EFL College Students' Perceptions of the Difficulties of Comprehending Academic English Lectures

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Abstract

Students' perceptions of the difficulties of comprehending academic English lectures affect their academic learning. Therefore, the present study is designed to explore EFL college female undergraduate students' perceptions of the difficulties of comprehending academic English lectures to bring to light those factors that affect students' academic performance and suggest solutions to overcome them. Participants were 365 female college students picked randomly from various grade levels enrolled in a four-year pre-service teacher education program at the College of Basic Education in Kuwait. The study adopted a descriptive design employing Likert's five-point scale assigned under two factors: linguistic difficulties and non-linguistic difficulties. Independent variables include age, nationality, grade level and GPA. Results showed that students' difficulties were at a medium level. Significant differences were observed for nationality, grade level and GPA. Implications and recommendations for future research were discussed.

Keywords

listening comprehension difficulties, listening to academic English lectures, EFL students' listening problems, lecture comprehension

1. Introduction

Listening to Academic English lectures is one of the most challenging skills that EFL college students need to be equipped with to succeed at higher education and post-graduate studies (Huang, 2006; Lei et al., 2010; Moradi, 2012; Miller, 2014; Rouhi et al., 2014; Civan, Coskun, & Reynald, 2016). Rubin (1995, p. 151) defines listening as "an active process in which a listener selects and interprets information which comes from auditory and visual clues in order to define what is going on and what the speakers are trying to express". Huang (2005) asserts that it is one element of academic learning. Listening helps enrich students' vocabulary and improve their language proficiency and language usage

(Barker, 1971; Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Huy, 2015).

To support this assumption, Lin and Morrison (2010) tested 762 Hong Kong Chinese university students for their receptive and productive vocabulary. Results showed that students who had their secondary education in English medium schools outperformed those who had their secondary education in Chinese medium schools. The latter were likely to encounter difficulty in trying to comprehend English academic lectures. Thus, students' success in higher education is linked to their English language proficiency (Khajavi & Gordani, 2010).

In a study by Powers (Huang, 2005), when American and Canadian professors of Engineering, Psychology, Chemistry, Computer Science, English and Business were asked to rate the four skills in degree of importance for international students' success, they rated listening and speaking the highest. Moreover, EFL students, who differ from ESL students in their amount of exposure to English in the environment, face a double challenge. Not only do they need to grasp the content knowledge of a lecture, they must also make sense of the language.

Lecturing is one of the areas of academic listening that EFL students face daily at college or university. As defined, lecturing is a monologue from an instructor to a large group of students in a lecture hall (Miller, 2014). The purpose of academic lectures is "to teach content matter and to have information presented, understood and remembered" (Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Huang, 2005, p. 555). The organization of a lecture affects its comprehensibility. Effective lectures usually have an introduction, a body and a conclusion (Diamond et al., 1983; Huang, 2005). Students need to have some background knowledge, to be able to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information, to be able to identify the topic and objective of the lecture, follow topic development and understand the role of discourse markers.

Thus, EFL college students usually find listening to academic English lectures frustrating (Huang, 2006; Rouhi et al., 2014; Rahimirad & Moini, 2015). Difficulties can be grouped under three categories:

1) difficulties related to EFL college students themselves, such as lacking the necessary academic vocabulary in relation to their discipline (Flowerdew & Miller, 1996; Benesch, 1998; Khajavi & Gordani, 2010) and lacking background knowledge and shortage of their working memory (Rouhi et al., 2014);

2) difficulties related to the English academic lecture itself as to the complexity of its syntactic structure, amount of redundancy, poor organization, speed of delivery, and the strange accent of the lecturer (Hayati, 2010; Miller, 2014); and

3) difficulties related to the EFL context; for example, lack of exposure to the language and lack of sufficient language practice as a result of time constraints (Khajavi & Gordani, 2010; Rouhi et al., 2014; Huy, 2015).

In spite of the above, listening to academic English lectures is one of the topics that has been rarely researched (Carrier, 1999; Buck, 2001; Chen, 2005; Herath & Qutub, 2012). One of the reasons for this might be the belief that listening skill can be acquired while students listen to the second language

being spoken in the classroom (Schmidt & Rinehart, 1992). Most of the studies in this area were interested in strategy rather than listening training (O'Malley et al., 2008; Khaldi, 2013; Huy, Rahimirad, & Moini, 2015). Some investigated listening to texts rather than academic lectures (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Huy, 2015). Others focused on difficulties of listening to academic English lectures in general, not specific to language (Nizkodubov et al., 2015). Moreover, a large number of those studies were done in ESL context (Huang, 2005; Jeon, 2007; Yuan, 2008; Talita, 2009; Selamal, Sidhu, & Lynch, 2011), and only a few were done in EFL. Some studies were also conducted on engineering, science, computer science, math or business students (Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Navaz, 2013; Akimovna & Kanatovna, 2015), but only a few were conducted using English-major students. In addition, some of those studies focused on first-year students and ignored other grade levels (Yousif, 2006; Hamouda, 2013).

For the above reasons and because academic listening is a deep-rooted practice at universities and colleges, it deserves its own research. Thus, the present study intends to investigate female EFL college students' perceptions regarding the difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures. Students are challenged by their low proficiency level and the need to comprehend academic English lectures above their competence level. The aim is to detect sources of difficulty with the expectation of finding new, previously unforeseen obstacles that EFL students from a different socio-cultural background may encounter, in order to add to the literature. Research results might help to develop awareness of students' listening comprehension difficulties and to suggest ways to improve instruction of academic listening. Hopefully, students can be brought to rethink their own difficulties and suggest possible solutions.

2. Theoretical Background

College students who attend English academic lectures on a daily basis need to be equipped with a level of proficiency that allows them to cope with such a challenging task. Thus, Cummins (Mozayan, 2015) talks about two kinds of proficiencies: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS allow the students to engage in conversational interactions with their friends—in other words, to socialize. It is cognitively undemanding and context-embedded vocabulary for informal situations in which meaning is clear. CALP, on the other hand, involves a higher level of proficiency that allows students to comprehend academic lectures. Lectures, according to Cummins (Mozayan, 2015), are cognitively demanding and context-reduced. The language used is very abstract and specialized according to the subject. Students need to analyze, synthesize, categorize and infer. They need to know how to think critically and be able to understand abstract concepts (Collier, 1987; Mozayan, 2015). According to Bloom's Taxonomy (revised, 2001), students in higher education need to exceed the understanding and remembering stage of higher level thinking skills—for example, application, analysis, evaluation and creation—at which they are expected to produce new or original work.

468

3. The Educational Background

Education in Kuwait is obligatory from primary through secondary school. It consists of four levels: kindergarten (two years), primary school (five years), intermediate school (four years) and secondary school (three years). All levels of education, including higher education, are free for students. There are two ministries responsible for education: the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for public and private schools, and the Ministry of Higher Education, which is responsible for Kuwait University and the colleges. At public schools, English is taught as a subject for forty minutes a day, five days a week. English is not usually used outside the classroom. Therefore, students' only chance to practice it is inside the classroom. Most Kuwaiti students study in public schools with Arabic curricula. Private schools are divided between Arabic medium schools following Kuwait's national curriculum and foreign language schools. In higher education, on the other hand, there are four colleges. One of them is The College of Basic Education in PAAET (Public Authority for Applied Education and Training), in which this study is conducted. PAAET was established in 1982 to become a vocational and technical training institution. One of its divisions is the College of Basic Education (CBE). The English Department at CBE introduced a new program, Teaching English for Young Learners (TEYLS), in 2002 for the degree of B.Ed. in English. This program requires four years of study, and students who graduate from it become primary school English teachers. Students need to pass 130 Credit Hours. The English major has 60 Credit Hours, including 12 credits for Basic Language Skills, 21 for theoretical and applied linguistics, 12 credits for Literature and 15 credits for English as a Foreign/Second Language. Students also need to take two French language courses in partial fulfillment of the General Education requirements. To enter the department, students need to have a high school certificate and pass an interview and an Admission Test carried out by the department.

4. Statement of the Problem

Teaching English in Kuwait public schools focuses on teaching and testing vocabulary and grammar. The most taught skills are reading and writing. With a classroom of 35 to 40 students, the teacher can hardly teach her or his content. Time constraints play a significant role. The time spent on listening is very short compared to reading and writing. Listening and speaking are the most neglected skills when it comes to testing by both teachers and administrators. Teachers are not trained in how to teach these skills. And students listen most of the time to the teacher, who is a non-native speaker. Of course, teachers also use their first language (i.e., Arabic) to save themselves time and to support students' comprehension. In addition, students hardly ever have a chance to hear native English speakers. They are exposed to English only in the classroom. Once they leave the classroom, they use Arabic. This means that students are not accustomed to hearing native English pronunciation. They are used to a slow rate of speech with lots of redundancy, paraphrasing and translation. The naturalness of second-language speech is missing in the classroom. In addition, the kind of vocabulary used is common, regular and informal—that which is usually used in social contexts. As a result, once these

469

students join college, they become overwhelmed by the academic vocabulary needed to cope with and succeed in their studies. Thus, the present study attempts to investigate female EFL college students' perceptions of the difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures. As the College of Basic Education is divided into two separate buildings male and female and the researcher teaches at the female section, this study is interested in female students only.

5. Literature Review

Learning a foreign language is not easy, especially for those who are rarely exposed to it in their daily lives. Students whose educational background is centered on teaching reading and writing with extra focus on vocabulary and grammar are unprepared for the challenges of EFL graduate work. Most of these students' objective is to study and pass the exam in order to get a job. There are rarely those who wish to continue their postgraduate studies abroad. This appraisal is verified by Khajavi and Gordani (2010), who investigated Iranian MA students' (from different faculties) perceptions of their academic English language needs and problems. They found that students reported that their problems were the result of inadequate secondary school programs and insufficient time given to the teaching of English. Teachers focused on grammar and used their first language (L1) most of the time. Learners also understood the importance of and need for listening during their academic lectures. This finding is further substantiated by Tahririan and Mazdayasua (2008), who explored Iranian undergraduate nursery and midwifery students' English language learning needs. Questionnaire results showed that students believed that they needed to master English language before taking their ESP courses. They thought they needed English to help them cope with their subject matter. Instructors also reported their dissatisfaction with students' proficiency level in English.

It seems that not only do students from different disciplines face difficulties with their academic listening, but so do those who have recently entered college—that is, freshman and first-year students who are not yet accustomed to the speech rate and naturalness of the second language. This finding is supported by Civan and Coskun (2016), who examined the influence of the medium of instruction (i.e., language) on the academic success of Turkish university students. Results revealed students in English degree programs were doing poorly compared to their counterparts in Turkish programs. This problem is given prominence in the freshman years but reduced over time. Interestingly enough, this difficulty lingered with fourth-year students.

In an EFL context, students are deprived of hearing native language. They are not used to the speed of delivery, the syntactic structure, the accents of the speakers, or the quality and quantity of the vocabulary. They are surprised once they enter college, where they are expected to perform at a proficiency level expected of a graduate student in all the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the EFL program, they need not only to deal with the specialized vocabulary in their discipline, but also with the content knowledge. This along with other factors—such as the instructor, the structure of the lecture, the lecture hall, their classmates and themselves—contribute to the problem

470

of comprehending academic lectures (Moradi, 2012; Miller, 2014; Rouhi et al., 2014; Huy, 2015). For example, investigating Chinese students' academic listening problems at an American university, Huang (2006) found students' weakest skills were listening and speaking. Because of vocabulary deficiency, 92% of them face difficulties understanding lectures, and 88% reported understanding only 50% of the lecture. Similarly, to examine university professors' views on ESL students' difficulties with listening from a variety of academic disciplines, Ferris and Tag (1996) reported all professors saying that their students had difficulties with listening comprehension.

The above barriers to comprehending academic lectures can be grouped into linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Some researchers reported both impediments in their research. For example, Flowerdew and Miller (1992) studied the perceptions, problems and strategies of 30 first-year Hong Kong Chinese university students. They found that students were not familiar with the formal English lecture-monologue. In addition, the speed of delivery of the lecture was an obstacle. They had problems with the new vocabulary, concepts and new terminology. Students found ideas and concepts hard to grasp. They had no background knowledge about the topics and had difficulties in concentrating because the lecture was long and was not followed by a question-and-answer session. Moreover, their classmates' talking caused them to lose concentration. They reported being sick and not having enough sleep along with all the above factors as possible causes for not understanding the lecture.

More difficulties were reported by Goh (2000), who investigated listening comprehension problems of EFL students at college and found that students were unable to recognize words they knew, to concentrate on part of the sentence and leave out the rest, unable to chunk speech, quickly forget what they heard, unable to make a mental picture of what they heard, understand the words but not the message, and are unable to find the key ideas in the speech. Similarly, Chen (2005) explored the difficulties faced by 64 fourth-year students studying at a college in Taiwan while learning listening comprehension strategies. Results showed a number of difficulties, such as listening for every word, non-purposeful listening, focusing on familiar words only and translating from English to Chinese. Other problems were inability to identify a spoken word, inability to recall the meanings of words, inability to identify linking words, speed of delivery, memory limitation, problems with the length of the lecture, physical fatigue, limited English vocabulary, problems with grammar, clarity of voice and unfamiliar accents. Furthermore, at a US university, Jeon (2007) researched the effects of content knowledge and second language (L2) listening proficiency on academic listening comprehension of 141 non-native speakers of English. Students reported their need for content knowledge and L2 listening proficiency. They further reported speed of delivery and incomprehensible pronunciation as obstacles. Other factors were lack of visual aids, lack of motivation, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, bad listening habits and inadequate teaching skills. On similar grounds, Rahimirad and Moini (2015) explored the difficulties of listening to academic lectures and found subjects having problems with listening as a result of speed of delivery and native accent. Other problems reported were inability to concentrate for a long time, unfamiliar vocabulary and using only bottom-up processing to guess

471

meaning. The authors relate the problems to students' low proficiency in English, including listening skills.

Other researchers were more concerned with non-linguistic factors. To explore what American classroom instructional factors affect 78 Chinese students' English academic listening, Huang (2005) reported a number of factors, such as lecture organization, not following the textbook, unclear blackboard writing, lecture summary, amount of student participation and group work. Noticeably, undergraduates had more problems in lecture comprehension than graduates. In the same way, in Iran, Gilakjan and Ahmadi (2011) investigated the effect of text familiarity on listening comprehension of 60 university students. They found that text familiarity and background knowledge helped learners understand listening texts.

Other researchers focused on linguistic factors. To explore Hong Kong undergraduate students' perceptions of the importance of English for academic success, Hyland (1997) found that students believed that their language skills were inadequate to guarantee success. These perceptions increased as they progressed in their studies. Students also reported deficiency in their reading and listening skills. They believed that specialist vocabulary is essential for success in their field of study. They further added that English is more important than subject knowledge and reported their inability to process large amounts of English language in lectures. In the same vein, Graham (2006) concluded from his study on students' perspectives of listening comprehension that students believed that listening was the most difficult skill in language learning. They suffered from the speed of delivery of speech, missing key words and the strange accent of the speaker as a result of not getting enough exposure to native English. Similarly, Evans and Green (2007) gave a questionnaire to 5000 Cantonese undergraduate students from 26 departments and found that students face difficulties when they study their major subjects in English. They suffer particularly from insufficient vocabulary knowledge. In addition, to investigate which language skills are the most difficult for graduate and undergraduate students, Berman and Cheng (2010) found that students with lower GPAs had more problems with their English. The most difficulty was understanding vocabulary in their major disciplines. Likewise, Eslami (2010) studied the problematic areas in EAP programs in Iran. Questionnaire results of 693 EAP students and 37 instructors showed different perceptions of students and instructors. It also showed students lack academic proficiency in English. Difficulties reported were lack of academic vocabulary; slow reading; and poor listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills.

More comprehension problems were reported by Hayati (2010), who examined the effect of speech rate on listening comprehension of 108 Iranian EFL learners using a listening comprehension exam. Results showed learners' listening improved after exposure to natural speech rate. Hayati concluded that naturalness of speech matters in listening comprehension. In the same way, Terraschke and Wahid (2011) studied Chinese, Korean and Iranian university students' difficulties in listening to lectures. They pointed out that students had problems with understanding specialist vocabulary, following the lecturer, and understanding the socio-cultural context of some of the topics in their lectures. Notably,

472

these difficulties diminished after a few months as students got used to listening to the lecturer.

Although the above studies attempted to include most of the difficulties students encounter in listening to academic lectures, plenty is left to be explored. However, research on L2 listening comprehension is insufficient (Rahimirad & Moini, 2015) and needs to be researched systematically (Siegel, 2014); only recently did researchers and educationalists begin to investigate L2 learners' problems in listening comprehension. Added to that, most of the research involved investigating listening to texts (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Huy, 2015), while lecture comprehension is a newly researched topic, along with knowing that listening to lectures is different from listening to texts and places more challenges on students' cognition. Additionally, most of the above studies could not be generalized because of small sample size (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Huy, 2015), and a large number of them looked at subject majors other than English (Civan & Coskun, 2016). Some looked at ESL rather than EFL (Huang, 2006; Jeon, 2007), knowing that EFL students are the ones who encounter more challenges because of limited exposure to the language. Also, some studies only used quantitative methods (Berman, Cheng, & Eslami, 2010). Furthermore, there exists hardly any studies of students in Arab countries—specifically those in the Gulf area, which have a different educational system and socio-cultural background from other areas. Underwood (1989) states that students whose culture and education emphasize storytelling and oral communication have fewer difficulties than those who come from reading and book-based cultural and educational backgrounds. Added to this is the fact that only a few studies compared students' views with instructors' views to come up with more comprehensive results. Khajavi and Gordani (2010) assert that it would be promising to ask the professors about their opinions and compare them with those of the students.

Hence, the present study attempts to fill the gap in previous studies and add to the literature specifically regarding EFL female college students from the Gulf area. This study intends to discover other kinds of difficulties from a different socio-cultural context with more emphasis on linguistic difficulties in the hope of adding to the literature.

Looking into the challenges EFL female college students face during their listening to academic lectures would help students spot these challenges and develop strategies to overcome them. Instructors complain about students' low level of performance and students complain about instructors' style of lecturing. Knowing both parties' points of view would go along way into figuring out a common ground. Added to that, researching different cultures and educational systems may result in new findings. Comparing those cultures along with their challenges would further add to the literature of listening to academic lectures.

Lack of second-language listening research and the need for systematic investigation has been pointed out by a number of researchers (Mendelsohn, 1998; Siegel, 2014). It is the most neglected and the least understood aspect of language teaching (Buck, Gilakjan, & Ahmadi, 2011). Rahimirad and Moini (2015) further state the need for more quantitative and qualitative research with a larger sample size and with different levels of proficiency. Listening-comprehension research in academic contexts is poor

473

compared to other areas of research, and there exists a need for more quantitative studies with college students in EFL contexts (Jeon, 2007). Jeon (2007) further indicates that other variables may be discovered that were not detected in his study. Hence, the present study intends to investigate a previously neglected area: female EFL college students' perceptions of the difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures. It attempts to answer the following research questions:

1) What are female EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions of the difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures?

2) What are female EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions of the linguistic difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures?

3) What are female EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions of the non-linguistic difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures?

4) Are there significant differences between female EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions in relation to age, nationality, grade level and GPA?

5) Which of the following difficulties—linguistic or non-linguistic—affect female EFL undergraduate college students' listening comprehension the most?

6) What are the proposed solutions for these difficulties?

6. Method

6.1 Subjects

Three hundred and sixty-five female EFL college undergraduate students from different grade levels enrolled into a four-year program (TEYLS) at the College of Basic Education took part in the study during the spring semester 2017-2018. Two hundred eighty-nine of the participants were Kuwaitis and 76 (20.8) were non-Kuwaitis. The age range is between 21 and 25 years (Table 1). Also, 15 instructors (six males and nine females) from the English Department at the College of Basic Education participated in the study. Their experience in teaching at the college ranges from one year to 34 years. They also taught different courses such as methodology, linguistics, applied linguistics, literature and skills courses.

Table 1. Distribution of Sample

Independent Variables	No.	%
Age*		
20 and less	95	26.8
21-25	208	58.6
25 and more	52	14.6
Total	355	%100.0
Nationality		
Kuwaiti	289	79.2
Non-Kuwaiti	76	20.8
Total	365	%100.0
Grade Level		
First Grade	64	17.5

Second Grade	83	22.7
Third Grade	120	32.9
Fourth Grade	98	26.8
Total	365	%100
General GPA		
New	19	5.2
3.67 thru 4.00	36	9.9
3.50 thru 2.67	167	45.8
2.50 thru 1.67	119	32.6
1.50 AND LESS	24	6.6
Total	365	%100

* Variables where a few subjects did not provide information for, therefore, they were not counted during the tests of variables.

6.2 Instrument

A questionnaire was administered to determine the factors that contribute to EFL college students' perceptions of the difficulties in comprehending English academic lectures. Some of the questionnaire items were obtained from the literature (see, e.g., Flowerdew & Miller, 1992; Hyland, 1997; Berman & Cheng, 2010; Huang, 2013) and were adapted to suit the study context. The researcher also managed to collect female EFL college students' perceptions of the difficulties they faced during listening to English academic lectures prior to the study. Students' responses were used to make the final draft of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of four sections: the first section relates to demographic information—for example, date of birth, nationality, GPA and grade level. The second section consists of two multiple choice questions related to students' background education. The third section is devoted to the kinds of difficulties students faced during their listening to academic lectures and is divided into two subsections: linguistics factors (25 items) and non-linguistic factors (16 items). The fourth section is a self-evaluation of students' listening proficiency. The final section consists of one open-ended question asking students to suggest solutions to the difficulties of listening to English academic lectures, which addresses the final question of the study.

For validity purposes, the questionnaire was reviewed by two colleagues in the field. As a result, the questionnaire was revised and modified based on their comments. A 5-point Likert Scale was used for students' perceptions. Each item was rated on a scale from 1 to 5 (Never = 1, Rarely = 2, Sometimes = 3, Often = 4, Always = 5). A Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.92 has been recorded showing a high level of reliability of the scale.

6.3 Procedure

A pilot study was conducted on 32 students to check for clarity of the items. Consequently, some items were rewritten. Finally, the questionnaire was administered during the spring semester of the academic year 2017-2018 to the remaining 365 students.

7. Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to discuss the different variables. Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to indicate students' perceptions of the difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures from two perspectives, linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors. In addition, a t-test for significant differences was used to distinguish between the Kuwaiti and non-Kuwaiti groups in linguistic and non-linguistic factors also between the different grade levels and the different GPA levels in linguistic and non-linguistic factors.

For statistical description, students' difficulties were distributed into three levels: high, medium and low. For instance, the high value in Likert scale (i.e., 5.00) is deducted from the low value (i.e., 1.00) and divided by the three levels.

- 1.00 + 1.33 = 2.33
- 2.33 + 1.33 = 3.66
- 3.66 + 1.33 = 5.00

Thus, means are computed as the following:

- Numbers from 1 - 2.33signify a low value mean
- Numbers from 2.34 - 3.66signify a medium value mean
- Numbers from 3.67 - 5.00signify a high value mean

As for the open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire, some students approved the reasons for their problems mentioned in the questionnaire while others reported different reasons. The researcher performed a content-analysis procedure by grouping students' comments under major themes. Students' responses for the open-ended question were compared with the instructors' responses to look for significant differences.

8. Results and Discussion

At the beginning of the questionnaire, students were asked four multiple-choice questions as a self-evaluation of their listening comprehension abilities and their English proficiency level. The first question asked students to evaluate their performance level during their secondary school choosing one of four options (satisfactory-good-very good-excellent). Results showed those whose level was "satisfactory" have more linguistic listening comprehension difficulties (M = 3.71) than others. Similarly, those whose level is "satisfactory" and those whose level is "good" suffer from non-linguistic listening comprehension difficulties more than others (M = 3.25 - M = 3.27 respectively) (see Table 13, Appendix A). Remarkably, most students rated themselves very good (N = 163) or excellent (N = 114), which is consistent with other studies who found that students usually overestimate themselves (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992; Khajavi & Gordani, 2010).

Also, when students were asked if they studied English somewhere other than school, like "joined a language institute" or "an English private school" or "lived abroad" or "used to listen to English via media" or "none" those who chose "none" experienced more linguistic difficulties (M = 2.90). As for

non-linguistic difficulties, although the results were non-significant, those who chose "none" experienced more problems (see Table 14, Appendix A).

The next multiple choice question asked students how much they understand from a lecture. Students had to choose from three options, "a quarter of a lecture", "half of a lecture" or "the whole lecture". Results were significant; it seems that those who understand a quarter of a lecture have more linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties (M = 3.29, M = 3.41 respectively) (see Table 15, Appendix B). Significantly, most students (N = 196) understand half of the lecture only which points out difficulties in listening comprehension.

The last multiple choice question asked students to rate their listening proficiency. Students have to choose from "poor", "good", "very good" and "excellent". Results showed those who rated themselves as "poor" have more linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties than others (M = 3.68, M = 3.50) (see Table 16, Appendix B). As expected, students either rated themselves "very good" (N = 197) or "excellent" (N = 86), being unaware of their actual level, or the difficulties they face in listening to English lectures.

As to the first research question of this study, "What are EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions of the difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures?" students' responses to the questionnaire indicate that they face medium difficulty (M = 2.52 - M = 2.99), according to the two factors, linguistic and non-linguistic.

Table 2. General Mean and Standard Deviations for All the Factors

No.	Title	Mean	S.D.	Rank
1.	Linguistic Factors	2.52	1.13	Medium
2.	Non-Linguistic Factors	2.99	1.153	Medium

The means and standard deviations for the factors as displayed in Table 2

This can be justified by the fact that most of the sample (N = 218) were third- and fourth-year students who had more experience listening to academic English lectures and thus had fewer difficulties than second- and first-year students. This is supported by Civan and Coskun (2016), who reported from their study that freshman students face more difficulties in comprehending English academic lectures, and this difficulty is reduced over time.

Regarding the second research question about EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions of the linguistic difficulties that affect their comprehension of academic English lectures, Table 3 shows almost half the students face difficulties when the instructor speaks fast (M = 3.04). This is examined by Hayati (2010), who found that those exposed to a natural speech rate did better than those who were exposed to a slow speech rate. Hayati concluded that a natural speech rate is important for listening comprehension. The difficulty continues with understanding English vocabulary, as a large number of students (M = 2.92) reported their inability to understand English words during the lecture, which eventually affects their overall comprehension. This finding is acknowledged by most studies (Azmi et

477

al., 2014; Berman, Cheng, & Hayati, 2010). Students further reported that they are unable to understand theories in their field of study (M = 2.81). In academia and in school of education, student teachers are likely to encounter theories related to English language or teaching methodology, and this necessitates a good storage of vocabulary to help them cope (Cummins, 1979; Mozayan, 2015), while knowing that students often come from secondary schools barely equipped with academic vocabulary.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations for Female EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
1	I can't understand an English lecture if the instructor speaks fast.	3.04	1.167	Medium
2	I need the instructor to repeat the information as it gives me more time to process it.	2.72	1.035	Medium
3	I have difficulty understanding the vocabulary during English lectures.	2.92	1.023	Medium
4	I find difficulty understanding the purpose of the lecture.	2.27	1.070	Low
5	I translate English into Arabic, so it takes me time to understand what is said.	2.28	1.196	Low
6	It takes me time to understand theories as they are too abstract.	2.81	1.110	Medium

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' difficulties in understanding academic lectures in relation to linguistic factors, according to Table 3.

According to Table 4 below, students tried to justify their weakness in listening comprehension by stating that they do not speak English outside the classroom (M = 3.55). In an EFL context, English is taught as a subject for 40 minutes a day, five days a week. Students further said that they do not understand every word the instructor speaks in the classroom (M = 2.46). Time after time, students report their poor vocabulary as a listening comprehension difficulty. Again, this is confirmed in statement 10.

Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations for EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
7	I can't understand vocabulary in my field of study.	2.33	0.991	Low
8	I can't understand and follow a lecture from beginning to end with no listening problems.	2.35	1.141	Medium
9	I can't understand most of the main points of a lecture.	2.22	1.029	Low
10	I don't have enough vocabulary to help me understand academic English lectures.	2.38	1.117	Medium

| 11 | In Kuwait, we do not speak English outside the classroom. | 3.55 | 1.229 | Medium |
| 12 | I can't understand the meaning of every word used by the instructor. | 2.46 | 1.102 | Medium |

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' difficulties in understanding academic lectures in relation to linguistic factors, according to Table 4.

Regarding Table 5 below, Statement 13 justifies students' difficulties in listening related to the speed of delivery (M = 2.66), which also confirms statement 1 above. This problem is the result of not speaking English outside the classroom and the way students were taught by non-native speakers, who generally talk to them slowly with lots of paraphrasing, repetition and translation (Teng, 2001). Furthermore, a large number of students said that they pay attention only to familiar words (M = 2.64). This suggests that they do not guess or use the words they know to figure out the meaning of other words. They lack listening strategies to cope with academic lectures. Again, the educational system is the one to blame for this deficiency, according to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011).

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
13	I find it difficult to follow the instructor's speed and pronunciation.	2.66	1.164	Medium
14	The foreign accent of the instructor affects my understanding of the lecture.	2.46	1.105	Medium
15	I have difficulty in interpreting what I hear.	2.30	1.049	Low
16	I understand the words but not the intended message.	2.17	1.125	Low
17	I listen to every word said, so I miss the whole idea of the speech.	2.40	1.210	Medium
18	I only pay attention to familiar words, words that I know the meaning of.	2.64	1.381	Medium

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' difficulties in understanding academic lectures in relation to linguistic factors, according to Table 5.

Once more, students acknowledge their weakness when it comes to vocabulary. Statement 21 supports this finding, as when students said they knew the pronunciation of a word, but not its meaning. To understand a word, one must know not only its pronunciation, but also its meaning and use. This is again related to educational background and the emphasis by some educators on rote memorization of a large number of words taught outside their context. Focus is put on *spelling* rather than *communicative* use. This finding is supported by Khajavi and Gordani (2010) and Huy (2015), who reported from his study that testing of listening and speaking is often ignored by teachers at the expense of reading and writing. Students' inability to guess the meaning of new words is further confirmed in statement 24 (M

479

= 2.59). Similarly, when sentences are long, students often miss the meaning (statement 23). Students are unable to dissect the sentence, to look for key words, to pay attention to the message and to look for grammatical clues. This is the result of lack of strategy training and the fact that students are not used to natural speech by native speakers during their secondary education.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations for EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
19	I don't know the right pronunciation of most if the words that I know.	2.48	1.144	Medium
20	I don't pay attention to keywords in a lecture.	2.31	1.127	Low
21	I know the pronunciation of the word, but I forget what the word means.	2.75	1.029	Medium
22	My knowledge of grammar doesn't help me in understanding the meaning in lectures.	2.30	1.149	Low
23	When sentences get longer, I lose the meaning of what is said.	2.52	1.205	Medium
24	When I listen to a lecture, I can't guess the meaning of new words.	2.59	1.126	Medium
25	When I find it difficult to understand the topic of the lecture, I don't pay attention to what is said.	2.16	1.217	Low

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' difficulties in understanding academic lectures in relation to linguistic factors according to Table 6.

With respect to the third research question about EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions of nonlinguistic difficulties that affect their comprehension of academic English lectures, Table 7 highlights students' main difficulties in listening. For example, a great number of students lose concentration when the instructor uses one style in teaching, i.e., lecturing (M = 3.44). Students have asserted in the open-ended question later in the study that the style of lecturing alone is not effective. Unless they share in the discussion, students fail to understand what is being said. This is consistent with Huang (2005), who reported in his study that the amount of student participation affects students' listening comprehension. Bajak (2014) adds that the traditional mode of lecturing is shown to be ineffective at promoting student learning and preparing future teachers. Additionally, many students stated that when they do not understand the lecture, they ask their classmates (M = 3.41) rather than their instructor, which might be related to the instructor's tendency to be humiliating and de-motivating, as students reported (M = 3.14). This is further acknowledged in the student responses to the open-ended question.

Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations for EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Non-Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
6	I forget what I hear quickly because of so many new information at once.	3.04	1.097	Medium
27	The instructor's style in lecturing is de-motivating for the student.	3.14	1.107	Medium
28	I find it hard to concentrate when the lecture is late.	2.80	1.205	Medium
29	I find it hard to focus when the instructor uses lecturing only.	3.44	1.179	Medium
30	If I don't understand the lecture, I ask my classmates.	3.41	1.225	Medium

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' understanding academic lectures in relation to non-linguistic factors according to Table 7.

Similarly, many students believe that summarizing the main points in a lecture is necessary to guarantee comprehension (M = 3.43). Summarizing gives students more time to process and understand information by focusing on the most important part of the talk that the instructor wants the students to remember. Students further said that their instructors do not write on the board (M = 3.21). Students claim that writing on the board helps them to understand the lecture better. This suggests that students may have difficulty understanding what they hear. It also suggests that students are not familiar with the mode of lecturing at college; they still feel more familiar with their secondary-school mode, for which teachers write all the time, rather than speak. Many students added that they can't ask the instructor questions because they feel shy (M = 3.20). This is related to the culture and the social context in which students are raised. They feel that their classmates might laugh at them when they make mistakes, or the instructor might discourage them.

Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations for EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Non-Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
31	I feel shy to ask the instructor during the lecture.	3.20	1.352	Medium
32	I can't take notes freely during the lecture.	2.84	1.321	Medium
33	When the instructor talks, she/he doesn't write on the board.	3.21	1.102	Medium
34	The instructor's style in lecturing is not interesting.	3.14	1.050	Medium
35	The instructor doesn't summarize the main points at the end of the lecture.	3.43	1.169	Medium

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' difficulties in understanding academic lectures in relation to non-linguistic factors according to Table 8.

Table 9 continues to display students' listening difficulties. Many students report that their instructor does not ask them questions to check their comprehension (M = 2.88). This is confirmed by Miller (2014), who believes that instructors should not only think of what to teach but how it can be delivered. Students further believe that their instructors should tell them what is important to focus on in a lecture (M = 2.87). This reflects an educational background in which students think they need summaries to study for the test. They do not want to waste their time by reading material that is not going to be on the test, as they have other courses and other exams to prepare for. Students lack strategies such as listening for keywords, detecting important information from a lecture, and noticing the body language of the instructor and his/her tone of voice. Noticeably, the culture of spoon-feeding information is verified in statement 41, in which students report that their instructors do not give detailed explanations of lecture content. But according to Blane (2015), autonomy necessitates that students take responsibility for their own learning.

Table 9. Means and Standard Deviations for EFL College Students' Difficulties in Understanding Academic Lectures in Relation to Non-Linguistic Factors

No.	Statement	M	S.D.	Rank
36	The instructor doesn't ask questions during the lecture to check comprehension.	2.88	1.145	Medium
37	The instructor doesn't give examples to explain the main points of the lecture.	2.70	1.125	Medium
38	The instructor doesn't say what is important to remember in a lecture.	2.87	1.211	Medium
39	The instructor doesn't allow students to participate in the lecture.	2.19	1.039	Low
40	The instructor doesn't connect the ideas well. Thus, the lecture becomes disconnected.	2.71	1.065	Medium
41	The instructor doesn't give detailed explanation of the lecture content.	2.87	1.048	Medium

The means and standard deviations were established for EFL college students' difficulties in understanding academic lectures in relation to non-linguistic factors according to Table 9.

In relation to the fourth research question—whether there are significant differences between EFL undergraduate college students' perceptions to linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties according to age, nationality, grade level and GPA—results show that differences were insignificant for the age variable. The reason for this could be that the age range for most of the sample group (N = 208) was small (21-25 years). As to whether there are significant differences in relation to nationality, results show that there are significant differences in relation to linguistic factors. Table 10 shows that non-Kuwaiti students face more linguistic difficulties than Kuwaiti students. This can be justified by the sample size, which, being random, included more Kuwaiti than non-Kuwaiti students, which might be because

during the semester that the sample was taken there were only a few non-Kuwaitis. As for non-linguistic difficulties, there were no significant differences.

Table 10. T-Test of Students' Perceptions of Linguistic Factors According to Nationality

No	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	T	Sig
1	Linguistic Difficulties	Kuwaiti	289	2.4770	.76440	.808	.018
		Non-Kuwaiti	76	2.7247	.80812		

The T-Test of students' perceptions of the linguistic factor according to nationality as displayed in Table 10.

Respecting Table 11, results show significant differences in students' perceptions among the different grade levels. Grade 1 students face the most linguistic difficulties. This can be explained by the fact that these students are freshmen and come from a different educational system, i.e., secondary school. They are used to being spoon-feed information and having their teachers translate for them. They are not used to native speech and the speed of delivery. They generally have poor informal vocabulary, and once they enter academia, they feel lost. Similar results were found by Vahid and Saadallah (2016) on Kurdish EFL learners and Cubailt (2016) on Thai English learners. As for non-linguistic difficulties, Grade 1 students continue to face difficulties through Grade 3. As for Grade 3 students, they might be starting their major courses without having taken any of their major courses during their first and second years. The reason for this lack of coursework is that when students first register for their courses, they often do not find enough required courses to take, so they take optional or preliminary courses and leave the major courses for later.

Table 11. T-Test of Student Perceptions of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Difficulties According to Grade Level

No.	Components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	Linguistic Difficulties	Grade 1	64	2.6694	.82424	3.998	.008
		Grade 2	83	2.3258	.64298		
		Grade 3	120	2.6540	.78177		
		Grade 4	98	2.4547	.81494		
		Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
2	Non-linguistic Difficulties	Grade 1	64	3.0840	.72821	3.628	.013
		Grade 2	83	2.7831	.66233		
		Grade 3	120	3.0938	.74675		
		Grade 4	98	2.9917	.66958		

483

The T-Test of students' perceptions of the linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties according to grade level, as displayed in Table 11.

With reference to whether there are significant differences in students' perceptions in relation to their GPAs, there were no significant differences regarding linguistic difficulties. This suggests that *all* students have linguistic difficulties, no matter what their GPAs might be, which is contrary to what Berman and Cheng (2010) found in their study: the more difficult students' perceived language skills were, the lower their GPAs. On the other hand, significant differences among students were found for non-linguistic difficulties, with those whose GPA is 1.66 and less (M = 3.09) having more difficulties than those with higher GPAs (Berman & Cheng, 2010).

Table 12. T-Test of Students' Perceptions of Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Difficulties According to GPA Level

No.	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	Non-Linguistic Difficulties	3.67 and more	19	2.7862	.85425	2.715	.030
		3.66-2.67	36	2.7917	.64348		
		2.66-1.67	167	2.9506	.72068		
		1.66 and less	119	3.0993	.67992		

The T-Test of Students' Perceptions of the Linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties, according to GPA level in relation to Table 12.

According to the research question about which of the following difficulties, linguistic or non-linguistic, has the most influence on college students' listening comprehension, results showed that non-linguistic difficulties play a major role in students' overall comprehension of academic English lectures (M = 2.99). This can be justified from three perspectives: first, most of the sample size were third (N = 120) and fourth-year students (N = 98) who might have become accustomed to listening to academic lectures during their freshman years, thereby avoiding linguistic difficulties (Civan & Coskun, 2016; Huang, 2006). Second, the literature has shown that the affective domain, which includes emotions, has a great impact on students' performance (Shahmohammadi, 2015; Aydin et al., 2009). This may be why some students responding to the open-ended question noted that they were feeling depressed because of the way their instructors treated them. Third, many students at this educational level suffer either from lack or ineffective strategies in their listening. Their deficiencies in the skills of note taking, concentrating, taking responsibility for their learning, using higher-order thinking skills, and feeling confident add further to their difficulties in comprehending English lectures.

Table 13. One-Sample T-Test Comparing between Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Difficulties

One-sample T Test						
No	Variables	N	M	S.D.	T	Sig
1	Linguistic Difficulties	365	2.5285	.77912	62.003	.000
2	Non-Linguistic Difficulties	365	2.9940	.71220	80.315	.000

The One-Sample T-Test Comparing between Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Difficulties, as displayed in Table 13.

The last research question asked about the proposed solutions for these difficulties. This question was posed to students as open-ended and was also directed to the instructors during the interview. Students' responses (N = 100) varied, but many commented about the need for instructors to improve their teaching methods by understanding that many students are public secondary-school graduates rather than private English school graduates. Some of the instructors talked about the need to provide student teachers with examples from daily life to facilitate the imparting of course content and to show them how to apply theory in the classroom. Chen (2005) asserted that instructors need to be careful about the materials they choose and make sure they suit the level of the students. And Miller (2014) further adds that instructors need to consider not only the *content* of lectures but the *delivery* of the lectures. In other words, do they include different media in their presentations, or do they simply speak?

In addition, students (N = 70) reported the crucial need for remedial courses in grammar and academic vocabulary and for attending private English-language institutes to develop their speaking skills. Likewise, instructors asserted the need for more remedial skills courses and EAP vocabulary. Another suggestion from students (N = 58) was that instructors should not embarrass them during the lecture. Aydin et al. (2009) claim that a teacher who neglects the affective domain is not an effective educator. Thus, content knowledge alone is not enough; teachers must be equipped with socio-affective skills to help them handle their students' emotions. Added to that, is a culture that does not allow students to express their feelings freely to their teachers. According to the lead author of this study, who is a college instructor, two of her students told her that their teachers made them feel depressed and unmotivated. Students (N = 47) further reported that instructors need to use more media to make their lectures more engaging (Khajavi & Gordani, 2010).

The fourth suggestion stated a need for student freedom to contribute their comments during the lecture and to share in the discussion (N = 40). Huang (2005) reported a suggestion by students in his study that instructors should encourage students to participate in the lecture. Similarly, some instructors reported that students should complete their reading assignments and come prepared to discuss what they have read and understood from the reading.

The suggestion with the next highest number of supporters (N = 39) calls for instructors to stop using difficult terminology. This is supported by literature maintaining that, among many factors, listening comprehension is impeded by unfamiliar lexis (Miller, 2014; Rouhi et al., 2014; Terraschke & Wahid, 2011; Hayati, 2010; Huang, 2005). Instructors further referred to the crucial role technical terms play in

students' academic careers. Other suggestions made by students (N = 27) were that instructors need to be aware of the low level of student comprehension of lectures delivered in English (Rahimirad & Moini, 2015). Students (N = 26) also saw the need for instructors to concentrate on the *quality* rather than the *quantity* of the material, knowing that students need more time to process information through repetition, paraphrasing and translation (Flowerdew & Miller, 1992).

Suggestions (N = 18) about lecture organization and identification of objectives were also made. Huang (2005) agrees that organization of a lecture affects its comprehensibility. Students (N = 15) further indicated the need for revision of previous materials as a means of facilitating lecture comprehension. Jensen and Vinther (2003) posited a need for repetition during lectures because it allows the utterance to be processed in working memory. A few students (N = 14) mentioned the use of the first language for translation purposes (Civan & Coskun, 2016). Similarly, 14 students stated that instructors need to reduce their rate of speech, which is argued in the literature (Rahimirad & Moini, 2015; Hayati, 2010; Teng, 2001). Thirteen students reported a need for writing on the board by the instructor to increase lecture comprehensibility (Huang, 2005), while others (N = 12) reported instructors' strange accents as an obstacle inhibiting comprehension. Instructors affirmed the need for native speakers to teach basic skills courses. Eleven students suggested that instructors should give an informal exam to enable students to know their weak points and improve their abilities, while nine reported the need for students to read more. Others (N = 8) suggested using English in their daily lives, and others saw the need for more courses to develop their teaching skills. Other suggestions to instructors included giving more oral presentations, distributing handouts describing the course material to students, varying the exam content using multiple-choice items and the open-book method, using only English during lectures, using only native English-speaking instructors, increasing the lecture time, sending exceptional students on worldwide tours, introducing a listening comprehension course, and accepting to the program only those students with high GPAs, which was supported by some instructors.

Students were further asked two multiple choice questions. One asked students for their opinion of what constitutes a bigger problem when it comes to understanding academic English lectures: "English proficiency" or "background knowledge". As seen in Table 14, more than half of all students (57.3%) believe that lack of English proficiency creates a bigger problem than does lack of background knowledge when it comes to comprehending academic English lectures. Similarly, most instructors (N = 8) said during the interview that English proficiency is more important than background knowledge.

Table 14. Numbers and Percentages for What Constitutes a Bigger Problem: English Proficiency or Background Knowledge

Independent Variables	N	%
English Proficiency	208	57.3
Background Knowledge	155	42.7
Total	363	%100

The Numbers and Percentages for What Constitutes a Bigger Problem: English Proficiency or Background Knowledge, as displayed in Table 14.

Students were also asked "What kind of difficulties do you face at this point of your academic study?" Respondents were provided with four choices: "listening", "writing", "speaking" and "EAP vocabulary". As far as linguistic difficulties are concerned, results were significant for listening (M = 2.89). Although results were not significant for nonlinguistic difficulties, listening continues to pose problems for students (M = 3.18) (See Table 18, Appendix C). This result validates those in Table 2 that showed students facing medium-rated difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures.

8.1 The interview

The first question was "Do you think EAP vocabulary is necessary for success at college and why?" Fourteen of the 15 instructors responded with "yes". Some emphasized the importance of EAP vocabulary for academic reading and writing purposes, some said that they need it for the major sciences, others said to understand academic information, while some said for research purposes. Students have indicated their shortage of academic English vocabulary which makes it difficult to comprehend lectures (statements 3, 10, 12, 19, 21 and 24).

The second question asked instructors if they think that their students lack English for Academic Purpose (EAP) vocabulary. All instructors (N = 15) agreed unanimously that the informal vocabulary students learned at school is not sufficient for academic benefits. Students affirmed this in statement 10 saying that they lack vocabulary to allow them to understand concepts in their field of study.

The third question was "Do you have a hard time explaining a theory or a concept to your students?" Instructors had to answer with either "yes" or "no". Eleven out of 15 answered "yes". They emphasized the fact that they need to repeat or simplify the language so students can understand, which is confirmed by students in statement 6, who reported that they spend a lot of time trying to comprehend theories in their major courses.

The fourth question asked instructors why most of their students face difficulties in comprehending academic lectures. Instructors gave many reasons—for example, spoon-feeding information at school, students' low level of English that requires instructors to code-switch (i.e., use English and Arabic interchangeably), unfamiliarity with higher-order thinking skills, insufficiency of EAP vocabulary, the number of new concepts and poor English skills. Students have acknowledged most of these difficulties in their responses to questionnaire items.

The fifth question was "Which is more important in your opinion, English proficiency or subject knowledge?" Eight instructors said "English proficiency", which matches the students' responses (see Table 14). Most instructors believe that elementary school teachers need English proficiency more than subject knowledge. Five reported that subject knowledge is more important. One said it depends on the level of instruction: for English teachers, proficiency is more important, but for post-graduate studies, subject knowledge is more important. One instructor said they need both English proficiency and subject knowledge.

487

The last interview question asked instructors if they have any suggestions to facilitate comprehending academic lectures. Instructors provided different suggestions, such as to give students examples from daily life before introducing a new topic; to show students how to put theory into practice and how to explore concepts; to train students on the use of higher-order thinking skills; to arrange for pre-college classes where high school students attend university classes to learn what an academic lecture is like; and how to listen and take notes. Others suggested the introduction of technical terms for students; the provision of more basic skills courses; the restructuring of the major sheet (for which students have all the required courses for their graduation) to meet students' requirements; the recruitment of native English-speaking instructors for the skills courses; the use of technology and training instructors on how to use it; the development of curricula; and finally, the boosting of Placement Test requirements and to be prepared by the British Council or a similar authority.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has substantiated that female EFL College undergraduate students experience difficulties while listening to academic English lectures. Although results showed students' difficulties in comprehending academic English lectures is at a medium level, students still suffer from linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties. Although students rated their listening proficiency as "very good" and "excellent" most of them stated that they understand only half of the lecture, and unknown vocabulary is an obstacle preventing their understanding. They reported being unable to understand theories and that, if the instructor speaks fast, they lose track of what is said. They further stated that when instructors use only lecturing to impart information, they lose concentration. Students particularly reported that instructors treat them in a manner that takes away their motivation and makes them depressed and humiliated, which resulted in students feeling shy and fearful of their instructors. This finding is supported by the literature, which notes how affect plays a crucial role in students' academic careers. The relationship between instructors and their students should rather be built on trust and friendship. Students further acknowledged their dependency on their instructors by demanding that instructors should summarize the main information, write on the board, ask questions to check comprehension, say what is important and explain in detail. This can be accounted for by the fact that students are the victims of an educational system that promotes spoon-feeding information and rote memorization to pass tests and get good grades.

These findings in relation to linguistic factors confirm that non-Kuwaitis face the most difficulties in listening comprehension. As expected, first-grade students face the most difficulties, whether linguistic or non-linguistic. In addition, those with lower GPA scores suffer more non-linguistic difficulties compared to those with higher scores. Surprisingly, non-linguistic difficulties seem to have greater impact on students' listening comprehension than linguistic problems. This is probably because most students in the study were third- and fourth-year students who had become accustomed to listening to academic lectures in English. A prominent result of this study is that non-linguistic factors play a

488

greater role in students' academic careers than linguistic issues, yet non-linguistic factors are usually ignored by educationalists and teachers.

Students have made suggestions regarding solutions for the difficulties regarding listening to academic English lectures, such as introducing new materials in a more comprehensible manner and introducing more remedial courses in grammar and vocabulary. Instructors should stop embarrassing students, use more media to make lectures interesting, allow students freedom to comment during lectures, use less terminology and focus on quality rather than quantity of what they teach.

On the other hand, instructors believe that academic vocabulary is necessary. They further observe that the vocabulary students learned at school is not sufficient for college. Thus, instructors exert great effort when they need to explain a theory or a concept to their students. They agree with students that language proficiency is more important than subject knowledge. What is more, instructors believe that students' weakness stems from the fact that during their secondary school system, they were spoon-fed information, rather than being encouraged to use their critical thinking skills to explore information by themselves and become independent learners.

A number of recommendations arise. For example, the English Department can introduce a course called English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to introduce students to academic vocabulary and specialized terminology in their major fields with remedial courses in listening and grammar. Instructors need to be trained in the use of technology to add to the effectiveness of their lectures. More importantly, instructors need to realize the crucial role of affect in learning and should avoid humiliating and otherwise disrespecting students.

As for future research, this study can be replicated on male and female college undergraduates to compare results. Also, it can be performed at all the four colleges (College of Basic Education, College of Business Studies, College of Technological Studies and the College of Medical Sciences) or as a comparison of two colleges, such as the College of Basic Education and the College of Education at Kuwait University.

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491

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492

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Appendix A

Table A. ANOVA Test for Students' Proficiency in English at Secondary School

No	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	**Linguistic Difficulties**	Satisfactory	18	3.7133	.80355	35.528	.000
		Good	70	2.9223	.71203		
		Very good	163	2.4712	.68382		
		Excellent	114	2.1818	.65768		
		Variables	**N**	**M**	**S.D.**	**F**	**Sig.**
2	**Non-Linguistic Difficulties**	Satisfactory	18	3.2535	.76019	8.322	.000
		Good	70	3.2768	.68676		
		Very good	163	2.9923	.63570		
		Excellent	114	2.7818	.75758		

Table B. ANOVA Test for Whether Students Studied English Somewhere Other Than School

No	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	**Linguistic Difficulties**	Language Institute	56	2.7386	.78761	16.376	.000
		English Private School	47	2.3779	.76832		
		Lived abroad or Listened to English via Media	170	2.2906	.61150		
		None	91	2.9099	.87523		
		Variables	**N**	**M**	**S.D.**	**F**	**Sig.**
2	**Non-Linguistic Difficulties**	Language Institute	56	3.0960	.77962	2.185	.089
		English Private School	47	2.8617	.64833		
		Lived Abroad or Listened to English via Media	170	2.9331	.70749		
		None	91	3.1120	.69887		

Appendix B

Table C. ANOVA Test for Students' Amount of Comprehension of English Lectures

No	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	**Linguistic Difficulties**	1/4 lecture	33	3.2921	.85238	71.758	.000
		1/2 lecture	196	2.7431	.67416		
		all lecture	134	2.0203	.58703		
2	**Non-Linguistic**	**Variables**	**N**	**M**	**S.D**	**F**	**Sig.**

494

	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
Difficulties	1/4 lecture	33	3.4129	.73586		
	1/2 lecture	196	3.2181	.58837	49.887	.000
	all lecture	134	2.5695	.66435		

Table D. ANOVA Test for Students' Ratings of Their Listening Proficiency

No	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	**Linguistic Difficulties**	Poor	7	3.6800	.74940		
		Good	74	2.9784	.78535	22.137	.000
		Very good	197	2.4591	.68793		
		Excellent	86	2.2019	.72950		
2	**Non-Linguistic Difficulties**	**Variables**	**N**	**M**	**S.D.**	**F**	**Sig.**
		Poor	7	3.5089	.35981		
		Good	74	3.2829	.66404	7.091	.000
		Very good	197	2.9267	.65160		
		Excellent	86	2.8706	.81860		

Appendix C

Table E. ANOVA Test for the Main Difficulties Students Face during Their Academic Study

No	components	Variables	N	M	S.D.	F	Sig.
1	**Linguistic Difficulties**	Listening	19	2.8989	.99182		
		Writing	115	2.4685	.73523	4.659	.003
		Speaking	92	2.7257	.76427		
		Vocabulary	134	2.4182	.75683		
2	**Non- Linguistic Difficulties**	**Variables**	**N**	**M**	**S.D.**	**F**	**Sig.**
		Listening	19	3.1842	.78988		
		Writing	115	3.0620	.71781	1.361	.254
		Speaking	92	3.0333	.68349		
		Vocabulary	134	2.9198	.69481		