match vocabulary, answer true/false questions, and complete sentences.

The analysis of the collected data was conducted as follows:

Exam scores were tabulated and analysed to determine the overall performance of the students.

Scores from each section of the exam (vocabulary matching, true/false questions, sentence completion) were compared to identify specific strengths and weaknesses.

## Results

The exam results of the listening comprehension assessment provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the short-term intensive one-week course.

**Table 1: Percentages of correct and incorrect definition by students**

| Vocabulary      | Correct answers | Incorrect answers |
|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Q1: Exam        | 80.76%          | 19.24%            |
| Q2: Bedtime     | 92.30%          | 7.70%             |
| Q3: A listener  | 92.30%          | 7.70%             |
| Q4: Low         | 34.61%          | 65.39%            |
| Q5: A tip       | 38.46%          | 61.54%            |
| Q6: The hardest | 42.30%          | 57.70%            |
| Q7: Busy        | 19.23%          | 80.77%            |
| Q8: Loud        | 42.30%          | 57.70%            |

Words like "Bedtime" and "A listener" had high correct response rates (92.30%). This indicates that students were able to understand and retain these terms effectively, likely due to their frequent use and clear context during the course.

Words such as "Low," "A tip," "The hardest," "Busy," and "Loud" had significantly lower correct response rates, with "Busy" being the lowest at 19.23%. This suggests that these terms were either less emphasized during the course or presented more difficulty in comprehension and retention.

The variation in correct and incorrect responses indicates a disparity in vocabulary acquisition. Terms with higher correct responses likely benefited from more contextual usage and repetition in the course materials. Conversely, terms with lower correct responses might need more targeted instruction and practice. This suggests that while the intensive course effectively covered some vocabulary, there are areas that require additional focus and reinforcement.

**Table 2: Percentages of correct and incorrect answers of true or false questions**

| Questions | Correct answers | Incorrect answers |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Q1        | 80.76%          | 19.24%            |
| Q2        | 65.38%          | 34.62%            |
| Q3        | 69.23%          | 30.77%            |
| Q4        | 57.69%          | 42.31%            |
| Q5        | 88.46%          | 13.04%            |
| Q6        | 84.61%          | 15.39%            |

Questions Q1, Q5, and Q6 had high correct response rates (80.76%, 88.46%, and 84.61% respectively). This suggests that students were able to accurately recall and understand the information presented in the listening passages.

Questions Q2 and Q3 had moderate correct response rates (65.38% and 69.23%). This indicates some level of comprehension difficulty or ambiguity in the listening passages related to these questions.

Question Q4 had the lowest correct response rate at 57.69%, suggesting that the information related to this question was either less clear or more challenging for the students.

The true/false section indicates a generally strong comprehension of the listening material, with the majority of students performing well. The lower correct response rate for Q4 suggests that specific parts of the listening material may need to be reviewed for clarity or that additional strategies for understanding detailed information could be beneficial.

**Table 3: Percentages of correct and incorrect phrases found by students**

| <b>Words/phrases to be used</b> | <b>Correct answers</b> | <b>Incorrect answers</b> |
|---------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Welcome                         | 96.15%                 | 3.85%                    |
| Get to be here                  | 73.07%                 | 26.93%                   |
| Earlier in the evening          | 84.61%                 | 15.39%                   |
| Turn off                        | 84.61%                 | 15.39%                   |
| Down low                        | 88.46%                 | 11.54%                   |
| Useful advice                   | 50%                    | 50%                      |

Phrases like "Welcome," "Earlier in the evening," "Turn off," and "Down low" had high correct response rates (84.61% to 96.15%). This indicates that these phrases were well understood and effectively utilized by the students.

"Get to be here" had a moderate correct response rate of 73.07%, suggesting some difficulties in contextual usage.

"Useful advice" had a balanced correct and incorrect response rate (50.00%), indicating significant difficulty in understanding or applying this phrase correctly.

The phrase completion section shows that students generally had a strong grasp of most phrases, suggesting effective teaching and learning of these expressions. However, the balanced performance on "Useful advice" highlights a potential gap in instruction or a need for more contextual practice with this phrase.

## Discussion

The exam results suggest that the short-term intensive one-week course had a positive impact on students' listening comprehension skills, particularly in understanding explicit information and commonly used phrases. This aligns with Lightbown and Spada (2013), who highlighted the effectiveness of intensive courses in facilitating rapid progress by immersing students in the target language.

However, the results also reveal areas that need improvement. Some vocabulary terms were not as well retained, indicating a need for more targeted practice and reinforcement. This is consistent with Rubin (1994), who identified unfamiliar vocabulary as a significant barrier to listening comprehension. To address this, continuous vocabulary reinforcement as suggested by Nation (2013) is crucial. Strategies such as spaced repetition and contextual usage could help improve retention.

Certain true/false questions had lower correct response rates, suggesting that students may benefit from additional strategies to improve their comprehension of detailed information. This finding supports Buck (2001), who emphasized that effective assessment should reflect real-

world listening demands and provide diverse contexts for students to demonstrate comprehension.

While most phrases were well understood, some phrases like "useful advice" presented challenges. Providing more varied and practical contexts for using these phrases could enhance understanding. This aligns with Carrier (2003), who stressed the importance of using authentic listening materials to expose students to natural language use, and Lynch (2009), who suggested formative assessments and feedback during lessons to identify areas where students need additional support.

Additionally, the study by Vandergrift and Goh (2012) on metacognitive strategies indicates that teaching learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening processes can significantly enhance comprehension. Implementing these strategies could address the observed difficulties in retaining vocabulary and understanding detailed information.

Finally, anxiety and lack of confidence, as highlighted by Graham (2006), may also play a role in listening comprehension difficulties. Creating a supportive learning environment and providing strategies to manage anxiety could further improve students' listening skills.

In conclusion, the short-term intensive course positively impacted students' listening comprehension, but targeted interventions are needed to address specific challenges. Continuous vocabulary reinforcement, the use of authentic materials, metacognitive strategies, and a supportive learning environment can collectively enhance listening comprehension skills among EFL learners.

### **Recommendations**

Incorporate more interactive and varied vocabulary exercises to help students better retain and understand new terms.

Teach specific listening strategies that help students better comprehend and recall detailed information from listening passages.

Provide more opportunities for students to practice using phrases in diverse and realistic contexts to improve their practical application and understanding.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of a short-term intensive one-week listening comprehension course for first-year university EFL students. The analysis of the exam results reveals several key insights into the students' listening skills and areas for further improvement.

Overall, the course had a positive impact on the students' ability to comprehend and respond to listening materials, particularly in the areas of vocabulary understanding and phrase usage. High correct response rates for terms such as "Bedtime" and "A listener" indicate that students were

able to effectively retain and comprehend frequently used vocabulary. Similarly, phrases like "Welcome" and "Turn off" were well understood, demonstrating the students' ability to apply these phrases in context.

However, the study also highlighted certain challenges. Vocabulary terms like "Low," "Busy," and "Loud" had lower correct response rates, suggesting that these words were either less emphasized during the course or presented more difficulties for the students. True/false questions related to specific details in the listening passages also revealed moderate to low correct response rates, indicating that students may struggle with understanding detailed information.

The balanced performance on the phrase "Useful advice" points to a need for more contextual practice and varied usage scenarios to enhance comprehension and practical application.

In conclusion, while the short-term intensive course demonstrated significant strengths in improving listening comprehension, targeted improvements in vocabulary instruction and contextual practice are essential for addressing the identified gaps. Implementing these recommendations will further enhance the effectiveness of the course, ultimately supporting EFL students in achieving greater listening proficiency. This study contributes valuable insights into the design and implementation of intensive language courses and underscores the importance of continuous assessment and tailored instructional strategies in EFL education.

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