

A STUDY ON LISTENING SKILLS AND PERSPECTIVE TO FIRST YEAR STUDENTS AT ENGLISH DEPARTMENT OF ACADEMIC YEAR 2015/2016

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Abstract

Good ability in listening means having competence to comprehend information during listening activities. However, Listening skill is still considered as one of the most difficult skills for English language learners although they have been learning English for few years. Hence, this study was designed to gather information about the students' challenges in listening activities, their perspectives on listening subject, and positive factors on the students' success in listening. Then, a set of listening test and questionnaire were distributed. Both quantitative and qualitative data were studied to identify the underlying matters in students' listening skills, addressing challenges, main listening hindrance factors and learning experiences. The findings of this study revealed that the students faced problems in listening because they still could not complete the basic listening skills in the test. Furthermore, Most of them considered that the listening classes are challenging for them due to some problems and difficulties during the teaching and learning activities. Besides that, there were 5 factors influenced the students' listening skill; lack of practice, limited vocabulary mastery, native speakers' accent, pronunciation, and uninteresting learning materials. Moreover, their knowledge about English structure and good facilities in listening classes supported them to be able to figure out some challenges in listening activities. In addition, the students realized the important of the listening activities, but assistances from the teachers and some other students were still needed during the teaching and learning activities. In conclusion, having good listening skill still appeared as a challenge for the first year students at English Department of Academic Year 2015/2016.

Keywords: *Listening Skill and Perspectives*

MEMPELAJARI KEMAMPUAN DAN TANGGAPAN SISWA/I TENTANG SKILL MENDENGARKAN DI SEMESTER PERTAMA PROGRAM STUDI PENDIDIKAN BAHASA INGGRIS TAHUN AKADEMIK 2015/2016

Abstrak

Kemampuan menyimak dapat diartikan sebagai kemampuan untuk memahami informasi ketika kegiatan tersebut berlangsung. Akan tetapi, menurut para mahasiswa/i yang telah mempelajari bahasa inggris selama beberapa tahun, kemampuan menyimak dianggap sebagai salah satu kemampuan yang paling sulit bagi mereka. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini dilaksanakan untuk memperoleh informasi yang terkait dengan tantangan-

tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para mahasiswa/i pada kegiatan menyimak, selain itu untuk mengetahui tanggapan mereka tentang pelajaran menyimak, selanjutnya untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor pendukung keberhasilan mereka dalam memahami informasi yang mereka simak. Tes menyimak dan kuesioner diberikan untuk mengumpulkan informasi yang dibutuhkan, serta dianalisa secara kualitatif dan kuantitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menyimak informasi, hal ini ditunjukkan oleh kesulitan mereka dalam menyelesaikan tes sederhana yang diberikan. Mereka juga beranggapan bahwa kegiatan menyimak tersebut termasuk kegiatan yang sulit. Ada lima faktor yang mempengaruhi kemampuan menyimak mereka; jarangnyanya melakukan latihan menyimak, rendahnya penguasaan kosakata, penekanan dan pengucapan penutur asli, dan materi belajar yang kurang menarik. Disamping itu, pengetahuan mereka tentang tata bahasa Inggris dan sarana prasarana yang lengkap mendukung mereka untuk mengatasi kesulitan-kesulitan dalam kegiatan menyimak yang mereka lakukan didalam kelas. Para mahasiswa/i sebenarnya menyadari bahwa pentingnya untuk memiliki kemampuan menyimak yang baik, akan tetapi sangat diperlukan bantuan dari para guru dan mahasiswa/i ketika kegiatan belajar mengajar sedang berlangsung. Sebagai kesimpulan, kemampuan menyimak dari para mahasiswa di program studi pendidikan bahasa Inggris, semester pertama tahun akademik 2015/2016 masih mengalami kesulitan.

Kata Kunci: Kemampuan Menyimak dan Perspektif

1. INTRODUCTION

Good ability in listening means having competence to comprehend information during listening activities or transfer the information in written or oral communication. It relates to the ability of understanding, communicating, and responding what is listened. Nation and Jonathan (2009:38) state that listening is a bridge to learn a language. Having good ability in listening is one of the main skills that has to be mastered by language learners because it tightly relates to the communication process. Harmer (2007:133) also states that listening can be helpful for students in running successful communication. The students' communicative competence successfully runs together with good listening skill of students. Bulley-Allen (1995) in Flowerdew (2010:159) state that Listening is dominant activity in daily communication (40%), 35 % for

speaking, 16 % for reading, and 9 % on writing. In other words, communication will not run well if it is not supported by good ability in listening.

To have good listening skill in English needs listeners to enrich themselves with basic language knowledge, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and other language components. Buck (2001: 1) states that there are two kinds of knowledge used in listening; linguistics and non-linguistics knowledge. Linguistics knowledge in listening comprehension relates to students' abilities in understanding phonology, syntax, lexis, semantics, and discourse structure. Then, the non- linguistics knowledge is knowledge about topic, context, and general knowledge. Both of them are really needed in the process of comprehending aural information because listening is complex process

that involves the students to activate their knowledge for reaching their listening purposes.

Unfamiliarity with the words used by speakers in a conversation or monologue will influence the listeners' ability in getting information, especially for English language learners who usually still have limited vocabulary mastery, they will have serious problems in the process of transferring the information. Then, having good understanding of word structure can also affect the students' listening activities, for example; the learners may get easier to identify time sequences of oral information that they listened, by recognizing the tense of the sentences. Another factor that may influence the learners' ability in listening activities relates to their ability to know the pronunciation every single word correctly because communication process cannot be separated from the activities of pronouncing words, phrases, and sentences. So, it is a must for the learners to keep improving their basic language knowledge to support them in listening activities. Ghaderpanahi (2012), there are numerous factors that guide the students into confusion in listening activities, such as native speakers' volume, speed-rate, accents, intonation, listening strategies, and pronunciation. Then, Buck (2000:32) also stated that there are some components that need to be considered in constructing listening comprehension test; phonology, accents, prosodic features, speech rate, hesitation, and discourse structure. In other words, during the listening comprehension process, listeners will deal with those components.

Furthermore, the learners also have to enlarge themselves with general knowledge that relates to current issue, history, scientific researches, and other topics because every communication process has its goals in which will affect the main information presented in the process of communication, such as; a student who has known or read certain topic before it is presented by teacher in the class, she tends to get easier in comprehending information than others can do. It happens because someone's background knowledge may influence the comprehension process in listening. So, the learners have to keep improving and updating their general knowledge to help them in listening activities.

Listening activities do not only need the learners' ability in mastering basic language knowledge and knowing various issues, but they also have to prepare listening strategies in order to help them in figuring out some problems that they will face in the process of listening, for example; when the learners get difficulties to complete some listening tasks that relate to the students' listening comprehension skill, they may apply a strategy that can support them in completing the task. In this case, the students may apply note taking strategy to notice important points from the audio. Then, they can answer all of the questions by using the notes that they had written. The learners may also apply bottom up or top down strategies to guide them in the process of comprehension. In bottom up strategy, the learners may activate their background knowledge about a topic discussed in the audio before starting the listening activities. In top down strategy, the learners may start the listening activities by listen to the

specific information in the audio, and correlate it with their background knowledge. Hsueh-Jui (2008) states that there is significance relationship among listening strategies in listening activities. However, without practice all of those points will not be really helpful.

Learners' listening practice is also one of the influential factors in improving their listening comprehension skill. They have to practice a lot to improve their skill, especially in comprehending monologs or dialogues uttered by speakers. Commonly, the students get difficulties when they are in that situation. They claim that speaker's style in communication guides them into a billion of confusion even the teacher has played the audio for two or three times. It is one of the students' reasons when they get difficulties in listening. In fact, it is not a big problem, they are only not familiar with the native speakers' styles in communication. In short, the students need to practice their listening activities because the learners have to face language learning experience to enhance their listening skill. Then, the learners and teachers should work collaboratively in this step.

Teachers' roles in teaching and learning activities in the class will also lead the students' success in completing listening activities. There are some efforts that teachers can do such as running and presenting listening activities in the class interestingly. English language teachers have to be able to provide the learners with intensive listening class that guide them to beat all challenges in listening activities. On the ground observation in some schools, commonly English

students' listening strategy, style, and proficiency levels. In short, the students should have the capability to apply

teachers do not often involve the students in listening practice. Many teachers try to skip listening activities in the class because of various reasons, such as lack of sources, tools, electricity, and others. The students get familiar how to develop their reading, writing, speaking skills, but they get harder problems in listening due to lack exposure of the skill.

In this case, providing various activities, sources, and information to help students to improve their listening skill as good as other skills is teachers' responsibility in the classrooms. The students had been trained since they were at Elementary until Senior High Schools. Unfortunately, students' voices about their problems in listening are still found in many English Language Classrooms

2. METHOD

This research applied descriptive qualitative research framework. Both quantitative and qualitative data were studied to identify the underlying matters in students' listening skills, addressing challenges, main listening hindrance factors and learning experiences.

A set-listening test was adapted from IELTS listening section 1, which contains basic skills in note taking simple information such as names, day and dates, general basic vocabularies and some multiple choices questions on simple words. This formulation of test

allows this research to look into simple listening skills of the students.

Upon the initial test data collected, questionnaire was brought up to gather further information on the students' skills, as the test data could not represent the information on individual and group basis. The information to collect in this tool was possible external factors, facilities and learning strategy. The data were aimed to connect with the result and to probe of any possible relevant information to the skill the research participant skills.

The research was carried out at English Department, Teachers' Training and Education Faculty, Islamic University of Riau, Pekanbaru.

The research took place in 6 classes of first year students; 1A, 1B,1C, 1D, 1E, 1F. Each of the foresaid classes had different test dates with four weeks of the early December 2015. The first and second week were allocated for listening test and examining the result. In week three, questionnaire was handed out to seek further information on the test result. In the last week is allocated for open-ended questions.

Purposive sampling was adopted in selecting the sample. According to Gay (2000: 134), it is one of the

methods to choose a sample that refers to the researcher's point of view to be representative of a given population.

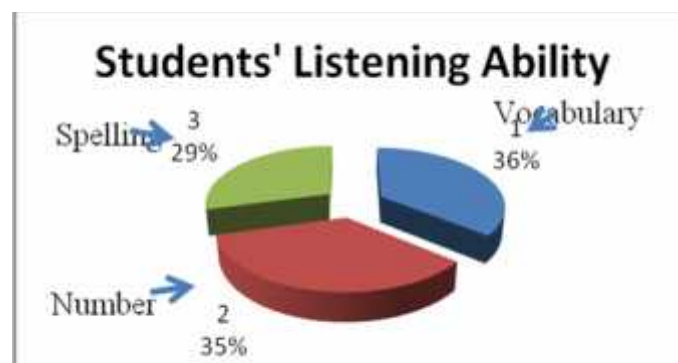
3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As previously stated that listening test and questionnaire were administered to gather information about; fresh year students' challenges in listening activities, perspective on listening subject, and influential factors for their success in listening.

a. The Students' Challenges in Listening Activities

Challenges in listening activities were still faced by the students even they have been learning English for several years. Based on basic listening test addressed to the students, the results of the test revealed that the students got difficulties in completing the test. It revealed the students' weaknesses because most of them could not successfully complete some basic information in the test, especially in note taking information about names, days, dates, and simple vocabularies. The percentage of the students' ability can be seen in the following chart:

Figure 1: Percentage of Students' Listening Ability



The chart above presents that the students faced serious challenges in doing note taking activities based on some aural materials that they had to listen. Obviously, they were only asked to fill information about vocabulary in context, numbers, and word spellings. problems with the vocabulary mastery. Many parts in completing appropriate vocabulary were written incorrectly by the students. In this case, the vocabulary mastery still appeared as one of the students' challenges that have to be figured out to support them in facing some other challenges in listening activities.

Then, the students also faced serious challenge to write some numbers uttered by the speakers in the recorder, there were only 35 % students could complete the test. It's also surprising finding because there were still numerous students who got difficulties to transfer the information that they listen in written text. Actually, this matter should not be a challenge anymore for the students who have been learning English for about six up to nine years. Unfortunately, the data represent the students' poor abilities in transferring the numbers from the aural materials.

The last but not least, the students' abilities in transferring correct spelling of words from the aural materials also appeared as the most significant challenge for them. It was in the lowest level, the students could only achieved 29 %. This finding showed that the students did not know very well how to spell words correctly, in fact they have learned how to pronounce English alphabets since the first time they learned English. This is a very basic matter that should be figured out

The percentages of the students' achievement in completing appropriate vocabulary in the test were only 36%. Actually it is the highest point, but it represents small numbers or less than a half of the students could not fill the tasks well. The students seemed having to develop the students' competence in English, especially in listening.

In other words, the information above clearly revealed that the students faced serious challenges in listening due to their difficulties to complete some basic listening tasks. It can be interpreted that the students will get more problems when they have to complete more advanced listening comprehension test.

After finding some challenges faced by the students, then the researcher explored more information about the students' perspectives on the listening. The students were expected to share their point of views about listening activities based on their experiences in learning the language. The findings were analyzed to find out whether there is any significant factor influenced the students' success on listening.

b. The Students' Perspectives on Listening Subject

To gather information about the students' perspectives on listening, some questionnaires were distributed to the students. The questionnaires were filled by the students after they did the listening test. There were some statements delivered in order to explore the students' perspectives on listening subject. They were constructed based on some phenomena that usually appear in listening classes.

The students have to respond 1-5 ranges of score to represent their perspectives on listening subject, each number will represent certain meaning, such as 1= strongly disagree, 2=

disagree, 3 = not strong feeling, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree. The students' responses about the statements can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Students' Learning Experiences in Listening Classes

No.	Statements	Range of Score				
		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Listening audio is not really clear	3	8	24	3	7
2.	Listening class is not really interesting because the activities were monotonous	5	20	3	12	5
3.	Listening class is challenging for me	17	19	5	1	3
4.	I feel nervous when I have to have listening activities in the class	9	9	14	6	7
5.	Listening activities in the class are more difficult than reading, speaking, and writing activities	9	6	14	8	8

Based on the students' responses in the first question, it can be implied that most of the students did not face really serious problem from the audio that they usually listen to in their listening activities. It explains that the students have been facilitated with qualified educational technology to support the teaching and learning process. Then, there were 20 students from 45 of them claimed that their listening activities in the classrooms were monotonous, it influenced their interests during the teaching and learning activities. Furthermore, listening class still appeared as challenging activities for most of the students. However, the students can

enjoy their listening classes even some unexpected things cannot be avoidable.

For overall, the researcher found that most of the students had positive perspectives and good experiences in listening class due to their positive responses toward five statements addressed to them. They considered that the listening classes are challenging for them because they still faced some other problems and difficulties during the teaching and learning activities, such as getting nervous to start the activities and worried about their ability to comprehend the information.

c. Factors Influenced for the Students' Success in Listening

There were 13 statements delivered to gather information about some

factors influence the students' listening activities. The statements were divided into two categories; possible factors influenced students' listening activities and their strategies on listening.

Table 2: Possible Factors influence Students' Listening Activities

No.	Statements	Range of Score				
		5	4	3	2	1
1.	Listening skill is difficult for me because I rarely practice my listening skill	3	18	13	5	6
2.	Lack of vocabulary mastery influences my ability in comprehending listening activities	6	15	14	6	3
3.	Speech rate in listening audio is very fast for me	11	9	19	4	2
4.	The speaker's accent is very difficult	5	20	18	0	2
5.	The speaker's ways in pronouncing words, phrases, and sentences bring various problems for me in comprehending activities.	4	15	17	5	4
6.	Listening facilities are bad	7	5	4	14	15
7.	My grammar knowledge helps me in completing my listening activities.	9	22	7	3	4
8.	Listening materials presented in the class are interesting	10	14	12	5	3

The table above presents that the students' problems in listening were influenced by 5 factors; lack of practice, limited vocabulary mastery, native speakers' accent, pronunciation, and uninteresting learning materials. However, their understanding about English structure and good facilities in listening classes supported them to be able to figure out some challenges in listening activities. In this case, the English teachers have to be able to figure out the students' problems in listening activities.

Furthermore, some statements to explore the students' listening strategies were also addressed. The students were expected to share their ideas about the importance of applying some strategies in listening activities and state some strategies that they do during listening activities.

The three focused aspects observed in this study; spelling, vocabulary and number suggested that more than quarter of students was unfortunately with problem in listening

to numbers. Despite of prolong experiencing with English studying, this minor issue seems to be neglected in English learning classroom. No further investigation was held on this aspect, however, several other responses indicates some aspects on certain driving factors.

As in the Table 3, this data strongly sees that students perception in majority admitted of vocabulary shortage. However, it appears that familiarity to particular English accent drive to vocabulary difficulty as they clarified that audio clarity affect less to the skill in answering the questions. Therefore, this specific data implies the importance of introducing various English accent to learners build better understanding in their later English communication.

Meanwhile, less than a third of the students were with spelling problems. Despite of its less significant issue appear, there is an interesting fact that the students failed mostly in differentiating *i, e, a, j* and *g*. As requested to perform English alphabets, all were spelled correctly, however, in its application into words spelling, it failed to work properly. The questionnaire results indicate that this was caused by lack of practice because there was no other driving factor suggests at high scoring. Therefore, this spelling section draw strong implication that listening classes around this province may put minor attention on spelling in their class practices, and recent intensive and complicated curriculum has overlooked simple aspects in listening skill teaching.

Looking into the Table 7, the students strongly expressed that they are

the listening draw back their achievement in listening. The students admitted that the subject is a challenging one for them

Slightly higher than appearing on the skill in listening number, students' skill in completing blank spaces with vocabulary made among main problems as well and also

aware of how to address their listening challenges and they had been supported in the learning process, however, by half of each agree and neutral opinion consecutively said that they practice individually. Contrasting to foresaid finding that little did they practice in spelling and numbers, this data suggests to further detailed information that by half students did individual practice other than number n spelling. An indication of less structured material arrangement in listening appeared in this data.

Having said that, it is important to look through again curriculum in any institution regarding this listening skills. As seperated subject, intitial placement test or skill diagnose test is primary to set further listening that meet students need and capacity. Since the participants of this research are from different districts and schools in Riau, the results revealed that this background affect the scores. However, the data on how this difference exist is absent as the access to this data is not a subject to this research.

As matter of fact, there is strong argument that students do not see that facilities, such as language laboratory, as their main hindrance.

This discussion draws main points that based on the responses, the

perspective of the students on listening play major part of their

support during learning process, this finding, at certain degree, should attract any education practitioners to initially look into his or her students views over the subject. Then, syllabus that meet students need should be developed and adjusted as part of supporting students success in acquiring listening skills.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion of the students' listening skills and perspective to first year students at English Department of academic year 2015/2016, there are some conclusions that can be drawn; the students still faced challenges in listening activities due to their problems in completing basic listening comprehension test in note taking activities about vocabulary in context (36%), numbers (29%), and words spelling (35%). Although listening class is challenging for the students, they still have positive perspective and good learning experiences. The students had been facilitated with good quality of audio and video learning materials. Then, the teaching and learning activities are interesting because the teachers can teach them in various interesting ways. In other words, the students enjoyed their listening class because of its facility and the teachers' ways to encourage the students in learning. However, there are also some factors that influence the students' listening skills; Lack of practice, limited vocabulary mastery, native speakers' accent, pronunciation, and uninteresting learning materials.

struggle in developing good listening skills. Despite of provided facilities and

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