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Daftar Isi
Exploring Students’ Difficulties in the Listening Class

Oleh
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Abstract
Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menemukan kesulitan mempelajari mata kuliah *listening comprehension* di semester 3 program Studi Bahasa Inggris STKIP Bale Bandung. Dengan menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, studi kasus ini telah dapat mengidentifikasi beberapa kesulitan, penyebab, dan berbagai jenis pemecahan kesulitan yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa dan dosen pengajar. Data didapat melalui dua jenis instrumentasi yaitu interview dan observasi kelas. Interview dilakukan kepada sembilan orang responden (satu orang dosen dan delapan orang mahasiswa), sementara itu observasi kelas telah dilakukan sebanyak delapan kali pertemuan (satu semester). Untuk validasi data saya melakukan *persistent observation*, dan *member check*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan utama para mahasiswa tersebut adalah mereka masih sulit untuk mengerti/menentukan gagasan utama suatu percakapan yang diperdengarkan dikarenakan oleh beberapa *listening characteristics* seperti: *reduced forms*, *speed of delivery*, dan *idioms*. Kesulitan pun semakin bertambah karena di samping harus mendengarkan, para mahasiswa juga sudah harus mampu menggabungkan kemampuan menyimak mereka dengan ke tiga *skills* lainnya (*reading*, *writing*, dan *speaking*).

Terdapat dua jenis sumber kesulitan yaitu dari sisi mahasiswa dan dosennya sendiri. Mahasiswa merasa enggan untuk bertanya ketika mendapat kesulitan di kelas, sebagian besar tidak memiliki buku pelajaran. Sementara itu dosen pun hanya menggunakan cara mengajar yang monoton sehingga membuat kelas menjadi membosankan. Lebih lagi, dosen tidak menerangkan apa tujuan pengajaran, dan bagaimana cara penilaian sehingga hal ini juga menimbulkan salah persepsi di antara mereka. Perbaikan yang ditempuh dosen untuk mengurangi kesulitan yang dihadapinya yaitu dengan mendiskusikan kata-kata sulit, membaca teks, memberikan pujian, bertanya, mengulang rekaman beberapa kali, dan menugaskan pekerjaan rumah. Mahasiswa lebih banyak mengasah kemampuan mereka dengan melihat film dan mendengarkan lagu-lagu barat, berbicara dengan penutur asli, dan juga banyak mengerjakan PR. Kesimpulan yang didapat dari penelitian yang telah dilakukan adalah: kesulitan terbesar mahasiswa yaitu menyimpulkan...
gagasan utama pembicaraan secara benar dan tepat. Mereka harus dimotivasi untuk berani bertanya, tidak bergantung hanya kepada guru, dan memiliki strategi belajar yang baik. Pengajaran mata kuliah Listening harus ditunjang oleh fasilitas yang baik, pengajar yang dapat menerangkan suatu masalah dengan sejelas-jelasnya, tahu cara menilai dan membuat suasana kelas menyenangkan.

Kata Kunci: Exploring, difficulty, listening, comprehension

A. Background

People in the world learn and use language as a tool of communication. Language as defined by Parrott (1993:179) is a system of human communication to express meaning. Furthermore, it consists of the structured arrangement of sounds or their written representation into larger unit, such as morphemes, words, sentences, and utterances. Besides using their own language, people in the world learn foreign languages as well, and it is English as the famous language which is learnt and used by a great deal of people in the world.

English is deployed either as a mother tongue, a second language, a foreign language, or as the language of instruction. As a foreign language in Indonesia, it has been implicitly as well as explicitly covered in the 1999-2004 State Board Guidelines (GBHN), and in the National Educational System Law to be taught in Indonesian educational context (Abdul Hamied, 2001:2). Furthermore, through the Minister of Education and Culture Decree No.096/1967, the Indonesian government declared that English becomes the first foreign language that should be taught and learnt at all levels of schools started form the elementary schools (Decree No. 006/U/1993) to the university.

There are four major skills in learning language, namely: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening and reading skills are well known as the receptive skills, in which readers and listeners actively produce understanding, whereas speaking and writing skills are regarded as the productive skills (Byrnes, 1985). These four skills are interrelated to each other and very important in the language learning and teaching, and mutually supported each other and hence we should not treat them discretely.
In our daily lives, listening plays an important role. Cohen (1998:68) argues that for about forty-five percent of our students school time is spent in listening and approximately one-third of students school time is spent in activities related to listening.

Listening comprehension as one of the four major skills consists of two words: listening and comprehension. Garfinkel (1986:50) defines listening as a mental process made up of the following essential elements: hearing, decoding, comprehending, and responding. Whereas comprehension is a multiple step evaluative stage at which the decoded message is weighed. By weighing or understanding the message, the listener may decode how to use, and how to respond to it.

Along with Garfinkel, Underwood (1996:1) defines listening comprehension as an activity of paying attention to, and trying to get meaning from something we hear. Hence, listening comprehension is a mental ability and activity to understand, interpret, and respond to the decoded message. In other words, it is essentially an active process of interpreting and negotiating the meaning.

In the process of teaching and learning, listening comprehension plays an important role, particularly in English classrooms in which almost all teachers use English as the language of instruction. Indeed, many language centers or colleges in our country use it for their classroom daily instruction, and consequently students must have good listening skill. However, some students of universities still find and consider that listening is a difficult subject to cope with compared to the other three skills. It dues to the following eight characteristics it has namely: clustering, redundancy, reduced form, performances variables, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm and intonation, and interaction (Brown, 1994:238). Therefore, the second or foreign learners have to pay more attention to the characteristics mentioned because they highly influence and can often block comprehension.

The difficulty of listening is also faced by some students of universities. On March 10, 2000 I administered some questionnaires regarding listening subject to the second semester students of English department of STKIP Bale Bandung. From the pilot study, I got the result that from fifty-five students, thirty-eight of them (70%) consider listening difficult. They rated listening as the following subject
followed by writing, speaking, and reading. Some factors affected the difficulties in listening, such as the length of teaching time (60 minutes), the material taught which is too difficult, the delivery rate (too fast), and the teacher’s traditional way of teaching, namely: introducing some new difficult words, listening to the recording again, and again, and finding some correct answers.

Through the study, I would like to investigate whether those respondents’ opinions aforementioned cause the difficulties in listening. Therefore it is important to conduct further observations on the real condition of the class, the students, and the teacher as well. The observation is aimed at developing a more understanding of what is happening in the class.

B. Statement of the Problems

The evidences obtained from the pilot study show that listening comprehension is still a problem for the students, and based on it I formulate the following questions:
1. What sort of difficulties do the students encounter in listening?
2. Why do they have such difficulties?
3. How do they solve the difficulties?

C. Method of Data Collection

The study is intended to explore the difficulties in listening faced by the students of STKIP Bale Bandung. I employ a descriptive-qualitative case study design, due to the nature of the subject studied, i.e.: an examination of a specific phenomenon such as program, an event, a person, a process, an institution on a social group (Merriam, 1988:9). By applying this method, I would like to describe and analyze the difficulties.

The primary data were obtained from two kinds of sources, namely: observation, and interview. I did eight times class observations, and was able to interview the teacher and nine students with different achievements. The obtained data are classified into three major points. The first one is difficulty consists of difficulty in learning listening comprehension, and difficulty in teaching listening comprehension. The second is source of difficulty, and the third is solution. The data are categorized, analyzed, and finally interpreted.
D. Data Analysis and Discussion

From the data analysis, there are 24 (twenty four) items influenced the students difficulties to understand listening, namely:

1. Difficulty: comprehending the main ideas, listening material, integrated skills, long setting speech, idioms, speed of delivery, and reduced forms.

2. Source of Difficulty: listening courses are a series of difficult courses, book and the recording material, laboratory, students frustration, teachers commitment to the academic integrity, memorizing the lesson, external disturbance, disruptive behavior, monotonous subject, book centeredness, and miscommunication.

3. Solution: vocabulary discussion, shadow reading, practice, verbal encouragement, listen more to native speakers utterances, integrate listening and writing skills, listening to English songs and news, and doing more homework.

E. Discussion

Listening comprehension is indeed difficult for the students, since they do not only listen but also identify and comprehend what others are saying. Compared to reading subject in which we can read the materials as long as we like, listening passage come into our ears in twinkling of an eye (Elis, 1997:139). The main difficult problems students have in listening subject are:

1. Comprehending the Main Idea of a Passage

Students consider getting the main idea of a spoken passage uttered by native speakers is the most difficult thing to cope with due to the existence of reduced form, speed of delivery, idiom, and integrated skills.

2. Sources of Difficulties

Sources of difficulties in teaching and learning process of listening are:

a. Students still have difficulties in listening though they have studied it for three semesters. Actually, the students should have discussed the problems with the teacher, but probably this is in line with what Ferris et.al. (1996:308) emphasize that ESL students need to overcome cultural inhibition shyness about speaking up in the class.
b. Teacher is committed to the academic integrity so that he does not communicate the marks with the students. He thinks that the students’ marks are based on what they get from the exam. Nunan (1995) argues that the principal reason for the mismatch between teachers and students, which give rise to a disparity between what is taught and what is learned, is that there is a mismatch between the pedagogical agenda of the teacher and that of the learners (p.135). He further emphasizes that interest and motivation are enhanced when the purpose and rationale of instruction is made explicitly to the learners since they come into the classroom with different mind-sets, different point of focus, or different agendas (p. 140).

c. On the other hand, students think that the teacher is not serious in carrying his duty since he allowed the disruptive students to join the class. And more over, the monotonous subject the teacher carried out in the class make them reluctant to join the class and make them passive.

d. So far the students are not taught to be able to grasp the meaning of a passage. What they do is only memorizing the discussed passages even for the examination. Such an activity makes the students frustrated. Since listening is not a skill that can be improved through the memorization of rules or discrete items (Oxford, 2001:6), it is the teacher task to modify his way of teaching the subject.

e. The role of the school board in facilitating the teaching and learning process is very important since the laboratory is really needed in listening class. For example, during the observation, I found out that some students tapes are out of order. Students listened to the recording only through the one loudspeaker, and the laboratory does not sound-proof. This is in line with what Ellis says that the noise whether from background noise or the recording, or the environment can take the listener’s mind of the content on the listening passage, and moreover some unclear voices resulting from poor quality equipment can affect on the listener’s comprehension (1997:139).

From the findings abovementioned, I could conclude that the biggest problem the students have in listening comprehension is they
still do not know how to understand the main idea. And to have good listening courses, a school should have an adequate teaching learning facility, and employ a teacher who explains things explicitly, accepts students complain, makes sure all students understand the subject taught, knows grading system, is able to modify the teaching techniques, and is forceful but not strict. And the school should empower the students to be independent, motivated, know some learning strategies, and confident to negotiate with the teacher.

References


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