

THE STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN SOLVING LISTENING DIFFICULTIES IN FOURTH SEMESTER STRUDENTS' OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM AT UNIVERSITAS PGRI KALIMANTAN

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Abstract. Listening ability is an important aspect that must be mastered by students', and based on preliminary studies it was found that there were difficulties in listening to English experienced by students' in the English Language Education Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan. Therefore, this research aims to find out what listening difficulties and strategies fourth-semester students' use to solve difficulties in listening. This research uses a descriptive design with a qualitative approach. This research analyzes the data to describe students' strategies in solving listening difficulties. The data collection method is through questionnaires and interviews. The data analysis is done through data reduction, data display, and drawing verifying conclusions. The most common listening difficulties experienced by students' in the fourth-semester students' of English Language Education Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan are listening difficulties related to speaking rate. Most students' used cognitive strategy to deal with listening difficulties. In this strategy, students' do exercises by using a dictionary or reference source, taking notes, and summarizing.

Keywords: Listening, Difficulties, Strategies

1. Introduction

Listening skills are an important skill that English language learners must learn. Communication has an important role in teaching and learning English. There must be interaction between at least two or more people involving the speaker and listener (Goh. C, 2002). The speaker expresses his ideas by introducing an utterance, and the listener receives the message, stores the utterance in his memory, analyzes and identifies the lexical illocutionary meaning. English Language Education is a Study Program that has an important role in preparing competent English language teacher candidates. One of the skills that is highly emphasized in this program is the ability to listen. Good listening skills are the main key to understanding and communicating in English.

Difficulty in listening can be detrimental to students' academic development, especially in the context of an English Language Education Study Program. In addition, poor listening skills can also affect the quality of their future teaching when they become English teachers. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper understanding of the strategies used by fourth-semester students' of the English Language Education Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan in solving listening difficulties.

According to a preliminary study using interviews with fourth-semester students' of English Language Education Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan, who have undergone listening courses, it was revealed that numerous students' encounter challenges in listening comprehension due to variations in accents. This leads to unfamiliarity with certain words or sentences. The discrepancy arises from the predominant use of American accents in teaching and learning sessions, contrasted with the utilization of British accents in listening assessments. Additional difficulties include the presence of homophones or words with similar pronunciation but distinct meanings, as well as a deficiency in

vocabulary hindering students' ability to swiftly comprehend conversations by native speakers. Furthermore, this study revealed a disparity among fourth-semester students' in the English Language Education program at University of PGRI Kalimantan, with some exhibiting readiness and strategies for solving listening difficulties, while others lacked such preparedness entirely.

This research aims to identify the strategies used by fourth-semester students' of the English Language Education Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan in solving listening difficulties. Through a better understanding of these strategies, students' will definitely know what strategies they are using and it is hoped that there will be concrete steps that students' can take to improve their listening skills. Thus, this research will make a positive contribution in improving the quality of English education at University of PGRI Kalimantan and help fourth-semester students' to become more competent English teachers in the future.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Definition of Listening

According to Downs (2008), listening can be defined as an intentional effort to hear or to give more attention to something we hear to gain certain information. In addition, in case of its objective to give more attention, listening is considered as a way we understand native speech at its normal speed where it involves auditory discrimination, aural grammar, selecting necessary information, remembering, and connecting to the process between sound and form of meaning (Gilakjani, 2016). Listening is different from hearing. In listening, we have a certain intention to look for some information (Downs, 2008).

Furthermore, Brown (2004) said that listening is our particular way to gain information by paying attention to the main point of what we hear, emphasizing the important supporting points, and making a conclusion to draw overall information the speaker has said. Furthermore, Rost's (2001) listening processing phases of decoding, comprehending and interpreting also provide a comprehensive understanding of how listeners process decoding, comprehending, and interpreting the multiple levels of knowledge to react to the appropriate responses to incoming information. This may incorporate the characteristics of linear steps and parallel processing, with both bottom-up and top-down processing interacting simultaneously.

There are seven difficulties that students' must face, such as limited vocabulary and interpretation, concentration level, established language habits, accent variations, speech rate, length of listening, and grammatical limitations. Therefore, students' have different strategies to solve their natural listening difficulties.

2.2 Students' Activities

The Academic Listening course is the final sequence of the Listening Skills courses. Before taking this course, students must have completed and passed the other Listening courses in the previous semester. In this course, students' focus on learning listening materials in TOEFL and IELTS. It is expected that students' will be able to identify the main ideas of conversations, understand supporting details of conversations, identify the meanings of vocabulary based on context, identify the speaker's attitude and purpose, determine the intent of the conversation, and identify the meanings of idioms found in conversations. The teaching methods include group discussions for offline meetings and assignment submissions through Google Classroom for online meetings.

2.3 Listening Difficulties

According to Samuel (1984), there are two factors of listening difficulties. They are external and internal factors. External factors are factors that come from outside the learners. It means those factors do not come from within the learner. External factors usually come from the environment. External factors can be learning opportunities. Internal factors come from the listeners themselves. According to Samuels (1984), several factors that can be categorized as internal factors are as follows.

2.3.1 Limited Vocabulary and Interpretation

Nowrouzi (2015) shows in her research that unfamiliar topics, sentential level problems, and too much information to process while listening also make the listening materials complicated in listening. Therefore, having mastery of vocabulary will be very helpful for the learners in

their listening skills. Practically, a learner with limited vocabulary has a 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.

2.3.2 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 kept 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. According to Bidabadi (2013) said learner's confidence and insecurity will affect them. If the students do not feel confident and feel nervous while listening, it will make them not feel comfortable and will affect their concentration to memorize and understand the vocabulary in listening.

2.3.3 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 a significant impact on what they can do in the listening test. This implies that the students' have not had sufficient listening skills since they are not familiar with English talks yet. Field (2011) also reported that lack of listening experience make the students think more to guess the context. This will take more time and does not make the students use time wisely.

2.3.4 Accent Variations

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 accents. According to Johnson (2008) and Hamouda (2013), some of the students have difficulty in understanding lectures due to lectures' rate of speech in relation to accents. While listening they understand the meaning of every word, however, it is difficult to understand the entire contents of the thing being heard because of the accent.

2.3.5 Speech Rate

The speech rate from the speaker who has different accents affects students' comprehension in listening. Some students' who study a new language will feel helpful when they listen at a slow speech rate. They will feel that slow speech can help them to simplify understanding the language clearly in listening because it gives a while for them to progress the message from what they just listened to. However, the problem is it will make them get used to comprehending the listening just if the lecturer talks at a slow speech rate (Hayati, 2010).

2.3.6 Length of The Listening

The study that has been done by Hamouda (2013) about an investigation of listening comprehension problems encountered by students' in the EL listening classroom pointed out that the length of listening becomes a big problem for the students'. The learners will lose their concentration and miss some important points from the recording. Some students' who are not accustomed to listening in English will also feel hard when listening. This is why the students' need to have more practice in listening. Through practice, it will give more experience for the students'.

2.3.7 Grammatical Limitations

In English, grammar is more discussed in writing skill and speaking skills. However, some students' forget that grammar play important role in listening skill. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) in their study stated that in listening to comprehend what was said by others, someone need to understand a speaker pronunciation, the speakers grammar and vocabulary, and understand the meaning. According to Hamouda (2013) some students' feel listening is

difficult because they do not have a better understanding of grammatical structures. This emphasizes grammar becomes a significant part of students' listening comprehension.

2.4 Strategies in Solving Listening Difficulties

Each learner is different and has different learning strategies to solve the difficulties in learning. According to Oxford (2003), there are six types of strategies for learning a language, but these strategies can also be applied to listening strategies. Those six learning strategies are cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

2.4.1 Cognitive Strategy

The cognitive strategy helps the students' to utilize the language material directly. This strategy contains practicing, reviewing, and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, and creating structure for input and output. Practicing helps the learners to use what they hear to facilitate in remembering information from long-term memory, and it can be achieved by using patterns and repeating. Then reviewing and sending messages assist the learners to get the idea immediately, it can be attained by skimming and scanning.

2.4.2 Meta-cognitive Strategy

The meta-cognitive strategy helps the learners to manage and control their own learning progress. Examples of these strategies are "identifying one's own learning style preferences and needs, planning for an L2 task, gathering and organizing materials, arranging a study space and a schedule, monitoring mistakes, and evaluating task success, and evaluating the success of any type of learning strategy" (Oxford, 2003).

2.4.3 Memory-related Strategy

The memory-related strategy helps the students' to save and retrieve the information from what they hear to help them in the learning process. A few memory-related strategy allow the learners to learn and get information in an "orderly string (e.g., acronyms), learning and retrieval via sounds (e.g., rhyming), 10 images (e.g., a mental picture of the word itself or the meaning of the word), a combination of sounds and images (e.g., the keyword method), body movement (e.g., total physical response), mechanical means (e.g., flashcards), or location (e.g., on a page or blackboard)" (Oxford, 2003).

2.4.4 Compensatory Strategy

The compensatory strategy helps the learners to complement for missing information when they do not hear to something obviously by guessing it using the clue that they have. In guessing to get the information, the learners can use linguistic clues (word order, word stress) to help them understand unfamiliar vocabulary and other clues (situational contexts, background noise) to guess what is happening (Huy, 2015).

2.4.5 Affective Strategy

The affective strategy is used to help the learners manage their feelings, emotions, motivation, or attitudes in learning listening skills (Huy, 2015). When the students' doing their listening task, but they feel difficult this strategy can help them to decrease their nerves while listening. It will make them become relaxed and help them to motivate themselves and feel confident to finish their listening task.

2.5.6 Social Strategy

The social strategy helps the learners to understand the language by learning and working with others. In this strategy, the students' can ask a question to get clarification from the teacher or their friends about something that they do not understand and make them confused. The students' also can work together to complete their tasks with their friends and exchange the information that they have with each other (Huy, 2015).

3. Discussion

The subjects of the questionnaire were 16 students' of the English Language Education Study Program at University of PGRI Kalimantan. All data is displayed in tabular and narrative form. Specifically, the findings of the questionnaire and interviews can be seen below.

Table 3 Students' Difficulties

No	Difficulties	Students'
1.	Limited vocabulary and interpretation	15
2.	Concentration level	15
3.	Established language habit	15
4.	Accent variations	15
5.	Speech rate	16
6.	Length of the listening	15
7.	Grammatical limitations	15

Table 4 Students' Strategies

No	Difficulties	Strategies	Students'
1.	Limited vocabulary and interpretation	Cognitive strategy	10
		Meta-cognitive strategy	2
		Memory-related strategy	7
		Compensatory strategy	1
		Affective strategy	0
2.	Concentration level	Social strategy	5
		Cognitive strategy	4
		Meta-cognitive strategy	2
		Memory-related strategy	3
		Compensatory strategy	1
3.	Established language habit	Affective strategy	6
		Social strategy	2
		Cognitive strategy	2
		Meta-cognitive strategy	2
		Memory-related strategy	11
4.	Accent variations	Compensatory strategy	0
		Affective strategy	1
		Social strategy	4
		Cognitive strategy	6
		Meta-cognitive strategy	2
5.	Speech rate	Memory-related strategy	6
		Compensatory strategy	1
		Affective strategy	0
		Social strategy	5
		Cognitive strategy	6
6.	Length of the listening	Meta-cognitive strategy	2
		Memory-related strategy	0
		Compensatory strategy	0
		Affective strategy	0
		Social strategy	10
7.	Grammatical limitations	Cognitive strategy	9
		Meta-cognitive strategy	3
		Memory-related strategy	0
		Compensatory strategy	1
		Affective strategy	0
		Social strategy	6
		Cognitive strategy	15
		Meta-cognitive strategy	0
		Memory-related strategy	2
		Compensatory strategy	0
		Affective strategy	0
		Social strategy	0

In this research, to solve the difficulties faced by students, it is important to know what difficulties students face and some strategies they use to help them. This research will discuss listening difficulties and strategies used by students to solve listening difficulties. The results show that each student has different strategies to practice their listening skills, namely cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive

strategies, memory-related strategies, compensatory strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. So based on Table 1 and Table 2 we can see that:

3.1.1 *Listening Difficulties*

3.1.2 *Limited Vocabulary and Interpretation*

In this research, based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 15 students' who had difficulty listening related to limited vocabulary and interpretation. The results of this student questionnaire were also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that because they had limited vocabulary, they had difficulty understanding what the speaker meant.

3.1.3 *Concentration Level*

In this research, based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 15 students' who had difficulty listening related to concentration level. The results of this students' questionnaire were also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that they had difficulty concentrating which resulted in them having difficulty understanding what the speaker was saying because they were often distracted by the noisy learning environment.

3.1.4 *Established Language Habits*

In this research, based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 15 students' who experienced difficulty listening related to established language habits. The results of this student questionnaire were also supported by the results of interviews with students who stated that they experienced difficulties due to their lack of experience listening to English which resulted in them having difficulty capturing and guessing what was being said by the speaker.

3.1.5 *Accent Variations*

In this research, based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 15 students' who experienced difficulty listening related to accent variations. Students' stated that they had difficulty guessing what the speaker was saying because the accent was unfamiliar to them.

3.1.6 *Speech Rate*

In this research, based on the results of the questionnaire, 16 students' had difficulty listening regarding speech rate. Students stated that they had difficulty understanding what the speaker was saying because the speaker's speed made them miss sentences that might be important.

3.1.7 *Length of The Listening*

In this study, based on the results of the questionnaire, 15 students' had difficulty listening regarding the length of the listening. Students' stated that they had difficulty understanding what was conveyed by the speaker, because of the long duration of the audio or the length of time the speaker spoke which made them lose concentration and miss several important points from the recording.

3.1.8 *Grammatical Limitations*

In this study, based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 15 students' who had difficulty listening regarding grammatical limitations. . Students' stated that they feel listening is difficult because they do not have a better understanding of grammatical structures. This emphasizes grammar becomes a significant part of students' listening comprehension.

3.2.1 *Strategies in Solving Listening Difficulties*

3.2.2 *Cognitive Strategy*

In this research, based on the results of the questionnaire, this strategy was used by 15 students' by using dictionaries or reference sources, taking notes, and summarizing. The results of this student questionnaire are also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that this strategy also helped them solve limitations in vocabulary and interpretation, concentration level, established language habits, accent variations, speaking rate, length of listening, and grammar limitations.

3.2.3 *Meta-Cognitive Strategy*

Based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 6 students' who used meta-cognitive strategies as a strategy to solving listening difficulties. Students' use this strategy by guessing the topic based on context clues. The results of this student questionnaire were also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that this strategy also helped them solve limited vocabulary and interpretation, level of concentration, established language habits, accent variations, speaking rate, and length of listening.

3.2.4 *Memory-related Strategy*

Based on the results of the questionnaire, researchers found 14 students' who used memory-related strategies as a strategy for solving listening difficulties. They use this strategy by listening to music, watching films or videos, and using visual imagery. The results of this student questionnaire are also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that this strategy also helped them solve limited vocabulary and interpretation, concentration level, established language habits, accent variations, and grammatical limitations.

3.2.5 *Compensatory Strategy*

In this study, based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 3 students' who used this strategy by using English learning applications. The results of this student questionnaire are also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that this strategy also helped them solve limited vocabulary and interpretation, concentration level, accent variations, and length of listening.

3.2.6 *Affective Strategy*

Based on the results of the questionnaire, there were 7 students' who used affective strategies as a strategy for solving listening difficulties. This strategy is used to create a comfortable learning environment. The results of this student questionnaire are also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that this strategy also helped them solve concentration levels, and establish language habits.

3.2.7 *Social Strategy*

In this study, there were 16 students' who used social strategies as a strategy to solve listening difficulties. they use this strategy by talking to other or native speakers and asking the speakers to repeat more slowly or clearly. The results of this student questionnaire are also supported by the results of interviews with students' who stated that this strategy also helped them solve vocabulary and interpretation, concentration level, established language habits, accent variations, speech rate, and length of the listening

4. Conclusion

The results of this study show that all listening difficulties are experienced by students' and the most common ones experienced by students' are listening difficulties related to speech rate. Students' also stated that they had difficulty understanding what the speaker was saying, because the speaker's speed made them miss sentences that might be important. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that all students have difficulty listening. The most common thing experienced by students is listening difficulties related to speech rate and most students' use cognitive strategy to solve listening difficulties. In this strategy students do exercises using a dictionary or reference source, taking notes, and summarizing.

5. Suggestion

The researcher gave several suggestions to English lecturer and further researchers, among others:

1) English Lecturer

It is recommended that English lecturers train students' English listening skills in a fun way, for example starting by creating a comfortable atmosphere or environment. Lecturers can also create learning materials from various reference sources, this can help students' become easier and happier in listening to English.

2) Further Researchers

It is recommended that further researchers who use this research as a source and reference material conduct similar research by conducting more in-depth investigations such as adding external factors of listening difficulties

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