

EXPLORING ENGLISH LISTENING PROBLEMS AMONG EFL STUDENTS AT IAIN KUDUS

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension becomes one of the most difficult skills for most of English learners especially EFL learners. As a foreign language, English is rarely used in communication by EFL learners in their daily life. Therefore, the learners or students always face some difficulties/problems in listening comprehension. It can be seen from the results of their tests. The purpose of this study is to investigate the problems occur in listening class of EFL students at IAIN Kudus and the solutions to overcome those problems. The EFL students in this study refer to the English Education Department students of IAIN Kudus. The participants of this study are the second semester of English Education Department students. This study is a qualitative research. Observation, interview and documentation were conducted to collect the data. By conducting this study, several problems in listening comprehension can be revealed. The listening problems encountered by the EFL students are the pronunciation (accents), speedy delivery and length of the listening, physical conditions, unfamiliar vocabularies and terminologies, and limited facility for listening. Some actions should be done to overcome these obstacles occurred during listening process. The solutions to overcome the problems are students should be focus, practice more in listening English, memorize vocabularies, and prepare a language laboratory.

Keywords: *listening problems; EFL students; IAIN Kudus*

Learning a foreign language is not merely about learning the grammar, pronunciation, and memorizing the vocabularies. One of the important things is how we use or practice the language itself. When we learn a foreign language like English, we should be able to use it either in spoken or written. Therefore, learning a language is divided into four aspects, those are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Those four language skills are important for the language learners' proficiency. Speaking and writing belong to

productive skills. Meanwhile, listening and reading belong to receptive skills. By listening, learners can produce language in speaking by vocabulary that they obtain from listening. By reading, learners can produce a good writing by vocabulary that they get from reading. It is clear that those language skills support each other. Unfortunately, the listening skill seems to be the most difficult one for the English learners. Many English learners face some problems in listening comprehension because of many factors.

They often get bad scores in listening comprehension.

Listening is the first skill obtained by everyone since they were babies. They listened to the sounds surround them and try to understand it. It is clear that we learn to train our listening comprehension since we were babies. According to (Nunan, 2003, p. 24), listening is an active, purposeful process of making sense of what we hear. Nunan in Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011, p. 977) also states that, listening is an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning from both verbal and non-verbal messages. Steinberg in Bingol (2014, p. 1) mentioned that listening process is “the ability of one individual perceiving another via sense, aural organs, assigning a meaning to the message and comprehending it”.

Listening plays an important role in communication especially oral communication. Listening is also one of the most important skills in English language learning (Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016, p. 123). A good listening skill helps the listener to get many information and comprehend the message conveyed by the speaker. For EFL learners, listening is also important to understand the foreign language and obtain the vocabularies. As stated by Richard & Renandya in Nor (2014, p. 2) that having knowledge of a foreign language means that being able to speak and listen in that language.

Teaching listening is not as easy as teaching other skills. It requires many media to deliver the listening materials. To teach listening, the teacher at least needs a tape recorder and a cassette to play the materials. Nowadays, teacher may use a computer or laptop and speaker to play the listening file. The teacher will teach listening comprehension effectively if the school has a language laboratory facility. The laboratory

is equipped with headphones which make the students are able to listen the materials clearly.

Listening is not only difficult for the teachers in the way of teaching but also for the students. Listening English is a difficult skill for the EFL students because it is not their mother tongue. Listening needs a high concentration to comprehend the materials such as monologue and dialogue. Most of the students encountered some problems in listening comprehension. It can be seen from the students' results of listening test. Many EFL students got bad scores for listening comprehension. It was influenced by various factors.

According to some previous research from (Darti and Andi Asmawati, 2017), the problems in listening comprehension faced by students“ not only from the listeners themselves but also from content material and environment of listening comprehension. Another previous research from (Prastiyowati, 2017) also stated that one of the problems of listening came from the supporting equipment. The research from (Rini, 2017) concluded that there are two factors: internal and external factors in listening difficulties. The difficulties are mostly came from external factors such as limited vocabularies, speed of speech, native speaker's accent, unfamiliar pronunciation, and condition of the class.

Identifying the students' problems in listening becomes the lecturer's responsible. By knowing their problems in listening, students will be able to solve the problems and find the solutions. The lecturer may help the students to overcome their difficulties. The lecturer will give some suggestions and advices for the students to study hard in order to improve and develop their listening skills. Hence, the writer were eager in conducting this study. The purpose of this

study is to investigate the problems occur in listening class of EFL students at IAIN Kudus and the solutions to overcome those problems.

METHOD

This study employed descriptive qualitative research. According to Nassaji (2015, p. 129), the purpose of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. The subjects were 75 students of second semester from TBI-A and TBI-B English Education Department at IAIN Kudus. The researcher take a few students to be interviewed. This research aims to know the problems occur in listening class of EFL students at IAIN Kudus and the solutions to overcome those problems.

In conducting this research, the researcher used observation, interview and documentation to collect the data. Since the researcher was the lecturer of the listening subject, she observed directly the teaching and learning process, the students' attitude during the lesson, and problems faced by the students. Then the researcher took around six students to be interviewed and kept their assignment papers as documentation. After collecting the data, the researchers analysed the data as follows: (1) transcribe the interview, (2) identify the problems occur in listening class of EFL students at IAIN Kudus, and (3) identify the solutions to overcome those problems.

FINDINGS

In the result of the interview, the EFL learners (the students of English Education Department IAIN Kudus) found several problems in listening comprehension. Most of listening problems explained by Bingol above were also encountered by the students. Some students stated that several problems

occur in listening comprehension are as follows.

1. Pronunciation (accent)
2. Speedy delivery and length of the listening
3. Physical conditions
4. Unfamiliar vocabularies and terminologies
5. Limited facility for listening

Those problems were listed in order. The highest rank of students' listening problem is pronunciation/accent used by the speakers. It was followed by speedy delivery and length of the listening, physical conditions, unfamiliar vocabularies and terminologies, and limited facility for listening. English education department is a new study program in IAIN Kudus. Therefore, the facilities were not adequate yet including the laboratory for listening (language laboratory).

By knowing the listening problems encountered by students, the solutions or some ways should be done to overcome or minimize the problems. Some solutions were given by students related to their listening problems. Below are the ways or solutions which can be done by the students.

1. Be focus
2. More practice
3. Memorize vocabularies
4. Prepare a language laboratory

Those solutions should be carried out by the students to overcome their problems. The first solution until the third solution should be done by the students. Meanwhile, the last solution became the responsibility of faculty/study program. The study program in coordination with the faculty should propose a laboratory facility to support the listening lesson.

DISCUSSION

Listening is an important skill for everyone to interact each other in oral communication. Since it belongs to receptive skill, it is also important for the students in teaching and learning process. As stated by Ferris in Bingol (2014, p. 2) that listening is the skill which used frequently in the classroom. In foreign language classrooms, listening skill provides input for the learners. By listening the learners can produce language such as speaking and writing by using the vocabularies which they obtain from listening.

The significance of listening in learning process is also stated by Swanson in Bingol (2014, p. 2) that “in reality, without effective listening, learning is a matter of chance”. Listening is sometimes more important than other language skills. According to Grunkemeyer in Rahimi et al. (2012, p. 1948), “listening involves hearing, transforming, absorbing, accumulating and retrieving data”. It can be concluded that listening takes part in learning process by obtaining the information or knowledge.

Due to the significance of listening skill, it is very important to be mastered by the learners especially EFL learners. As the writer stated before that in EFL classrooms, listening skill provides input for the learners. It provides vocabularies in order to produce language in speaking or writing. In fact, most of the EFL learners do not have a good listening skill.

Listening comprehension is a bit difficult for EFL learners. In this study, the EFL learners are the students of English Education Department IAIN Kudus. They often face several problems in listening comprehension. They couldn't hear every single word what the speakers say clearly and understand the topic of the spoken text. Those problems come from many factors. Moreover, they often get bad scores in

listening test. It can be seen that there are crucial problems encountered by learners in listening comprehension. Those problems should be solved in order to overcome the difficulties by finding the solutions for the learners.

Identifying the listening problems in a classroom becomes the lecturer's responsible. After identifying the problems, the lecturer should find the solutions or some ways to minimize those problems so that the learners will be able to increase listening comprehension. According to Bingol (2014, p. 3), there are some problems encountered by learners which may appear during or before listening.

1. Quality of recorded material
The quality of sound system will affect understanding of listening.
2. Cultural differences
Having a cultural knowledge of foreign language is important in order to understanding the context. The topic of the spoken text may contain different cultural matter than the learners have. The teacher/lecturer should give prior knowledge about the topic beforehand.
3. Accent
The learners has to be familiar with both British and American accent. The recording materials or the spoken text is usually spoken by native speakers in British or American accent.
4. Unfamiliar vocabulary
Familiar words or vocabularies will be easier for learners to understand the listening passage. Knowing the meaning of the words will also give a positive effect in listening ability. So, the learners should learn and memorize a lot of vocabularies and their various meanings.
5. Length and speed of the listening

One of the greatest difficulty in listening comprehension is the speed of the speaker. If the speakers speak too fast, listeners or learners may have difficulties to catch the words. Besides that, the length of listening passage will influence the learners' concentration. Listening passage which is very long will make the learners feel bored and lose their concentration. Therefore, a slow and short listening passage will help comprehension for second language learners especially beginner learners.

6. Physical conditions

The condition of classrooms affects learners listening comprehension. Large classroom and small classroom will give a different effect to the learners. In the large classrooms, learners who are sitting on the back rows may not hear the recording as learners sit in front. Learners who sit next to the windows also effected by the noise that come from outside. The temperature of classroom will also be a factor that makes listening comprehension difficult. A classroom which is very hot will influence the learners' concentration in comprehending the listening text.

7. Lack of concentration

One of the crucial factors that affect listening comprehension is learners' motivation. It can be difficult for learners to maintain the concentration in a foreign language learning classroom. When the topic of the listening text is interesting for learners, comprehending would be easier. Learners find listening is very boring even if the topic is interesting because it needs a huge amount of effort in order to not miss the meaning.

There are five problems encountered by the students in listening. The first

problem faced by English students of IAIN Kudus in listening comprehension is pronunciation (accent). It is rather difficult for the students to identify the words spoken by the native speakers. As explained by Bingol above that the recording materials is usually spoken by native speakers in British or American accent. Many people argue that British accent is a bit difficult than American. When the student found recording materials in British accent, it is hard for them to catch the words. In the interview, Bagas (English student of TBI-A IAIN Kudus) said, "sometimes I feel strange when I hear the words." Alfina (English student of TBI-B IAIN Kudus) also stated that it was very difficult for her to get information even though she had tried to focus. So, though the students tried to concentrate they couldn't hear the words clearly. It is because of the accent or pronunciation of the native speakers.

The second problem is speedy delivery and length of the listening. In her research, Maulida (2018, p. 14) also mentioned the problems in listening, two of them are unfamiliar vocabulary and length and speed of the listening. Native speaker usually deliver the listening passage too fast. As it was said by Safuroh (English student of TBI-A IAIN Kudus) that the native explained the materials very fast. This condition makes the students miss the materials of listening, do not get the main idea and cannot answer the questions related to the materials. The third, students often face a problem from the environment surround them. This physical condition problem is the noise from their friends in classroom. "It is hard for me to be focus when my friends are so crowded," said Husna (English student of TBI-A IAIN Kudus). The same reason is also stated by Imroatul (English student of TBI-B IAIN

Kudus). She was also bothered by her rowdy friends.

The next major problem is unfamiliar vocabulary. Besides the physical condition, Husna (English student of TBI-A IAIN Kudus) added her problems in listening comprehension. She said that she did not know the vocabulary spoken by the native. The last, another problem in listening comprehension is the equipment or facility used for listening. To teach listening the lecturer should provide some supporting equipment in order to delivering the listening materials well. In fact, English Education Department is one of new study programs at IAIN Kudus. As a new study program, English Education Department does not have adequate facilities yet especially to support the listening activity. EED IAIN Kudus does not have language laboratory yet. So, to teach listening, the lecturer only uses a laptop and speaker. A small speaker, of course, is not appropriate to be used in a large classroom. Inaya (English student of TBI-B IAIN Kudus) said that she couldn't hear what the native said because the sound was not clear.

Those 5 problems can be overcome or minimized by several ways, those are be focus; more practice; memorize vocabularies; and prepare a language laboratory. To overcome the physical problem, the students should be focus on the listening passage. Before the listening passage is played, students should be ready and prepare themselves to listen the materials carefully. They should concentrate on what they hear and ignore the noise surround them. As it was said by Imroatul (English student of TBI-B IAIN Kudus) that she had to be focus and more careful. The lecturer also plays a role to minimize this problem. Before starting the lesson, the lecturer should ensure that the students are

ready, prohibit them for making noise, prevent the noise that come from outside, and adjust the temperature of the class.

The second solution is more practice to listen all kinds of listening materials. Not only various materials of listening but also kinds of English accents like British and American should be learned by students. Being familiar with all kinds of listening materials and English accents will overcome and minimize the listening problems like pronunciation (accent), length and speed of listening as well. Inaya (English student of TBI-B IAIN Kudus) said, "More practice English listening, so I know the new words with correct pronunciation." Inaya explained that by having more practice of listening, she would know new words and the correct pronunciation. Safuroh (English student of TBI-A IAIN Kudus) also added that more exercise of listening will minimize her problems in listening.

The third way to overcome listening problem is memorize many vocabularies. As stated by Bingol (2014: 3) that familiar words or vocabularies will be easier for learners to understand the listening passage. Besides that, knowing the meaning of the words will give a positive effect in students' listening ability as well. English students of TBI-A and TBI-B, Safuroh and Inaya, give their solutions to add more English vocabularies by reading or practice listening. New vocabularies or terms in a certain topic of listening become one of main problem in listening comprehension. Bagas (English student of TBI-A IAIN Kudus) stated that listening music, watching movie and using dictionary will help students to learn many vocabularies.

The next step to minimize the listening problems is facilitate the listening activity by preparing the equipment or facility i.e. language laboratory. One of the

significant problems in listening comprehension at IAIN Kudus is the existence of language laboratory. IAIN Kudus especially English Education Department does not have adequate facilities yet to support the listening activity. The lecturers should bring their own equipment like laptop and speaker to teach listening. The small speaker cannot support the listening activity in a big classroom and a lot of students. So, the students face a problem in listening the English materials. They said that the sound was unclear and they couldn't hear what the speaker say clearly. It will be better if the listening activity is held in a language laboratory. Each students will be able to hear the listening materials clearly by using headphone. They will be more focus and won't be disturbed by the noise from outside. The lecturer will be easier to manage the classroom and the listening activity will run smoothly.

CONCLUSION

In teaching listening, the lecturer has a responsible to know the students' capacity and identify the factors that may influence their listening comprehension. There are several factors related to students' listening

problems; they are listener's factor, physical condition, and listening facility. Therefore, pronunciation (accents), speedy delivery and length of the listening, physical conditions, unfamiliar vocabularies and terminologies, and limited facility for listening were the major problems encountered by English students of IAIN Kudus.

The solutions to overcome and minimize the problems are students should be focus, practice more in listening English, memorize vocabularies, and prepare a language laboratory. By applying those solutions, students can minimize the listening problems. The English Education Department of IAIN Kudus should facilitate the students by providing a language laboratory. Besides that, the lecturer should improve the listening materials with variety of English accents and give more listening practice in the classroom so that it can build students' knowledge. Lecturer also encourage and motivate students to practice listening at home in order to improve their ability in listening comprehension.

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