

## THE X FACTOR IN UNDERSTANDING LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILL

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### ABSTRACT

This research was aimed to find out factors affecting students' challenges in listening comprehension as perceived by students at SMAN 1 Calang. This is a descriptive qualitative study. The samples of this research were selected by using purposive sampling. There were 75 eleventh-grade students who participated in this research. Questionnaire and interview were designed as research instruments. The questionnaire consisted of 30 items grouped into five categories, namely students' listening comprehension challenges related to factors attributed to the content and linguistics features of the listening text, factors attributed to the speaker, factors attributed to the listener, and factors attributed to the physical setting. Moreover, the interview consisted of three questions asking students' opinion about listening comprehension, challenges they faced in listening comprehension activity, and factors that caused those challenges. The result indicates listening texts, speaker, listener, and physical setting were the main sources of students' listening comprehension challenges. The dominant factor affecting students' challenges in listening comprehension was the physical setting such as the noise from environmental surroundings, with the percentage of 89.6%.

*Keywords: Listening, Listening comprehension, Factors on listening challenges*

### INTRODUCTION

As the most famous language subject in Indonesia, English needs to be learned at Junior and Senior High Schools. Among other skills of language, listening is the first to acquire before one is able to speak, read

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and write. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) mention that listening has an essential role in communicating. From total time spent on communicating, listening takes up to 40-50%, speaking 25-30%, reading and writing about 9%. The mastery of listening skill for many students in EFL (English Foreign Language) context is still considered challenging. Hamouda (2013) mentions the various challenges commonly encountered by students in listening comprehension such as making prediction, guessing unknown words, and recognizing the main point.

Meanwhile, from the result of a preliminary study that the researchers conducted by interviewing eleventh grade senior high school students at SMAN 1 Calang who learned listening comprehension in English language subject, they found that the students considered listening was challenging and faced some difficulties in listening skill such as inability to focus, to comprehend the text, and to remember the information from the text. Moreover, the teacher who had been interviewed for the challenges faced by students in listening comprehension stated that from the result of students' listening comprehension test, it can be revealed that students have some challenges in identifying the main idea, specific detailed information, and inference.

Ghaderpanahi (2012) mentions several factors that brought the students into confusion in listening activities, such as native speakers' volume, speed-rate delivery, accents, intonation, listening strategies, and pronunciation. Yagang (1993) asserts the challenges in comprehending listening were caused by the four following factors: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Rost (2002) explains that listening is a complex process where the listeners interpret the message by connecting what they listen to what they already know. Jafari and Hashim (2015) emphasize that listening is a medium for comprehensible input and learners' time in learning a foreign language is devoted to listening skill which they spend more than 50 percent of the time in learning a foreign language. According to Nunan (2003, p. 26), "Listening is a process of matching the sounds that are listened from the phonemes to the text completely." Brown (2001, p.263) indicates "Listening skill means the skill of listening intended to comprehend the meaning of what is being listened to". Hamouda (2013)

further defines listening comprehension as an interactive process as the listeners are required to put a full involvement in constructing the meaning of the messages. According to Nadig (2013), listening comprehension is the process of comprehending and making sense of spoken language.

Ja'fr (2013) as he conducted a research on ELF students at Al Yarmouk University found out that the problems that hindered EFL learners in listening comprehension were the accent of English, colloquial language, pronunciation, limited time, fast rate of delivery speech, and limited knowledge of vocabulary and structure of sentences. Furthermore, in the ESP Centre at Damascus University in Syria, Hasan (2000) examined 81 Arabic speakers who learned English as a foreign language for academic purposes and their perception of listening comprehension challenges. He found out unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structure, and long spoken text were the most important message factors for listening challenges faced by students. Pertaining to the factors attributed to the speaker, it was revealed that the clarity of the speech was the main source of EFL listening challenges. As regards with listener factors, lack of interest and the requirement for a complex answer to listening comprehension questions were the two main reasons for listening comprehension challenges encountered by EFL students. This study examined the factors and the dominant factors affecting students' challenges in listening comprehension. This research was also expected to give meaningful information for both teacher and students in order to be more aware about factors on listening comprehension challenges.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Seventy-five eleventh grade students of SMAN 1 Calang were selected. They have learned and experienced listening comprehension activity in English language subject. The respondents were chosen purposively based on the teacher's suggestion that eleventh-grade students encountered some challenges in listening comprehension.

The data were collected by distributing the questionnaire and interviewing students. The questionnaire which was employed to the respondents was close-ended questionnaire consisting of 30 items grouped into five categories; the content and linguistics features of the listening text, speaker, listener, and physical setting. This questionnaire allowed respondents to choose the best answer according to their experience or feeling. The items of the questionnaire were mainly

adapted from Assaf (2015). The questionnaire was designed after a review of the literature (Boyle, 1984; Yagang, 1993; Underwood, 1989; Rubin, 1994; Dunkel, 1991) about factors affecting students' challenges in listening comprehension. Furthermore, to strengthen the data from the result of questionnaire, the researchers interviewed students related to factors on listening comprehension challenges. In this study, the researchers used semi-structured interview in which they could formulate and modify the format of the questions during the interview process in order to guide the respondents to answer the questions based on the research objective that researchers intended to find.

To analyze the result of data from questionnaire, the researchers used the percentage formula proposed by Sugiyono (2012), namely  $P = (TS/HS) \times 100\%$  where P is the percentage of respondents' answer; TS is the total score per one statement/item; HS is the highest score; and 100% is the constant ordinal. Meanwhile, in relation to the result of data from interview, the researcher used three steps of data analysis proposed by Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2006), namely; reading, describing, and classifying.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The following is the conclusion of the result of data from questionnaire. The result is described by showing the top five listening comprehension challenges as faced by eleventh-grade students at SMAN 1 Calang.

**Table 1. The Top Five Listening Comprehension Challenges**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Statement</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Description</b>
30	1	Physical Setting	I find it difficult to concentrate with noise around.	89.6%	Strongly Agree
29	2	Physical Setting	I find it difficult to concentrate when there is unclear sound resulting from a poor-quality CD player.	86.9%	Strongly Agree
15	3	The Speaker	I find it difficult to understand the spoken text when speakers speak too fast.	85%	Strongly Agree

14	4	The Speaker	I have difficulty understanding speakers with unfamiliar accents.	84.2%	Strongly Agree
1	5	Listening Text	I find it difficult to understand listening text when the topic is unfamiliar.	83.7%	Strongly Agree

The top five listening comprehension challenges found from the result of questionnaire were factors attributed to the physical setting, noises from environmental surroundings, poor-quality equipment, speech delivery, accent of the speaker, and unfamiliar topic of listening text, the percentages of which are respectively 89.6%, 86.9%, 85%, 84.2%, and 83.7%. From the table, we can conclude that the dominant factor affecting students' listening comprehension was directed to the item 30 of questionnaire, which says "it is difficult for me to concentrate with noise around". It is related to physical setting which received 89.6% of the response. It is similar to what has been found by Assaf (2015) that noises around could be a major factor that would cause challenges in listening comprehension. The study by Yagang (1993) and Hasan (2000) also supported the present study finding that any distraction such as noises can cause a break in listening comprehension. This result is also in line with a study conducted by Hamouda (2013) that found a great number of students could not concentrate on listening due to the noises around. According to Hamouda, noise is another environmental barrier to comprehension as it can take the listener's mind off the message of the listening text.

Besides, the following is the result of data from interview. The first question was given to examine students' perception towards the importance of listening comprehension activity. The students thought that listening comprehension was crucial and useful in order to master English language well. In addition, the second question was given to investigate the challenges that students' faced in listening comprehension. The students revealed that they were challenged in understanding the meaning of the message conveyed by the speaker.

Meanwhile, from the respondents' responses related to the third question of interview, some participants argued that some factors causing their listening comprehension challenges were the fast rate of delivery speech and accents of the speaker, the unfamiliar topic of listening text, and having a lack of prior knowledge of vocabulary from the listener

itself. Related to ‘the fast rate of speech’, studies conducted by Hasan (2000), Osuka (2008), Ja’afar (2013), Abidin and Juan (2013) found that the participants mentioned similar problem in performing listening comprehension tests. They all argued that fast rate of speech impaired listening comprehension and made them unable to control the speed of the speakers in speaking. In addition, in line with ‘the accent’ of the speaker, Hamouda (2013) in his study showed that accents cause challenges to students in listening comprehension since they used to listening the accent of their teacher and did not have much exposure to the accents of English native speakers. Regarding the role of ‘unfamiliar topic’ of listening text, Buck (cited in Hamouda, 2013) identified that unfamiliar topic was one of the numerous difficulties which could be confronted in listening skill. In addition, in line with having a lack of prior knowledge of vocabulary, Goh (2000), Hasan (2000) and Abidin and Juan (2013) conducted a study which showed that the prior knowledge of vocabulary contributed to word recognition and new vocabulary during listening comprehension activity. This means that students who have a limited prior knowledge of vocabulary will face difficulty in listening comprehension.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There were various factors that affect students’ challenges in listening comprehension. Those factors mainly came from the content and linguistics features of listening text, the speaker, the listener, and the physical setting. The dominant factor that affected the students’ challenges in listening comprehension was physical setting with the percentage of 89.6%.

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