

STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES TOWARD ENGLISH LISTENING COMPREHENSION AND ITS ADDRESSING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengungkap kesulitan siswa dalam memahami saat mendengarkan (listening) dan resolusinya yang terjadi di kelas Bahasa Inggris Intensif di Pondok Pesantren Edi Salatiga. Subjek penelitian ini adalah 30 siswa dan 8 guru bahasa Inggris. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah desain deskriptif dengan data kuantitatif diperoleh dari angket dan data kualitatif dari observasi dan wawancara. Setelah memvalidasi data kesulitan pemahaman dari sudut pandang siswa dan guru, ditemukan bahwa kesulitan tersebut sebagian besar terkait dengan aksen penutur asli, suasana kelas, kecepatan pembicara, kosa kata bahasa Inggris siswa yang terbatas, dan kurangnya konsentrasi siswa. Selain itu, strategi menyimak yang diusulkan oleh siswa dan guru menyarankan penggunaan media lagu dan film berbahasa Inggris, interaksi bahasa Inggris-Bahasa campuran di kelas, peningkatan mood dan minat siswa, dan lebih banyak latihan menyimak cepat secara berurutan. untuk mengatasi kesulitan.

Kata kunci : *pemahaman dalam listening, strategi, kesulitan-kesulitan siswa*

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research was to reveal students' difficulties toward listening comprehension and its resolutions that took place in the intensive English language class at Edi Islamic Boarding School, Salatiga. The subjects of this research were 30 students and 8 English teachers of the course. The method used in this research was descriptive design with the quantitative data obtained from questionnaire and the qualitative data from observation and interview. After validating the data on the listening comprehension difficulties from both students' and teachers' sides, it was found that the difficulties were majorly in relation to the accents of the native speakers, atmosphere of the class, speaker's fast pace, students' limited English vocabulary, and students' lack of concentration. Besides, the listening strategies proposed by the students and the teachers suggest the use of English song and movie media, the mixed English-Bahasa language interaction at class, the students' mood and interest build-up, and more practice of speed listening in order to overcome the difficulties.

Keywords: *listening comprehension, strategies, students' difficulties*

INTRODUCTION

Listening is an essential part of English as a foreign language just like the other skills such as writing, reading, and speaking (Darti, 2017). No one can deny the importance of listening skill for foreign language learning because the key to acquire a language is in the reception of language input. However, Kurita (2012) stated that learners may find listening comprehension skill difficult to learn and this requires

teachers to change their listening exercise into more effective ones.

Hamouda (2013) stated that factors causing students' listening comprehension problem are categorized into different sources including problems related to the listening text, listening problems related to task and activities, listeners' problems related to the listener and teacher's methodology. Some previous research such as Hamouda (2013), Abidin (2013), Anandapong (2011) who completed related

studies, emphasized that in order to help students improve their listening ability, language teachers have to understand students' listening difficulties in comprehending listening text, and instruct effective listening strategies to help the students to solve their listening difficulties. On the same note, Wulan (2016) highlighted that there are some potential difficulties of comprehending listening which must be undertaken to make a good progress of class learning including the difficulties related to these 7 aspects namely listening materials, basic linguistics, low concentration, psychological characteristics, the speaker, physical settings, and the ones coming from listeners; this classification was later be utilized in formulating questionnaire statements as one of the data collection tools in this study.

Such challenge in teaching listening effectively has become one major concern in many institutions in Indonesia as English here is a foreign language and learned and used daily by minor number of citizens. Therefore, authors were keen to study more of this phenomenon in one of a local English village program at *Kampung Bahasa* of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School where students there are all of university level, so it is hoped that the study would contribute in not only identifying what difficulties they encounter but also looking for some strategic resolution so improvement in their listening comprehension could be achieved. Specifically, these are the primary questions addressed in this study:

1. What difficulties are faced by students in comprehending listening material at *Kampung Bahasa* of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School as perceived by students and teachers?
2. What factors cause students' difficulties in comprehending listening material at *Kampung Bahasa* of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School as perceived by students and teachers?
3. How can those students' and teachers' perceptions about the listening difficulties and causing factors be used to format a better concept of the teaching of English listening at *Kampung Bahasa* of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School?

There were similar studies conducted previously on the matter such as the one by Nurhidayah Sari and Rinda Fithriyana (2019) entitled "*Exploring EFL*

Students' Problems in Listening Comprehension" which revealed that the second semester students of English Study Program of University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai have low listening comprehension with the average score of 62,5. The second research has been conducted by Nanik Apriliya (2017) with the title "*A Study On Listening Difficulties At Second Semester Students of University Nusantara PGRI Kediri In Academic Year 2016/2017*" where students found the difficulties in comprehending listening such as regarding unfamiliar words, too long duration of speech, unfamiliar topic, speaker's fast speed, and low concentration. Another study by Seli Siti Sa'diyah (2016) entitled "*EFL Learners-Faced Problems In Listening Comprehension*" recognized that the problems that are mostly found in the listening for the TOEFL paper test are related to the content of the listening text, the listener and speaker, linguistic features, and problems caused by the failure to concentrate, psychological characteristic, physical setting, and students' general self-rating to listening proficiency.

As a comparison, those previous studies mostly analyzed students' difficulties in listening comprehension based on students' perspectives only, whereas in this research, students' difficulties in listening comprehension are obtained using both students' and teachers' perspectives. In addition, all the three studies above were conducted in the university, meanwhile this research took place in an English intensive program at a student dormitory, thus it gives impact a little differently in terms of the target audience. Lastly, this study also looks for alternatives solutions to the identified problems which were absent from all those three preceding studies.

METHOD

The method used in this research was descriptive design with qualitative approach. In gathering the basic information and providing general knowledge on the students' difficulties, researchers firstly used a minor quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire tabulated in percentages. The questionnaire is a table consisted of 28 statements that measure and student respondents' views on their attitude and perceptions regarding their listening comprehension which used the Likert Scale formula where respondents only needed to

give always/ often/ sometimes/ never formula of responses. To be noted, the 28 questionnaire statements were determined by developing potential causing factors of the 7 listening comprehension difficulties defined by Wulan (2016) as mentioned in the Introduction part of this article.

For the deeper analysis, the qualitative data obtained from observation and interview were implemented in order to achieve the purposes of this research, i.e., (a) to investigate the factors causing students in *Kampung Bahasa* of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School to face difficulties in comprehending listening skill of English and also (b) to find the right strategies to deal with the difficulties that are encountered by students. In terms of doing the observation, the researchers used passive participation because researchers did not get involved while observing the listening classes, meanwhile the interview was conducted with all teachers and selected students only whose questionnaire results identified students' low degree of comprehension and more complex circumstances regarding their listening difficulties. The interview with the teachers, moreover, has the function to confirm key results researchers got from students' questionnaire and interview.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data presentation and analysis that answer all the research questions are as follows:

1. Results from questionnaire, observation, and interview

As the 28 statements in the Questionnaire was classified into 7 per type of difficulties, the result is presented in the following 7 tables. However, due to space limitation, each statement isn't written out but clear description that touch the discussion around them is put below each table. The terms AL, OF, SO, NE used in these columns refer to *Always*, *Often*, *Sometimes*, *Never* which records students' responses.

Table 1. Difficulties related to listening materials

Statements	Choice (%)			
	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-1	13,33	40,00	46,67	
Statement-2	23,33	36,67	36,67	3,33
Statement-3	23,33	46,67	26,67	3,33
Statement-4	20,00	53,33	26,67	

The listening materials presented in the English course are always focused on what topics usually go with people's daily life. The material itself could be the beginning of the students' difficulties since students have no deal with some particular condition. From the table above (Table 4.3), the majority of the students (13,33% always, 40% often, and 46,67% sometimes) have responded that unfamiliar words interfered their listening comprehension. Only 3,33% of the students stated that they never find difficult when the spoken text is too long. Almost half of the students (46,67%) mentioned that they often felt fatigue and distracted when listening to a long spoken text. And majority of the students (20% always, 53,33% often, and 26,67% sometimes) find it difficult when the topic is unknown.

Table 2. Difficulties related to basic linguistics

Statements	Choice (%)			
	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-5	6,67	50	40	3,33
Statement-6	26,67	43,33	23,33	6,67
Statement-7	13,33	50	33,33	3,33
Statement-8	13,33	46,67	40	

Linguistics can be one of the difficulty aspects that make students hardly do a listening test properly and well. Many students (6,67% always, 50% often, and 40% sometimes) mentioned that colloquial expressions and slang made it hard for them to comprehending listening. When encountering an unknown word, almost three quarters of the students (26,67% always and 43,33% often) stopped listening and thinking about the meaning of the word. This interrupts the flow and thus the students may miss some essential information from the spoken text. The majority of the students (13,3% always, 50% often, and 33,33% sometimes) find it difficult when the spoken text using unfamiliar accent. And also all of the students (13,33% always, 46,67% often, and 40% sometimes) find difficult to infer when the spoken text using unfamiliar accent only with different degree of occurrence.

Table 3. Difficulties related to low concentration

Statements	Choice (%)			
	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-9	16,67	46,67	36,67	16,67
Statement-10	26,67	40	33,33	26,67
Statement-11	30	50	20	30
Statement-12	23,33	40	36,67	23,33

These difficulties might become the most common problems happened in the listening class. Since students have to understand new information that comes out from what they are listening; they will be very confused if they lose their concentration. A considerable number of students (16,67% always, 46,67% often, and 36,67% sometimes) lose their concentration when they hear new words and tend to depend more on analytical processing so that they would easily get distracted by the new words and fail to keep concentration on useful clues in the context. Thinking another question also another reason for losing concentration. Many students (26,67% always, 40% often, and 33,33% sometimes) may be thinking about another question, therefore, they will not concentrate too much on the text. Students (30% always, 50% often, and 20% sometimes) can also lose their concentration if the recording is in a poor quality. And most of students (23,3% always, 40% often, and 36,67%) also lose their concentration when the spoken text is too long.

Table 4. Difficulties related to psychological characteristics

Statements	Choice (%)			
	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-13	10	40	40	10
Statement-14	10	30	20	40
Statement-15	30	33,33	30	6,67
Statement-16	10	36,67	50	3,33

The students' feeling about doing listening is also affecting on the students' capability of listening comprehension process. Every time students feel nervous and uncomfortable, at the same time the students will find it hard to focus. From the table above (Table 4.6), 10% students (3 students) always feel worried and doubtful when joining listening class. More than half of students (10% always, 30% often, and 20% sometimes) or 27 students feel bad about themselves when the other friends got higher score. And

the others, 12 students (40% never) claim they never feel bad when the other friends got score higher. Twenty-eight students (30% always, 33,33% often, and 30% sometimes) expressed that they feel nervous and worried when they don't understand the spoken text. Matters of motivation and interest are also important factors in understanding the topic of the spoken text. And most of students (10% always, 36,67% often, and 50% sometimes) or 29 students find it difficult to understand the spoken text which is not interesting to them.

Table 5. Difficulties related to the listeners

Statements	Choice (%)			
	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-17	16,67	56,67	23,33	3,33
Statement-18	10	43,33	40	6,67
Statement-19	16,67	43,33	36,67	3,33
Statement-20	23,33	36,67	36,67	3,33

Listeners themselves of course are the defining factor that will make the comprehension process successful or not. The result from the table above (Table 4.7) states that the majority of the students (16,67% always, 56,67% often, and 23,33% sometimes) mentioned that their problems may arise from their inability to recognize the main words, although they feel familiar with the pronunciation. Others claimed that they (10% always, 43,33% often, and 40% sometimes) cannot listen and answer to a spoken text at the same time. Almost all of the students (16,67% always, 43,33% often, and 36,67% sometimes) have responded that they find it difficult to predict what would come next. And more than half of the students (23,33% always and 36,67% often) also responded that they find it difficult to identify the word they know in their written form when they hear them in a stream of speech. Most of students normally recognize the words in their written form, but they find it difficult whenever they hear them in a stream of speech.

Table 6. Difficulties related to the speaker

Statements	Choice (%)
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	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-21	33,33	36,67	23,33	6,67
Statement-22	30	40	30	
Statement-23	23,33	46,67	30	
Statement-24	40	33,33	26,67	

These difficulties may come rooting from the natural way of speaking the speaker has. Table 4.18 shows that more than half of the students (33,33% always and 36,67% often) find it difficult to understand the meaning of the spoken text without seeing the speaker's body language. This deprives them of some contextual clues which make the message easily understood as they cannot see the speaker's faces and gestures. Unclear pronunciation of some speakers is also considered as a source of listening problem. All of the students (30% always, 40% often, and 30% sometimes) find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly. More than half of the students (23,33 % always and 36,67% often) indicate that they find it difficult to understand the listening text when the speakers speak too fast, because pauses give listeners more time to process what they need to understand. Another problem connected with listening is the fact that listeners cannot always make the speakers repeat what they have just said, and 40% students always find it difficult when what the speaker says is not repeated.

Table 7. Difficulties related to physical settings

Statements	Choice (%)			
	AL	OF	SO	NE
Statement-25	30	50	16,67	3,33
Statement-26	26,67	46,67	23,33	3,33
Statement-27	6,67	20	53,33	20
Statement-28	13,33	40	26,67	20

These difficulties may be directed to students surrounding environment. Since it's not only about how good the listening ability the listener has but it also about how comfortable the environment of the listener can support listener best effort in doing listening. Noise is another environmental barrier to comprehension where interior as well as exterior class noise can be an obstacle to comprehension. The table 4.9 shows that

the majority of the students (30% always, 50% often, and 16,67% sometimes) find it difficult to concentrate with noises around, meanwhile 3,33% never in that situation. Another problem comes from poor quality of the audio, with 26,67% of the students always find it difficult to focus when the quality of the audio is bad. Almost all of the students (6,67% always, 20% often, and 53,33% sometimes) mentioned that sitting too close with their classmates lower their focus in listening. And almost three quarters of the students (13,33% always, 40% often, and 26,6% sometimes) stated that being monitored too closely by teacher also lowers their focus in listening.

Furthermore, the interview was conducted with 10 student participants and followed with 3 teachers as a means to confirm important results found from student-related data. The interview is semi-structured around four issues of the listening comprehension which will be discussed below. Here is a glimpse of the interview stage which reveals about the four major questions being asked and highlighted answers from student respondents:

Q1: How Important Is Listening Comprehension Based On Your Personal Opinion?

"Listening comprehension is very important, because through listening we can know how to pronounce a vocabulary correctly". (Interviewee 2)

"Listening is very important, because with listening we are able to train our concentration to understand the meaning of something we hear". (Interviewee 7)

Q2: How Do You Rate Your Listening Skills?

"My listening ability is still very low. Because since high school, at school we were only taught how to answer questions on the worksheet, not being familiar with listening and also pronouncing vocabulary properly and correctly. So during the listening section, it was difficult for me to understand the words that were said". (Interviewee 10)

"My listening quality is quite low. Because of the limited vocabulary

that I mastered, it made it difficult for me when listening section". (Interviewee 5)

"I am the type of person who when doing something must be focused. So if the classroom atmosphere is very noisy, it really annoys me when listening. So I can't really listen to every spoken word, and I can't catch the meaning of the word that comes out of the speaker." (Interviewee 3)

Q3: What Are The Problems That Affect Your Comprehension As Listeners?

"Speakers who speak very quickly overwhelm me in grasping the meaning of what being said" (Interviewee 6)

"The noisy classroom conditions made me lose my concentration while listening section". (Interviewee 7)

"If the speaker has spoken very quickly, I am lazy to listen because I certainly don't understand what the speaker's means". (Interviewee 1)

"I like listening to music. When I listen to a spoken text, I'm often confused, especially when the spoken text is too long". (Interviewee 8)

Q4: What Are The Strategies That You Do To Improve Your Listening Comprehension?

"I mostly watch movies to improve my listening skills". (Interviewee 4)

Meanwhile, here is the overview of the interview with the teachers using similar questions as used with the students:

Q1: How Important Is Listening Comprehension Based On Your Personal Opinion?

"Listening is very important. Because listening is one of language skills to master English and also to increase students' vocabulary, and it is key to all effective communication because English is international language". (Interviewee 11)

"English has become an international language, so learning English is very important. Especially listening, because listening can make us more familiar with vocabulary that have never been heard before". (Interviewee 12)

Q2: How Do You Rate Your Students' Listening Skills?

"In my opinion it is still lacking because they are not accustomed to listening to English". (Interviewee 11)

"Seeing from the results of students' answer after working on listening questions. If they answer correctly, they will automatically understand the listening. And another case, if they answer the question of listening incorrectly, it means they do not understand what was said during the listening section. And I think their ability in listening is still lacking, but it doesn't matter, because it's a process". (Interviewee 13)

Q3: What Are The Problems That Affect Your Students In Listening Comprehension As Listeners?

"Because this Kampung Bahasa is held at the end of the evening study hour, so this is quite a problem that greatly affects student concentration, because the time is not conducive so a lot of noise or disturbing friends who are nearby so they are not sleepy". (Interviewee 11)

"Very limited vocabulary mastery made *students* difficult during the listening section. Because the lack of vocabulary they master, makes it difficult for them to understand the meaning of the words conveyed by the speaker. Then the media used is also very influential, such as speaker. If the quality of the speaker used is bad, it will really make it difficult for students during the listening section". (Interviewee 12)

Q4: What Are The Strategies That You Do To Improve Your Students' Listening Comprehension?

"Familiarize the students with listening to English, for example in the learning process we must not fully use Bahasa, but it is also mixed with English, so they can be a bit more familiar. Then also ask them to listen to English songs more often, because it is a fun method of learning English". (Interviewee 11)

"Build a good mood, while I believe that a good mood can be built by listening to songs, the song referred to here is of course English songs. So at least they are interested in learning listening". (Interviewee 12)

“Ask students to listen to English songs and watch English movies to increase vocabulary and also improve their listening quality and also get them used to mixing Bahasa Indonesia and English in class”. (Interviewee 13)

2. Matchness Degree Between Students' and Teachers' Perspectives

After conducting research by observation, distributing questionnaires, and interviews, the researcher found a similarity of perspective between teachers and students regarding students' difficulties in comprehending listening. For example, all participants (teachers and students) stated that (1) students find it difficult to guess every word that comes out of the speaker because the vocabulary they mastered is very limited, so sometimes they need a moment to remember and guess the unfamiliar words, and this really hinders the listening process in class; (2) students find it difficult when the speakers spoke quickly with an unfamiliar accent, so they have difficulty in grasping the meaning and message of the spoken text; (3) students find it difficult when the atmosphere of the class is too noisy because it disturb their concentration thus they cannot focus on the spoken texts and questions that are being played. Having this similar perspective means there is no misunderstanding between teachers and students in seeing the case of listening class, which is a good ground to find some problem-solving which meet both teachers' and students' criteria.

3. Most Common Difficulties of Listening Comprehension

Based on the results of data collected, the students faced quite many difficulties during listening process. There were 5 major problems found through the questionnaire and interview answers. The problems were related to limited English vocabulary, native accent, condition of the class, lack of concentration, and speaker speak too fast.

a. Limited English Vocabulary

In this research, all participants stated that students' difficulties in comprehending listening were related to limited vocabulary. The students

said that they often encounter unfamiliar words. So, they needed English dictionary to help them in knowing the meaning of the words. In addition, some students also stated that unfamiliar words are one of the problems when listening to English. Most of them did not know the meaning of the words and had never heard before. Due to the limited vocabulary they mastery, so that students need a moment to guess the meaning of the word.

Alqahtani (2015) stated that vocabulary is very important for students to master, because mastery of vocabulary is needed to express ideas and to be able to understand others. That is why if the vocabulary is not mastered, the listener will not be able to grasp the meaning and message of the spoken text.

b. Accents of Native Speakers

English is the most popular foreign language in the world (Sa'd, 2018). And in Indonesia, English is also studied as a foreign language which has its own accent. A native speaker's accent can influence the comprehension process. Because students are used to hearing Indonesian accents, some difficulties can be caused by how the native speakers deliver their English speech. If the accent is too unfamiliar for students, they could not understand what the speaker was talking about. At this stage, it is important that Indonesian English teachers help students feel familiar about various types of English accent so they can comprehend more when listening to native speakers' speech with whichever accent they have.

c. Condition of the Class

Students' difficulties during listening do not only come from internal, but also from external factors. In this research, the students had a hard time to catch the message if the condition of the class was too crowded, which is very similar to what Apriliya (2017) found in her study as well. Furthermore, the researcher found that conditions in the classroom and surroundings could interfere with students' concentration during listening to the speaker. Some

participants said that the atmosphere in the classroom made them feel uncomfortable when listening to the spoken text.

d. Lack of Concentration

Sa'diyah (2016) stated that the students thought listening skill is very important but sometimes it is boring and not interesting. In this research, the researcher also found out that another basic difficulty was this internal factor from students. Some of them find it difficult to concentrate under certain circumstances such as because they felt sleepy and lack energy. This makes them lose their concentration while listening.

e. When Speakers Speak Too Fast

Most of the students stated that one of the main causes of listening difficulties was that the speaker spoke too fast. From the reflection, some students said that the speakers spoke too quickly, which made them unable to understand the contents of the spoken text. Gilakjani (2016) stated that in listening activities the listener cannot control how fast the speaker speaks. So, when the listener does not listen well and process is fast, they won't be able to comprehend.

4. Strategies to Eliminate Listening Comprehension

Bao (2017) stated that listening strategy is one of the most important factors influencing the listening comprehension process. Strategies in overcoming this problem are important because they aim to improve students' listening skills. If meaningful listening skill improvement is to be achieved, the strategies should come from both the students and the teachers.

Based on the research results, the recommended strategies that should be made by students are (1) to listen to English songs to solve students' problems in improving vocabulary; (2) to get used to hearing various English accents through English movies; (3) and to practice listening to the speakers who deliver their speech quickly.

Meanwhile, the strategies that should be made by the teachers are (1) to build students' good mood first as the effort to make students interested in having listening class; (2) to mix using

Bahasa and English while leading the learning process aimed to increase students' vocabulary mastery; (3) to use English songs and English movies to attract students' learning listening interest which offer many other benefits too such as enriching their knowledge of the world and overcoming the problems they faced, such as getting unusual with English pronunciation and accents and having limited number of vocabulary.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings and data analysis, the following conclusion could be drawn. First, there was a matchness of data between students' and teachers' perspectives on students' listening comprehension difficulties. Second, the students' at *Kampung Bahasa* of Edi Mancoro Islamic Boarding School have several difficulties in listening comprehension arising from both external and internal factors where five major problems found to be dominating. Accents of the native speakers, condition of the class, and when the speakers spoke quickly topped the external factors. Meanwhile, limited English vocabulary and a lack of concentration were named as the dominant internal factors. Finally, those difficulties can be eliminated by strategies that should be practiced by both students (i.e., listening to English songs, watching English movies, practicing speed listening) and teachers (i.e., building students' good mood/interest, mixing Indonesian and English in their classroom interaction, using songs and movies in their teaching).

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