

ENGLISH LISTENING PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS AT AN INDONESIAN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This article elucidates English listening problems faced by students at an Indonesian senior high school. Specifically, it reveals (1) the students' English listening skill, (2) the problems they faced in English listening and (3) how the teacher overcomes the problems.

The research employed descriptive qualitative method and was conducted at a senior high school in Sinjai, South Sulawesi, 25 students of The eleventh were picked as the research subjects through purposive sampling technique. The data were obtained through a series of English listening tests using recordings with both non-native and native speakers, observation and interview.

The findings show (1) the students have not had sufficient listening skill, particularly when the speaker is a native speaker, (2) the problems they face in English listening deal with speaking speed, limited vocabulary, concentration level and established language habits, and (3) to overcome those problems, the teacher applies the top-down strategy and vocabulary enrichment by providing the students with some important words used in the listening practice in the learning process. Thus, it can be inferred that the teacher's efforts are relevant to the listening problems faced by the students.

Keywords; Problems, Students, English Listening

INTRODUCTION

Mastering English involves the four integrated skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Besides, there are some language components that build those skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc. Of the four skills, listening deserves special attention since it is assumed as a difficult skill to many students at all levels of school in non-English speaking countries throughout the world. In reality, for many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, it is not easy to catch information from spoken messages, particularly those produced by native speakers. This is absolutely such a pity since the learning process involves interaction between teacher and students in the target language. Several cases occurring in EFL classroom indicate that many students are still troubled by their weak listening, even when the teacher is not a native speaker.

Listening is a process that includes hearing, attending to, evaluating and responding to spoken language that speaker says and also still the weakness of the students ability especially listening comprehension in EFL classroom. SMA Negeri 5 Sinjai is one of the state senior high schools in the district of Sinjai, South Sulawesi. Located in the sub district of North Sinjai, the school has more than one hundred students and two EFL teachers for each grade, especially the XII grade. After conducting some preliminary observation, the researcher highly assumed that most of the students still have poor listening, and this was admitted by both the students and teachers. Consequently, many of the students view English as a very difficult subject.

OBJECTIVES

Listening plays an important role in second language instruction for several reason (Rost, 1994). Willing to explore the theories of humor and classroom interaction, the researcher conducted the research to achieve the following objectives;

1. To explore the student's listening skills.
2. To find out the problems faced by the students in listening.
3. To find out how the teachers overcome the students' problems in listening

RELATED LITERATURE

Assaf (2015) has conducted a study entitled "The Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners in Listening Comprehension as Perceived by ELC Students at the Arab American University-Jenin". The aims of the study were to identify the difficulties students face in listening comprehension and to study the relationship of the difficulties encounter by EFL students with students' academic level, academic year, gender, try of school and number of school year studying English. In order to achieve the study objectives, the research develop a two different data collection instruments : A questionnaire and interview. The find out of the study showed that disability of word recognition lacking background information about the topic, noises around, poor quality listening equipment and not enjoying the listening excerpt got high effect degree.

It is also found by Khamprated (2012) in her research at a Private Vocational School, Bangkok under the title “The problems with the English Listening and Speaking of Students Studying”. This study attempted to investigate the English Listening and speaking problems and causes of these problems among of students. The instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: (a) the general background information of the participant, (b) their problem with English Listening, (c) their problems with English speaking, and (d) the causes of their English Listening and speaking problems. The find out of the study showed that there were 8 out of 20 items rated at a high level of English Listening problems. The students reported that it was difficult to understand a speaker with a regional accent, a speaker who spoke too quickly, after only listening once, and it was also difficult for them to understand a speaker with poor pronunciation. The students also realized that it was difficult for them to understand jokes due and cultural differences. The limited grammar and vocabulary skills of the students made it difficult for them to understand spoken English and they became nervous and worried as a result.

In the same line, Hamouda (2013) conducted a research in the field of listening comprehension under the title “An Investigation of Listening Comprehension Problems Encountered by Saudi Students in the EFL Listening Classroom” . The present study attempted to investigate the listening problem encountered by a group of first year English major student of Qassim University. Data was gathered by means of questionnaires and interview. The find out of the study showed that accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording were the major listening comprehension problems encountered by EFL Saudi learners. Understanding students’ learning difficulties may enable EFL teachers to help students develop effective learning strategies and ultimately improve their English listening abilities.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research. The research is particular phenomenon approach and this design approach related to what state that Gay, Mills & Airasian (2006), the qualitative method deals with the collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive, narrative, and visual data in order to gain insight into a particular phenomenon of interest. Therefore, the purpose of qualitative research focuses and deals with promoting a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon, such as environment, a process, or even belief. Furthermore, the researcher employed this method to collect and analyze data which suitable with the purpose of this research in order to get the description about the problems the students faced in listening comprehension.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. The students’ listening skill

The teacher administrated the test in two sessions for the 25 grade XI students of MIPA 3 of SMA Neg 5 Sinjai. In the first session of the test, the students were required to listen to a recording of a casual conversation between two Indonesian speakers of English. I Komang Ayu, one of the two interlocutors in the conversation recording, was describing her career story

as a nursing director of Sanglah Hospital Bali as her responses to her speaking partner's questions; her description included her private life, education and last position in the hospital. After the conversation, there were some questions for the students to answer. Meanwhile, the second session of the test, the students had to answer some question based on what they had heard from the recording; in the recording, a native speaker of English was describing the life of a popular actress named Delta Goodrem.

Based on findings that the result of the test, mostly of students can answer the questions in test part 1. Question from number 2-5, many students answering the question with correct answer because the speaker of the test part 1 is Indonesian speaker beside that it is still easy level for them. While in part 2, especially the question number 1 and 6 there are many students answer with incorrect because the speaker of the test is native speakers, In this situation student assumed that the test is very difficult for them. The findings that the native speaker influenced the students in answer the questions. This result is caused of the native speaker voice is not familiar to the students.

For many EFL learners, listening is not a piece of cake, particularly when the oral message is produced by a native speaker. The research findings dealing with the students' skills in listening seem to have confirmed this.

As described in the previous section, the students did better in the first session since the test only required them to catch oral information from non-native speakers of English, meanwhile, when having the second session, which demanded them to listen to a native speaker, they did not give many correct answers. This obviously imply that it is much easier for the students to comprehend talks of non-native speakers of English than those of native speakers.

The above-mentioned findings lead us to understand that the students have not had sufficient listening skill. Whether or not they are able to catch information from oral message seems to greatly rely on who the speaker is. It seems that this condition is due to the fact the students have not been familiar with utterances produced by native speakers of English yet. In fact, none of them has ever had verbal interaction with a native speaker. So far, they are only used to listening to their EFL teacher's utterances in the classroom. It is also important to highlight that in the learning process in the EFL classroom, the students seldom have listening practice using audio recording with native speakers of English. From here, we can see that habit is one important factor that determines a learner's listening skill.

b. The problems faced by the students in listening

The problem faced by the students in listening during observation and interview were administrated by the researcher. When on going teaching and studying process the students always complain to their teacher if the recording to speed and can not repeat the audio, they feel that many unfamiliar words they heard, so that they can not get the point of contents' what the speaker says. Another reason of the problem in listening in the classroom is concentration level, where they have nervous and get pressure.

When conducted interview to the students. And from the interview the researcher get answer from the students about the listening problem faced when was listening in the classroom

process. There are speed speaker, limited vocabulary, interpretation, established language habits and accent.

Speed speaker deals with one's speaking speed; it also includes the matter of speaking fluency. The native speakers of English absolutely have higher speaking speed than do the non-native. Consequently, for an EFL learner, oral message uttered by a native speaker is more difficult to understand than that uttered by a non-native. Thus, it is not surprising that the listening test with a native speaker was much harder than that with Indonesian speakers of English for the students.

In a listening test, it is a common rule that the recording can only be played once, hence, when the test takers miss it, there will be no more possibility for them to get the second chance. This is what the problem of inability repeated deals with. When having the listening test with a native speaker, most of the students were unable to complete the test as required. Considering that it was just some tryout to the class, the teacher played the tape over and over until they all managed to answer all the questions. This reality leads us to understand that the students are not ready to take the real listening test yet.

Two next problems faced by the students in listening, limited vocabulary and interpretation, seem to relate with each other. Practically, a learner with limited vocabulary has big potential to misinterpret what he hears. This is exactly what happened with the students when having the listening test. Having poor vocabulary, many of them misunderstood what they heard from the recording. In fact, many words used in the talks they heard during the test were still new words to them.

Another problem faced by the students in listening deals with their concentration level. Literally, this problem seems so psychological. In fact, when doing the listening, many of the students were unable to focus on every single thing uttered by the recorded speakers. When, for example, they found one part unclear, they keep thinking of it and therefore could not move on to the next parts, and finally, there were not many things that they managed to capture from the spoken messages. Accordingly, we can infer that the students' bad psychological state contributed towards their low achievements in the listening test.

Established language habit, which is the next problem faced by the students in listening, is definitely due to the fact that many of them are not familiar with English speaking circumstances yet. Even the learning process in the EFL classroom has not provided them with English speaking atmosphere; the teachers have not spoken fully in English yet since they often consider the students' level. From here, we can learn that what the students usually have outside the listening test has significant impacts on what they can do in the listening test. This implies that the students have not had sufficient listening skill since they are not familiar with English talks yet.

The last problem faced by the students in listening, accent, is what the theories have not elucidated yet so far. It is known that in English speaking, there are some distinctive accents such British, American and Australian. Many of the students admitted that the matter of accent also troubles them when having a listening test. So far, the accent that they are familiar with is American accent, therefore, it is very difficult for them to catch oral information uttered in British and Australian accent.

c. How the teachers overcome the students' problems in listening.

When conducted the interview to two teacher in the school with audio recording, one teacher is teaching from the class XI MIPA 3 and the last teacher is teaching from another class. From interview the researcher get the point how to the teachers overcomes the students' problems in listening.

Based on interview to both of the teacher, they say that how to solving the problem faced by the student in listening, when she giving listening test to the students for example long text, she will play the audio per paragraph first and then if the students still difficult to get answer she will play again the audio listening per sentence until the students understand the information that they have listened.

Listening strategies can be classified by how the listeners process the input, namely top-down and bottom up strategies (Keatley and Kennedy, 2004) the teacher using top down strategy, These strategies are listener based. It means that the listener taps into background knowledge of the topic, the situation or context, the type of the text, and the language. This background knowledge activates a set of expectations that help the listener to interpret what is heard and anticipate what will come next. Top-down strategies include: listening for the main idea, predicting, drawing inferences, and summarizing. The teacher will give description what the general topic of the test for example when she giving a song test and the student asked to complete the lyric. The teacher will giving the theme of the song, and keywords of the song that always mention in lyric after that the student will hear the song and complete the test.

As described previously, the problems preventing the students from answering all questions in the listening test correctly include speed speaker, inability repeated, limited vocabulary, interpretation, concentration level, established language habits and accent. This seems to be an ordinary fact; EFL students with low level of English usually have those problems.

To overcome the students' problems dealing with speed speaker, established language habits and accent, the teachers push the students to be more and more familiar with English speaking atmosphere. This seems so reasonable since the students need to get used to hearing oral message uttered in normal speed and in different accents. Absolutely, it takes some steps to completely overcome these problems. For instance, for speed speaker, the teachers need to start from "abnormal" speed, and for accent, the teachers have begun introducing different accents in English speaking such as British, American and Australian to the students.

To overcome the problem of inability repeated, the teachers have to provide the students with more listening practice. At the first step, the teachers let the students hear the recording several times, until they manage to fully understand what it is all about. At the next step, the students are required try to capture the information only by listening to the tape twice. At the last step, the students are provided with a listening practice in which they only have one single opportunity to listen to the tape.

To overcome the problems dealing with limited vocabulary and interpretation, the teachers absolutely have to keep trying to improve the students' vocabulary, in and outside the listening practice. In relation to listening, before giving the students some listening practice, the teachers introduce some new words used in the practice as the scaffolding. Definitely, the implementation of this idea helps the students get through the listening practice.

To overcome the problem of concentration level, the teachers introduce some important tricks in having a listening test to the students. One of the most important tricks is that when finding words that they do not understand, the students are not supposed to panic; they have to remain calm and just follow the next parts. To fully overcome this psychological problem, the teachers always end their explanation with some real relevant practice.

CONCLUSSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings signal that the students have various problems in listening. Below are three concluding points drawn based on the findings

In listening skill the findings that the students performed better in the listening test with Indonesian speaker. This implies that they are quite good listeners to English speaking in Indonesian accent and still poor listeners to English speaking in native accent. The effort to improve students' listening skill needs to be based on sufficient understanding of the problems faced by students. Accordingly, EFL teachers are urged to identify their students' problems in order to determine the right treatments in the listening learning.

To overcome those problems, the teachers apply the top-down strategy and vocabulary enrichment as the treatments. The teachers apply the top-down strategy by cutting the recording into paragraphs and sentences and vocabulary enrichment by providing students with some important words which they will find in the listening practice. It takes another study to discover whether or not what the teachers do to overcome the problems faced by the students is effective. Hence, next the teacher focus on the impact of top-down strategy and vocabulary enrichment on students' listening skill improvement.

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