

**THE INFLUENCE OF AFFECTIVE FACTORS ON LISTENING  
COMPREHENSION: ANXIETY AND DISTRACTION IN EFL CONTEXTS**

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20108520>

**Abstract:** This study investigates the effects of anxiety and distraction on students' listening comprehension in an EFL context. The data were collected through questionnaires, observations, and interviews with third-year students. The results show that most students experience nervousness and lose concentration during listening tasks, which negatively affects their performance. To solve this problem, the "Double Listening with Focus" method was applied, and it helped students become more confident and focused and improved their listening comprehension.

**Keywords:** listening comprehension, anxiety, distraction, EFL students, concentration, pre-teaching vocabulary, repetition, listening strategies, student confidence.

**AFFEKTIV OMILLARNING TINGLAB TUSHUNISHGA TA'SIRI: EFL  
KONTEKSTIDA XAVOTIR VA CHALG'ISH**

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**Annotatsiya:** Ushbu tadqiqot EFL sharoitida talabalarning tinglab tushunishga xavotir va chalg'ish omillarining ta'sirini o'rganadi. Ma'lumotlar uchinchi bosqich talabalari ishtirokida so'rovnoma, kuzatuv va intervyular orqali to'plandi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatdiki, aksariyat talabalar tinglash jarayonida hayajonlanadi va diqqatini yo'qotadi, bu esa ularning natijalariga salbiy ta'sir qiladi. Ushbu muammoni hal qilish maqsadida "Diqqat bilan ikki martalik tinglash" metodi qo'llanildi va u talabalarning o'ziga bo'lgan ishonchini oshirishga, diqqatini jamlashga hamda tinglab tushunish ko'nikmalarini yaxshilashga yordam berdi.

Kalit so'zlar: tinglab tushunish, xavotir, chalg'ish, EFL talabalari, diqqat, oldindan lug'atni o'rgatish, takrorlash, tinglash strategiyalari, talaba ishonchi.

**ВЛИЯНИЕ АФФЕКТИВНЫХ ФАКТОРОВ НА ПОНИМАНИЕ ПРИ  
АУДИРОВАНИИ: ТРЕВОЖНОСТЬ И ОТВЛЕЧЕНИЕ ВНИМАНИЯ В  
КОНТЕКСТЕ EFL**

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**Аннотация:** В данном исследовании изучается влияние тревожности и отвлечения внимания на понимание студентами аудирования в условиях EFL. Данные были собраны

посредством анкетирования, наблюдений и интервью со студентами третьего курса. Результаты показали, что большинство студентов испытывают волнение и теряют концентрацию во время заданий на аудирование, что отрицательно влияет на их результаты. Для решения этой проблемы был применён метод «Двойное аудирование с фокусом», который помог студентам стать более уверенными и сосредоточенными, а также улучшить навыки понимания на слух.

**Ключевые слова:** понимание на слух, тревожность, отвлечение внимания, студенты EFL, концентрация, предварительное изучение лексики, повторение, стратегии аудирования, уверенность студентов.

## INTRODUCTION

For most EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, listening is considered the most difficult among the four language skills. This difficulty raises an important question: why do many students struggle to understand even simple audio during listening tasks? Surprisingly, the problem is often not what students know, but how anxiety and distraction silently break their concentration at the very moment they need it most.

In recent decades, researchers have increasingly emphasized the role of affective factors in foreign language learning. Among these, anxiety has been widely recognized as a significant barrier that interferes with students' cognitive performance. According to Fang, anxiety is associated with negative emotions such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and tension, all of which can obstruct the learning process and reduce learners' effectiveness. Furthermore, Gardner and MacIntyre point out that anxiety is one of the most influential negative factors affecting language performance. In the context of listening comprehension, anxiety becomes particularly problematic because listening requires real-time processing of spoken input. Unlike reading, learners cannot pause or revisit the information, which increases psychological pressure. According to Horwitz and colleagues, listening anxiety is the negative emotional response experienced by foreign language learners when performing listening tasks, especially when they are worried about not understanding the content or achieving poor results. This emotional reaction not only affects learners' comprehension but also weakens their motivation and overall learning effectiveness.

Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner argue that anxiety limits concentration and reduces the efficiency of cognitive processing, which directly affects comprehension and learning outcomes. Eysenck explains that anxiety creates feelings of fear and nervousness, which lead to poor performance and, as a result, even higher levels of anxiety. This creates a negative cycle. He also emphasizes that worry, as a cognitive aspect of anxiety, consumes mental energy that should be used for memory and information processing, making it harder for learners to focus on the task. Furthermore, according to Scarcella and Oxford, listening anxiety often arises when students perceive tasks as too difficult or unfamiliar. This situation becomes even worse due to unrealistic beliefs, such as the idea that learners must understand every word in order to succeed. According to Joiner, such beliefs lead to a negative "listening self-concept," where learners lack confidence in their listening abilities. As a result, anxiety and distraction become powerful barriers that prevent students from concentrating, processing spoken information effectively, and performing successfully in listening tasks.

This research explores the impact of anxiety and distraction on students' listening comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Specifically, the study seeks to

understand how these emotional and psychological factors interfere with learners' ability to concentrate, process spoken information, and achieve accurate comprehension during listening tasks. By examining the sources and effects of listening anxiety and distraction, the research also aims to provide insights for developing practical strategies that can help students manage these hidden barriers. Ultimately, the study aims to highlight the importance of addressing both cognitive and affective aspects of listening in order to enhance overall language learning effectiveness and support students' confidence and resilience in EFL classrooms. This research effort aims to discover the following issues and answer these questions.

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1. How does anxiety influence students' listening comprehension in EFL classrooms?
  2. How does distraction affect learners' focus and understanding during listening tasks?
  3. What strategies can help students manage anxiety and distraction to improve listening skills?

**Fig. 1. Research objectives**

Third-year students at Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages (NamSIFL), aged 20–21 and from the Davlatobod district of Namangan region, were chosen as research participants. This paper first discusses several studies about listening anxiety and distraction and how they influence students' understanding in EFL classes. Then, it focuses on the psychological factors that make students lose concentration during listening tasks. Finally, it suggests some practical ways to help students manage anxiety and stay focused while listening.

#### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study was prepared based on previous research on the effect of anxiety on students' listening comprehension. In this type of research, listening tests and questionnaires are often used to understand both students' performance and their feelings during listening tasks. Usually, listening is tested through answering questions after audio tasks. However, in many cases, students cannot perform well not because they lack language knowledge, but because they feel anxious or distracted. These emotional factors make it difficult for them to concentrate and understand the audio clearly. The main purpose of this study is to find out how anxiety and distraction affect students' listening comprehension. For this reason, questionnaires, observations, and interviews were used among third-year students. The study also tries to find ways to reduce these problems and help students improve their listening skills. The research used a mixed-method approach, which includes both tests and questionnaires (quantitative) and interviews and observations (qualitative). This helps to understand not only the results but also students' feelings and experiences.

Observations and data collection were conducted at Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages (NamSIFL) during regular EFL classes. The participants were third-year students aged 20–21 from the Davlatobod district. Around 16 students were selected randomly from the class, including approximately 14 girls and 2 boys. The advantage of this method is that it shows both students' real performance and their emotional condition. It helps to understand hidden problems like anxiety and distraction. Also, using strategies like pre-teaching vocabulary and giving listening tips can help students feel more confident and focused.

Listening is one of the most important skills in language learning, but it is often difficult for students because it requires attention, fast processing, and understanding at the same time. Many students face problems not only because of their language level, but also because of anxiety and distraction during listening tasks. Therefore, it is important to study these factors and find ways to reduce them. The research participants were third-year students from Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages. Around 16 students, both male and female, took part in the study. They were selected randomly from one group and had upper-intermediate and advanced levels of English. The data were collected through questionnaires, classroom observations, and short interviews. The questionnaire was given to students to understand their feelings before and during listening tasks and to identify what makes listening difficult for them. In addition, some students were interviewed to get deeper information about their experiences. Classroom observation was also used to see students' behavior, such as losing concentration or showing signs of nervousness during listening activities.



**Fig. 2. Anxiety and distraction during listening tasks**

The results of the questionnaire showed that many students feel anxious before listening tasks, especially when they think they might not understand everything. The main difficulties included fast speech, unknown vocabulary, and losing concentration. Some students also mentioned that if they miss one word, they panic and cannot continue listening properly. During interviews, students explained that they often compare themselves with others and feel less confident. Teachers also mentioned that students easily lose focus and become nervous during listening tasks. They suggested that students need more practice and a supportive classroom atmosphere. Listening difficulties can be connected to both internal and external factors. Internal factors include anxiety, low confidence, and overthinking. External factors include noise, technical problems, and the fast speed of audio materials. The independent variable in this study was the use of strategies such as pre-teaching vocabulary and giving listening guidance, while the dependent variable was students' listening comprehension and level of anxiety. This method helped to understand both students' performance and their emotional difficulties. It also showed that reducing anxiety and distraction can improve students' listening skills and confidence.

According to the results of the survey, the researcher noticed that students mostly struggle with losing concentration and feeling nervous during listening tasks. Based on this idea, repetition was combined with a simple focus strategy. Considering the students' level and needs, a method called "Double Listening with Focus" was created. However, at the beginning, a usual listening method was used to see students' real performance. For the research, a short listening audio suitable for the students' level was selected. During the first week, a traditional method was used, where students listened only once and answered the questions. Many students felt nervous and had

difficulty understanding the audio. In the second week, based on the survey results, the “Double Listening with Focus” method was applied. In this method, students listened to the audio twice. During the first listening, they focused only on the main idea and were told not to worry about unknown words. During the second listening, they tried to understand more details and answer the questions. Before listening, a few key words were also given to make students feel more prepared. During the activity, students were reminded not to panic if they missed something and to continue listening. After that, students discussed their answers in small groups. This helped them feel more relaxed and confident. This method was called “Double Listening with Focus” because it helps students reduce anxiety and stay focused by listening step by step.

### RESULTS

The data were collected from 16 students through a questionnaire about listening anxiety and distraction. Most students (68.8%) reported that they feel a little nervous before a listening task, while 25% feel relaxed and only 6.3% feel very anxious. This shows that a certain level of anxiety is common among students and it can influence their performance even before listening starts. It also suggests that students are not fully confident in their listening abilities and may already expect difficulties before the task begins.

How do students feel before a listening task?

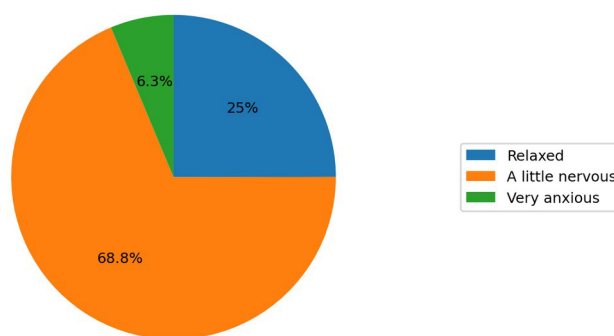


Diagram 1. Listening anxiety and distraction pattern

The main difficulty for students is losing concentration (43.8%), followed by fast speech (37.5%). A smaller number of students mentioned new vocabulary (12.5%) and noise or environment (6.3%). This means that attention and processing spoken language quickly are more serious problems than simply not knowing words. Even if students understand vocabulary, they may still fail to follow the audio because they cannot keep their focus or process information at the speed of the speaker. This highlights that listening is not only a language problem but also a cognitive one.

What usually makes listening tasks difficult?

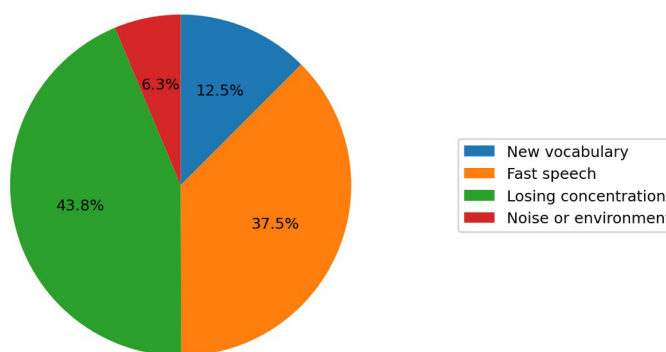
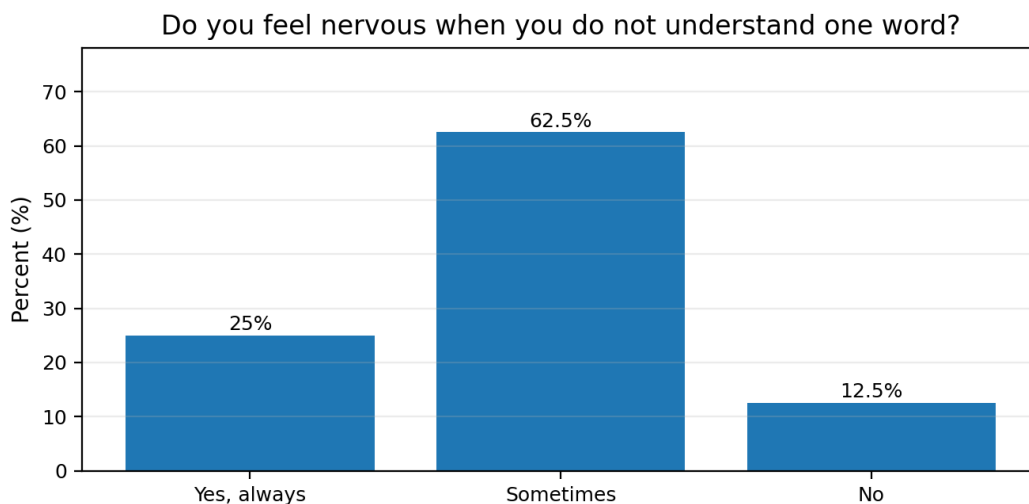


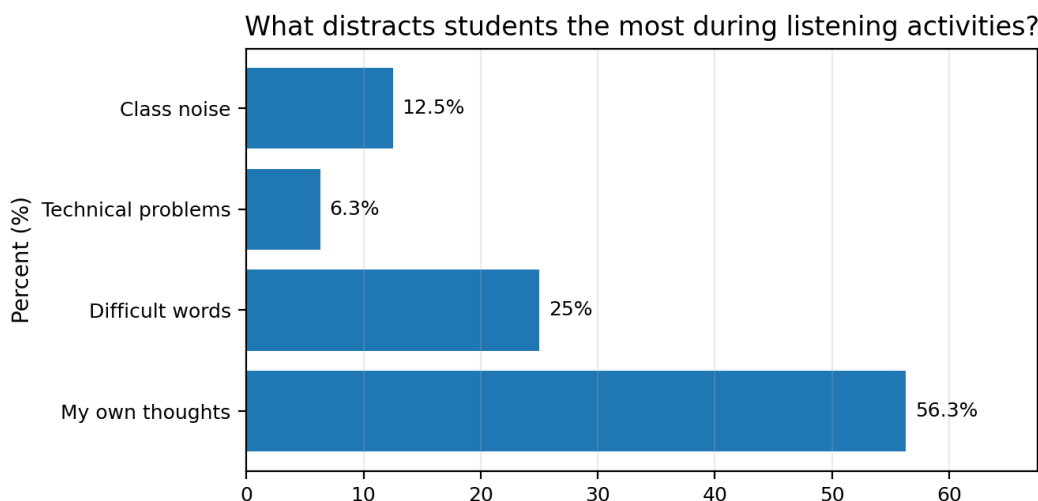
Diagram 2. Main affective factors for students

When students do not understand one word, 62.5% sometimes feel nervous and 25% always feel nervous, while only 12.5% do not feel nervous. This indicates that many students are sensitive to small difficulties during listening. Missing one word can make them panic, lose confidence, and stop following the rest of the audio. As a result, they may miss important information and their overall comprehension becomes weaker. This also shows that students tend to focus too much on individual words instead of the general meaning.



**Diagram 3. How missing words can affect students' performance**

The biggest distraction for students is their own thoughts (56.3%), compared to difficult words (25%), class noise (12.5%), and technical problems (6.3%). This clearly shows that internal distraction is more serious than external factors. Students may start thinking about previous mistakes, worrying about understanding, or comparing themselves with others, which prevents them from focusing on the listening task. This kind of overthinking reduces their ability to stay present and follow the audio step by step.

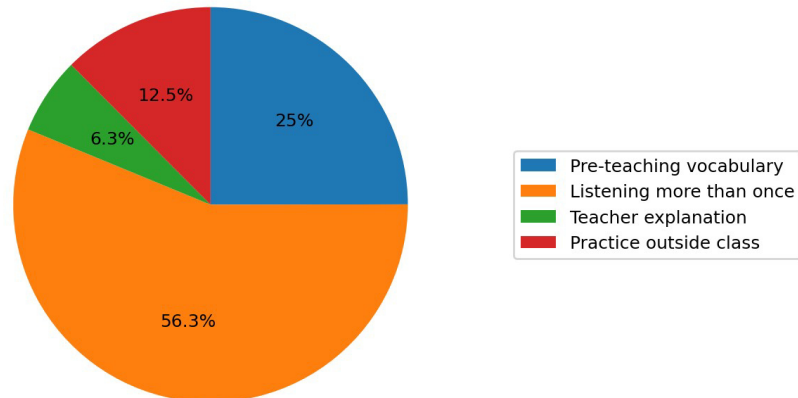


**Diagram 4. What distracts students the most?**

Most students (56.3%) said that listening more than once helps them understand better. This shows that repetition is very important for improving comprehension and reducing stress. Pre-teaching vocabulary was chosen by 25% of students, which means that preparation before listening can also support understanding and increase confidence. A smaller number of students preferred practice outside class (12.5%) and teacher explanation (6.3%), showing that independent practice and clear guidance are helpful but not used by many students regularly. In addition, the results

suggest that students rely more on in-class support than on independent strategies. They feel more comfortable when tasks are guided and repeated, which helps reduce their anxiety. This also means that teachers play an important role in creating a supportive environment and organizing listening tasks in a way that reduces pressure.

What helps students understand listening better?



**Diagram 5. Certain strategies help listening understanding**

Overall, the results show that listening difficulties are mainly caused by anxiety and loss of concentration rather than only a lack of vocabulary knowledge. Internal factors such as nervousness, overthinking, and lack of confidence play a bigger role than external problems like noise or technical issues. These findings suggest that teachers should not only focus on teaching listening content, but also help students feel more relaxed, confident, and focused. Using strategies such as repeated listening, pre-teaching vocabulary, and creating a supportive classroom environment can help reduce anxiety and improve students' listening performance.

### DISCUSSION

When students followed the "Double Listening with Focus" method, they became more relaxed and focused during listening tasks. It helped them understand the general idea first instead of worrying about every single word. This reduced their anxiety and made listening easier for them compared to the traditional method. Listening more than once allowed students to process information step by step. They did not panic when they missed something and were able to recover their attention during the second listening. This shows that repetition plays an important role in improving listening comprehension.

The method also helped students develop better listening habits. Instead of translating word by word, they started focusing on the overall meaning. This improved their confidence and made them more active during the lesson. Group discussions also supported their learning, as students could share ideas and correct each other. This research shows that simple strategies like repetition, pre-teaching vocabulary, and giving clear instructions can reduce anxiety and improve students' performance. It proves that emotional factors are as important as language knowledge in listening. However, the study was conducted with a small group of students and only for a short period of time. Because of this, it may not fully show long-term improvement in listening skills. More time and a larger group of participants could give more reliable results.

### CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that listening anxiety and distraction significantly affect EFL students' comprehension. Applying strategies such as the "Double Listening with Focus" method, pre-teaching vocabulary, and structured repetition can help reduce these emotional barriers and

improve students' understanding. Students became more confident, attentive, and capable of processing spoken information without excessive worry about missing individual words. Although the study was limited by its small sample size and short duration, the findings highlight the importance of addressing both cognitive and affective factors in listening instruction. Future research with larger groups and longer interventions could further validate these methods and support the development of more effective strategies to enhance listening skills in EFL classrooms.

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