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PhD program in Education Sciences

**The Impact of Pygmalion Effect on Listening Anxiety and Comprehension in  
an English as a Foreign Language Context (In Iraqi Universities)**

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Extended Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation in Education Sciences

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# INTRODUCTION

## Significance of the research

The contemporary globalized world is increasingly changing every day. The demand on people knowing English is growing very fast. The ways for (and the requirements of) efficient teaching (taking into consideration students' need while choosing educational materials, classroom activities, teaching and assessment methods; interactive teaching, application of new electronic hardware and software) are also changing quickly. This is why research of efficient teaching English is becoming more and more significant. However, many studies have mentioned some negative feelings that foreign language learners may experience in the process of learning the target language and later applying it for real-life situations (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999; Young, 1991; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1991). So, whatever the materials, activities, teaching and assessment methods, these unpleasant feelings may arise, which will decrease student motivation and, ultimately, learning outcomes. These unpleasant, difficult to explain and describe feelings are termed 'anxiety'. Students suffer from shyness, even panic attacks, they grow pale or turn red, sweat, their legs fail them, and headache and/or stomach ache start when they enter a foreign language classroom or need to talk to a foreigner.

There are many factors that cause foreign language learning anxiety, such as fear of something new, lack of self-confidence, lack of language competence and learning strategies, on the one hand, and the pressing need to communicate, on the other, etc. But one of the most important factors causing language learning anxiety deals with the basics of educational process – teacher/student relations. Very much in students' desire to learn a language depends on how teacher treats his/her students. If students see that teacher treats them as capable of learning the target language, supports them, is patient, etc., even when they repeatedly make mistakes, cannot build sentences and fail some tests, they become resilient learners, their self-confidence grows, and so does their motivation to learn. Ur (1996:274) states that motivated learner is the one who is ready to be involved in learning activities. It is easier both to teach and to learn, if students are motivated.

Listening anxiety is a specific language learning anxiety dealing with listening comprehension. Although students do not often mention listening as the activity which causes anxiety, in reality listening causes one of the strongest anxieties. The previous research on the rating of different types of language anxiety (speaking, listening, reading and writing), according to Morchio (2009), whose opinion researcher completely shares, has put the questions wrongly,

that is why in the rating of language anxieties listening anxiety is the last but one in the list (the last one is reading). The question should deal not with those activities that are held in class, which may be too easy, but with language tests and the real-life situations.

Thus, it is very **significant** to find out, what sort of teacher behaviors can increase language (in particular, listening) anxiety and, correspondingly, decrease learning outcomes, and vice versa, what sort of teacher behaviors can decrease the negative feelings of students and their impact on students' learning. It matters, as research clearly depicts that teacher expectations and attitudes towards students change students' beliefs and behaviors and finally outcomes related to EFL language classroom (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

### **Problem**

Many students, studying the target language for years, manage to memorize some amount of vocabulary and grammatical structures, fulfil corresponding exercises, read and write, and produce some oral utterances on the level that permits them to pass the course, but are unable to be involved in real-life oral communication. Among the psychological factors that obstruct their oral communication (lack of self-confidence and motivation, students' shyness and introversion) anxiety is a very influential one. The fear of not understanding or misunderstanding the partner while listening makes students keep silent in response, while wrong comprehension triggers wrong answers, which also causes communication failure. To overcome these psychological problems, teacher may contribute through the so-called Pygmalion Effect (PE) - teacher's belief in students' ability to learn, transmitted in various ways to students. The **goal** of the dissertation was to analyze the literature on the topic in order to find out the mechanisms of the Pygmalion Effect to develop such a model of the Pygmalion Effect that would involve not simply praising students, but also such teacher behaviors that would 'translate' teacher's positive views into students' positive behaviors and to see whether it can have a significant impact on students' listening anxiety and the quality of their listening skills.

### **Novelty**

The Pygmalion Effect and Self-Fulfilling Prophecy (which involves both positive and negative impact of expectations - stressing the negative one – on the learning outcomes) were studied by educational psychology and sociology of education specialists intensively in the 1960s-1990s (Brophy, 1983; Elashoff & Snow, 1971; Jussim & Eccles, 1992; Livingston, 1969; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal, 1987; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Sibicky & Dovidio, 1984; Smith, Jussim, & Eccles, 1999; Snow, 1995), and the results of the research were contradictory, either

supporting or denying its significant impact on the learning outcomes. An effort to reach consensus between the views through developing such a model of PE that would have a significant effect was made in the dissertation.

In the XXI century this social approach has seldom been in the focus of research. The researcher<sup>1</sup> thought it was worth reviving the research on the issue, and to link it in particular to listening comprehension in the target language. This kind of research has not been found for Iraqi context. Also, in general it mostly deals with learning on the whole (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Natanovich & Eden, 2008; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012) or learning the foreign / second language (Tsiplakides et al, 2010; Wang, &Lin, 2014), but not listening in particular, which is the basis of the novelty of the given dissertation.

### **Hypothesis**

The application of the Pygmalion Effect will decrease EFL students' listening anxiety and simultaneously increase the level of their listening skills. To achieve this,

- Teacher's views on the subject, particular lesson, educational materials, and students' ability to develop their target language (listening) skills have to be positive;
- Teacher behaviors (student-centered teaching, interactive tasks, constructive feedback, etc.) should express their positive beliefs.

On these conditions teacher's views and behaviors will have a positive impact on students' views and behaviors and eventually increase the quality of their listening skills.

### **Research methods**

In order to test the hypothesis, the literature relevant to the topic was analyzed, an efficient model of PE was developed. As the level of students' listening anxiety and listening skills had to be measures, the research methods applied were quantitative:

- Survey
- Experiment (involving pre-, while-test 1, while-test-2 and post-test; as well as pre- and post-questionnaire)
- Statistical treatment of the obtained data

### **Theoretical value**

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<sup>1</sup>From here onwards, the author of this dissertation, Rauf Avci, will be mentioned as the researcher.

The theoretical bases of the dissertation include:

- Rosenthal's Pygmalion Effect (Harris & Rosenthal, R., 1985; Rosenthal, 2002; 1987; Rosenthal & Jakobson; 1968);
- Thomas's (1928) and Brophy's self-fulfilling prophecy (Brophy, 1983; 1986);
- Uznadze's (UNESCO, 2002) Set Theory;
- Behaviorist Psychology (Skinner, 1957; 1969; 1976; Thornbury, 1998; 2006);
- Positive Psychology (Csikszentmihalyi & Nakamura, 2011; Griffiths, 2008; Lopez & Snyder, 2009; Peterson, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000);
- Expectancy x Value Theory (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002);
- Self-Efficacy Theory (Bandura, 1997; Bandura & Locke, 2003);
- Attribution Theory (Weiner, 1984);
- Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis (1985, 1995);
- Research on anxiety, learning anxiety, language anxiety and listening anxiety (Horwitz, 1989; 1987; 1985; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; 1991; McIntair & Gardner, 1991; Morchio, 2009);
- Research on teaching listening (Berne, 1995; Evans, 2008; Kim, 2011; Lazzari, 2009; McKinney, Dyck & Luber, 2009; Rosell-Aguilar, 2007, and Thorne & Payne, 2005).

The theoretical value deals with summarizing the existing research on Pygmalion Effect and developing its efficient model in particular for the improvement of EFL listening skills. In the dissertation such theoretical issues as the definition of the Pygmalion Effect, the comparison of L1 and L2 listening skills' development, difficulties of EFL listening and the place of anxiety among them are analyzed.

### **Practical value**

Hopefully, the presented dissertation will make at least a humble contribution to changing target language teachers' views on teaching listening to positive ones. This can both make language learners happier and help improve their communicative skills in an authentic situation. The listening activities discussed from PE viewpoints can contribute to efficient teaching of listening and help language teachers to work in harmony with their students.

## **Structure of the dissertation**

The dissertation is structured in such a way as to help view the topic of the dissertation from various viewpoints. It includes an introduction, overviewing the significance, goals, problem, hypothesis, research methods, theoretical and practical value of the dissertation, three chapters, first, critically viewing the literature on the issue, second, developing the ways to apply PE for teaching listening, and the third, giving the detailed description of the research held in Kurdistan Region of Iraq: a survey on students' and teachers' views on PE role in teaching / learning listening and an experiment in an Iraqi university. In the end conclusions and recommendations, a list of references and an appendix are offered. The dissertation involves 21 tables and 7 figures.

## **CHAPTER I. Literature Review on Pygmalion Effect on Listening Anxiety and Comprehension**

The concept of Pygmalion effect, introduced in the time of great social changes – end of the 1960s, used to be very popular, but later the research of the issue declined, partially due to certain contradictions of the obtained results, and partially due to research interest in education shifting to newer directions. However, the issue sounds contemporary enough nowadays, with all the emphasis on student-centered approach. As students are in the focus, it is very important to understand how teachers may contribute to student academic achievement by raising student's self-confidence.

### **1.1. Definition of Pygmalion Effect**

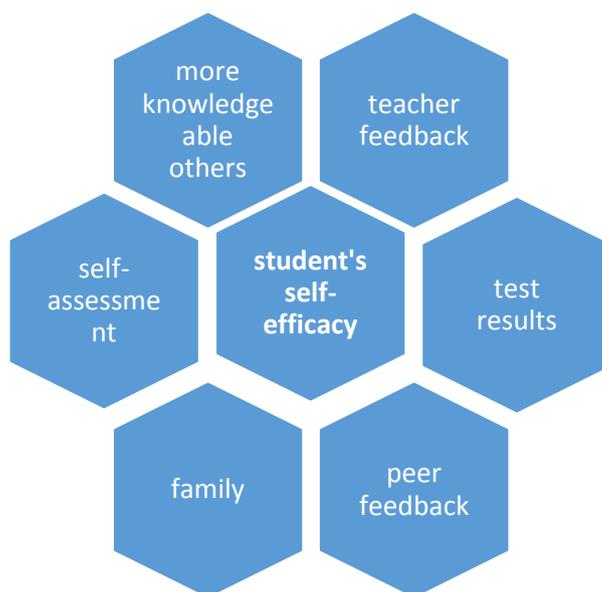
The name Pygmalion originated from a Greek myth about Pygmalion, a prince of Cyprus, who was a sculptor. Once he carved an extremely beautiful sculpture of his imaginary perfect woman and fell in love with her. His love was so powerful, that the sculpture subsequently came to life.

The 'Pygmalion Effect', also sometimes known as the 'Rosenthal Effect', according to the name of the researcher who studied it (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), is the result of belief that the positive regard that the teacher has upon his/her students can improve self-efficacy, which in turn improves performance.

The term ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ was introduced by sociologist Thomas (1928). According to him, a teacher first forms an expectation, and then treats a student in correspondence to it. Eventually, his/her students largely conform to his expectations.

PE and self-fulfilling prophecies are related to teacher stereotypes. Both negative and positive teacher stereotypes are dangerous, as teacher becomes ‘blind’ to the changes in student behavior and achievement. Teachers have to be trained not to form stereotypes, to find out the reasons why the students do not do homework or take part in classroom activities, help students develop effective learning strategies, instead of treating them as dumb.

As shown in figure 1.1 made by the researcher, teacher is one of the most important people, according to whom students judge about their self-efficacy. When teachers have a strong belief in their students’ ability to succeed and high expectations for learners and demonstrate that belief to students, students’ self-assessment increases, and they become more motivated to study well in order to maintain both teacher’s belief and their own self-confidence. The teacher may show his/her belief in a verbal or non-verbal way.

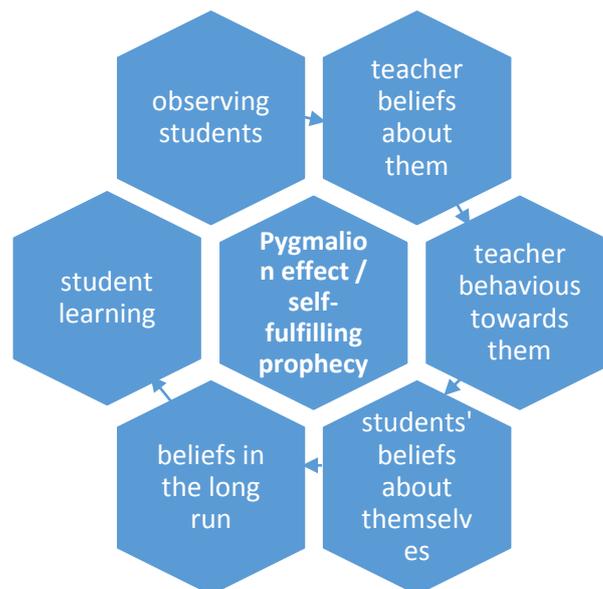


**Figure 1.1. Factors of student self-efficacy**

The Figure 1.2, also made by the researcher, shows how the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy works. Teacher observes students, to form his/her idea of their IQ, motivation

of learning in general and their subject in particular. Based on this, the teacher behaves sympathetically towards students who, to his/her mind, are gifted, and less positively towards students who do not demonstrate the learning behavior s/he expects of them. The majority of students treated positively are inspired to go on working, as they know their effort will be rewarded. However, some students may not care about teacher treatment and be (almost) self-reliant. Besides, some students who are approved of by the teacher may become too self-confident and stop working hard. The majority of students not treated positively will lose the motivation to study. Only those who strongly believe in their own capacity will try to prove to the teacher that s/he is wrong. And, of course, involved and self-confident students will benefit more from the lessons than those students who are not involved and only try somehow not to fail in the course.

This study will try to determine the extent to which the Pygmalion effect is a type of self-fulfilling prophecy and can help learners improve listening skills and reduce listening anxiety.



**Figure 1.2. Variety of Pygmalion effect**

Rosenthal and Jacobson's research (1968) was a pioneering one in the field. Many studies (Claire & Fiske, 1998; Jones, 1986, 1990; Rist, 1970; Schultz & Oskamp, 2000; Taylor,

1992; Weinstein & McKown, 1998) followed, which obtained approximately the same findings and strongly agreed on three things:

- 1) Teacher expectations often turn into stereotypes;
- 2) Teacher expectations have an impact on learning outcomes;
- 3) Teacher expectations may cause inequality and injustice.

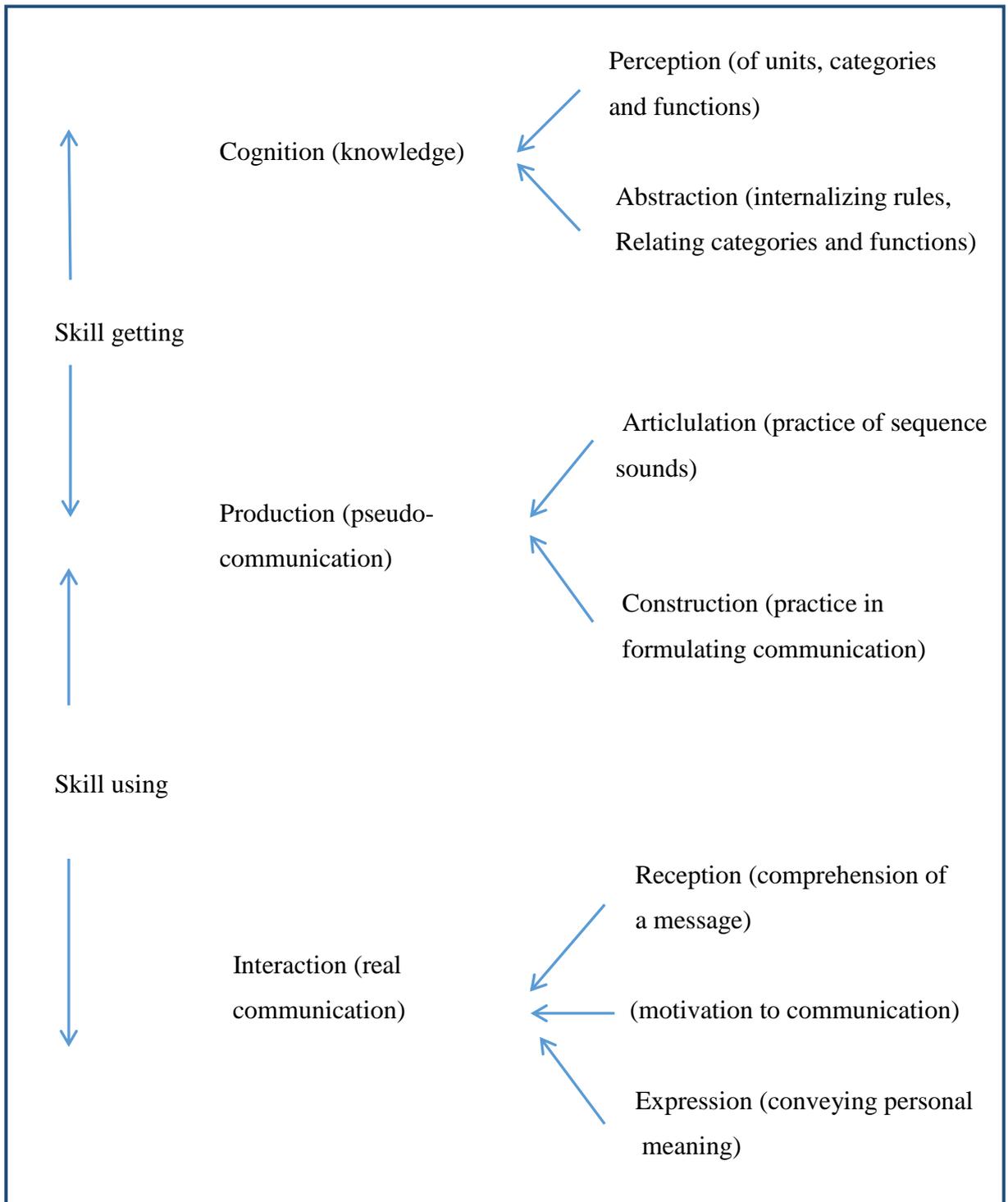
However, results obtained later (Chang, 2011; Ruthert & Reed, 2001) were more contradictory, which is understandable, as such variable as teacher expectations is rather an accompanying variable (the independent variables being teaching and learning methods and strategies, as well as classroom management) than an independent one, and one of the several such variables, namely, student SES, culture, gender, etc., so its impact is rather indirect (via increasing student self-confidence and motivation and decreasing anxiety) than direct. Although a general trend, Pygmalion effect may not work due to various reasons (e.g., student's self-efficacy is low by the moment s/he meets the teacher, it is not easy to overcome the already formed view on oneself as a learner and it definitely takes time). Educational psychologists (Elashoff & Snow, 1971; Jensen, 1969; Snow, 1969; Thorndike, 1968) stressed good teaching vs. peer and teacher attitudes.

Listening is a sophisticated skill. Its development and application is as in the figure 1.3 below.

According to Krashen (1985; 1995), listening is the only comprehensible input for a child mastering mother tongue, and as a very important comprehensible input for older learners and users to develop their L1 or L2 skills. It is unimaginable to learn a language without passing the listening stage.

Interestingly, students often mention listening activities in the classroom as easy ones (Doghonadze, Çepik, & Kapukaya, 2015; Morchio, 2009). This is partly connected with the view on L1 listening, which is definitely the easiest among the L1 verbal communicative skills. Morchio (2009), who held research in the 7<sup>th</sup> grades at Argentinian schools, came to conclusion that this is due to the following reasons:

- The students in her study were pre-taught the vocabulary and grammar
- Repeated listening was applied with difficult texts
- Teacher made comments in L1 to help the students understand the text



**Figure 1.3. The complex cognitive nature of listening** (based on Rivers & Temperly, 1998, p. 4)

Rost (1999, p. 225) classifies the listening difficulties into three groups: linguistic aspect (lack of linguistic knowledge), inferential aspect (inadequate strategy selection) and procedural aspect (unskilled response).

According to Ji (2015), who held a research with 60 randomly chosen non-English majors in the foreign language department of a university in China who had 9 years' experience of learning English as a foreign language, the challenges in listening comprehension that the students were suffering from were:

- lack of self-confidence, presentation of speech (accents, recorded speech, familiar / unfamiliar interlocutor, speaking rate),
- gaps in the message (unfamiliar vocabulary, natural background/technical noise, not understanding the context, situation and the topic),
- applying various strategies (no possibility for meaning clarification; poor comprehension strategies),
- language problems (formal language, like in a lecture or a broadcast),
- contents (lack of background knowledge)
- absence of visual support (facial expression and mimics, gestures, eye contact and posture, environment)

Anxiety is a neurophysiological reaction to a (often unknown) potential threat or to an unpleasant situation. It often deals with an uncertain fear of failure, which often pushes a person to take no action, to keep silent, etc. Some people prefer to fail via doing nothing than to fail as a result of an effort. They perceive it as more shameful.

A reasonable degree of anxiety may help people (except those who possess trait anxiety – see for the definition below) to concentrate and demonstrate their knowledge, skills and capacities at their maximum. This is termed facilitating anxiety. On the other hand, strong anxiety usually has a debilitating effect: the person forgets and mixes up everything s/he knows, loses the ability to speak or move. The threshold between facilitating and debilitating anxiety is individual, for somebody quite low and for somebody high enough.

Researchers (Brown, 2000; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012) have come to conclusion that foreign language anxiety is a specific type of anxiety and it is widely spread. They found that student nervousness during a second / foreign language test was higher than during a native language test. However, they also found, that if anxiety was reasonable, it helped the majority of students to tackle with the task, while for some students it still blocked their brain and did not let them demonstrate the knowledge and the skills that they had. A high level of foreign language anxiety has an impact, on the one hand, on the ability to learn / acquire the target language, and,

on the other hand, to demonstrate the knowledge and skills that the person possesses (not only in exam situations, but also, while trying to communicate in the target language in real-life situations). Concerning real-life listening situations, one of the most difficult ones is speaking / listening to a total stranger (whose speech peculiarities or background knowledge one does not possess). It is often quite difficult even for experienced language users.

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) state that the major reason of listening anxiety in a FL class is the extreme difficulty of the task. Joiner (1986) names students' low self-confidence as another reason. This low self-confidence may most probably result from experienced failures as well as from teacher and peer reactions to these failures. Horwitz (1987) seeks the reason of low self-confidence in students' perfectionism. Sharif & Ferdous (2012) research held with 60 Iranian University students as respondents revealed the following sources of listening anxiety: lack of motivation, fear of making mistakes, lack of listening experience in a FL, teacher criticism not accompanied by recommendations on how to improve, lack of background knowledge on the topic of the text, text's linguistic difficulty, lack of processing time, rate of speech in the recording, and lack of visual support.

Not only poor listening skills may cause listening anxiety, but also vice versa, listening anxiety (rightly or wrongly based on low self-efficacy concerning foreign language listening) can block the listener's ability to comprehend the oral utterance. Horwitz (1987) defines this negative listening self-concept as the false impression that in order to be 'good' at a language, students should possess ideal, native-like pronunciation, know hundreds of thousands words, be a grammar expert, have experience of communicating with native speakers, and have a natural aptitude for language learning. The realization of the impossibility of the task (unless you have already spent many years on learning the language) may cause a strong anxiety. It may seem paradoxical, but it is often the knowledgeable students who suffer from anxiety: they are so accustomed to being good students that they do not want to lose the face.

The causes for existence / growth of listening anxiety largely coincide with the causes of language anxiety in general:

- Feeling that the text is ephemeral (not everybody has the bravery to regularly ask the interlocutor to repeat the utterance; in many not-face-to-face situations listening repeatedly is simply impossible) (Vandergrift, 2011);
- Lack of linguistic (grammatical, lexical) knowledge (Giovanelli, 2015);
- Lack of experience in listening (especially, in authentic situations) (Melanlioglu, 2013);

- Linguistic and contents complexity level of the text (Kiliç &Uçkun, 2013);
- Various distracting factors such as noise (Samuels, 1984), speaker's pronunciation peculiarities, speaking rate, etc. (Xu, 2011), listener's hearing impairment (Ebbels et al., 2014);
- Lack of listening comprehension strategies (Bekleyen, 2009);
- Negative listening self-concept (Joiner, 1986), lack of self-confidence (Dunkel, 1991).

Based on this, logically, the ways that will decrease listening anxiety in a foreign language classroom, are:

- Doing repeated listening for a while, until learners develop certain self-confidence and strategies
- Working on linguistic competence
- Providing more foreign language listening in and out of class
- Developing listening strategies by presenting, discussing and practicing their application
- Dealing with familiar topics, probably, even letting students read up beforehand in the native language
- Pygmalion effect: teacher demonstrating his / her belief in students' ability of listening well

## **CHAPTER 2. Model for Efficient Teaching Listening Applying Pygmalion Effect**

In fact, compared to teaching methods and activities which have a direct impact on the improvement of knowledge and skills, Pygmalion Effect, like anxiety, motivation, self-confidence and other affective variables, has an indirect impact of the development of language skills, including listening. It can decrease anxiety, help students concentrate attention, boost self-confidence and motivation, thus keeping students on task and actively involved in the class. Students supported emotionally by teacher do not to develop learned helplessness even in case of repeated failure and keep trying until they reach their goals.

The impact of teacher emotional support on student engagement in learning has been shown by Goodenow (1993) and Wentzel (1994). Ryan and Patrick (2001) have found that

teacher support matters for students developing their learning strategies. Horwitz (2008) has emphasized that teacher support helps decrease student language anxiety.

Young (1992) views three factors: student, teacher and teaching methods – as sources of language anxiety. According to him, teachers' views on language teaching, teacher-student relations, classroom and assessment procedures can increase or decrease students' learning anxiety. All these are tightly linked with Pygmalion Effect. A teacher who believes language learning is too difficult for some students and verbally or via his/her behavior demonstrates this to the student will increase student's debilitating anxiety. And, vice versa, teacher who believes that a foreign language (including listening comprehension) is something that his/her students can succeed in, plans corresponding activities, tries to relieve testing from extra tenseness, can help students be self-confident, decrease their anxiety and succeed in both learning and testing.

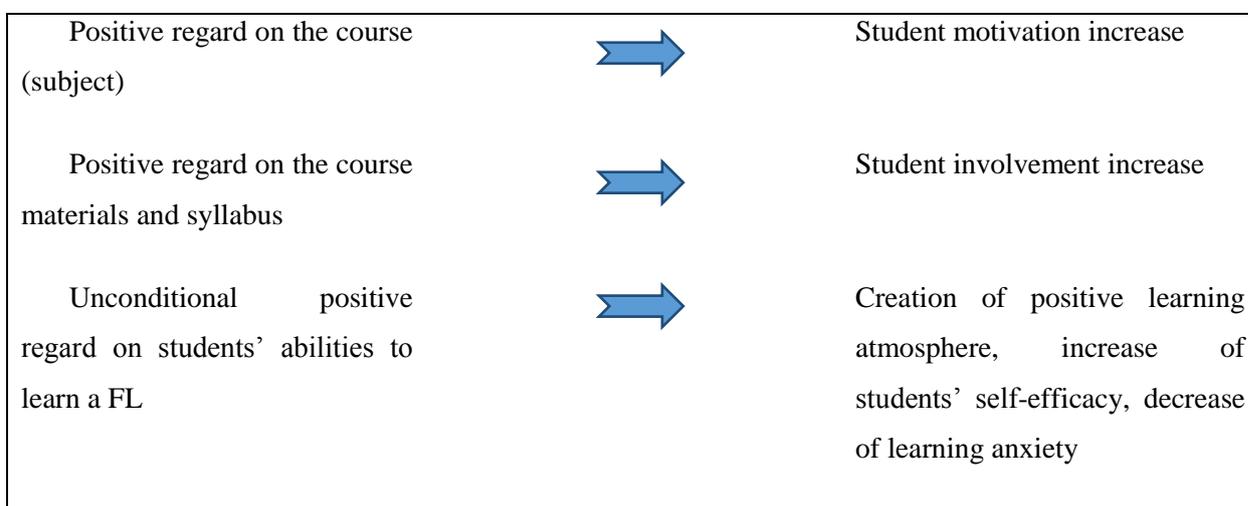
There is presently no one clear definition for 'beliefs' about language learning. A pioneer in the research of beliefs about language learning, Elaine Horwitz, dealt with the definition in her articles (Horwitz, 1985; 1987; 1988), referring to beliefs with ambiguous terms such as *preconceptions* (Horwitz, 1985), *preconceived ideas* (Horwitz, 1987), and *preconceived notions* (Horwitz, 1988). In her instrument BALLI (beliefs about language learning inventory), Horwitz (1988) uses the word *opinions* to denote beliefs. Many researchers refer to beliefs about language learning as a section of metacognitive knowledge, which Wenden (1998) does not agree with, stipulating that both terms are interchangeable with each other. Pajares (1992) takes this ambiguity in the definition a step further, adding to the synonyms' list 'attitudes', 'conceptual systems', 'implicit and explicit theories', 'rules of practice', etc. Pajares opines that the confusion occurs because of the use of the word 'knowledge' while attempting to define *beliefs*, by researchers.

Beliefs about language learning have been investigated through various studies for teachers, in-service and pre-service, as there exists the hypothesis of teacher beliefs influencing the beliefs of students with their instructional practices. Teacher beliefs may not coincide with students' beliefs, but they do have an impact on them. In Kern's study (1995), for example, teachers believed that speaking is easier than listening, while their students did not think so. However, teacher positive beliefs may or may not have a strong impact on students' beliefs, while teachers' negative beliefs more often have a strong impact on students' lack of self-confidence.

Teacher beliefs are so deeply rooted in teacher’s mind that, whether outspoken or not, they have an impact on everything the teacher does – builds up relationships with students, presents materials or assesses students’ knowledge and skills (Williams & Burden, 1997).

The relationships between the beliefs of teachers and their teaching practices in the classroom have piqued the interest of researchers to further understand the development of these beliefs. It is assumed that pre-service teachers, who begin their learning with preconceived ideas, are soon influenced by the formal learning program and develop certain beliefs influenced during the formal learning. A phenomenon popular amongst research scholars is Lortie’s (1975) *apprenticeship of observation*, wherein he suggests that pre- service teachers begin their education in a classroom as students and their beliefs begin to develop from this early phase onwards, identifying that present classroom practices of teachers is a reflection of their own teachers. Jonhson’s (1994) findings corroborate this observation that the practices of teachers bear clear influence of their own experiences during their formal learning.

To sum up the analysis in this sub-chapter, figures 2.1 and 2.2 were made up. They illustrate which aspects of teacher beliefs have a direct impact on students’ learning, also how teacher views have an impact on teacher behavior and, indirectly, via teacher behavior, on students’ behavior.

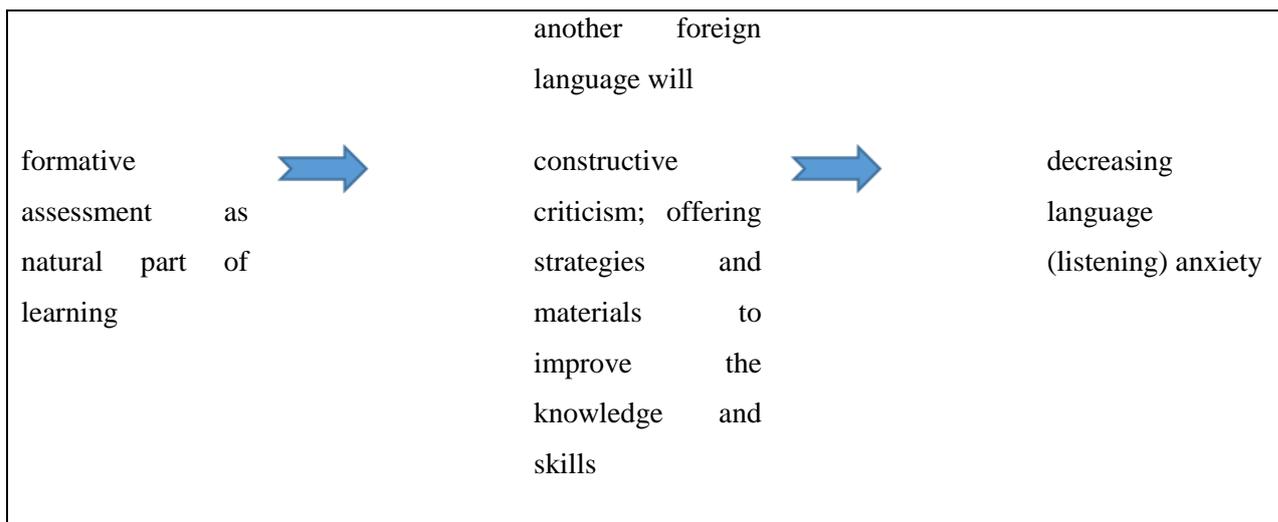


**Figure 2.1. Positive teacher beliefs revealed to students and their impact on student learning (designed by the researcher)**

When the teacher is enthusiastic about the course s/he is delivering, s/he shows to her/his students that the course is both useful for students’ future life and learnable. It is very important that students realize not only the general need of possessing EFL skills, but also that the syllabus has been made up according to the contemporary requirements and that the particular materials

are both interesting, useful and learnable. And, what is especially important to the given dissertation, the teacher's positive views of his/her students' abilities to learn EFL create a safe psychological atmosphere in class and students' self-efficacy increases.





**Figure 2.2. Teacher views and behavior and their impact on learning English (designed by the researcher)**

A teacher who holds student-centered, democratic views takes students' interests, needs and abilities into consideration, while planning the course and each particular lesson. This provides to better involve students in the classroom activities. The understanding by the teacher that learning is an active process and provision by him/her of sufficient and various language learning (listening) activities increases students' learning time and its efficient application, which, in turn, should have a positive impact on students' language (listening) skills. The activities should be authentic, to promote the communicative skills that will be needed in real life. Students will both enjoy and benefit from such activities. By believing in the roles of strategies in language application (listening), teacher will share his/her own strategies and stimulate students to do so. Raising learning to a higher cognitive level will make it more meaningful for students and, thus, more effective. Dealing with errors is one of the most important aspects of language learning. If the teacher realizes that learning is impossible without them, s/he will provide constructive criticism instead of just punishing students for errors. Error fossilization will be largely avoided, and learning anxiety will decrease. Finally, a view on assessment as an indivisible part of educational (language learning) process will help teachers decrease stressfulness not only of formative, but also of summative assessment.

Berne (1995) advises language teachers to select listening activities carefully, as they may cause high-level student anxiety, which will make the process of training ineffective. First of all, the task has to be formulated clearly. If a student does not understand what he/she is expected to do, the anxiety level will rise. Berne recommends not to start directly with listening, but to apply effective pre-listening tasks in order to avoid anxiety increase. These may be

question-answer (to find out their background knowledge of the issue), brainstorming on the vocabulary that may be met in a text on the given topic, discussing listening comprehension strategies, watching a mute video recording, forecasting according to the title or the first sentence.

Listening to teacher and to each other are listening activities in nature and should be treated correspondingly. Anxiety level during these activities is lower than while listening to recordings. This fact can be applied in PE.

If we are using some listening comprehension tasks such as true-false, multiple choice or answer the questions, it is a good idea that the task is given to the students before they start listening. If they listen aimlessly, they may not listen attentively, on the one hand, and may be unable to fulfil the activity, although while listening they seemed to understand everything. The longer the listening piece, the more important is this recommendation.

As it has been mentioned, classroom listening activities, especially the ones which are similar to testing formats, may increase students' listening anxiety. Thus, it is teacher's task to develop such listening activities or to hold listening activities in such a way that students do not feel too worried.

Due to contemporary students' love of technological gadgets, their application for the development of listening skills is definitely effective. And the teacher who uses them gains popularity among his/her students as a netizen, like themselves. According to Evans (2008), Kim (2011), Lazzari (2009), McKinney, Dyck and Luber (2009), Rosell-Aguilar (2007), and Thorne and Payne (2005), podcasting has recently been found especially beneficial for the development of listening skills. Compared to other technologies, podcasting provides authentic or educational listening practice which can be used anywhere and at any time, which, on the one hand, helps the learner relax (as the learning process is informal), and, on the other hand, increases both the listening time and the listening motivation.

### **CHAPTER 3. Research of Pygmalion Effect Impact on Listening Anxiety and Comprehension Held at Universities in Kurdistan Region, Iraq**

This chapter includes the design of the study and the processes to obtain the targets in the study. The steps, methodology to collect data, and the analysis of data held by the researcher are reflected in a detailed way. Some background information on teaching English (in particular

listening) is provided in the chapter.

The chapter deals with two studies – a survey (questionnaire fulfilled by 98 students and 28 teachers from seven Iraqi Universities in the Kurdistan region), and an experimental study in an Iraqi university, to test the dissertation hypothesis.

The research held, on the one hand, **aimed** to find out the nationwide situation dealing with listening skills and anxiety in the process of their development and application, on the other hand, it aimed at holding an experimental study, in order to assess the model of teaching listening developed in the dissertation, which is based on Pygmalion Effect.

The **research questions** were:

- 1) What is the level of undergraduate students' EFL listening skills' level in Kurdistan Region (according to students' self-assessment)?
- 2) What is their listening anxiety level?
- 3) How efficient from the viewpoint of decreasing the listening anxiety and the level of listening skills is the Pygmalion-Effect-based model of teaching listening developed in the dissertation?

To do this, **measurement tools** had to be selected and/or developed. The teachers' and students' questionnaires for the nation-wide survey were designed **based on the literature analysis** in the dissertation. They concerned students' listening anxiety level. To provide their **reliability and content validity** the draft version of the questionnaire was applied with a group of 20 students and 10 teachers not involved in the study. For the reliability of results some synonymous items were suggested in order to see whether the answers to them by the same respondent would coincide. When it was not so, the items were omitted or reformulated. The teachers were also asked to provide feedback dealing with the clarity of the items. Eventually, the questionnaire for students involved 16 items that had to be assessed in a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 – totally disagree to 5 – completely agree). The questionnaire for teachers was analogous (the items were reformulated like 'I am anxious' → 'The students are anxious', and 4 items dealing with teachers' awareness of Pygmalion Effect were added. After the teachers filled in the questionnaire, they were informed on its goal and were asked whether the items were relevant to the goal, to provide the content validity. A discussion followed, after which some items were removed or reformulated.

The **questionnaire** fulfilled by 98 students and 28 teachers from seven Iraqi Universities in the Kurdistan region showed that the students supported the statement that they are more anxious

while listening than when they are speaking, reading or writing (4.12). Some of them get so nervous that do not understand things that they know (4.05). This is easy to explain: both psychologically and linguistically (total dependence on the interlocutor for his / her clarity of speech, accent, rate, vocabulary and grammar, no visual support or possibility to elicit the meaning from the interlocutor in case of audio recorded speech) foreign language listening comprehension is very complicated.

The statements that express the absence of students' anxiety (items 1-5) all received low points (1.99-2.30), which means that students' anxiety is quite high. The anxiety is especially high in the classroom (1.99 – item 4), and lower in authentic situations (2.30 – item 2), which may mean that students are afraid of assessments of the people they know (teacher and classmates). When they know that nobody is assessing them, they feel more peaceful.

On the other hand, statements which dealt with existing anxiety (items 6-16) yielded high results (4.0-4.43), which again means that students' anxiety is quite high. Least anxious students are when they are prepared for the lesson (4.05 - item 9), and they are most anxious about not understanding the other speaker due to his/her unclear speech (4.43 – item 12). The declining order of listening anxiety of the respondent deals with:

- Unclear speech (4.43)
- Comparison to other students (4.28 / 4.27)
- Speed of speech (4.25)
- Complicated language (4.14)
- Desire of understanding every word (4.09)
- Teacher's speech (4.08)
- Topic (4.05)
- Being prepared for the lesson (4.0)

It is possible to see that comparison to other students, which can be regulated with the help of Pygmalion Effect, stands the second in the list. Of course, it is impossible to make conclusions about the whole region with a sample of 98 students, but certain trends are visible.

The experiment held at Ishik University, Kurdistan Region, Iraq, involved two groups, the control group of students, taught traditionally, without purposeful teacher emotional impact (i.e., Pygmalion Effect), and the experimental group, with Pygmalion Effect regularly applied as

presented in the dissertation. Otherwise, both groups, to provide maximally trustworthy results, were taught listening in English with the same materials (Soars & Soars, 2016), the same number of hours (9 hours per week for listening, totally 36 hours for all 4 skills during the week, and by the same teaching methods. The two groups were taught by different teachers, however, their qualifications were maximally close to each other. The experiment involved 43 students from Mathematics, Physics, Biology and English Language Teaching Departments at Education Faculty of Ishik University, Iraq. The duration of the experiment was one semester. The listening tests were used from Soars & Soars (2016), as they have been professionally piloted and their **reliability** and **validity** does not cause any doubt. Both groups were given the same structure and level tests before, during and after the experiment. The tests aimed to measure the students' listening skills' level and to find out whether any positive changes occurred. Besides, they had to answer the pre- and post-experimental questionnaire, also developed by the researcher based on the literature analysis and assessed for reliability and validity the same way, dealing with students' satisfaction with learning listening and the level of their listening anxiety, in order to find out, whether the suggested model was more efficient than the traditional one.

For the pedagogical experiment, the first year (freshman) students of Ishik University's Education Faculty, including the departments of Mathematics, Physics, Biology and ELT, participated in the study. As the experimental and the control groups, to be comparable, had to involve students of the same level of language (listening) skills, so, their level was defined in accordance with the results of the Oxford Online Placement Test that is requested and applied by the Education Faculty. Students having beginner level were invited to participate in the experiment. Totally 43 students out of approximately 390 students at the faculty and about 3500 students at the university, volunteered to participate. This number is representative of the faculty (11.03%), but not really representative of the university (1.23%). They were divided into two groups: control and experiment. The experimental group was composed of 22 students, while the control group - of 21 students. The students of the experimental group were aged 17- 21, while in the control group – 18-23 (mean age 20). The groups were formed from the volunteers at random, observing gender balance. The composition of the groups made their results comparable.

During the **experiment**, the efficiency of the two approaches (traditional and Pygmalion-Effect-based) was compared through two types of data: testing and questionnaire results.

### **Table 3.1. Summary of Testing Results**

	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre-test	Experimental Group	22	42.3182	5.07455	1.08190
	Control Group	21	42.6667	7.45878	1.62764
While-Test1	Experimental Group	22	56.4091	5.49163	1.17082
	Control Group	21	52.7143	7.55078	1.64772
While-Test2	Experimental Group	22	69.0909	5.94346	1.26715
	Control Group	21	55.7143	7.47090	1.63028
Post-Test	Experimental Group	22	86.9545	9.66820	2.06127
	Control Group	21	63.5714	6.92511	1.51118

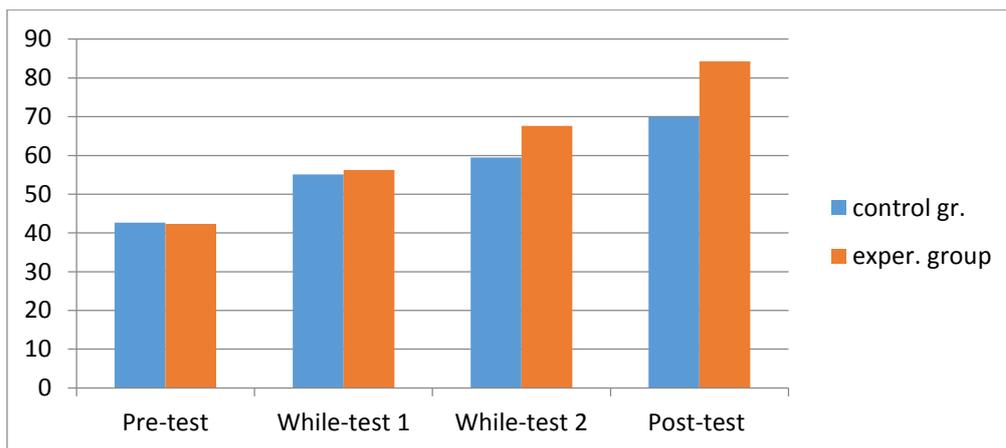
Initially, the level of listening skills in both groups was quite close to each other (42.3182 and 42.6666), which makes the two groups quite comparable. If in while-test 1 the results of both groups do not differ significantly (56.2273 and 55.1429), later the difference becomes more tangible. This is natural enough, as it takes time to achieve the changes due to different treatments.

Due to the intensive teaching, teachers' high qualification and students' enthusiasm, both groups achieved perceptible success. The improvement took place on each stage of the experiment, not only in the groups on the whole, but for each student as well.

However, the average results in the control group (42.6667 → 69.9524, i.e. an increase by 27.2857 points or by 63.95%) did not grow as significantly as in the experimental group (42.3182 → 84.2273, i.e. an increase by 41.9091 or by 99.03%).

The standard deviations in both groups were within norm (5-8 points) and growing slowly during pre-, while-1 and while-2 tests, but the post-test a bit too high in both groups, which shows that the groups were initially quite homogeneous, but they were becoming more heterogeneous. It means that both approaches have a different impact on different students, some students progress fast, while others – slowly. The standard error is low enough (1-3 points), which means that the difference between the groups' results which exceeds 3 points is statistically important.

The testing results are presented in Figure 3.2, to see the difference between the groups more visually.



**Figure 3.2. Testing results**

To see whether the obtained results differ statistically significantly, Independent Samples Test and Paired Samples Test were held with SPSS.22, and the results were analyzed.

The same student satisfaction / anxiety level questionnaire involving 11 questions was held before and after the experiment in both groups (the students had to assess the given statements in 5-point Likert scale: 1 – totally disagree → 5 totally agree). Questionnaires were given to all students in both groups, and they consented to fill them in. The obtained mean results show that students' satisfaction in the experimental group increased significantly (2.38 → 4.063 points in Likert 5-point scale), while in the control group decreased to a certain degree (3.03 → 2.29). The results were also assessed by Paired Samples statistics with SPSS.22 software to find out their statistical significance.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Listening comprehension is one of the essential language skills, learning of language, native or target, begins with it. It provides, according to Krashen (1985, 1995) the indispensable comprehensible input for language learning.
2. Although often falsely viewed as an easy skill (Morchio, 2009) it is very difficult both from linguistic and psychological views. Listening anxiety is a psychological factor creating huge problems for the development and functioning of listening skills.
3. Pygmalion Effect – the term introduced by Rosenthal & Jacobson (1968) in the end of the 1960s - is teacher's belief in students' ability to learn, transmitted in various ways to students.
4. Taking conclusions 1 and 2 into consideration, the researcher hypothesized that the

application of Pygmalion Effect could create a productive environment for the decrease of students' listening anxiety and the improvement of their listening skills.

5. Although the initial research on the Pygmalion Effect (Rosenthal, 1987; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) yielded positive results concerning the level of the students' knowledge and skills in various subjects, some later held researches turned out to be inconclusive (Chang, 2011; Ruthert & Reed, 2001). The researcher's idea was that Pygmalion Effect in those researches was perceived too simplistically, just as praising students for their success and not punishing them for any failure. In reality the idea of the Pygmalion effect (in particular, for teaching target language listening) can be developed much further. An effort to create a new model for PE applied for language (listening) teaching was done in the dissertation.
6. The model, suggested by the researcher is in detail presented in sub-chapter 2.3 (figure 2.2). Teacher's theoretical views should develop towards more student-centered and constructivist, the teacher should emphasize participatory learning, communicative views on language teaching, as well as tolerance towards errors and emphasis of constructive feedback. These up-to-date views will change teacher's behavior so that teacher/student relations will be democratic and friendly, effective classroom management supporting PE is used, strategies for listening comprehension are explained to students in the process of corrective feedback. Only on this condition PE can be really effective for students. The students will both change their attitudes (that L2 listening is doable and necessary) and their behavior in class (they will be more engaged and feel more self-confident). Due to the application of the suggested model students will really decrease students' listening anxiety and increase the level of their listening skills. As the impact has an indirect nature (via the decrease of anxiety and increase of motivation), the impact cannot be dramatic, but the correlation between PE application and students' listening skills should be statistically significant.
7. To be better aware of the background for the study, a questionnaire survey was held with 98 volunteer Iraqi students from 7 universities. It showed that the students supported the statement that they are more anxious while listening than when they are speaking, reading or writing (mean results of 4.12 in a 5-point Likert scale). This means that for Iraqi students in Kurdistan region listening anxiety is a serious problem creating real obstacles for the development of students' listening skills.
8. A hypothesis was formulated that the application of the suggested model of Pygmalion Effect and the corresponding listening activities and classroom management would cause

a decrease of listening anxiety and an increase of the level of listening skills.

9. The suggested PE model for dealing with listening anxiety and skills was tried out experimentally. The obtained results are quite inspiring. The experimental group was taught based on the suggested model. The students' listening anxiety, according to the held questionnaire, dropped significantly (e.g., item 8: I feel worried while doing the listening tasks - from 4.09 to 2.05 points in the 5-point Likert scale), while their listening skills improved significantly (from 42.3 in pre-test to 87 points in post-test, out of 100). The Paired Samples test confirmed the statistical significance of the obtained results. At the same time, the control group was taught in a traditional way, without a special emphasis on Pygmalion Effect, especially practiced so systematically as in the experimental group (which does not exclude friendly relationships between the teacher and the students and teacher support to his students). The initial level of listening anxiety in the group was high (item 8 – 4.3 points), after the experiment it decreased to a certain degree (item 8 – 4.0 points). The decrease is statistically insignificant and obviously less than in the experimental group. The level of the listening skills in the group in the pre-test was 42.7, in the post-test it increased to 63.6, the change is statistically significant, but much less than in the experimental group. The obtained results mean that the teachers in both groups were doing their best, they are qualified teachers, however, the increase of the level of listening skills in the experimental group is tangibly greater. As the only condition by which the groups differed was the application (or its absence) of the suggested model of the Pygmalion Effect, it is possible to conclude that the change of the dependent variable (level of listening skills) was caused by the independent variable (the application or its absence of the suggested model of the Pygmalion Effect).
10. The obtained results have limitations. While the questionnaire survey population is to a certain degree representative of the EFL teacher and student population in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the experimental study involved a limited number of students, besides, the duration of the experiment was just one semester and a postponed testing could not be held. Correspondingly, no far-reaching conclusions can be made. Further, larger scale research is necessary to generalize the obtained in this dissertation results. The developed and piloted measuring instruments (questionnaires) permit to replicate the research in other universities / countries. On the other hand, if we take into consideration that the obtained results are in the same line as the researches that have found positive consequences of PE (Boser et al, 2014; Claire & Fiske, 1998; Jones, 1986, 1990; Livingston, 1969; Rist, 1970; Rosenthal, 1987; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Schultz &

Oskamp, 2000; Taylor, 1992; Weinstein & McKown, 1998), certain generalization can be made, at least for teaching EFL listening.

11. Based on the above, the researcher would like to recommend EFL / ESL teachers to get better acquainted with the phenomenon called the Pygmalion Effect, to advise the administration of educational institutions to hold seminars and trainings on its applications.
12. The researcher suggests his model of PE application to both teachers and researchers. Of course, researchers might modify this model or develop their own ones. The perspectives of PE usage are, as minimum, interesting.

The main ideas and data of the dissertation have been reflected in the following publications:

1. Rauf Avci. (2016). Is there a Pygmalion Effect in learning EFL? The 6<sup>th</sup> International Research Conference on Education, Language and Literatures (IRCEELT). Proceedings. Tbilisi: IBSU, p. 377-382.
2. Rauf Avci. (2016). The impact of the interaction between teacher and learner on the motivation and achievement of the learners. The 7<sup>th</sup> International Visible Conference on Educational Studies and Applied Linguistics (VESAL), p. 359-368. Ebril, Iraq: Ishik University.
3. Rauf Avci. (2017). The impact of anxiety on listening in a foreign language and the ways to overcome its negative effects. *Journal of Education in Black Sea Region*, vol. 2, # 2, p. 97-115.