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Kurdish EFL Learners' Attitudes Towards the Role of Listening Skill in Enhancing their Speaking Skill

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Abstract

This research is an attempt to investigate Kurdish EFL learners' attitudes in pairing a receptive skill (listening) and a productive skill (speaking). The aim of the paper is to indicate Kurdish EFL learners' attitudes towards pairing these two skills. It also aims at revealing the attitudes of both genders concerning the relationship between the factors and ways that enhance their listening and speaking skills. The method employed in doing the research is a mixed-method, meaning that both quantitative and qualitative data have been collected via two research instruments: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The quantitative data have been analyzed using SPSS software (version 26) and the qualitative data have been analyzed using thematic analysis by giving alphanumeric codes to the participants' quotes and analyzing the themes found in their responses to the questions. The study is significant for both EFL university teachers and students in that several factors behind Kurdish EFL learners' poor speaking performance have been revealed which can be dealt with for the purpose of solving the problems. The results indicate that Kurdish EFL learners, including both genders, generally make attempts to enhance their listening and speaking skills and become fluent and competent speakers; they use various channels to achieve this goal. One of the conclusions arrived at in the paper is that there exist several barriers negatively affecting Kurdish EFL learners' speaking performance. In this regard, necessary recommendations have been provided in relation to the issue.

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مواقف متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الكرد تجاه أثر الاستماع في تطوير مهارات التحدث

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المستخلص

تستقصي هذه الدراسة مواقف المتعلمين الكرد للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية إزاء العلاقة التكاملية بين مهارة الاستماع كمهارة استقبالية ومهارة التحدث كمهارة إنتاجية. تسعى الدراسة لاستجلاء تصورات هؤلاء المتعلمين حول التكامل بين هاتين المهارتين اللغويتين، مع إيلاء اهتمام خاص لاستكشاف الفروقات بين الجنسين في إدراك العوامل والمنهجيات المؤثرة في تعزيز كفاءتهم الاستماعية والتحدثية. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجية بحثية مزدوجة تجمع بين المقاربتين الكمية والنوعية، حيث جُمعت البيانات عبر أداتين بحثيتين: استبانة منظمة ومقابلات شبه منظمة. خضعت البيانات الكمية للتحليل الإحصائي باستخدام الحزمة الإحصائية للعلوم الاجتماعية (SPSS) الإصدار السادس والعشرين، بينما عولجت البيانات النوعية من خلال التحليل الموضوعي الذي اشتمل على ترميز استجابات المشاركين برمز أبجدية رقمية واستخلاص المحاور الرئيسية من إجاباتهم. تكتسب هذه الدراسة أهمية بالغة للمنظومة الأكاديمية في الجامعات، سواء لأعضاء هيئة التدريس أو للطلبة متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، إذ كشفت عن طيف واسع من العوامل الكامنة وراء تدني الأداء التحدثي لدى المتعلمين الكرد، مما يتيح فرصة معالجتها وإيجاد حلول علمية مدروسة لهذه الإشكاليات. أظهرت النتائج أن المتعلمين الكرد للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، بغض النظر عن الجنس، يبدون التزاماً واضحاً بتطوير مهاراتهم الاستماعية والتحدثية سعياً لبلوغ مستوى الطلاقة والكفاءة اللغوية، مستعينين بقنوات تعليمية متعددة لتحقيق هذا المسعى. غير أن الدراسة استخلصت وجود معوقات متعددة تلقي بظلالها السلبية على الأداء التحدثي لهؤلاء المتعلمين. وفي ضوء هذه المعطيات، قدم البحث توصيات جوهرية لمعالجة هذه القضية التعليمية الملحة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية الكرد كلغة أجنبية، مهارات الاستماع والتحدث، مواقف المتعلمين، القلق اللغوي، الأداء التحدثي.

1. Introduction

When it comes to learning the English language, speaking skills tend to be the most important area of focus and should be emphasized first in the methods of instruction. However, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) struggle with speaking skills development as English is not spoken in the academic institutions and the environment in which they study English. Thus, teachers from the Kurdish region are challenged to look for better ways of teaching. Although speaking is given more importance, other skills such as reading and listening should not be overlooked as they are crucial for EFL learners as well in the process of learning English. As reading increases vocabulary, listening does improve pronunciation and contextual comprehension. Developing the skills together help to form the basis of effective communication and mastery of the language (see Harmer, 2007; Krashen, 1985).

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a phenomenon in which someone, particularly a language learner, develops a language other than their mother tongue. The acquisition can be influenced by factors such as age, motivation, exposure, and the environment surrounding the learning process, among others. In connection to this, Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) claims that effective acquisition of a second language is if the learner is exposed to comprehensible input at a level above the learner's $i+1$. Furthermore, Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985) affirms that focusing on form to facilitate language use or production in this case is important since it allows students to detect their shortcomings and use the language correctly due to the changes made in their learning progress. Together, these theories highlight the interdependency of comprehensions and production in the context of SLA.

Generally speaking, most EFL learners reach a point in the process of learning a language which is known as fossilization. The concept was first introduced by Selinker (1972) as he states that a learner may stop making progress in their second language even after extensive training. Some of the factors that why fossilization may occur are the age of the learner, how much they are exposed to the language for how long and their individual differences in learning styles. This phenomenon in second language acquisition is relevant as it relates to the fixation of incorrect linguistic features that remain the same with

more exposure to the target language. Fossilization can occur in certain aspects of the language such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The existence of fossilization can be easily noticed and heard from English department fourth-year students as well as graduates of the department.

Turning to the listening skill, pre-listening activities are required since they prepare learners by recalling their background knowledge and setting the focus for the listening activity (Field, 2008). During the listening phase, focusing on note taking, focusing on the general idea or on the particulars improve input use within the learners. Afterwards, post-listening activities such as discussion and summarization assist in strengthening the understanding of the text and encouraging critical thinking towards the text (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Whereas the target is to improve the teaching processes that are related to thinking in English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it is necessary to study learners' attitudes and beliefs regarding the relationship between the skills of listening and speaking.

This research adopts an interdisciplinary approach which incorporates a mixed-method approach regarding the examination of the related literature on the topic. For this purpose, the study aims to explore the attitudes and perceptions of Kurdish EFL learners towards the significance of their listening skills in the development of their speaking skill. Also, looking for the relationship between attitudes towards listening and speaking, measuring the effects of these attitudes on learners' motivation and engagement, and suggesting ways to the teachers on how they can incorporate listening tasks to improve speaking skills in the EFL classroom is another aim of the study.

The main research question which is supposed to be answered in this research is: "What do Kurdish EFL learners think about the role of listening skill with regard to their speaking skill?" In addition to this research question, there is another one which seeks whether there is any significant difference between the attitudes of EFL learners towards the influence of the listening skill on their speaking performance as far as gender is concerned. The objective of this inquiry is basically meant to assist learners to better understand the intricacies of their experiences so that a better teaching method that can aid their linguistic level can be applied. As such, it is hypothesized that the improvement of the listening skill

has a great effect on the promotion of the learners' speaking skill. Also, it is hypothesized that male and female EFL learners have similar attitudes towards the role of listening in enhancing their speaking performance.

2. Previous Related Studies

The development of speaking proficiency among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is profoundly influenced by receptive skills, particularly listening and reading. Research consistently highlights their foundational role in shaping oral communicative abilities, as listening provides auditory models crucial for accurate speech production, while reading aids vocabulary expansion and structural reinforcement (Supraba et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2024). These findings underscore the necessity of an integrated approach to language learning, wherein receptive skills are leveraged to enhance spoken fluency and confidence.

A growing body of literature supports the argument that receptive skills serve as catalysts for productive language use. Tran et al. (2024) examined the effects of video conferencing on speaking and listening proficiency among Vietnamese EFL learners, demonstrating that structured conversational interactions significantly improve oral fluency and auditory comprehension. Similarly, Supraba et al. (2020) found a strong correlation between reading aloud and enhanced pronunciation, articulation, and lexical retention, reinforcing the importance of integrating receptive and productive skills in language instruction.

Beyond receptive skills, various instructional methodologies have been explored to improve EFL learners' speaking proficiency. Rezalou and Yağiz (2021) implemented communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques across multiple instructional cycles, revealing notable improvements in students' oral fluency and attitudes toward interactive learning. Similarly, Yusof and Abugohar (2017) underscored the impact of extracurricular activities, showing that non-classroom engagements foster motivation and enhance spoken proficiency.

Mart (2020) further explored how top-down and bottom-up listening processes contribute to effective speech production, emphasizing the necessity of incorporating listening-based activities to facilitate oral fluency. Assma (2017) echoed these conclusions, showing that improved listening comprehension

directly enhances speaking accuracy and fluency. Collectively, these studies reinforce the need for pedagogical approaches that explicitly interconnect receptive and productive skills to optimize language acquisition.

Despite pedagogical advancements, speaking proficiency remains a complex skill influenced by multiple linguistic factors. Ali et al. (2019) highlighted vocabulary and grammar as critical components, underscoring the need for targeted interventions to address lexical and syntactic deficiencies. In a similar vein, Cárdenas (2018) investigated fossilized grammatical errors among intermediate learners, demonstrating that structured self-monitoring techniques significantly reduce persistent inaccuracies and improve spoken accuracy.

The effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies has also been widely acknowledged. Al-Tamimi and Attamimi (2014) synthesized findings from multiple studies on cooperative learning, concluding that structured peer interactions cultivate positive attitudes and lead to significant fluency gains. Koran (2015) emphasized the role of instructors in creating conducive speaking environments, demonstrating that engagement with relevant and engaging topics significantly increases student participation in spoken discourse.

The reviewed studies collectively emphasize the integral role of receptive skills in fostering speaking proficiency among EFL learners. Pedagogical approaches that incorporate interactive methodologies, extracurricular engagements, and cooperative learning strategies have demonstrated their efficacy in enhancing oral fluency. Nonetheless, linguistic challenges such as fossilized grammatical errors and vocabulary limitations necessitate strategic interventions. The present research contributes to this discourse by examining the interrelationship between receptive and productive skills through exploring Kurdish EFL learners' attitudes, employing both quantitative and qualitative methods to offer a nuanced understanding of speaking skill acquisition.

This study advances the existing body of research by concentrating specifically on productive language skills, with a particular emphasis on speaking, given its intrinsic interrelation with receptive modalities, especially listening. Recognizing the pivotal role of listening in facilitating speech development, this investigation seeks to enhance the speaking proficiency of Kurdish EFL learners while fortifying their competency in this fundamental

linguistic domain. To achieve these objectives, the study employs a dual-method approach, utilizing a researchers-made questionnaire and a semi-structured interview as primary data collection instruments. The quantitative data obtained through the questionnaire are subjected to rigorous statistical analysis via SPSS (version 26), enabling a comprehensive examination of key factors influencing speaking proficiency among Kurdish EFL learners.

3. Methodology

Research design

There exists a common problem among English department graduates which is the weakness of their performance in speaking. They usually complain that they cannot speak well even after studying English for four years and taking listening and speaking classes for at least two years. To investigate this issue, we found it necessary to conduct a study and propose a practical solution to the problem. A mixed-method approach was employed in conducting the research. Two types of researchers-made tools were used: a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was given to the students in person, hence the researcher administration strategy was used in order for the researchers to observe the situation in which the respondents answered the questionnaire items. Also, for the purpose of triangulation, as it is common in the mixed-method approach, the interview items were given to the participants. As is well-known, triangulation makes the findings more valid and more credible. Likert's five scale of frequency was adopted for the participants to decide in relation to each item of the questionnaire. Concerning ethical consideration, the students were informed orally in advance that they are supposed to be participants of a study and they agreed to participate voluntarily. The questionnaire was distributed randomly to the students and the interviewees were also selected randomly, thus the technique of probability sampling was used in conducting the research. As for reliability of the questionnaire items, they were sent to four experts for the purpose of face validity. Then they were given to eight students as a piloting process. At the final stage, the responses were entered into the SPSS software (version 26) using Cronbach's Alpha to test their reliability. The reliability score was high (0.889 Cronbach's Alpha), hence consistency was found in the items and the questionnaire was reliable.

Participants

The participants of the study include ninety-two second-year students in six public universities in the KRI. Of these, twenty-nine were males and sixty-three were females. Nearly half of the participants, exactly forty-three participants, took part in the semi-structured interview. The distribution of the students can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: the number and percentage of participants, their gender, and their universities

Universities	Number & percentage of participants	Males	Females
Salahaddin -Erbil	19 (20.66%)	2 (6.9%)	17 (26.98%)
Sulaimani	12 (13.04%)	7 (24.13%)	5 (7.93%)
Raparin	12 (13.04%)	4 (13.8%)	8 (12.69%)
Halabja	12 (13.04%)	3 (10.34%)	9 (14.28%)
Garmyan	21 (22.82%)	7 (24.13%)	14 (22.22%)
Soran	16 (17.40%)	6 (20.68%)	10 (15.87%)
Total	92 (100%)	29 (100%)	63 (100%)

Data collection tools

Two tools were used to collect the data which were a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire consisted of eighteen closed-ended items and the semi-structured interview consisted of two questions, both tools were given to the participants in person.

Data analysis

The data obtained were analyzed in two different ways: the quantitative data, namely the questionnaire, were analyzed using descriptive statistics (SPSS, version 26) indicating the percentage of each item, mean, and standard deviation (for the sake of simplicity, only the percentages have been shown in the tables). As for the qualitative data, i.e. the semi-structured interview, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis by coding the speeches of the interviewees using alphanumeric symbols and qualitatively analyzing their responses.

4. Results and Discussion

Quantitative data:

In this part, only the quantitative results, namely those of the questionnaire, are presented in the form of tables separating the results of the sixty-three EFL female participants (table 2), the twenty-nine male ones (table 3), and then both genders (ninety-two) together in table (4). The collected responses from the participants to the questionnaire items highlight several remarkable results. It is worth mentioning that the questionnaire items are structured in accordance with four dimensions: the effect of listening classes on EFL learners' speaking proficiency (items 1-6), various ways and channels EFL learners use to practice listening (items 7-10), the ways through which EFL learners practice speaking (items 11-14), and finally paying attention to pronunciation, fluency, and intonation imitating English native speakers (items 15-18). The rationale behind this arrangement is that EFL learners should follow these procedures step by step to become competent and fluent speakers of English. In this regard, the discussion of the results of the quantitative data is carried out with respect to these four groups of items, meaning that each of the four collections of the items are discussed together and separately from the others.

Table 2: The number and percentage of (63) female participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire.

items	never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
1	1 (2%)	5 (8%)	16 (25%)	19 (30%)	22 (35%)
2	5 (8%)	8 (13%)	19 (30%)	15 (24%)	16 (25%)
3	2 (3%)	5 (8%)	9 (14%)	27 (43%)	20 (32%)
4	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	3 (5%)	7 (11%)	50 (79%)
5	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	20 (32%)	19 (30%)	20 (32%)
6	2 (3%)	6 (10%)	32 (51%)	13 (21%)	10 (16%)
7	1 (2%)	13 (21%)	21 (33%)	10 (16%)	18 (28%)
8	3 (5%)	13 (21%)	18 (28%)	14 (22%)	15 (24%)
9	2 (3%)	2 (3%)	24 (38%)	15 (24%)	20 (32%)
10	25 (39%)	15 (24%)	15 (24%)	3 (5%)	5 (8%)
11	10 (16%)	16 (25%)	21 (33%)	6 (10%)	10 (16%)
12	7 (11%)	6 (10%)	17 (27%)	15 (24%)	18 (28%)
13	3 (5%)	5 (8%)	16 (26%)	14 (22%)	25 (39%)

14	7 (11%)	15 (24%)	11 (17%)	16 (26%)	14 (22%)
15	5 (8%)	14 (22%)	22 (35)	8 (13%)	14 (22%)
16	2 (3%)	9 (14%)	14 (22%)	13 (21%)	25 (40%)
17	3 (5%)	13 (21%)	18 (28%)	18 (28%)	11 (18%)
18	1 (2%)	2 (3%)	5 (8%)	16 (25%)	39 (62%)

Table 3: The number and percentage of (29) male participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire.

items	never	rarely	sometimes	often	always
1	1 (3%)	7 (24%)	8 (28%)	5 (17%)	8 (28%)
2	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	13 (45%)	9 (31%)	4 (14%)
3	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	7 (24%)	3 (10%)	18 (62%)
4	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)	7 (24%)	14 (48%)
5	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	4 (14%)	11 (38%)	9 (31%)
6	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	14 (48%)	5 (17%)	6 (21%)
7	1 (3%)	5 (17%)	7 (24%)	7 (24%)	9 (31%)
8	6 (21%)	5 (17%)	7 (24%)	4 (14%)	7 (24%)
9	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	14 (48%)	10 (34%)
10	16 (55%)	4 (14%)	4 (14%)	2 (7%)	3 (10%)
11	8 (28%)	3 (10%)	11 (38%)	6 (21)	1 (3%)
12	5 (17%)	12 (41%)	4 (14%)	5 (17%)	3 (10%)
13	0 (0%)	6 (21%)	7 (24%)	11 (38%)	5 (17%)
14	8 (28%)	4 (14%)	4 (14%)	5 (17%)	8 (28%)
15	4 (14%)	3 (10%)	10 (34%)	4 (14%)	8 (28%)
16	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	11 (38%)	7 (24%)	7 (24%)
17	1 (3%)	5 (17%)	14 (48%)	4 (14%)	5 (17%)
18	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	4 (14%)	7 (24%)	17 (59%)

What follows is a structured discussion of the results of the quantitative data. The above two tables (table 2 for females and tables 3 for males) indicate the results of both genders' responses to the items of the questionnaire. It should be notified that, for the sake of simplicity, the points have been removed in percentages. Let us discuss the results of each collection of items separately:

Items (1-6): the effect of listening classes on EFL learners' speaking proficiency

As can be seen in these items (see the appendix), they are concerned with what EFL learners do during their listening classes. The results indicate that the majority of EFL learners do their best to understand the material they are supposed to listen to during listening classes. This can be noticed from the results seen in 'often' and 'always' columns, meaning that most of them ask questions for repetition, use their smart phones, concentrate to understand well, etc. Conversely, in 'never' and 'rarely' columns very lower percentages appear; the borderline between the two is 'sometimes' column showing that the respondent is in the status of being intermediate. It is worthwhile that the results of both female and male EFL learners are quite similar with reference to these items in that the majority of them answered positively. A slight difference can be noted in connection to item (2), which signifies the need of asking for repetition when the student cannot understand something during the class. As is well-known, culturally speaking, female EFL learners feel shy more than male ones do. This shyness may make them not ask questions when they do not understand a point in the class. Hence, taking 'never' and 'rarely' columns together, 21% of female learners are reluctant to ask questions while only 10% of male learners refrain from asking questions. Additionally, their responses to 'often' and 'always' columns are quite close to each other: 49% for female learners and 45% for male learners. The reason behind this slight difference, generally speaking, can be because of anxiety or shyness which is more common among female learners (see also Krashen, 1985; Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020).

Items (7-10): various ways and channels EFL learners use to practice listening

These items are related to the channels and ways EFL learners use to practice their listening skill. Four channels have been listed in these four items: mobile apps, TV channels, YouTube channels, and the radio. The results of the two tables (2 and 3) show quite close similarity of using these channels by the two genders. It follows that they share a preference to use or avoid a certain channel. As noted, the vast majority of the participants use YouTube channels to practice their listening: 82% of males 'often' and 'always' use YouTube and 58% of females do so. They also use mobile apps to a great extent which is 55% for

males and 44% for females. As for TV channels and the radio, their preference decreases sharply, especially to the radio. The results tell us that 38% of males have a preference to watch TV channels to enhance their listening skill while it increases to 46% by females. When it comes to the radio, only 17% of male learners have a preference to enhance their listening through the radio whereas it decreases to 13% by female learners. The results of rejecting the use of the radio, which can be deduced from 'never' and 'rarely' columns, are 69% for males and 63% for females. In short, their strong preference to the use of YouTube stems from the overwhelming influence of the internet on this generation. The advantage of listening to the radio is that the learner only focuses on what they listen to, not being busy with visuals. However, the advantage of resorting to YouTube channels can be that the learner pays attention to the mouth shape of the speaker and it is more lively.

Items (11-14): the ways through which EFL learners practice speaking

These items are about the various ways EFL learners follow to practice their speaking: speaking with friends at university, speaking aloud at home, speaking with themselves making scenarios in their minds, and using social media platforms. Of these, speaking with friends face-to-face at university (item 11) is the most influential one in enhancing their speaking performance as they can give themselves corrective feedback and take advantage from each other's experience and talents. The results of this item indicate that university Kurdish EFL learners are not eager to practice speaking in this way in that only 24% of female learners state that they 'often' and 'always' speak with their friends in English at university while 38% of them say that they 'never' and 'rarely' do so; the other 38% claim that they sometimes speak with friends in English. As for the male learners, the results are closely similar to those of females: only 26% of them state that they 'often' and 'always' speak English with their friends whereas 31% of them affirm that they 'never' and 'rarely' do so. Hence, the results of both genders tell us that about a quarter of Kurdish EFL learners practice their English speaking performance with friends at university. Concerning items 12, 13, and 14, the majority of both genders 'often' and 'always' try to enhance their speaking skill in the three ways mentioned above. Thus, no remarkable

difference can be noticed in the attitudes of Kurdish male and female EFL learners towards these four ways of speaking practice.

Items (15-18): imitating English native speakers

This last group of items are related to their tendency to have native-like fluency, pronunciation, intonation, and their effort in doing so. Generally speaking, as can be seen in the results of the tables, the majority of both genders have such a tendency and they do their best to be native-like in terms of fluency, pronunciation, and intonation patterns in their speaking. Of these, they are more concerned with pronunciation rather than fluency and intonation. In fact, all the three should be seriously taken into account to be a competent speaker of English language.

Table 4: The total number and percentage of (92) participants' responses to the items of the questionnaire

items	Never	Rarely	sometimes	Often	always
1	2 (2%)	12 (13%)	24 (26%)	24 (26%)	30 (33%)
2	6 (7%)	10 (11%)	32 (35%)	24 (26%)	20 (22%)
3	2 (2%)	6 (7%)	16 (17%)	30 (33%)	38 (41%)
4	4 (4%)	5 (5%)	5 (5%)	14 (15%)	64 (70%)
5	4 (4%)	5 (5%)	24 (26%)	30 (33%)	29 (32%)
6	4 (4%)	8 (9%)	46 (50%)	18 (20%)	16 (17%)
7	2 (2%)	18 (20%)	28 (30%)	17 (18%)	27 (29%)
8	9 (10%)	18 (20%)	25 (27%)	18 (20%)	22 (24%)
9	2 (2%)	4 (4%)	27 (29%)	29 (32%)	30 (33%)
10	41 (45%)	19 (21%)	19 (21%)	5 (5%)	8 (9%)
11	18 (20%)	19 (21%)	32 (35%)	12 (13%)	11 (12%)
12	12 (13%)	18 (20%)	21 (23%)	20 (22%)	21 (23%)
13	3 (3%)	11 (12%)	23 (25%)	25 (27%)	30 (33%)
14	15 (16%)	19 (21%)	15 (16%)	21 (23%)	22 (24%)
15	9 (10%)	17 (18%)	32 (35%)	12 (13%)	22 (24%)
16	3 (4%)	12 (20%)	25 (35%)	20 (24%)	32 (35%)
17	4 (4%)	18 (20%)	32 (35%)	22 (24%)	16 (17%)
18	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	9 (10%)	23 (25%)	56 (61%)

The above table is a collection of the results found in tables (2 and 3). What is important to focus on in the table above is items (9 and 10), which are about EFL learners' favourite channels to practice their listening skill. The former is related to their preference to YouTube channels and the latter is related to their listening to the radio. Outstanding differences are noticed in their preference to the two totally different channels: nearly two thirds (65%) of the participants 'often' and 'always' use YouTube channels while the opposite is the case with respect to listening to the radio in that two-thirds (66%) of them 'never' and 'rarely' listen to the radio. Also, there is a remarkable similarity in the attitudes of female and male Kurdish EFL learners towards the role of mastering listening skills in enhancing their speaking skills.

Table 5: The relationships between gender and EFL learners' perception scores towards the role of listening in enhancing their speaking skill (No=92)

Variable	Item	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	t value	p-value
Gender	Male	29	60.55	20.85	-0.809	0.421
	Female	63	64.12	19.14		

As the results in table (5) indicate, there is no significant difference between the mean scores of the participants' perceptions with respect to their genders towards the role of listening in enhancing their speaking skill with p-value of 0.421 ($p > 0.05$). Hence, the above results answer the second research question and justify the null hypothesis confirming that there is no significant difference between the above mean scores.

Qualitative data:

Concerning the findings of the qualitative data, several themes can be found in the interviewees' responses to the questions. The qualitative data have been analyzed using alphanumeric codes referring to the participants' views responding to the questions, then analyzing the themes found in their responses. As for the first question which is "What are the factors behind the English department students' poor performance of speaking English?", the following

themes can be determined from the responses of forty-three participants taking part in the semi-structured interview:

1. Lack of practice: As can be seen from the quotations of R1 and Suli4, among others, Kurdish EFL learners do not practice enough in listening to native English speakers in order for them to be fluent speakers of the language.

R1 stated that *“Lack of practice, students may not have enough opportunities to practice speaking English outside the classroom”*.

Suli4 confirmed that *“Only learning in class and not trying to practice more, and lack of commitment”*.

It is well-known that the more EFL learners practice listening, the better they can speak and the more fluently they can express themselves since speaking is the output of listening and they are parallel to each other. This finding parallels that of Yusof and Abugohar (2017) emphasizing the importance of non-classroom activities in improving the speaking skill. Additionally, as can be noted from Suli4’s statement, doing listening activities is not enough in the class. Rather, EFL learners need more practice outside the class, for example, at home, on social media platforms, with their friends everywhere, etc.

2. Lack of background knowledge: In addition to lack of practice, lack of background knowledge in English language is another factor behind Kurdish EFL learners’ inability in the speaking skill. It can be said that many students join the English department without prior interest or having enough skills in English language. Furthermore, lack of foundational knowledge, for example, vocabulary and pronunciation, makes speaking difficult. This can be illustrative from the statements of the interviewees below:

Sal2 claimed that *“Due to the lack of their background, they can’t improve”*.

H2 stated that *“In our country, in schools, they don't teach students to learn English. After that, we go to university, we cannot speak English well”*.

Logically speaking, English learners should be prepared well in high schools because having some sort of background in the language skills help them tackle certain issues related to mastering the skills in university. Therefore, it is recommended that high school teachers pay more attention to the listening and

speaking activities in their classes. Aligning with this argument, Ali et al. (2019) and Cárdenas (2018) confirm that having various background knowledge in the other skills of language fosters the development of the listening and speaking skills.

3. Fear of making mistakes: Due to shyness or lack of self-confidence, there exist certain EFL learners who are afraid of making mistakes; eventually, they cannot speak well and they encounter various problems which hinder their speaking abilities. With respect to this, an interviewee (Sal5) stated that “*Because they are shy and they have never spoken this language before and it isn't their native language, they can't speak well*”. There is no doubt that those who suffer from self-esteem or feel shyness during speaking activities, they cannot achieve their goals in learning the language as they always feel worried about what they are going to say, hence making mistakes and a poor performance is expected in such a situation. Rajitha and Alamelu (2020) also confirm that factors such as anxiety, shyness, etc. can cause EFL learners to fear making mistakes during the speaking performance. This is also confirmed by Krashen(1985) that increased anxiety hinders the process of speaking and interaction. There is no doubt that anxiety about making grammatical or pronunciation errors discourages students from speaking. Also, fear of ridicule or embarrassment in front of peers lowers confidence.

4. First-language interference in classroom activities: Sometimes, adopting code-switching or due to other reasons, part of the class is covered speaking Kurdish language. This is a fact that cannot be denied in the environment of the Kurdish classes in the KRI. On this basis, an interviewee, namely (Sor11), claimed that “*Speaking in Kurdish in class may cause learners not to speak well*”. Unfortunately, there is a sort of misunderstanding between code-switching and the overuse of the mother tongue in EFL classes. This phenomenon should be avoided in listening and speaking classes since it has a negative impact on the proficiency of Kurdish EFL learners and it may cause carelessness in learning the language in the correct way. This finding is similar to the one found in Norrman (2024), concluding that the first-language use in the class negatively influences EFL learners' proficiency.

5. Ineffective teaching methods: This theme can be linked to the second one as it is also related to not having an appropriate background knowledge due to the high school teachers' more emphasis on other fields of language other than listening and speaking. In this regard, another interviewee, G1, states that *"Schools focus on grammar and writing and neglect speaking and listening which is why we don't learn how to speak English from school although we study English in school for 12 years"*. Keeping the balance in the teaching of all the skills of language should be taken into serious consideration because the skills are complementary to each other in that neglecting or overlooking one of the skills leads to the EFL learners' failure in learning the language. This theme can be justified by Koran's (2015) finding confirming that the teacher plays a crucial role in enhancing the EFL learners' listening and speaking abilities. The instructors play a great role in creating conducive speaking environments, demonstrating that engagement with relevant and engaging topics significantly increases student participation in spoken discourse. Therefore, the teachers should use effective teaching and eclectic methods to convey the message.

Now, turning to the second question of the interview, almost all responses to the second question, which is "To what extent can mastering the listening skill help English department students speak better?", are positive concerning the influence of being a good listener leads to becoming a good speaker. Most respondents agreed that strong listening skills significantly enhance their speaking proficiency. They confirmed that mastering the listening skill helps EFL learners speak better and more fluently. In this respect, they claim that good listening causes mastering a sizable amount of vocabulary by hearing new words and commonly used expressions, and pronouncing the words and expressions fluently. This is supported by Mart (2020) who argues that top-down and bottom-up listening processes contribute to effective speech production, emphasizing the necessity of incorporating listening-based activities to facilitate oral fluency. Also, following native speakers in using intonation patterns appropriately makes EFL learners more native-like speakers through imitation. Increased confidence and fluency, in line with Rezalou and Yağiz (2021), who implemented communicative language teaching (CLT) techniques across multiple instructional cycles, reveals notable improvements in students' oral fluency and attitudes

towards interactive learning. Examples supporting this can be found in responses of (R4, Suli 2, Sor 4, G1, among others) as shown below:

R4 stated that *“I think listening skill is one of the major points to make people speak better because when you listen too much you can learn new phrases and you know how to pronounce these new words that you learnt”*.

Suli 2 claimed that *“Mastering listening skills creates a strong foundation for speaking by improving pronunciation, vocabulary comprehension, fluency, etc. that can help EFL learners speak better”*.

Sor 4 stated that *“Yes, it helps us because when you listen to something, you will never forget it, and it helps to improve your vocabulary and your pronunciation”*.

G1 also affirmed that *“When students listen to native speakers, they become more aware of how words are pronounced and the intonation patterns used in English conversations”*.

Depending on the above quotations, it is advisable for the teachers who teach listening and speaking paying more attention to the listening skill first, then turning to speaking practice and taking benefit from the clues taken from the listening part such as imitating native speakers' pronunciation, intonation patterns, adopting various phonological process during communication, etc. In doing so, the EFL learners can have something fresh in their minds to be used in practicing their speaking skill (see Assma, 2017; Tran et al., 2024). Enhancing pronunciation and vocabulary, which is supported by Supraba et al. (2020), who found a strong correlation between reading aloud and enhanced pronunciation, articulation, and lexical retention, reinforcing the importance of integrating receptive and productive skills in language instruction. This means that listening helps internalize correct word usage and speech patterns.

Surprisingly, two participants, namely (Sal4 & Sal6) think that it depends on the individual, meaning that it is not always the case that mastering the listening skill leads to becoming a proficient speaker. Their quotes have been put below:

Sal 4 stated that *“It depends on yourself”*.

Sal 6 affirmed that *“It depends usually, some students tend to master listening skill, yet they can't speak better”*.

For the researchers, the factors behind this view can be the lack of learner autonomy or their reluctance to learn the language, or more specifically to the listening and speaking skills. One of the most crucial factors behind learning a language or enhancing a specific skill of the language is having tendency or eagerness to learn it, otherwise the opposite is the case.

Now, answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses, depending on the findings of the qualitative data, we notice that Kurdish EFL learners in universities confirm that there is a close relationship between listening and speaking skills in that the more EFL learners master the listening skill, the more they can be competent and fluent speakers of English language. Concerning the second research question, as the results of the quantitative data also indicate, male and female EFL learners have similar attitudes towards the role of the listening skill in enhancing their speaking proficiency. As such, both hypotheses are justified in that the results and the findings support them.

5. Conclusions

After a thorough investigation of the results and the findings of both types of data used in carrying out the study, one can notice that Kurdish EFL learners have a positive perspective towards the influence of mastering the listening skill exerted on having a better performance in their speaking skill. It is confirmed that the more EFL learners pay attention to mastering the factors affecting the listening skill, the more they can be fluent and competent speakers of English. Also, there is no significant difference between the male and female EFL learners' attitudes towards the role of listening in enhancing their speaking skill and the effect of using various channels of listening on their speaking proficiency. It is also concluded that Kurdish EFL learners encounter several barriers in their attempts to have a better speaking proficiency. Among these barriers, lack of practice, lack of background knowledge, fear of making mistakes due to shyness and anxiety, first language use in listening classes, and inappropriate teaching methods are the remarkable ones that the participants of the study referred to. On the basis of the conclusions arrived at throughout the study, it is recommended that Kurdish EFL learners at the university level be encouraged to speak in English as much as possible with their friends, at home, and at any other potential event they may be involved in. This can be achieved

by their participation in debates, presentations, conversation clubs, etc. In doing so, they can overcome their fear of speaking English language.

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Appendix

1. A researchers-designed eighteen-item questionnaire

Dear second year student,

We kindly request of you to take part in a study concerning Kurdish EFL learners' perceptions of the role of listening skill in enhancing their speaking skill. It is worth mentioning that these tools are used for research purpose and you'll participate in it voluntarily and any kind of personal information will be kept confidential.

Thanks in advance

University:

Gender:

Likert's five scale of frequency concerning Kurdish EFL learners' perceptions of the role of listening skill in enhancing their speaking skill

No.	Items	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1.	I intensely concentrate on the listening audio clips played by the teacher in listening classes.					
2.	When I do not understand something, I ask the teacher to repeat it.					
3.	When I do not understand an expression, I use my mobile to look up its meaning.					
4.	I dream of speaking like the native speakers.					
5.	I carefully listen to the characters in the audio clips so as to speak fluently.					
6.	I feel confident speaking English after the listening practice.					

7.	I practice listening through mobile apps.					
8.	I practice listening through watching English TV channels.					
9.	I practice listening through watching YouTube channels.					
10.	I practice listening through radio programmes.					
11.	I practice speaking English with my friends at university.					
12.	I practice speaking aloud at home.					
13.	I make scenarios in my mind and I speak English with myself.					
14.	I practice speaking English with my friends using social media platforms.					
15.	I imitate native speakers' fluency.					
16.	I imitate native speakers' pronunciation.					
17.	I imitate native speakers' intonation.					
18.	I do my best to have good pronunciation and fluency when I speak.					

2. The semi-structured interview:

Q.1: What are the factors behind the English department students' poor performance of speaking English?

Q.2: To what extent can mastering the listening skill help English department students speak better?