

CAPTURING THE EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION PROBLEMS

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Abstract: Listening is of paramount importance for the language development of EFL students. The objective of the present study was to investigate the listening comprehension problems of the EFL students at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. The researchers applied the survey method in conducting this study. There were 105 EFL students who participated in this study, and the instrument used in collecting the data was the Listening Comprehension Problems Questionnaire (LCPQ). After collecting the data, the researchers used SPSS (Version 26) to analyze the data. The findings of this study revealed that 80.63% of the participants experienced listening comprehension problems due to their limited knowledge of pragmatic expressions used by the speakers in the listening audio materials. Other listening comprehension problems encountered by the participants were related to parsing problems, which covered 59.05%, and perception problems, which covered 50.76%. Taking into account the present study's findings, it reveals that the students experienced some degree of difficulties in understanding spoken language. Henceforth, further studies on overcoming the difficulties experienced by the students and some strategies applied by them are worth researching in future research.

Keywords: Listening comprehension, EFL students, Listening problems.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of listening has been stressed by language experts. Nunan (2002) states that listening is essential to language communication and Rost (1994) claims that listening is essential in language communication since it contributes inputs to other language skills such as speaking. When EFL students have good listening comprehension skills, it assists them in the teaching-learning process to acquire language. Darweesh (2014) states that to be able to succeed in the academic setting, both instructors and students must acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension. Students who have good listening comprehension can help themselves understand and get new information from the learned materials. To come to a better understanding and comprehension of what speakers say, students need to have a great deal of mental activity (Vandergrift, 1999:168) and they need to select and interpret information that comes from the auditory and/or visual clues (Ali S. Hasan, 2010). Besides, Hogan, Adlof, and Alonzo (2014) emphasized that listening comprehension skills deficiency positively contributes to the low reading comprehension skills of students. In other words, having a good skill at listening comprehension enables the students to improve their ability and learning achievement.

Albeit its importance, listening remains problematic to EFL students. Listening comprehension problems are related to all the difficulties that students may encounter and are categorized into three phases, which are perception, parsing, and utilization (Anderson, 1995; Goh, 2000, Vandergrift, 2003).

Perception difficulties arise when listeners are unable to discriminate between sounds and words in a continuous stream of

speech (Field, 2008b). Phonological and lexical difficulties are two distinct sorts of difficulties that listeners encounter during the perception phase. Phonological difficulties encompass learners' inability to comprehend intonation, stress, and a variety of accents (Ur, 1984). These difficulties are frequently associated with the listeners' limited linguistic skills (Goh, 1999). Certain characteristics of casual conversation, such as pauses, interruptions, repetitive gaps and overlaps, as well as continuous variations in the flow of speech, create significant difficulties for EFL listeners (Goh, 1999). According to reports, issues such as a rapid speech rate and foreign prosody impair learners' comprehension of video texts (Cross, 2009a). Goh (2000) identified five out of ten difficulties concerning the listening skills of second language learners. Those are "Do not recognize terms they know; disregard the next section when considering meaning; are unable to chunk streams of speech; overlook the beginnings of texts; and concentrate too hard or are unable to concentrate"

The difficulties experienced by the learner during parsing are frequently syntactic and semantic. Syntactic difficulties can manifest themselves in the following ways: (1) rapid forgetting of what was heard, (2) inability to build a mental representation from the words heard, and (3) inability to comprehend successive segments of input due to previous difficulties (Goh, 2000). Whereas, semantic issues arise when learners become fixated with the meaning of particular words that may be repetitious. As a result, they overlook other portions of the message due to their short-term memory's limited processing capacity and superficial processing (Goh, 1999).

The utilization stage of L2 listening comprehension is typically related to low pragmatic competence. "Pragmatic competence refers to the capacity to express meaning in a socially acceptable manner and to interpret meaning based on context, whether explicit or tacit" (Thomas, 1995 as cited in Nowrouzi, Tam,

Sareian and Nimehchisalem (2015). When listeners comprehend the meaning of words but fail to recognize their intended meaning, pragmatic difficulties arise. Discoursal difficulties arise when the listener is unable to follow the progression of ideas in connected speech. For instance, when students are unable to discern the overall order of the ideas in a text, they are experiencing discoursal difficulties.

Numerous studies on listening problems have highlighted interesting findings on EFL students' learning English. Hogan, Adlof & Alonzo, (2014) stated that vocabulary, inference, and background knowledge are a few key language factors that affect students' listening comprehension. In addition, other researchers have discovered that EFL students have limited exposure to listening activities in the classroom (Wang, 2010), students have little interest in doing listening tasks (Kit-Ling Lau, 2017) unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech rate, and linking sounds between words (Ai-hua Chen, 2013), a different accent of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety (Seli Siti Syadiah, 2016), and making inference, low confidence, lack of concentration in listening to the spoken texts (Nurhidayah Sari, Rinda Fithriyana, 2019).

Despite several studies conducted by some researchers on listening comprehension problems encountered by the EFL students, the study at hand was conducted on account of some recommendations of previous studies. Hamouda (2013), Juan & Abidin (2013), Anadapong (2011), stated that to help students improve their listening skills, first and foremost, lecturers or teachers have to understand students' listening problems before they start teaching their students to develop listening skills. Van Han & Van Rensburg (2016), if the teachers as instructors are expected to assist learners to improve their ability in listening comprehension, they must comprehend students' listening difficulties in understanding spoken passages. In so doing, the

teachers can design effective teaching listening strategies and solve students' listening comprehension problems. Therefore, the research question that underpins the present study is to uncover EFL students' perception of listening comprehension problems.

METHOD

In this research, the researchers used a quantitative research method by applying a survey research design. The researchers applied the survey method by using questionnaires to capture the students' listening comprehension problems. The questionnaire used in the present study was the Listening Comprehension Problem Questionnaire (LCPQ) developed by Nowrouzi et al (2015). LCPQ consists of three main aspects of listening comprehension problems which are perception problems, parsing problems, and utilization problems. The total number of items of the questionnaire was 23 items with a Likert scale.

The participants ($n = 105$, $F = 68$, $M = 37$) were randomly selected from EFL students who studied at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng. The participants were informed that all the data would remain confidential before distributing the questionnaire. Averagely, it took them about 15 to 20 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. Participants were requested to double-check their responses in the questionnaires. The rate of the responses was 100% in this survey.

In reference to the research question, the data in this study were taken from 106 participants using the online survey and analyzed quantitatively. The researchers worked on students' responses to their listening comprehension problems of the online survey. The responses were counted and tabulated to be later discussed as the findings. In this study, since the questions were written in the form of a Likert scale with four optional answers, students' responses were grouped into Agreement and Disagreement. The answers in 'Strongly Disagree (1)' and 'Disa-

gree (2)' were considered as 'Students' Disagreement'. Contrarily, the responses in 'Agree (3)' and 'Strongly Agree (4)' were reported as 'Students' Agreement'.

RESULT

The results of the study on capturing the listening comprehension problems experienced by the EFL students are presented in table 1.

Table 1. EFL Students' Listening Comprehension Problems

Aspects of Listening problems	Number of Respondents	Number of Items	Total Responses	Results			
				Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Perception problems	105	10	1.050	4.57	41.14	44.48	8.38
				45.71		50.76	
Parsing Problems	105	7	735	6.53	34.42	46.12	12.93
				40.95		59.05	
Utilization Problems	105	6	630	3.97	15.40	66.19	14.44
				19.37		80.63	
TOTAL		23	2415	5.01	32.38	50.97	11.64
				37.39		62.61	

As shown in Table 1, among the three aspects of listening comprehension problems, the largest percentage of students' agreements was shown in the utilization problems aspect which covers 80.63%. By this data, most students confirmed that they experience listening comprehension problems due to their limited understanding of pragmatic expressions used by the speakers.

The data in Table 1 also revealed that the second aspect of EFL students listening comprehension problems was related to the parsing problems, which cover 59.05% of EFL students' listening comprehension problems. In other words, the students agreed that they encountered syntactic and semantic difficulties when they listened to the spoken texts. Lastly, there were 50.76% of the EFL students agreed that they experienced listening comprehension problems in terms of phonological and lexical difficulties.

DISCUSSION

Comprehending what we hear is considered an active process in which humans infer meaning from passages and make connections between what we hear and prior knowledge (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Namaziandost, Sabzevari, & Hashemifardnia, 2018). For EFL learners, mastering listening comprehension is the first step toward fully acquiring a foreign language (Ziafar & Namaziandost, 2019). The present study revealed some interesting results on EFL students listening comprehension problems. Out of the three aspects of listening comprehension problems, utilization problems cover 80.63%. It signifies that the EFL students have some difficulties with their listening comprehension due to the limited pragmatic competence of the students. This limited pragmatic competence has made the students unable to articulate meaning in context or interconnections between language and the context in which language is employed.

This finding seems to be in line with the findings of a study conducted by Namaziandost, Neisi, Mahdavirad and Nasri (2019) who discovered that the English learners suffered from listening problems due to the input of the target language and the students

comprehend the words but fail to comprehend the meaning of the words in context or pragmatic meaning (Thomas, 1995 cited in Nowrouzi, et all. 2015).

Other difficulties encountered by the EFL students during listening activities are related to phonological and lexical problems. These phonological and lexical problems are similar to the findings of the studies. For instance, listening problems are caused by the accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary, the different accent of speakers (Sa'diyah, 2016), remember the meaning of the words (Nimehchisalem, 2016), and mental translation and inability to chunk streams of speech (Ozcelik, Branden, and Steendam, (2019).

Having revealed listening problems encountered by the EFL students, the findings of the present study imply that there is more to assist the learners to learn English. The EFL teachers have an essential role in deciding effective learning strategies in order to minimize the listening difficulties faced by the students and make their learning an enjoyable experience.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the important information obtained from the students about their listening comprehension problems is as follows. The highest percentage of EFL students listening problems was the utilization problems which covers 80.63%. The percentage of the parsing problems covers 59.05% and perception problems cover 50.76% of EFL students' listening comprehension problems.

Knowing students' learning difficulties may enable EFL teachers to develop effective learning strategies and ultimately improve their English listening abilities. The suggestion is made for addressing problems regarding how students can help themselves and the teachers can help their students to overcome the listening comprehension problems encountered by the

students. The findings generally imply that it is important for instructors of a second language to take note of the different listening problems that exist among listeners so as to enable them to apply the appropriate strategies in learning.

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