

Exploring Students' Strategies in Improving Their Listening Skill

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ABSTRACT

Strategies are employed in order to improve listening skill and cope up with listening problems as mastering listening is necessity for English language learners. This evidence happened in an English language department of a private university in Yogyakarta. This research aimed to explore students' strategies in improving listening skill. In gathering data, qualitative research method is employed and interview is used as an instrument to collect data. Six participants were interviewed. This research revealed that students used various strategies in order to improve their listening skill, namely cooperating with friends, and asking for clarification. In addition, most of the participants are using audio or audio visual such as movie, music, podcast, and video to help them applied the strategies. Other strategies are paying attention to the familiar word, repeating the audio, mimicking, note-taking, paying attention to the phonetic, keywords, and accents, and connecting word to the other word. Different strategies occurred because some students facing different problems, different concern in listening, and different learning style.

Keywords: Listening strategies, students' strategies.

Introduction

Skills for learning a foreign language include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Each of them is essential to be mastered, especially listening since it belongs to the first skill in the receptive skill. Listening is crucial for students who are learning a foreign language, for example English as it helps students communicate to others and also is used in daily life. Listening can help students improve their knowledge and speaking (Rost, 1994; Doff, 1995; Ziane, 2011). Listening is essential parts of learning language because it can give input for students and it also has important role in developing students' language knowledge as it is used in real life (Morley, 2001; Rost, 2013). In addition, these days, listening takes an important role to the development of technology and globalization (Mendelsohn, cited in Kazemi & Kiamarsi, 2017). It is in line

with S. Yildirim and Ö. Yildirim (2016) who mentioned that listening is important for students in order to retain effective communication in daily life and academic context. Based on the scholars, it is possible for a learner who has good listening ability in English language to listen to podcast, music, to study, watch film, or even communicate to the native speaker of English. Therefore, it is necessary for language learners to improve their listening skill in order to make the language learning more comprehensible and for clear communication.

With its important role in learning English, there are a number of students who are still struggling in listening process. The struggles happened because of many factors that students may face during the listening process. According to Azmi, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul (2014),

students may face accents, lack of vocabulary, and rapidness of listening, quality of recording, and cultural diversity. It is also supported by Vandergrift and Baker (2015) who mentioned that students' understanding in vocabulary, listening ability, and background knowledge can affect students' listening comprehension process. Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian, and Nimehchisalem (2015) investigated the problems which Iranian students faced in listening comprehension. The result showed that the problems in perception, parsing, and utilization were experienced by the group of the students.

The same evidence happened to some students in one of private university in Yogyakarta, particularly in English Language Department. Surprisingly, these problems are not only faced by freshmen, but also senior students in the university. Based on the researcher's observation,

these senior students experienced problem in listening even those students have been learning English for more than three years and taking the classes that are conducted by using English. Consequently, the students make unsuccessful listening and ineffective communication. Therefore, there is a need for students to employ strategies in order to improve their listening ability.

Strategies may be useful for learners studying a foreign language, which in this case is learning English. It helps students tackle their barriers and achieve their language goal. However, research which talks about listening strategies from students' perspective are lacking, especially for English as a foreign language context. Thus, this research aims to explore what kind of strategies that students use in their listening. The researcher wants to look for a number of strategies that students employ based on

the problem they are facing. The researcher puts this concern into this study, entitled, “Exploring Students’ Strategies in Improving Listening Skill”.

Research Methodology

This research attempts to explore students’ strategies to improve listening ability. This research employed descriptive qualitative as the research design. A descriptive qualitative enabled the researcher to give detailed information and understanding about the issue to be seen in the end of the study (Creswell, 2012; V. Lambert & C. Lambert, 2012; Magilvy & Thomas, 2009; Nassaji, 2015). The research was conducted at one of the private universities in Yogyakarta at the English Language Education Department. The participants were students of English Language department, as the field of this research was about learning English language. The criteria namely students who had high score, average score, and

low score in Pre-test TOEFL listening as the researcher explored strategies from different perspective of different students’ ability. The researcher used pre-test TOEFL for her criteria because the score is a valid measurement to indicate which person who has high score, average score, and low score. Over all, the highest score of the pre-test TOEFL score was in 680 points and the lowest was in 380 points. The researcher calculated the score and she got that high score was in scale 680 until 570, followed by the average score was in scale from 570 until 520, and the lower score was 520 until 380 in scale. Students should be in batch 2014 because this batch was the oldest batch that had been learning English in this semester. Most of the students in this batch had been taking classes which were conducted in English, some of them were still learning in that department because of particular reasons. There were six participants in this

study. The participants were two students of each score level; high score, average score, and low score. The participants were three female students and three male students. This study explored students' strategies in improving listening ability. This research employed in-depth and guided interview approach to collect data. The data gathered using interview guideline (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). Next, the researcher made a piloting test in order to avoid misleading response and unsure participants about questions the researcher gave. The result of piloting was the interview guideline was answering the research question. After piloting, the researcher asked one of the students who were fulfilling the criteria to be her participant by asking their permission to be interviewed for this research. The student agreed to be participant; she made an appointment to meet. The participants were asked their

availability to be interviewed and recorded. The researcher recorded the interview instead of taking note because the researcher avoided missing important information. The interview took around ten until twenty minutes. The interviews were conducted in 11 August 2018 until 15 August 2018. The researcher interviewed the participants by looking at the interview guideline. The interview was conducted using Indonesian language in order to ease the participants to express and describe what they thought confidently and comfortably. Also, Indonesian language is mother tongue of both the researcher and the participants. Next, the researcher used a recording application to record the interviews. After doing interview, the researcher reported the interview result. The researcher disguised the participants' identity in order to keep their privacies. Beside, the researcher used pseudonym technique to

name the participant. The first participant named Krisan, the second named Mawar, the third was Anggrek, the fourth was Melati, the fifth was Kamboja, and the last was Gerranium. After conducting the interview, the researcher transcribed the data based on the recording from the interview. The researcher converted the recording into text data. In this step, the researcher had to transcribe carefully in order to avoid risks such as missing important information. After transcribing, the researcher asked the participants about validity of transcription through member checking. Member checking is used for the researcher to improve accuracy, credibility, external validity and reliability (Barbour, 2001). The researcher did member checking by showing the transcription to the participant. From the member checking, it showed that the participants approved all information in transcription. The obtained data was

processed using coding for labeling and segmenting into theme (Creswell, 2012). The data were analyzed using three steps namely open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Data analyzes were using following steps; first step was open coding the data. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), open coding provides analysis through categorizing and characteristics of a category. In this step, the researcher broke down the information into piece of categories and picked the information to the appropriate category that is related to the research. The next step was axial coding. Strauss and Corbin explained that axial coding break down categories from open coding into small units from the whole text (as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). After doing open coding, the researcher developed categories from open coding into smaller unit of meaning. The third step was selecting the same

between open coding and axial coding into bigger theme. This called selective coding (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2011). In this step, the researcher chose the result on open coding and axial coding into one category of students' listening strategies that answered the research question. After transcribing and coding process, the data was reported into sentences; the researcher elaborated the obtained data through report and explained the category in the findings using theories in discussion section.

Findings and Discussion

Students' strategies used in improving listening skill

Based on the interview data, these students have different strategies used to deal with listening improvement. The researcher found eight findings based on the interview. In the findings, the participants mostly used English songs, podcasts,

movies, and videos as featured media to support their learning.

Cooperating with friends. The first strategy that students used for improving listening skill is cooperating with friends. Student uses this strategy because he/she is working or studying to improve their listening with other students or friends. Asking for the meaning from friends is adapted by Mawar, "I will ask my friend what the meaning is (P2.5)". Mawar asked one of her friends to figure out listening problem, such as new vocabulary. On the other hands, Gerranium argued that he was improving his listening skill by chatting with his friends. He argued, "We make conversation. Having a chat, just like studying together with spontaneous topic. Not too often, rarely. But, it is one of my strategies for improving listening (P6.8)". Gerranium used chatting with friends as chance to improve his listening even it was not often. Cooperating with friends is, such

as working, or studying together with classmates, partner, or friends of theirs. It is in line with Vandergrift and Cross (2018b) that students learned listening by interacting with other people, the students embrace socio-affective strategies. This strategy helps student to solve problem, monitor one's listening back and forward, enrich information, practice their listening, and have feedback from other person.

Asking for clarification. In this strategy, student ask some explanation or clarification about what they heard by asking to teacher, or someone who they think is expert in listening. As Melati argued, "If I am not sure (about the word), (or) I do not understand, I will ask teacher (P4.8)". Based on the participant's statements, participant was asking his teacher for clarification of unfamiliar word. He was interacting to someone who he thought that he/she was expert in listening. Asking for explanation from other person,

such as teacher develop comprehension in listening. Asking for explanation from someone who is expert in language is part of questioning for clarification, sub strategies of socio-affective strategies, where student is seeking for help in understanding language (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift, 1997; Vandergrift, 2003).

Paying attention to the familiar word.

Students use this strategy in order to get message of what the speaker said. Melati argued that she paid attention to the familiar word in order to understand the message from the audio she heard. She argued, "I listen to it (without script), then the second step I try to comprehend it (comprehend it by listening to the familiar word in order to get the meaning of the song (P4.3)". On the other hands, Gerranium demonstrated how he used song to improve his listening. He argued, "for example, I listen to the song for the first time; I indeed look up its lyric,

right? To see how the word looks like. Just look at the lyric while listening to the music. Just like that so (I) let myself know words, and I get used to listen to it, if I heard this word again, I do not need to look up dictionary again (P6.5)". He argued that he not only practiced his listening but also developed his vocabulary. According to the O'Malley and Chamot (1990) in their classification, paying attention to the familiar words is included into directed attention, in which the students are paying attention to the general of listening, ignoring distracter, and keeping the listening is going. Abdalhamid (2012) added that paying attention to the speaker is included into metacognitive strategies. To sum up, the goal of this strategy is to comprehend the whole text. All participants argued that they are listening to the speaker and only paying attention to the familiar words in order to understand the whole text

or conversational setting and can improve their listening .

Repeating the audio. Melati demonstrated how he used this strategy in listening performance,"I will play the audio again, I try to comprehend, I repeat the audio until I feel really recognize and understand with the sentence or word in the audio (P4.4)". Based on the participant's statement, repeating the audio is a strategy in order to make sure what she heard and avoided mishearing from the audio in the second attempt of listening. According to Goh (2018) and Oxford (2003), this strategy is called double-check monitoring, where students verify their listening in order to ensure their understanding and avoid mistake in listening .

Mimicking. Mawar applied this strategy when she watched movie on her laptop or in a theatre. She argued, "Then, also this... the way to improve listening is, for example, watching movie (P2.10)". Mawar

demonstrated how this strategy worked, “It is like, for example, the actor says this sentence “How are you?” something like that, common people, who are not native speaker of English, like me for the first time do not know yet how to pronounce this correctly and the meaning of the sentence listen it like how it is pronounced, I repeat again what the actor have said like “how are you?”, the way the actor said, how to pronounce it correctly (P2.11)”. Mimicking word or sentence while watching movies or listening to music is a strategy in order to help them understand how word works and remember sound. Mimicking is an activity which one is repeating some behavior or words from other person. It is similar behavior as repetition in learning language strategies. In cognitive strategies, students used repetition while listening; repetition can be done by repeating a half or a bit of a language in listening performance (Chamot

& O’Malley, 1987; Abdalhamid, 2012; Vandergrift & Cross, 2018).

Note-taking. Note-taking is employed by students in order to remember unfamiliar word and its translation for future listening. Krisan stated, “I jot down sentences that I do not understand what the meaning is (P1.7)”. Anggrek added that if he found a word which is hard to pronounce, he took note of this word, as he argued “I take notes of words that are hard, like hard to pronounce (P3.5)”. Note-taking can be useful for students for improving listening skill, as the participants said, they wrote down unfamiliar word and its translation in order to help them understand the spoken text or conversational audio as it has an impact to their listening. It is in line with Abdalhamid (2012) who stated that students who employed cognitive strategies use note-taking as their strategies. Classification that Vandergrift (1997) adapted explained that note-taking is an

activity where students taking note of
k e y w o r d s .

Paying attention to the phonetics,

keywords, and accents.

Mawar argued that she listened to words by paying attention to the phonetic, intonation, and stress, “Then, (I) often listen to how to pronounce this word, how this word is pronounced, say for example, in /d/ sound (for example like in word ‘sand’) is being read or not, how its intonation, how its stress, just like that (P2.7)”. Angrek tried to find the keywords while listening and learn accents before listening. He demonstrated how he applied this strategy, “I will find what the keyword of the sentence is. There many of, long sentences, many words. Usually, I listen to those keywords, listen to the sentence (P3.1)” and he added, “After I learn about accent, for example Australian accent, New Zealander accent, American accent, or British accent. Take example New Zealander accent, I will listen to the

conversation that use New Zealander accent.

As New Zealander speaks fast, so I have to get used to the accent and find colloquial word of New Zealander, so... (maybe) later when I meet them (again) (P3.3)”. Based on this finding, participants pay attention to details of language in order to help their comprehension in listening. The details in this case are how words are pronounced, phonetic, intonation, stress, and accents of language. It is in line with Abdalhamid (2012), who argued that students who embrace metacognitive strategies decide to pay attention to which one to be paid attention, for example decided to pay attention on the accents and pronunciation for understanding the whole sentences. In classification system in Vandergrift (1997) paying attention to details is included into sub metacognitive strategies, selective attention. Goh (1998) explained that metacognitive strategies adapt selective attention. Thus, paying attention to details,

such as accents, stress, intonation, and pronunciation, is included in metacognitive strategies.

Connecting one word to the others. This strategy was used by Kamboja. As she argued, “I try to connect it to one thing to another thing to remember the pronunciation (P5.7)”. Kamboja argued that she connected one thing, or in her case is word, to another in order to memorize its pronunciation. According to the classification system, this student was using auditory monitoring, which the one listen to how word sounds in order to remember the pronunciation of the word (O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990; Vandergrift, 1997). By using this strategy, the students recognize the sound and help them in listening so that they can grasp the information from what they recognize. Students understand how something works because they are making sense the word during listening performance.

Conclusion

Learning language covers four skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

All of them are important to be mastered especially listening since it is the first skill that one employs in learning language. Even though listening is important for students to be mastered, some students still faced problem during listening. These students, who have been taken most of the classes conducted in English, faced problems in listening. This evidence happened in English language department at one of private universities in Yogyakarta. Because these students faced many problems in listening, they employ strategies for handling their problems in listening and improve for better listening in the future. That is the reason why the researcher came up with the study called “Exploring students’ strategies in improving listening skill.”

This research attempts to explore listening strategies for listening improvement among English learning students in one of private universities in Yogyakarta. This research belongs to qualitative method as the researcher explores students' strategies through their experience in listening as deep as possible. Interview fits to gather the data. The result of the study revealed ten findings of students' strategies. Based on the data, the students reported that they use tools in order to aid their learning. They are using audio and audio visual media and dictionary or pronunciation machine. Other strategies are applied, namely cooperating with friends, asking for clarification, paying attention to the familiar word, repeating the audio, mimicking, note-taking, paying attention to the phonetic, keywords, and accents, and connecting word to the other word. In addition, some students used the same. To sum up, students use different

strategies for improving their listening. Different strategies occurred because some students were aware of their own problems and design their strategies that work best for them.

Recommendation

The research attempted to explore students' strategies in improving listening skill. Based on the finding and conclusion, the researcher provides some recommendation for three parties related to the research. Those are the English teachers, students, and other researchers. For English teachers, this research showed that some students employed different strategies. The students used the strategies that worked best for supporting their improvement in listening. The English teachers should be aware of these strategies and do some research for better understanding for students needs. Also, the English teachers concern of these findings and are able to design and conduct teaching using material that suits for

students for listening section. The English teachers should support the students to embrace more strategies and facilitate them to discover more strategies that work effectively .

For students. This research reveals some strategies that students from earlier years employed to improve their listening. The researcher recommended this research for students who want to improve their listening as the strategies in the findings are reported based on the earlier-year-students employed for improving listening. The strategies are many and students should choose one or more of those strategies that feel work for themselves, and use it as a consideration for students who are aware of listening improvement .

For other researchers. This research discusses about students' strategies in order to improve listening skill. The researcher welcomes other researchers who want to use this research for emphasizing their own

research that has similar topic or related to. Also, the researcher welcomes to the other researchers who want to conduct the same field. This study has limitation; other researchers should conduct the same field but in different case study or narrative inquiry design in order to give nuance to this topic and more details such as gather more students from English language department or different major, or use different methodology so that further findings would support this research.

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