

Unveiling the Relationship between Self-Esteem and Listening Comprehension of Iraqi EFL University Students

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Although previous studies have successfully established generalizable evidence related to the relationship between EFL undergraduate students' self-esteem and their listening comprehension, they often fail to explore the lived, nuanced experiences of learners related to the factors resulted from students' self-esteem that influence EFL undergraduate students' listening comprehension. Accordingly, the current study provides a contribution not only in quantifying the correlation between the two targeted variables but also delves into the qualitative "how" and "why" behind it. The current study aims at identifying and investigating the relationship between EFL university students' self-esteem and their listening comprehension. The study also explores the factors that cultivate students' performance in listening comprehension as they are resulted from their self-esteem. The sample of the study is represented by 80 EFL university students who were randomly selected from the Department of English-College of Education for Humanities- University of Anbar. A mixed modes explanatory correlational design was used aided by a self-esteem questionnaire, a listening comprehension test, and a semi-structured interview to gather information. Quantitative and qualitative analysis procedures were used to analyse the collected data. The findings found a statistically significant correlation between EFL university students' self-esteem and their performance in listening comprehension. As evidenced by the positive Pearson correlation coefficient between the two variables. Besides, the interview findings were also in consistent with the quantitative results as they revealed that certain factors helped in promoting students' performance in listening comprehension due to their high level of self-esteem. These factors are; self-esteem cultivates students' motivation and self-confidence, increases mental readiness, helps students overcome listening anxiety, and helps students' avoid boredom and impatience.

Keywords: self-esteem, listening comprehension, EFL, CSEI.

Iraqi students are required to study English. From elementary school through college, language proficiency is assessed based on the following four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Out of the four language skills in English, listening is the most important in people's lives. The listening skill is a crucial component of communication and language acquisition, as it is one of the receptive skills. According to

Mendelsohn (1994), “the majority of individuals allocate approximately 40-50% of their daily communication time to listening, while only dedicating 25-30% to speaking, 11-16% to reading, and 9% to writing”. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue that language learners can improve their comprehension and processing of information by developing their listening skills, which in turn facilitates the development of additional language abilities. Moreover, as Rost (quoted in Nunan & Carter, 2001) points out, the key difference between high- and low-proficiency language learners lies in their ability to use listening effectively as a means of acquiring the target language.

Although listening is a crucial language skill, it is frequently perceived as a difficult one, evoking anxiety in language learners as a result of its complex characteristics (Ahmed et al., 2024; Mendelsohn, 1994; Nasim et al., 2022). According to Vandergrift (1999), listening is a complex form of language proficiency requiring the simultaneous and immediate processing of multiple types of information—vocabulary, background knowledge, grammatical structure, and sounds. According to Underwood (1989), there are seven barriers to effective auditory comprehension. These barriers include an inability to control speaking speed, a lack of repetition in auditory material, a restricted vocabulary, an inability to recognize speech cues, a lack of contextual knowledge, difficulty concentrating, and a tendency to translate every word while listening.

Furthermore, during a listening test, a variety of factors can affect learners' performance. Both linguistic and non-linguistic elements can have an impact on various aspects of language learning, particularly listening skills. According to Yan (2012, p. 18), some students tend to solely rely on translating words instead of actively listening and comprehending on their own. This phenomenon frequently arises from an individual's inadequate self-assurance regarding their English listening capabilities, resulting in decreased intrinsic motivation. Consequently, many students may feel inclined to give up when they are unable to understand the speaker. Self-esteem, a prevalent concern that significantly impacts language learning, particularly in the area of listening comprehension, intimately links this issue to psychological aspects.

Self-esteem is a complex set of emotions that impact attitudes, inspire individuals and shape conduct (Dedmond, 2009; Shagufta & Nazir, 2021). Acharya and Deshmukh (2012) states that self-esteem as a judgement of one's own ability and worth based on specific values, which includes both psychological and social components. According to the definitions provided above, self-esteem is a person's level of self-respect and self-evaluation, which has a substantial impact on their psychology, behaviour, emotions, and motivation.

An informal interview with teachers and numerous university students studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL) revealed that most students do not realize the benefits of self-confidence in their learning. The students were unaware that self-esteem plays a crucial role in their performance in learning English, particularly in the area of listening comprehension. The teacher was unaware of their students' self-esteem while they were learning. Consequently, the majority of students fail to recognise their own self-worth. During the listening comprehension exercises, the students encountered challenges in comprehending the speaker's discussion on the English language. During the listening exercise, they struggled to focus and understand the details. At times, the learners were less enthusiastic about listening to English because they could not understand the basic terms used in the conversation. One of the factors cited was their lack of self-confidence, which is a psychological factor.

The importance of the relationship between students' self-esteem and their English listening skills has been a fruitful area of study for many researchers in the fields of applied linguistics and educational psychology. Hence, several previous studies have been conducted quantitatively to empirically confirm the importance of such a correlation in the students' listening skill in English language (Hayati & Ostadian, 2008; Bakhtiarvand, 2012; Nourelahi et al., 2021; Palo, 2013; Itzchakov & Weinstein, 2021; Yu & Abdullah, 2025). These studies have used quantitative, correlational research designs that produce statistical data to proof the strength and direction of the correlation between students' self-esteem and their listening skill. Although these previous studies have successfully established generalizable evidence, they often fail to explore the lived, nuanced experiences of learners related to the factors resulted from students' self-esteem that influence EFL university students' listening comprehension by using a mixed mode research paradigm. Accordingly, the current study provides a contribution not only in quantifying the correlation between the two targeted variables but also delves

into the qualitative "how" and "why" behind it, exploring learners' perceptions, experiences, anxieties, and motivational shifts during listening tasks. By integrating quantitative and qualitative in-depth analysis, the current study affords a more holistic and contextualized understanding of the self-esteem/listening comprehension correlation—a perspective that remains underexplored.

Hence, the objectives of this study is to unveil the relationship between students' self-esteem and their listening comprehension.

In accordance with the purpose of this research, the following questions are answered:

1. What are the EFL university student's level of self-esteem?
2. What are the EFL university student's level of listening comprehension?
3. Is there any significant correlation between Iraqi EFL university students' self-esteem and their listening comprehension?
4. What are the factors resulted from students' self-esteem that influence EFL university students' listening comprehension?

This study may provide valuable insights for English language teachers to understand students' self-esteem, which is a significant factor in students' academic performance. Self-esteem is a psychological factor that significantly influences students' academic performance, particularly in the listening domain. The study's findings can also motivate students by offering support to boost their confidence, especially in English listening skills, which can lead to improved listening comprehension results. Students are anticipated to acquire new knowledge through listening, which can enhance their self-esteem abilities. The results of this study are expected to provide additional insights that will serve as a foundation for future research, particularly in the areas of students' self-esteem and auditory comprehension.

Literature Review

Self-Esteem

In recent years, psychologists have shown a marked increase in interest in the topic of self-esteem. The study of self-esteem has a long and fruitful history in psychology. Self-esteem is a fundamental concept in clinical psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, and social psychology. In fact, researchers have been examining its impact on psychological functioning for almost a century (Greenier et al., 1995). People often overestimate the importance of self-esteem, attributing all negative outcomes to low self-esteem and linking all positive outcomes to high self-esteem (Manning et al., 2006). Moreover, Hewitt (2002) argued that the traditional method of studying self-esteem has resulted in a vast and extensive body of research that is difficult to condense. Hence, the objective of this chapter was to elucidate the primary subjects within the extensive body of literature on self-esteem. It is imperative for every individual to prioritise self-love, either above or at least on par with any other person or object. This elucidates the fundamental principle prevalent in the majority of religions, which is to "love others as you love yourself." The convergence of all cultures and religions in embracing the fundamental principle of treating and loving people as one would like to be treated and loved is quite astonishing (Dolan, 2007).

Sedikides and Gress (2003) define self-esteem as an individual's self-assessment of their own worth, which encompasses feelings of self-respect and self-confidence, as well as positive or negative attitudes toward the self. Self-esteem is associated with an individual's personal convictions regarding their skills, abilities, and social connections. Murphy et al., (2005) define self-esteem as a holistic construct that includes both cognitive evaluations of an individual's intrinsic value and affective responses to these assessments. In a similar vein, Wang and Ollendick (2001) argue that self-esteem is the reciprocal relationship between an emotive reaction to oneself and the self-evaluation process. Prevalent conceptualizations and definitions of self-esteem incorporate both affective and evaluative elements. In their study, Brown et al., (2001) identified three distinct applications of the phrase "self-esteem." (a) "Global or trait self-esteem refers to an individual's inherent disposition towards themselves, including feelings of fondness for oneself." b) The process of self-evaluation is how people judge their own skills and qualities. c) Feelings of self-esteem are linked to short-term emotional states. For example, someone might say they feel more confident after getting a big raise, or they might say they feel less confident after getting divorced.

According to Branden (1969), self-esteem consists of two components: (a) viewing oneself as competent, and believing in one's ability to think, learn, make wise decisions, overcome obstacles, and bring about change; and (b) self-worth, a sense of confidence in one's right to happiness, and a belief in one's worthiness of respect, love, and personal fulfillment. Abdel-Khalek (2016) has recently proposed that self-esteem consists of two separate dimensions: competence and worth. Based on these two elements, he defines self-esteem as "the perception of having the ability to overcome life's difficulties and being deserving of happiness." The field of personality psychology encompasses a widely recognised differentiation between traits and states (Spielberger et al., 1983). Some researchers distinguish between "self-esteem as a personality trait," which remains stable over time due to its intrinsic link to an individual's personality, and "self-esteem as a temporary state," which is more dynamic in nature and is susceptible to being influenced by various events, situations, and emotions (Gilovich et al., 2006).

Some researchers studying self-esteem have distinguished between explicit self-esteem, which is measured through questionnaires, and implicit self-esteem. The influence of an individual's attitude toward themselves on their evaluation of self-related and non-self-related objects—which they may not be aware of or may misidentify—is known as implicit self-esteem (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995).

Listening Comprehension

The act of listening consists of perceiving, comprehending, and responding to the speaker. An adept auditor possesses the capacity to fully comprehend the speaker's discourse and provide responses that are suitable for the given context. People are required to understand and respond to what their interlocutors say. Meaningful communication is dependent on the capacity to attend effectively (Moghadam et al., 2023). Listening, according to Jun (2009), is a key method of absorbing linguistic information, and hence an essential component of foreign language learning. Students must be able to listen carefully when interacting with others in order to comprehend debates. According to Pascal and Bertram (2009), there is a common perception that listening is a supplementary skill to speaking, reading, and writing. This perception stems from the assumption that learners will naturally develop their listening ability while devoting effort to improving their speaking, reading, and writing abilities. Nevertheless, attentiveness is not merely a skill that facilitates the development of language learning components; it is also an independent skill.

Alderson et al., (2005) assert that despite its complexity in listening, the capacity to comprehend spoken texts has received considerably less scholarly attention. Moreover, according to Hidayati et al., (2020), listening is a process in which recipients and decoders of speech signals engage in comprehension. Audience members occupy a comparatively passive position in contrast to those involved in speaking, writing, and translating. Furthermore, the rapid, uninterrupted, and transient nature of speech signals necessitates that students maintain a constant state of mental acuity and a substantial psychological burden.

In contrast, listening comprehension is defined by Afriani (2017) as the ability to comprehend discourse in a foreign or second language. Listening comprehension is the cognitive process that perceives information and stimuli. Listening comprehension may be defined as the process of matching the speaker's orally transmitted information with the recipient's understanding. As stated by Tyagi (2013), the ability to observe is critical for effectively receiving messages. The speaker's words are perceived auditorily as well as emotionally. It consists of three elements: a sender, a message and a recipient. It is the mental mechanism through which people listen, react, and derive the meaning to verbal or nonverbal messages. According to Brown and Smith (2007), listening is not a unidirectional process of receiving audio symbols but rather a multidirectional activity. The psychomotor process, which entails the reception of sound waves through the ear and the subsequent transmission of brain signals.

The significance of listening comprehension According to Hogan et al., (2014), communicative methods of language teaching place significant emphasis on listening at all stages of language learning. The level of listening competency has a significant impact on other language skills, including speaking and reading. Proficient listening skills are crucial for effective communication in all contexts (Ross, 2006). Students who possess proficient listening comprehension abilities are more likely to engage in communicative situations with

greater effectiveness. Listening comprehension is beneficial for EFL students because it helps them understand the information and facilitates their learning process.

According to the findings of a study by Padang et al., (2022), there is a statistically significant relationship between listening comprehension skills and the ability to improve various language skills, including speaking, reading, and writing. In order to achieve better results of the listening instruction process and create awareness of the students about the significance of the listening comprehension in the acquisition of English language, teachers should actively conduct research on the character and mechanism of the listening comprehension. This involves learning the process of listening comprehension and rehearsing the same.

Methods

Research Design

The current study used a mixed-methods explanatory correlational research design, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, to achieve the study's goal and answer its research questions. This allows for the triangulation of multiple data collection sources that enrich the findings of the study (Creswell, 2014). Emphasising this fact, Gay et al., (2009) argue that combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies enhances the interconnectedness and robustness between them, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of events. Furthermore, the mixed-method facilitates comprehension and exploration of the many facets of the investigated phenomenon from multiple viewpoints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As a result, researchers can simultaneously present statistical trends and amplify participants' perspectives. Thus, the current study used a self-esteem questionnaire and listening comprehension test as tools for collecting quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews with focus groups as tools for collecting qualitative data.

Participants

The study population consisted of all third-year students majoring in English as a Foreign Language who were enrolled in the English Department at the College of Education and Humanities at Anbar University during the second semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. The population totalled 126 students. A priori power analysis was run with the help of G*Power 3.1 to identify the correct sample size to use in the quantitative analysis. Since the research design was explanatory correlational, the analysis would be prepared to two tailed test of correlation with an expected medium effect value ($r = 0.30$), an alpha level of 0.05, and the desired statistical power of 0.80. The description of the power analysis showed that a significant effect, in case it exists, should be detected in a minimum of 84 participants. The study sought to ensure that a sample that was close to this threshold was recruited in order to consider possible incomplete or invalid responses. A randomly selected sample of 80 EFL undergraduate students in Iraq was used to take part in the quantitative part of the research. This random sampling has been done through giving each of the 126 students a definite number and taken the 80 participants through random number generator and then invited them on the basis of their willingness and consent to participate. The criteria on the inclusion were very rigid in that they required the respondent to be a third year, officially enrolled student within the department; no respondents were excluded on the basis of age or to be a male or female to ensure that the sample was representative of the target population. These 80 students were the main sample and were requested to respond to the questionnaire of self-esteem and listening comprehension test.

Moreover, from this main sample described above, a sub-sample of 20 students was selected randomly by the same randomization technique (random number generator) and invited to answer the questions of the semi-structured focus group interview. Those students were divided into four groups; each consists of five students. The sample was composed of all participants with similar educational and language backgrounds, and their age was between 19 and 21 years. There were strict ethical principles adhered to during the research. The University of Anbar has a departmental committee that gave official permission to carry out the study. All the 80 main sample participants were well informed about the nature of the research, the voluntary nature of the study, and their freedom to withdraw without any penalty before data collection. Each participant including the sub-sample of 20 students who participated in the interviews was then asked to give their informed consent in writing. They were cautious of the privacy of the data and all personal identifiers were deleted, and the data was

anonymized through unique participant codes (questionnaires and interview responses). The data given by the respondents was utilized in the context of this study and was kept in a safe place to ensure that it safeguarded their privacy.

Data collection Instruments

The triangulation of mixed-mode research instruments was used to gather data as follows:

1- Quantitative research instruments:

The quantitative data collection instruments used in the current study were a five-point Likert self-esteem questionnaire and a listening comprehension test. In order to measure self-esteem, the researchers adopted 55-item questionnaire on which Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory (CSEI) was modified into a version by Ryden (1978). The initial 58-item CSEI was adjusted to form a five-domain format, namely: “general self-esteem (23 items)”, “social self-esteem (8 items)”, “family self-esteem (8 items)”, “academic self-esteem (8 items)” and a “lie scale self-esteem (8 items)”, leading to the elimination of 3 original items. A five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) was in place of the dichotomous response format of CSEI to increase sensitivity. Some items were inverted to counter the bias of response before analysing. The general, social, family, and academic domains cumulative scores are higher which means more positive self-esteem, whereas the lie scale evaluates social desirability response biasness.

Furthermore, the questionnaire items were translated into the native language of the students (Arabic) to guarantee the accuracy and easy understanding of the concepts in every item by the students. To confirm the appropriateness of the translation, a translation and back translation procedure was conducted by asking two experts in the field of English linguistics and translation. They both confirmed the appropriateness and clarity of the translation with a high agreement percentage.

As for the listening comprehension test, it is developed based on TOEFL listening comprehension test and includes the following domains; listening comprehension (10 items), short conversation (15 items), and academic listening (15 items).

To establish the face and content validity of the listening comprehension test and questionnaire, the researchers were exposed to tested by committee of five experts. The experts' suggestions led to some amendments to the questionnaire items. Lastly, the items in questionnaires were piloted so that their construct validity, language clarity, accuracy, practicality and reliability would be ensured. Construct validity is essential in any quality assessment. Construct validity is used whenever a specific attribute must be measured because it is the most applicable form of validity for assessing measurements (Creswell, 2012; Al-Jumaily & Alazzawi, 2025). The construct validity of all instruments is established through item analysis, which includes examining the differences between items, the relationship between item scores and the total test score, the relationship between item scores and their corresponding factors, and internal correlation matrices. A two-sample t-test is used to determine the significance of the difference between the two groups after calculating the mean scores and standard deviation. The calculated t-value for all items is higher than the critical value of 1.96, at 78 degrees of freedom and a significance level of 0.05, indicating that all items are statistically significant. The reason is to establish the internal consistency of the questionnaire items that is, the relationship between the scores of individual items and the overall test score that is assumed to measure the validity of the test. Based on this, the correlation coefficient of Pearson was employed to establish the level of correlation between scores on the items and the total score of the 80 respondents. The items were subjected to statistical analysis, which showed that all the correlation coefficient values are statistically significant in as compared to the critical level of 0.217; that is, 79 degrees of freedom and significance level of 0.05. In addition, the difficulty scores of the test items vary between 0.32 and 0.67 whereas the discrimination indices vary between 0.38 and 0.71.

As far as scoring the Lie Scale is concerned, it should be explained that it was considered as a validity check and not as a part of the overall self-esteem score. In line with traditional procedures of the CSEI, the eight items of the Lie Scale were given to determine the level of responding to which the participants could answer social desirability. As a result, they were not used in the computation of the total self-esteem score in order to achieve

the construct validity of the measure since the scale is supposed to measure the self-esteem and not social desirability.

Hair et al., (2017) recommend that the Alpha values must be more than 0.70. In this case, the reliability value for the questionnaire (excluding the Lie Scale) is 0.85, while the reliability value for listening comprehension is 0.83. The aforementioned figures indicate a good level of reliability for both tests.

Qualitative research instruments:

Concerning the qualitative research tool, a focus group semi-structured interview was applicable due to the privacy of triangulating the combined qualitative and quantitative data, which enables the conjoint validation of the data. To do this, the interview questions are designed to explore genuine, and detailed data related to students' experiences and perception parallel to the various aspects of the self-esteem questionnaire including; "general self-esteem, social self-esteem, family self-esteem, academic self-esteem, and the self-esteem" factors that promote the EFL students' listening comprehension. Examples of these questions are: (*When you sit down to do a listening exercise in English, what general thoughts or feelings about yourself come to mind?, How do you feel when you are in a group of people, and you need to understand something they are saying in English?, When you are at home and you hear English in a movie, song, or a family member uses it, how do you feel about your own ability to understand it?, Compared to other skills in English (like reading, writing, or speaking), how would you rate your listening ability? Why do you think that is?, How does believing in yourself help you when you are trying to understand a difficult English audio or conversation).*)

The prompts of the interview in their original form were sent out to a review committee of experts to determine their validity and appropriateness in supporting the current study with rich data and responding to research questions of the study. The experts confirmed the suitability and validity of the interview content and suggested some modifications, which the researchers took into account. The researchers then piloted the interview with a group of five students to confirm its clarity and suitability for the study's selected sample. The results of this pilot interview administration confirmed that the interview prompts were clear and suitable for the interviewees, as they answered all of them comfortably and easily.

It is worth mentioning that the interview was done in the form of group sessions with four groups of students each comprising of five students. Based on their choice and their convenient time, they were asked to attend in a calm and comfortable place for the purpose of creative answers and discussion. Based on this, the interview sessions were all conducted in the department of English laboratory. Each interview session took around 30-45 minutes duration and the students in the four groups were all creative in their answers, and comfortable in their discussion.

Data Analysis Procedures

Since the current study employed mixed modes data collection methodology, the collected data were analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis processes.

As for the data collected by the self-esteem questionnaire and listening comprehension test, quantitative data analysis procedures were followed via the use of numerical statistical analysis with the use of the "Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 21." As a result, the significant difference between the mean scores of the self esteem of the students and the theoretic mean scores was determined through a t-test with one sample which was used to determine the level of the students in terms of self esteem. On the same note, a one-sample t-test was the tool employed to establish the significant difference between the mean score of the students in their listening comprehension and the theoretical mean in order to determine the level of listening comprehension of students. Besides, one-way analysis of variance was used to find out the EFL university students' performance in listening comprehension domains: listening comprehension, short conversation, and academic listening. Finally, in order to find out the correlation between students' self-esteem and their performance in listening comprehension, the Pearson correlation coefficient is utilised.

The data derived from the semi-structured interviews conducted with the focus groups were subjected to qualitative analysis using the thematic analysis method developed by Creswell (2012). These steps are: “preparing and organising the data; exploring and coding the data; describing findings and forming themes; representing and reporting findings; interpreting the meaning of the findings; and ensuring credibility and trustworthiness of the findings” (p. 238). Thus, the interview recordings of the four focus group interviews were all transcribed verbatim and were prepared, organized, and saved in Microsoft Words files to be ready for qualitative deep analysis. Then, the researchers read the interview transcribed content for three times highlighting the essential words, and expressions that refer to the main constructs and themes related to the students’ self-esteem feelings. After that, they re-read these highlighted parts and grouped them together based on their ideas, meanings and arranged them into themes as they support and parallel to the main aspects of the self-esteem questionnaire. At this stage, the themes as well as the extracts that reflect these themes were ready for reporting the findings of the study and their interpretations and justifications.

To confirm the objectivity and authenticity of the qualitative findings and in accordance with Denzin and Lincoln (2018) procedures, two main procedures were followed. These are data triangulations and reviews by an external auditor. The researchers employed multiple data collection sources and tools to make sure that they have triangulation, which is a guarantee of the accuracy and compatibility of the findings that can be obtained after the study. With regard to the second step, which is the external review, an applied linguistic expert with a long-term experience in the sphere was invited to review the initial draft of the qualitative analysis of the findings critically and thoroughly, discussing all of its key and sub-themes. The external reviewer then ensured that the results of the analysis were scientifically valid and true. These two steps will make sure that the researchers made an unprejudiced and scientifically adequate analysis (AbdulGhafoor & Challob, 2021; Ali & Tariq, 2025).

Findings of the Study

The subsequent sections provide an exhaustive summary of the study's findings as they pertain to the research questions that were previously presented.

Students’ level of self-esteem as it is Reflected in the Questionnaire

As shown in Table 1, the students' self-esteem mean scores are 152.42, and the theoretical mean is 141, with a standard deviation of 17.53. The T-test formula for one sample is utilised to ensure the level of students’ self-esteem. The calculated t-value of 5.828 surpasses the tabulated t-value of 1.994 at the 0.05 level of significance, particularly when the degree of freedom is 79. This indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the student’s theoretical mean and the self-esteem mean scores, and it is in favour of the self-esteem scale. Thus, according to these results, the students at Anbar University have a good level of self-esteem.

Table 1

Students’ Level of Self-Esteem as it is Reflected in the Questionnaire Items

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	Theoretical Mean	T-Value		Level of Significance
					Calculated	Tabulated	
Self-esteem	80	152.42	17.53	141	5.828	1.994	0.05

The qualitative findings gathered through interviews were consistent with the quantitative findings mentioned above, indicating that students have a high level of self-esteem across various aspects of self-esteem. To further explain this fact, when interview excerpts were analyzed, it was observed that students have given their overall self-assessment as indicated in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Interview Extracts Indicating Students' Reference to "General Self-Esteem".

Participant	Interview Extracts
S3	<i>I feel that I can understand my everyday plans and I can do it by myself.</i>
S6	<i>ummm.I think that I can easily be familiar with the new life and educational experiences specifically the good things</i>
S10	<i>As related to me, I think that I am a successful person in my life.</i>
S17	<i>It is easy to be an independent person when you clearly understand what to do and how to do it .</i>
S19	<i>I feel that I look nice as seen by people around me.</i>

Besides, social self- esteem is also reflected in the students' responses to the interview questions. Table 3 below introduces examples from the interview extracts that reveal the students' social self-esteem.

Table 3

Interview Extracts Indicating Students' Reference to "Social Self-Esteem".

Participant	Interview Extracts
S1	<i>Based on my everyday behavior, I think that I am famous among my colleagues having the same age of my.</i>
S3	<i>I always feel that I am an exciting person with people around me.</i>
S4	<i>As I deal with in everyday lif activities, I think that friends used to depend on my points of view and follow me confidently..</i>
S7	<i>I always would like to be with people irrespective of their ages .</i>
S12	<i>People around me used to depend on me in critical situations.</i>

As related to family self- esteem, students also revealed this kind of self-esteem in their interview responses as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4

Interview Extracts Indicating Students' Reference to "Family Self-Esteem".

Participant	Interview Extracts
S6	<i>My Parents usually encourage me to be a good model to my friends.</i>
S8	<i>I like the way my family look at my plans and understand all of them.</i>
S11	<i>My parents encourage me to do my best to attain my goals.</i>
S13	<i>Family members used to respect the way I behave and think .</i>
S118	<i>My family respect my feelings towards the thinks and activities that I like much.</i>

Moreover, students also clearly reflected signs of their academic self-esteem in their interview responses as shown in Table 5 below:

Table 5

Interview Extracts Reflecting the reference to the "Academic Self-Esteem".

Participant	Interview Extracts
S2	<i>My teacher always encourages me to do best in my educational activities.</i>
S5	<i>I am sure that I can do well inside and outside of my class as related to my study activities.</i>
S9	<i>I always feel proud about by learning experiences and performance.</i>
S16	<i>I used to be easy going and collaborative in group based learning activities.</i>
S20	<i>I feel comfortable to act as a learning model in front of my group mates.mm, It is easy for me to do this</i>

Students' performance in listening comprehension

As far as the performance of the students in the listening comprehension is concerned, the average performance of the students is 56.70 with a standard deviation of 9.48 and the performance ought to be 50 theoretically. The T-test formula for one sample is used to identify students' listening comprehension performance. As shown in Table 6 below, the calculated t-value is 6.317, which is higher than the critical t-value of 1.994 at a significance level of 0.05 and 79 degrees of freedom. This suggests that there is a statistically significant difference, favouring the listening comprehension test, between the theoretical mean of the students and the mean of their performance. Thus, according to these results, the students at Anbar University have a good level of listening comprehension (see Table 6 below).

Table 6
Students' Performance in Listening Comprehension

Group	No. of students	Mean	SD.	Theoretical Mean	T-Value		Level of Significance
listening comprehension	80	56.70	9.48	50	Calculated	Tabulated	0.05
					6.317	1.994	

Comparison among Iraqi EFL university students' performance in listening comprehension domains

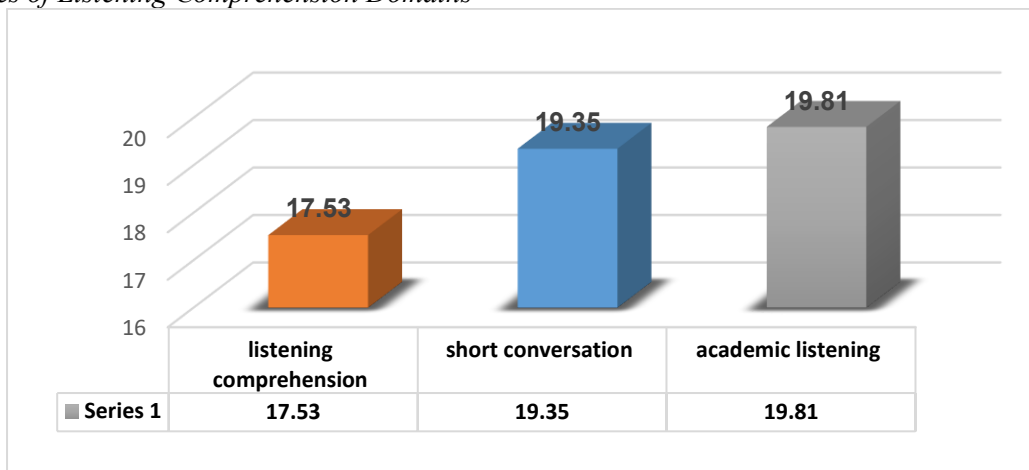
To determine comparison between listening comprehension domains performance of Iraqi EFL university students in performance of listening comprehension. The results represent a sample participant (N=80) EFL university students. The mean score and standard deviation were calculated in order to assess students' performance in the three domains of listening comprehension: "Listening Comprehension," "Short Conversation," and "Academic Listening." According to the means of three domains obtained, listening comprehension mean score is 17.53, short conversation 19.35, and academic listening 19.81. A repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to assess the statistical significance of the changes among the three domains of listening comprehension. Mauchly's Test of Sphericity indicated that the assumption of sphericity had not been violated $P= 0.558$. The partial eta squared (partial η^2) was calculated to assess the variance in listening comprehension scores attributable to the three domains, as illustrated in Table 7.

Table 7
Within-Subjects Effects Tests (Sphericity Assumed)

	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
(Listening)	Sphericity Assumed	233.606	2	116.803	7.324	.001	0.085
	Error	2519.894	158	15.949			

According to Table 7, a repeated-measures one-way ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference in the number of three domains of listening comprehension given, $F(2, 158) = 7.324$, ($p < .001$). The obtained partial eta squared was 0.085. The percentage of variance in the three domains of listening comprehension is positively influenced, indicating that there is as significant differences among three domains of listening comprehension. The analysis involved conducting three post hoc t-tests. This phase of the analysis aimed to assess the differences among the three pairs of conditions: (*Listening Comprehension- Short Conversation*), (*Listening Comprehension- Academic Listening*), and (*Short Conversation-Academic Listening*). Post hoc comparisons between conditions were conducted using three paired sample t-tests. A paired sample analysis revealed a significant difference between Listening Comprehension-Short Conversation conditions, $t(79) = 3.059$, $p = 0.001$. A second paired sample t-test revealed a significant difference between the (Listening Comprehension- Academic Listening), $t(79) = 3.591$, $p = 0.001$. The third paired sample t-test revealed non-significant difference between the (Short Conversation- Academic Listening) conditions, $t(79) = 0.709$, $p = 0.480$. All pairs showed a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level, except for the difference between (Short Conversation-Academic Listening) is non-significant. This was indicated by a substantial effect size, $d = 1.00$.

Figure 1
Mean Scores of Listening Comprehension Domains



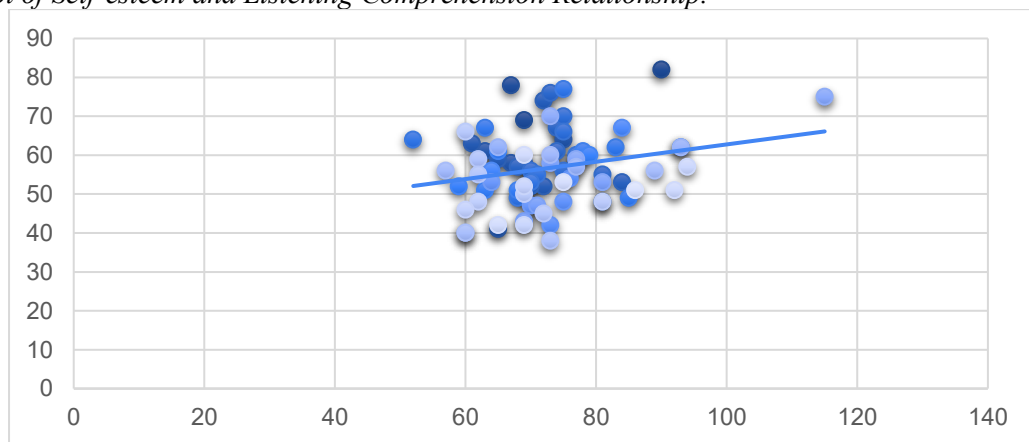
The correlation between Iraqi EFL students' self-esteem and listening comprehension.

Pearson's correlation coefficient is used to assess the relationship between students' self-esteem and their scores on the listening comprehension test. The findings indicate that the r value is 0.238 that is more than critical value of 0.182 at significance level of 0.05 and with a sample size of 80. This, therefore, implies that self-esteem of the Iraqi EFL university students has a positive correlation with their performance in terms of listening comprehension as demonstrated in Table 8.

Table 8
The Correlation between Students' Self-Esteem and their Performance in Listening Comprehension

Sample Size	R- Value	Critical Value	Significance 0.05
80	0.238	0.182	significant

Figure 2.
Plot of Self-esteem and Listening Comprehension Relationship.



Qualitative data, as evidenced by students' responses to interview questions, indicate a strong correlation between students' self-confidence and their performance in listening comprehension. As indicated in the analysis of the interview extracts, students clearly confirmed that there is a positive relationship between their level of self-esteem and listening comprehension performance in the English language. Students admitted that there are several factors that promote their listening comprehension, resulting from their high level of self-esteem, as explained in the next section.

Self-Esteem Factors that Promote the EFL Students' Listening Comprehension

Students indicated that certain factors that promote listening comprehension, as explained below, are responsible for the positive correlation between their self-esteem and their listening comprehension performance. Table 9 illustrates the factors that the study's sample perceives as promoting students' listening comprehension, stemming from their high self-esteem.

Table 9

Self-Esteem Factors that Promote the EFL Students' Listening Comprehension.

No.	Factors	Frequency of Students (Out of 20 Students)	Examples from the Students' Interview Extracts
1	Self- Esteem Cultivates Students' Motivation and Self-Confidence	17	S2: I think that I feel highly motivated due to my high level of self-esteem. This helps me be good in listening skill. S6: Well, mmmm, I can say that I am good in listening comprehension as I feel so confidence in my English language ability to listen and understand. S12: I am so proud in my listening ability. hmmm, I feel that I am quite confidence in my language ability. This is why I am sure that I can perform well in listening test.
2	Self- Esteem Increases Mental Readiness	15	S5: I feel that I am perfectly prepared to attain good marks in the listening test. I am proud of this. S11: I think that feeling with high self- esteem helps me attain good marks in English listening since it prepares my mind to listen well and understand well and got good marks. S15: I feel that having high level of self-esteem increases my cognitive readiness to be a good listener in English language.
3	Self- Esteem Helps Students' Overcome Listening Anxiety	13	S4: I think that when I experience high self-esteem, I will no longer fear from English listening skill. I can attain good mark in English listening test. S13: If I have high self-esteem, my anxiety to the listening skill will be decreased and consequently I can perform well in listening test. 19: I did not feel anxious at all, when I asked to conduct the listening test. This is because I am sure of my language ability.
4	Self- Esteem Helps Students' Avoid Boredom and Impatience	12	S1: Due to my high self-esteem, I feel that I am a good and patient listener with any listening text in English. I can comprehend any listening text, short or long text, native or foreign speakers. S10: I feel that I can listen to any type of English text without feeling bored. This help me understand it well. S14: I have interest to listen and understand well any English text. This is because I feel that my English ability is good.

As shown in Table 9 above, students revealed in their interview responses that if they experience high self-esteem, they can gain good results in English listening comprehension. They justified this fact by admitting that having self-esteem increases their feeling of self-confidence and high motivation and makes them mentally ready for the listening skill. Besides, having high self-esteem helps them overcome internal barriers associated with the listening skill, such as feeling anxious, impatient, and bored while they are practicing the listening comprehension activities.

Discussion

The results of the study are relevant to the existing literature on affective variables in second language acquisition because they ensure the statistically significant positive relationship between self-esteem and the listening comprehension among the students of Iraqi EFL university ($r = 0.238$, $p < 0.05$). This correlation, supported by both quantitative and qualitative evidence, places self-esteem as an important psychological factor that leads to L2 listening performance a skill that is commonly known as one of the most anxiety causing and cognitively challenging to language learners (Vandergrift, 1999).

Theoretical Positioning

According to the frames of humanistic psychology and the educational psychology, these results are consistent with the conceptualization of self-esteem introduced by Branden (1969): self-esteem has two basic components: self-competence (belief in one cognitive capabilities) and self-worth (sense of personal value). These components are operationalized in the study by the qualitative data of students describing their experiences: the general self-esteem as the ability to comprehend the plans of the everyday life and navigate in new situations alone, and academic self-esteem as the ability to be proud of personal learning performance and collaborative skills in students. This duality underlies the argument by Abdel-Khalek (2016) that self-esteem is an interactive mechanism of perceived ability and entitlement to it.

In L2 listening comprehension context, these results can be theoretically placed in the Affective Filter Hypothesis of Krashen (1982), which holds that the affective variables (anxiety, motivation, self-confidence) can hinder or facilitate processing of comprehensible input. The qualitative themes described in this paper, namely, increased motivation and self-confidence, heightened mental preparedness, reduced listening anxiety, and being more resilient to boredom are literally the mechanisms that trigger the affective filter downward, thus allowing more effective phonological processing, lexical access and meaning construction during listening tasks. This theoretical framing goes beyond the correlation to the degree that it is used to explain the process by which self-esteem could lead to listening outcomes.

Moreover, the results also sound in the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) according to which competence, autonomy, and relatedness are the basic psychological needs that increase intrinsic motivation. The expressions of relatedness are needed in the form of social self-esteem (friends used to rely on my points of view) and the family self-esteem (my parents support me to do my best) as well as the competence need satisfaction in the form of academic self-esteem (I am sure that I can do well) demonstrate the satisfaction of the needs. Once these psychological needs are fulfilled, the learners show more autonomy in undertaking challenging tasks- in this case L2 listening- and do not give up due to lack of understanding.

The four mediating variables that self-esteem promotes listening comprehension are a new addition to the body of literature that will complement the prior quantitative studies (Hayati & Ostadian, 2008; Bakhtiarvand, 2012; Nourelahi et al., 2021; Palo, 2013; Itzhakov & Weinstein, 2021; Yu & Abdullah, 2025) with a deeper insight into the process through which the self-esteem promotes listening comprehension. These mediators, motivation/self-confidence, mental readiness, and patience/resilience, can be theorized as a series of affective and cognitive processes that include self-esteem leading to confidence, which subsequently leads to anxiety and more mental preparedness, which then prevents attention and patience in the real-time processing task of listening comprehension.

The differences in performance in the fields of listening comprehension where academic listening (19.81), short conversation (19.35), and basic listening comprehension (17.53) give the highest mean scores deserve theoretical attention. The considerable variations of basic listening comprehension with conversational and academic listening ($p = 0.001$) imply that monitoring of self-esteem can make a dissimilar impact on listening activities according to their cognitive loads and familiarity with the settings. Although it is more complex, academic listening can be supported with metacognitive strategies and schema-based processing of students, and simple listening comprehension, that involves quick phonological decoding, may be at a disadvantage of affective interference.

Theoretical Contributions

- This paper shows that self-esteem is a stable characteristic (using the CSEI) and a dynamic phenomenon (as evidenced by the contextualized responses of students in interviews), and hence the distinction made by Spielberg et al., (1983) is significantly supported and the study is extended to the L2 listening field.
- The qualitative determination of four mediating variables has an empirical basis to the process-oriented model of the role of self-esteem on listening comprehension where the earlier studies have determined that there is a correlation but not the mechanism behind it.
- The results apply the Western theories of self-esteem to the Iraqi educational setting, which proves cross-cultural generalizability and also shows culturally-specific variations (e.g., family self-esteem as a particular sphere).
- The mixed-method design, which combines the results of the questionnaires and the focus-group interviews, proves the importance of triangulation in the study of the affective variables, which can capture the strength of relations as well as the experiences behind the statistical trends.

Practical Contributions

- Self-esteem assessment must be included in the diagnostic process of educational institutions that are looking to work out students who are at risk of having problems with listening comprehension so that it can be established early in their life before the affective barriers get established.
- EFL teacher training programs must also incorporate modules on affective variables, whereby training instructors should be trained to identify the indicators of low-self-esteem and introduce classroom activities that allow learners to have positive self-esteem (e.g., fair participation systems, attributional retraining).
- There should be progress of the level of listening assignments (i.e. high-structured, low-anxiety, such as supported academic listening with pre-teaching) to more challenging ones (i.e. authentic conversations) as listening self-esteem increases.

Conclusion

This study confirms that self-esteem is an important psychological asset to the Iraqi EFL university students, which have a positive impact on listening comprehension through four mediating effects observed. The results contribute to the theoretical knowledge by locating the self-esteem under well-developed conceptualizations of affective filtering and self-determination, and they provide pedagogical practice with empirically-supported guidelines. The high self-esteem students show improved motivation, cognitive preparedness, anxiety management as well as persistence in the task, a factor necessary to success in the cognitively demanding task of L2 listening. As an educator, the results highlight the necessity of focusing not only on the development of linguistic competence but also the psychological conditions that facilitate the application of the knowledge that the learner possesses within the time limitations of the real-time processing of the listening comprehension. Future experimental studies must explore the potential to have measured improvements in listening performance through targeted interventions on self-esteem, which would allow building the causal relationships to the correlational ones found here.

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