

A CASE STUDY OF EFL LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION

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Abstract

This research tries to analyse the students' level of students' difficulties in listening comprehension and the factors causing it. This is a case study research. This research revealed that students had many difficulties in listening comprehension. The difficulties from the biggest percentage were understanding organization, pragmatic understanding, and basic comprehension. Then, there were many factors causing students' difficulties in listening. The factors were from the speaker, the environment, and the speaker itself. The factors causing the difficulties from the biggest percentage were the environment (noisy), poor recording, unfamiliar topics, accent of the speaker, ungrammatical sentences, long listening, concentration or focus, unknown words, uninteresting topic, and recognizing main points.

Keyword: *listening difficulties, factors causing listening difficulties.*

INTRODUCTION

Several researchers have investigated the students' difficulties in listening comprehension. Bingol and Celik (2014) stated that students often face difficulties in understanding meaning of unfamiliar vocabularies and accent of the speaker. These difficulties may be caused by quality of recorded material, students' physical condition, unfamiliar topic, unfamiliar words, and length and speed of the listening. As investigated by Osada (2004) in Vanderfrift (2004: 8), the unsuccessful in listening is caused by the speed of the speaker.

In line with, Jun and Zhenghou (2014) stated that the problems in listening encountered by students are they do not understand the whole text, forget the text quickly, and the speaker's sounds (omission, linking, assimilation, and accents).

Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in conducting a research about listening comprehension difficulties encountered by fourth semester of university students. This research try to analyze the students' level of difficulty in listening comprehension from the biggest

percentage to the smallest one and the factors causing it.

Defining Listening

Listening is the early stage of language development in a person's first language. Becoming a good listener, a person can learn how to speak, read, and write well. Listening is a key to create an effective communication. According to Murcia (2001: 71) listening is a basic skill of language learning and is a passive skill. In line with, Kathleen (2009: 37) defined listening as the basic skill that a person must have.

Vandergrift (2012 :4) stated that listening can facilitate other language skills. Listening is about receiving information or getting meaning of the conversation. By a good listening, people can interact one to each other.

Listening takes a big part in a communication process. As stated by Richards (2008: 3) that listening facilitates spoken discourse. Listening is the ability to receive and interpret a content or message of a conversation. The basic concept of listening is hearing. In hearing, a person must have a good focus or concentration. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are often misunderstood.

Fred (2013) stated that listening is a complex process of understanding and

making sense of spoken language. This process includes recognizing speech sound, understanding the meaning of words, understanding syntax in which they are presented, making relevant inferences based on context, real-world knowledge, and the speaker attribute (e.g., to what information the speaker has access and what about he or she is talking next).

Because of those complex processes of listening comprehension, students often found many difficulties. They are often difficult in understanding the main idea, especially understanding the main idea from a long conversation. Then, this become more difficult when they must find out the details from a context or conversation. These are might caused by students lose their concentration during hearing a conversation. Besides that, listening also needs many language abilities.

There are many listening attributes of language ability:

1. Phonological Knowledge

This knowledges relates to phonemes, phonological rules, and the ability to process speech quickly.

2. Syntactic Knowledge

This knowlledge relates to knowledges of sentences, discourse, structures, and cohesion.

3. Semantic Knowledge

These knowledges are the knowledge of words, phrases, and words categories.

4. Pragmatis Knowledge

This is about how fluent users of the language communicate.

5. General Knowledge

This commonly discusses topics (Rost, 2011: 226-227).

From the explanation above, there are many types of listening questions that often appear in a listening comprehension

assessment, they are: (1) listening for main ideas; (2) listening for main purpose; (3) listening for major details; (4) understanding the function of what is said; (5) understanding the speaker's attitude; (6) understanding the organization; (7) connecting content; (8) making inferences.

The examples of listening comprehension questions are shown in the following table:

Table 1
Listening Questions Types

Question Type	Question Test	Sample Questions
Basic Comprehension	Listening for main ideas	1. What problem does the main have? 2. What is the main topic of the lecture? 3. What is the lecture mainly about? 4. What aspect of X does the professor mainly discuss?
	Listening for main purpose	1. Why does the student visit the professor? 2. Why does the professor explain X?
	Listening for major details	1. According to the professor, what is one way that X can affect Y? 2. What are X? 3. According to the professor, what is the main problem with the X theory?
Pragmatic Understanding	Understanding the function of what is said	1. What does the professor imply when he says this? (replay) 2. What can be inferred from the professor's response to the student? (replay) 3. What is the purpose of the woman's response? (replay)
	Understanding the speaker's attitude	1. What can be inferred about the student? 2. What is the professor's attitude toward X? 3. What is the professor's opinion of X? 4. What does the woman mean when she says this? (replay)
Understanding organization (there are general and specific question for each category of understanding)	Understanding organization	1. How does the professor organize the information about X that he presents to the class? 2. How is the discussion organized? 3. In what order does the speaker describe the topic?

organization)		4. Why does the professor discuss X?
	Connecting contents	1. What is the likely outcome of doing procedure X before procedure Y? 2. What does the professor imply about X?
	Making inferences	1. What can be inferred about X? 2. What will the student probably do next? 3. What kind of weather does El Nino cause? 4. According to the professor, which characteristic describe memoirs?

The descriptions of listening comprehension questions in the table above are discussed as follows:

1. Basic comprehension question asks the main ideas, the main purpose, and the major details. Listening for main ideas and main purpose asks information based upon the content of the passage. Then, listening the major details asks about details which are concerned with major, not minor, details.
2. Pragmatic understanding involves understanding the function of what is said and understanding the speaker's attitude. The questions of pragmatic understanding usually replay a part of listening passage and often ask about the degree of certainty.
3. Connecting information involves understanding organization, connecting content, and making inferences. Understanding organization questions often asks for more than one answers. Connecting

content questions often ask to classify items into some categories; identify sequence of events or the steps involved in a process or specify the relationship between various ideas in a manner that was not presented in the passage; make inferences about information in the passage; make a prediction; and make a conclusion. Then, making inferences questions may ask about various things like a simple process, a cause and effect, or a comparison contrast.

The Factors Causing the Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

Even listening comprehension is one of the skills of language and considered as the basic skill of language, many students considered listening comprehension as unimportant skill. They leave listening comprehension behind other language skills. So that many students failed for one until more in listening comprehension test. The score of

listening comprehension often below the other skills of language.

There are many factors causing it. First, when facing listening questions, students must concentrate both in short and in long conversation. The students' condition when facing the paper test often influence the concentration during the test. Then, their ability in understanding and getting information from the conversation also causing it. Then last is the speaker. The speed of speech of the speaker and the speaker's accent also influence the successful of the students' listening comprehension.

THE METHOD OF THE RESEARCH

The method used in this research is a qualitative case study. There are many steps in qualitative research according to Fraenkel, et.al. (2012: 429-431), they are identification, generation of the hypothesis, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation and conclusion. The detail of those steps are explained as follows:

1. Identification of the phenomenon to be studied

The researcher tries to seek the students' difficulty in listening comprehension and the factors causing it.

2. Identification of the participants

The number of the participants are 20 students of the fourth semester students of university. The researcher choose them as the participant because they can give the researcher the data needed for completing the research. They are the students who almost complete the level of listening comprehension in English Education Department so that the test given to measure the level of difficulty is easier to be got by the researcher.

3. Generation of the hypothesis

In this step, the researcher explores the listening process in the classroom. The researcher want to know the students' level of difficulty in listening comprehension from the biggest percentage and the factors causing the the students' difficulty in listening comprehension.

4. Data collection

Data collection means the researcher is continually observing the materials needed to support the research, such as people, events, and occurrences. In this step, the first data got from the class observation. Then, to get the data of the level of difficulty in listening comprehension, the researcher give the multiple choice questions of

listening. There are 20 questions containing the all types of listening questions. The researcher then analyzes it and calculates the percentage of each question category.

After gave the multiple choice questions of listening comprehension, then the researcher gives the participants open-ended questions.

This is used to get the free response from the participants about the factors causing the students' difficulty in listening. From those responses, the researcher makes the closed question questionnaire. This questions of questionnaire only have two possible answer (yes or no). This is used to find out the percentage of the factors causing students' listening difficulty from the biggest percentage to the smallest one. This type of questions are used because quick and relatively inexpensive to analyze (Kothari, 2004: 103).

5. Data analysis

Data analysis means the researcher analyzes, synthesizes, and reduces the information from many resources, such as observation, questionnaires and documents.

6. Interpretation and conclusion

Interpretation and conclusion is the last step of qualitative research. After analysed the data, in this step, the researcher interprets and makes the conclusion of the research or decides what is going to tell others.

THE TECHNIQUE OF COLLECTING DATA

The technique used in this research is qualitative data. The qualitative data are all information which is obtained from the action or what happens in listening class. The data are taken from:

1. Observation

Class observation was done in this research. It includes activities in the teaching and learning process of listening and also the observation of the environmental atmosphere of the listening process.

2. Test

The researcher spread out a listening paper test to analyze the students difficulties in listening comprehension. From this test, the researcher got the data about types of questions that students often meet as the difficulty in listening comprehension.

3. Questionnaire

The researcher spread out a list of questionnaire to get the data about the students' difficulties in listening and the factors causing students' difficulties in listening. The researcher uses open-ended questionnaires were addressed to the respondents to get their responses in a form of written data.

ANALYZING THE DATA

This research used qualitative and quantitative data analysis. The qualitative data were derived from a class observation. The qualitative data analysis is the process of finding and arranging materials which support the researcher to present what have been told to others. Analysis involves working with data; organizing, breaking into some manageable units, and synthesizing them, and searching for patterns; and discovery what is important and what is to be learned. Then, the last process of analysis is deciding what to tell others (Bogdan and Bilken, 1992: 153).

Based on the explanation above, this research are analyzed through the following procedures:

1. Observing students' listening activities in class.
2. Giving questionnaire to the participants.
3. Counting and classifying the result of the questionnaires.
4. Analyzing the result of the questionnaires.
5. Interpreting.
6. Discussing.
7. Drawing conclusion.

The quantitative data derived from questionnaires and test. In order to answer the two research questions, the descriptive statistics of percentages were used.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

The research is my personal classroom experiences. From item test analysis revealed that students have many difficulties in listening comprehension. The level of difficulty from the most difficult to the easiest is understanding organization, pragmatic understanding, and basic comprehension. More detail of these descriptions will be shown by the following table:

Table 2
*Question Type and
the Level of Difficulty*

Question Test	Question Type	Sample Questions	Level of Difficulty (%)
Basic Comprehension	Listening for main ideas	1. What problem does the man have? 2. What is the main topic of the lecture?	5 %
	Listening for main purpose	1. Why does the student visit the professor? 2. Why does the professor explain X?	5 %
	Listening for major details	1. What are X? 2. According to the professor, what is the main problem with the X theory?	25 %
Pragmatic Understanding	Understanding the function of what is said	1. What does the professor imply when he says this? (replay) 2. What can be inferred from the professor's response to the student? (replay)	30 %
	Understanding the speaker's attitude	1. What is the professor's attitude toward X? 2. What does the woman mean when she says this? (replay)	35 %
Understanding organization	Understanding organization	1. How does the professor organize the information about X that he presents to the class? (specific) 2. How is the discussion organized? (general)	70 %
			45 %
	Connecting contents	1. What is the likely outcome of doing procedure X before procedure Y? (specific) 2. What does the professor imply about X? (general)	65 %
	Making inference	1. According to the professor, which characteristic describe memoirs? (specific) 2. What can be inferred about X? (general)	20%
			50 %
			10 %

From the table above, it can be concluded that the most difficult in listening is understanding organization. There are three question types in

understanding organization, they are organization of the text; connecting contents; and making inferences. There are the general understanding of the text organization and the organization of the specific information in text organization.

In general understanding of the text organization, 45% of the students found difficulties in answering question like, “How is the discussion organized?”. Then, as the most difficult was in the organization of the specific information. There are 70% of the students who found difficulty in answering such of this question type, “How do the professor organize the information about X that he presents to the class?”.

The next most difficult in text organization is connecting content. There were 65% students who found difficulty in such of this question type, “What is the likely outcome of doing procedure X before procedure Y?”, but It would be easier for students to answer this type of question in more general, like “What does the professor imply about X?”. There were only 20% students who found difficulty in this question type.

Then, making inferences become the easiest question in organization. There were only 10% students who found difficulty here. Some of them could answer a question like “What can be inferred about X?”. But it became more difficult when students must answer such of question “According to the professor, which characteristic describe memoirs?”. There were 50% students found difficulty

in answering the more specific question of making inferences.

The next difficult question type is pragmatic understanding. There were 35% students who found difficulty in understanding the speaker’s attitude. Then, there were 30% students who found difficulty understanding the function of what is said. They found difficulty in answering a such of question “What does the professor imply when he say this?”.

The easiest question type is in basic comprehension. There were only 25% students who found difficulty in answering questions of major details, like “According to the professor, what is the main problem with X theory?”. Next, there were only 5% students who found difficulty in answering main purpose question. There were only 5% students who found difficulty in answering this such of question, “Why does the professor explain X?”. Then, there were also only 5% students who found difficulty in answering main ideas question. There were only 5% students who found difficulty in answering this such of question “What is the main topic of the lecture?”.

The Factors Causing the Students’ Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

There were many factors causing students’ difficulties in listening.

The factors will be shown by the following table:

Table 4
Factors Causing Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

Factors	Total Number of Students	The Percentage of students
Prediction	9	45%
Unknown words/phrase	15	75%
Recognizing main points	3	3%
Unfamiliar topics	18	90%
Uninteresting topics	12	60%
Ungrammatical sentences	17	85%
Long listening	16	80%
Concentration/focus	16	80%
Accents of the speaker	18	90%
Speaker's speed of speech	17	85%
Environment (noisy)	19	95%
Poor recording	18	90%

The table above shows that the environment takes a big part in influencing students' difficulties in listening comprehension. There were 19 students or 95% of the students who stated that environment causes their difficulty in listening comprehension. Based on my classroom experiences, the surroundings which are too noisy can make them difficult in answering questions of listening comprehension. It is caused of the location of language laboratory that is in the second floor, and near to parking area

and street. Then, the language laboratory is not soundproof enough.

The next factors are the quality of the recording, the speaker, and the unfamiliar topics of the text or conversation. There were 18 students or 90% students who stated that those factors influencing their result of listening comprehension. It might be caused by the CDs that are often used or the students' itself, they might under the bad physical condition so that they think that the recording is poor. It also can be caused by their seat. The students who sit in the back of the classroom might not hear the recording as good as the students who sit in front of the audio.

Then, there were also 18 students or 90% of the students stated that the accents of the speaker made them difficult in answering the questions of listening comprehension. It is caused by English is a foreign language for them so that they often found the different accents of the speaker made them difficult in hearing and in understanding the text or the conversation. Then, there are many natives, such as Australian, British, American, and so on. The accents of English British, for example, must be different from the accents of English American, and this made students difficult

in understanding the text or the conversation.

There were also 18 students or 90% of students who found that the unfamiliar topics made them difficult in listening comprehension. Based on the research, the students found difficulties if they must listen to the conversation or the text which is unfamiliar for them. Unfamiliar topics made them difficult in understanding the message of the whole text or conversation, or even difficult in recognizing the words.

The next factors are the speaker's speed of speech and ungrammatical sentences that take the same percentage of the students. There were 17 students or 85% of the students who found that the speaker's speed of speech and ungrammatical sentences could make them difficult in listening comprehension. There were often a speaker who speaks too fast and with omission, linking, and assimilation and these could make students difficult in recognizing the words or sentences. For example, the sentence like "Kill them all" sounds "Kill themol", so that the students who seldom hear a such of this sentence would find difficulties in getting the meaning and or the message of the sentences.

Then, there were 16 students or 80% of the students found difficulties in

listening comprehension because of concentration or focus, and long listening. They often lost their concentration while listening. Loosing concentration or focus even only a second could make them lagged some parts of the text or conversation and then failed in understanding the message of the whole text or conversation. Then, long listening could make them bored and loose concentration or focus. Based on the research, many students failed in getting message from a long listening.

There were 15 students or 75% of the students found unknown words or phrase as a difficulty in listening comprehension. The students often meet a sentence with unknown words. Then, these unknown words could make them difficult in getting the message of the sentence.

Next to unknown words is uninteresting topics. Uninteresting topic is like long listening for students. There were 12 students or 60% of the students found this as the difficulty in listening comprehension. They were easy to bored because of the topic is not interesting for them. For instance, topic in biology might not interesting for students of education.

Then, there were 9 students or 45% of the students found prediction as the difficulty in listening comprehension.

Making prediction could be difficult for them if they met one or some factors above, such as uninteresting topic, unknown words, or losing concentration. But, even the students did not know the meaning of the whole text or conversation, they could still predict the message of the text or conversation, so that this factor only took 45%.

The last factor or the less difficult in listening comprehension is recognizing main point. There were only 6 students or 30% of the students found recognizing main points as a difficult in listening comprehension. Many students were successful in recognizing the main points of the text or conversation. This might be because it was easy for students to get the main idea of the text or conversation.

CONCLUSION

The Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

The research revealed that the students found difficulties in listening comprehension. The level of difficulties from the most difficult to the easiest are understanding organization, pragmatic understanding, and basic comprehension. Their most difficulty in listening is understanding organization. The level of

difficulty for each category is 50% degree of difficulty for understanding organization, 32% degree of difficulty for pragmatic understanding, 30% degree of difficulty for making inferences, and 12% degree of difficulty for basic comprehension.

The Factors Causing the Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

There were many factors causing students' difficulties in listening. The factors are from the speaker, the environment, and the speaker itself. The factors that caused the difficulties from the biggest percentage are the environment (noisy) (95%), the accent of the speaker (90%), unfamiliar topics (90%), poor recording (90%), the speaker's speed of speech (85%), concentration or focus and long listening (80%), unknown words or phrase (75%), uninteresting topics (60%), prediction (45%), recognizing main point (30%).

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