



Learning Autonomy and Challenges in Mastering English Listening Skills: EFL Learners' Voices

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Abstract. Language instruction has changed with online education, enabling self-learning. Listening abilities are crucial to language acquisition, and task-based language teaching can improve EFL students' autonomy. This study seeks to a) Determine the effectiveness of technology-mediated TBLT on learners' autonomy in listening comprehension and b) Explore the challenges of acquiring listening skills. Mixed methods were conducted using Likert scale surveys for quantitative data and open-ended survey questions for qualitative data. 81 EFL students in the second year at English education department participated in this study. According to the research, EFL learners believe they can study independently through online assignments, especially in listening subjects. The results reveal that Online assignments are viable for self-directed learning, but opinions vary. EFL learners study daily content and complete online listening activities quickly, although opinions differ, as seen by the more significant standard deviation. The challenges the learners encounter in mastering listening skills include pronunciation, unfamiliar vocabulary, comprehension, technical issues, motivation, interactivity, digital literacy, speech rate, and time management. Targeted methods and support are needed to address these issues.

Keywords: Learning Autonomy, Mastering English, Listening Skill, EFL Learner.

1. Introduction

The shift towards online education has revolutionized language instruction, offering new possibilities for autonomous learning. The digital era has revolutionized education, giving rise to online platforms that facilitate flexible and accessible learning experiences. Language acquisition, a cornerstone of education, is no exception.

Listening skills play a pivotal role in language acquisition, and incorporating task-based approaches in an online setting may prove to be a promising avenue for enhancing autonomous learning. With the burgeoning popularity of online education, it becomes

imperative to investigate methodologies that enhance language skills and empower learners to take control of their language acquisition journey(1–4).

Autonomy in language learning is recognized as a key factor in long-term proficiency. Online platforms present an ideal environment for implementing task-based approaches, offering learners opportunities to engage with authentic listening tasks that mirror real-life scenarios. Autonomy in language learning refers to the ability of learners to take charge of their learning process, make informed decisions, and set individualized goals. Empowering learners with autonomy has been recognized as a crucial factor in achieving long-term language proficiency (5).

TBLT emphasizes the use of authentic language tasks to facilitate language learning. Tasks engage learners in meaningful communication and are aligned with real-life situations, making them a suitable approach for language acquisition (6). Online language instruction provides flexibility and accessibility, making it an attractive option for learners. Technology integration in language teaching has opened new avenues for implementing innovative pedagogical approaches.

Therefore, this study aims to: a) Investigate the effectiveness of Technology-mediated TBLT on learners' autonomy in mastering listening comprehension and b) Delve the challenges in mastering listening skills using Technology-mediated TBLT.

2. Methods

Research Design

This study investigates the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners regarding their autonomy in learning and the challenges they encounter in developing listening skills. This research employed a mixed-methods approach, utilizing Likert scale surveys to gather quantitative data and open-ended survey questions to obtain qualitative data.

Participants

The study included 81 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, comprising 27 male and 54 female participants. These students were enrolled in two classrooms during their second year. The aforementioned EFL students have undergone a two-semester period of technology-mediated Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in the context of listening classes. This instruction was provided in both Elementary and Intermediate listening classes.

Research Instrumentation

The research instruments utilized in this study consist of a Likert scale of seven items. These items were designed to assess participants' experiences in acquiring proficiency in listening comprehension through the implementation of Technology-mediated Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Participants were administered a set of Likert scale questions requiring them to rate their responses on a 5-point scale ranging from "never" to "always." Furthermore, open-ended questions were carefully included to facilitate participants' provision of comprehensive and detailed responses, enabling a thorough exploration of the challenges EFL learners face in mastering listening comprehension using technology-based learning tasks. Before the main survey, a pilot test and expert judgments were conducted with a small sample to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the survey instrument.

Data Collection Procedure

The participants were requested to complete the survey electronically using the Microsoft form platform. The survey consisted of three components: an ethical protocol that prioritized informed permission and anonymity, a demographic survey, and a Likert scale questionnaire, together with open-ended questions.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from Likert scale responses was analysed using SPSS 25, providing numerical insights into participants' perceptions (number of participants, mean, and standard deviation). Meanwhile, qualitative data from open-ended responses were analysed using NVivo 12 as thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and nuanced insights.

3. Results and Discussions

Participants' experiences in acquiring proficiency in listening comprehension through the implementation of Technology-mediated TBLT

The results of the Likert scale questionnaire reveal valuable insights into their perceptions and behaviors regarding their learning autonomy in mastering listening skills regarding the implementation of technology-mediated TBLT which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' experiences in acquiring proficiency in listening comprehension through the implementation of Technology-mediated TBLT

Category	Number of Participants	Mean	Std. Deviation
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EFL learners can learn independently by listening to subject materials and doing online assignments.	81	3.6543	.77718
EFL learners usually make a plan and think of the best way to carry out the online-based listening comprehension task	81	4.1975	.84291
EFL learners invest time in studying daily material and completing online listening tasks in a timely manner.	81	3.7778	.94868
EFL learners were able to learn listening lessons on their own using both teacher-made and YouTube videos provided by the instructor.	81	3.9259	.81820
EFL learners use lecturers' input to revise their assignments and monitor their progress.	81	4.4074	.89132
Using task-based listening learning activities allows me to interact and collaborate with learners meaningfully.	81	3.7407	.98460
EFL learners feel comfortable using digital tools to do listening comprehension learning activities.	81	4.1111	.93541

EFL learners can learn independently by using listening subject materials and online assignments

On average, participants scored 3.65 out of 5, indicating a moderate agreement that EFL learners are capable of independent learning using online assignments related to listening subject materials. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a degree of consensus among participants regarding this statement. This first finding suggests that EFL learners, on average, believe they can learn independently using listening subject materials and online assignments (Mean = 3.6543). While the mean indicates a moderate agreement, the relatively low standard deviation (0.77718) implies a certain level of consensus among participants. This finding implies that EFL learners may perceive online assignments as a viable tool for self-directed learning. This study yielded results that support the findings of prior research that online learning with autonomy assignments enhances learning effectiveness as well as efficiency by fostering a more personalized and focused learning experience (7).

EFL learners usually make a plan and think of the best way to carry out the online-based listening comprehension task

Participants, on average, strongly agree (mean of 4.20) that they usually make a plan and think strategically about the best way to approach online-based listening comprehension tasks. The higher standard deviation indicates a more comprehensive range of opinions among participants, but the mean suggests a generally positive perception of planning behavior. The second result indicates a strong agreement among participants that they usually make a plan and think strategically when approaching online-based listening comprehension tasks (Mean = 4.1975). This finding, coupled with a moderate standard deviation (0.84291), suggests a generally positive and consistent perception among participants regarding the importance of planning in the context of online learning activities.

EFL learners invest time in studying daily material and completing online listening tasks in a timely manner

The mean score of 3.78 indicates a moderate agreement that EFL learners invest time in daily study and complete online listening tasks promptly. Consistent with the current findings, prior research has shown that online language learning tasks have been widely seen to promote learner autonomy in language lessons, allowing students to have control over their learning and facilitating real interactions (8).

EFL learners were able to learn the listening lesson on their own using both teacher-made and YouTube videos provided by the instructor

With a mean of 3.93, participants expressed a moderate agreement that they were able to learn listening lessons independently using both teacher-made and YouTube videos provided by the instructor. The standard deviation indicates a relatively consistent level of agreement among participants. The fourth finding indicates a moderate agreement that EFL learners were able to learn listening lessons independently using both teacher-made and YouTube videos (Mean = 3.9259). The standard deviation (0.81820) suggests a relatively consistent level of agreement, indicating that participants see value in a variety of learning resources.

EFL learners use input from lecturers to make revisions to assignments and monitor their own progress

The high mean of 4.41 suggests a strong agreement among participants that they use input from lecturers to make revisions and monitor their own progress. The standard deviation indicates a relatively consistent consensus among participants. The fifth finding reveals a strong agreement that EFL learners use input from lecturers to make revisions to assignments and monitor their own progress (Mean = 4.4074). The standard deviation (0.89132) suggests a moderate range of responses, but overall, participants seem to highly value the feedback loop between themselves and their instructors for self-improvement.

Using task-based listening learning activities allows learners to interact and collaborate with peers meaningfully.

Interpretation: Participants moderately agree (mean of 3.74) that using task-based listening learning activities facilitates meaningful interaction and collaboration with peers. The higher standard deviation suggests a somewhat more diverse range of opinions on this statement. The sixth finding suggests a moderate agreement that task-based listening learning activities facilitate meaningful interaction and collaboration with peers (Mean = 3.7407). The higher standard deviation (0.98460) indicates a broader range of opinions, suggesting that while some learners find value in collaborative activities, others may not perceive them as equally beneficial.

EFL learners feel comfortable using digital tools to do listening comprehension learning activities

With a mean of 4.11, participants generally agree that they feel comfortable using digital tools for listening comprehension activities. The standard deviation indicates a moderate range of responses, with some participants expressing stronger agreement than others. The final finding highlights that EFL learners, on average, feel comfortable using digital tools for listening comprehension activities (Mean = 4.1111). The standard deviation (0.93541) indicates a moderate level of variation in responses, implying that while many learners feel at ease with digital tools, some may have reservations or differing comfort levels. EFL Learners' Challenges in Mastering Listening Comprehension through Technology-Based Listening Learning Tasks

Inferences from the provided data suggest that challenges related to language skills, both in terms of pronunciation ability (22%) and unfamiliar vocabulary (16%), are the most prevalent issues students face in online learning environments. Additionally, difficulties with understanding learning materials (14%) and technical or Internet connection issues (12%) are significant concerns. The data also indicates that factors such as students' low motivation (8%), a less interactive online learning environment (8%), and a lack of comprehension of teachers' instructions (8%) contribute to the overall challenges faced by students. Furthermore, issues related to digital literacy skills (4%), a fast speech rate (4%), and time management (3%) are relatively less common but still noteworthy challenges in the context of online education. This suggests a multifaceted landscape of obstacles students encounter in online learning, emphasizing the need for comprehensive strategies to address these varied challenges. Online learning has become an integral part of education, especially recently. While it offers flexibility and accessibility, several challenges can impede the learning process for students. This discussion will delve into various obstacles faced by students in the online learning environment and propose effective strategies to overcome them.

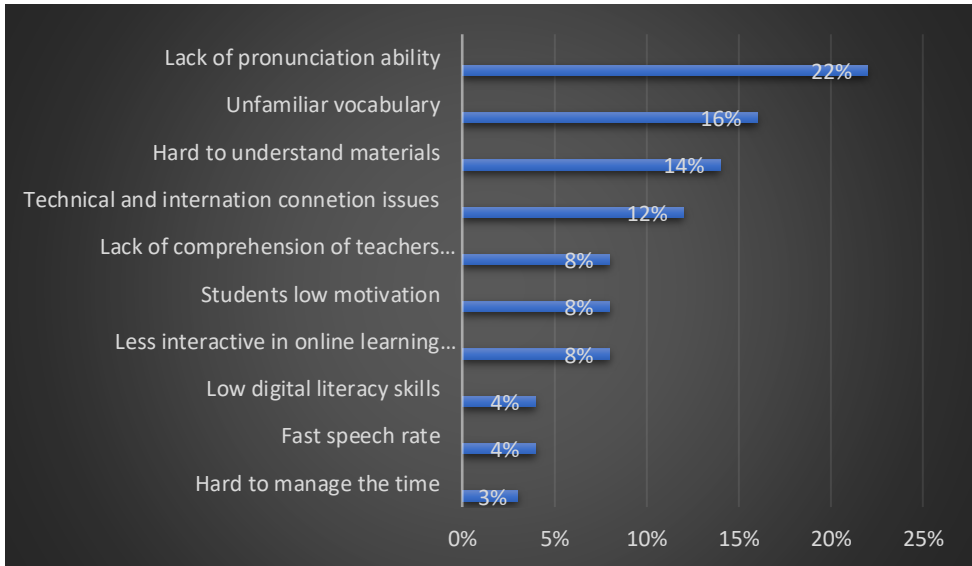


Fig 1. EFL Learners' Challenges in Mastering Listening Skills using technology-mediated TBLT

Lack of Pronunciation Ability

One of the significant challenges students face is the lack of pronunciation ability, which can hinder effective communication. This issue may arise due to the absence of face-to-face interactions. To address this, educators can incorporate pronunciation exercises in virtual language labs and encourage peer-to-peer communication to enhance students' spoken language skills (9).

Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Encountering unfamiliar vocabulary is a common challenge, particularly in subjects with specialized terminology. This finding corroborates the previous study on the difficulties of listening comprehension because students prioritize comprehending the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary in the text rather than emphasizing the vocabulary functions (9). To solve this problem, EFL teachers can employ various techniques such as pre-teaching key terms, providing glossaries, and integrating vocabulary-building activities into lessons. These strategies help students grasp and retain new words more effectively.

Hard-to-Understand Materials

Complex or poorly presented learning materials can lead to frustration and hinder comprehension. Educators should prioritize clear and concise content, use multimedia resources, and provide additional explanations when necessary. Students should also be encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification to enhance their understanding.

Technical and Internet Connection Issues

Technical challenges, including poor internet connectivity, can disrupt the learning process. Institutions should work to provide technical support, ensure access to necessary resources, and offer alternative methods of content delivery (e.g., downloadable materials). Educators can also create contingency plans for students facing persistent technical issues.

Lack of Comprehension of Teachers' Instructions

Students may struggle to understand instructions in the absence of immediate clarification. Teachers should offer detailed instructions, use multiple communication channels (e.g., written and verbal), and be readily available for questions. Clear communication helps students navigate assignments and assessments more effectively.

Students' Low Motivation

Maintaining motivation in an online learning environment can be challenging. Educators should incorporate engaging and relevant content, foster a sense of community through virtual discussions and collaborative projects, and provide constructive feedback to keep students motivated. Recognizing and rewarding achievements can also boost motivation.

Less Interactive in Online Learning Environment

The lack of face-to-face interaction can lead to a less engaging learning environment. Educators can leverage virtual breakout sessions, discussion forums, and collaborative online tools to enhance interactivity. Encouraging group projects and peer collaboration fosters a sense of community among students.

Low Digital Literacy Skills

Some students may struggle with the technical aspects of online learning platforms. Institutions should offer digital literacy training, tutorials, and support to enhance students' proficiency in using online tools. Clear instructions on platform navigation and technical troubleshooting can alleviate this challenge.

Fast Speech Rate

Fast-paced lectures or discussions may pose a challenge, especially for non-native speakers. Educators should be mindful of their speech rate, provide transcripts or subtitles for recorded content, and encourage students to communicate their pace preferences. This ensures that all students can follow the learning materials effectively.

Hard to Manage Time

Effective time management is crucial in online learning. Students should be equipped with time management skills, and educators can provide guidance on creating schedules, setting priorities, and avoiding procrastination. Additionally, institutions can offer workshops on time management strategies to support students in this aspect.

4. Conclusions

Addressing the challenges in online learning requires a collaborative effort from educators, institutions, and students. By implementing the proposed strategies, educational stakeholders can create a more inclusive and supportive online learning environment, ensuring that students overcome obstacles and achieve academic success. These findings underscore the diverse landscape of self-directed learning experiences among EFL learners. The strong agreement regarding strategic planning and engagement with lecturer feedback suggests the importance of these elements in fostering effective self-directed learning. However, the variations in agreement across different aspects of self-directed learning highlight the need for personalized approaches that cater to individual preferences and learning styles. Further research could delve into understanding the factors influencing EFL learners' attitudes and behaviours towards self-directed learning. Exploring how various teaching methodologies and digital tools impact their perceptions could provide educators with valuable insights for designing more effective and tailored learning experiences.

Authors Contributions

All authors contributed to the design and implementation of the research, to the analysis of the results and to the writing of the manuscript.

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