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## Investigating Students' Difficulties in Mastering English Listening Skills

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### Abstract

This research aimed to find out the difficulties of students in mastering English listening skills at one of non-government MTs Bengkulu Tengah. This his study employed descriptive qualitative research method. The research subjects in this study are students at VII A Class of MTs Panca Mukti Bengkulu Tengah as the primary data source with the total subjects are 35 Students. The instruments used to collect the data in this research were observation, interview and documentation. The Semi Structured Interview consists of 12 questions. The researcher observed the class, after that, the researcher choosed fifteen students who had most difficulties in listening to be interviewed. The results of this study showed that the difficulties that the students faced in listening were related into four categories namely students' difficulties related to the listening material, students' difficulties related to the speaker, students' difficulties related to the listener, students' difficulties related to the physical environment. Besides, the factors which cause students' difficulties in listening were lack of vocabulary, having hearing problems, unfocussed, the speaker spoke too fast.

**Keywords:** *Listening difficulties, students*

## Introduction

In the teaching and learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Listening is an initial ability that plays an important role that needs to be mastered by students. Listening is a process paying great attention, comprehending, appreciating, and interpreting oral symbols in order to learn information, record messages or content, and understand the meaning of communication being expressed by the speaker (Tarigan, 2008). Listening skills has a difference with reading skills and speaking skills where the process and results can be seen, while listening skills has its own difficulties both the process and the results cannot be seen. What we refer to as listening is an inaudible and invisible process of internalizing meaning from the auditory impulses being transferred to the ear and brain. Or You may also make the case that the student's spoken or written response, which demonstrates proper (or improper) auditory processing, is the result of listening. The result of hearing and reading is not the spoken or written response, to reiterate. The product is inside the structure of the brain, making it impossible to monitor until teachers carry around tiny portable MRI scanners to identify relevant intake. Just as you can only see the end consequence of a meaningful input in the shape of a spoken or written output, or as you can only see the end result of a wind by observing trees moving back and forth (Brown, 2004).

The fact has been revealed by some studies; one of which was conducted by (Yahmun et al., 2020). The investigated at basic listening class showed that there were four main difficulties faced by the students. Those difficulties namely the record speed and lenght, vocabulary, pronunciation and accent. (Saraswaty, 2018) concludes that listening is crucial for daily conversation as well as language learning. But it seems like the students have trouble listening. Many issues arise, such as a lack of time spent studying independently to improve skills, inappropriate learning strategies, and listening to the material itself. The provision of supportive infrastructure and facilities is also crucial to the learning process, in addition to the skills of the teachers and students. (Hargreaves, et al in Febriana et al., 2018) stated that urban schools have more teachers and simpler access to resources for learning and teaching, so they are superior to rural schools. This is in contrast to teachers in rural areas, who often lack the necessary teaching resources to support them in delivering classroom teaching.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher tries to examine the difficulties of students in mastering listening skills, especially at one of non-government MTs Bengkulu tengah.

## **Research Method**

This research belongs to descriptive qualitative research. (Creswell, 2012) states that a strategy for studying and comprehending the significance that various people or groups of people assign to social or humanitarian issues is qualitative research. The research subjects in this study are students at VII A Class of MTs Panca Mukti Bengkulu Tengah as the primary data source with the total subjects are 35 Students. The instruments used to collect the data in this research were observation, interview and documentation. The Semi Structured Interview consists of 12 questions.

## **Result and Discussion**

### **1. Research Findings**

#### **A. Observation**

Students need to listen the audio and mark the picture by giving the number. Number one has been done as an example. It is “Farah and her friends like gardening”. What speaker say after number one and so on, students must choice it as the next number. And then, after observed at seventh-grade A, the researcher found that there are several difficulties that students had. The results of the observation checklist as follows:

#### **a. Message Characteristics**

First is vocabulary and syntax. Half of the students were familiar with vocabulary and syntax of the speakers from the audio listening.

Vocabulary knowledge is more than just knowing the definition of a word in a given context; it also frequently seen as a crucial tool for second language learners. Meanwhile syntax is a set of grammar rules in words or clauses in forming sentences. Both vocabulary and syntax are important to known by students because these are the main thing to understand a meaning of something.

Second is topics. Few students of the students understood the topics discussed. Topic is an issue or subject matter that is still general and abstract, is basically the subject matter in the whole writing that is worked on and as a foundation that can be used by a writer to convey his intention.

b. Message Delivery Characteristics

First is Speed of Delivering Messages. More than half of the students felt that the speed speakers deliver messages was too fast. Second is Accent. More than half of the students felt that difficult to understand well because of the speaker accent.

According to (Handout in Saipullah et al., 2021) a subgroup of language speakers who speak that language in a particular way that is distinguished by its phonological traits is said to have an accent. English-language communication will occasionally be difficult due to accents. When speaking or listening, the accent may have certain consequences on non-native English speakers. In this case, they had trouble listening because the speaker speaks too quickly and has an accent they couldn't get it. They didn't frequently use English as their first language, therefore they weren't familiar with the speaker's accent. Learning English is difficult for students with certain accents because it affects their speech patterns, how they pronounce words, and how they make sounds. And it more challenging for students because the speaker spoke too fast.

c. Message Recipient Characteristics or Listener

First is Motivation. More than half of the students had a motivation to listen to the material presented. Second is Concentration, Half of the students could concentrate on listening to the material presented. According to (Eggen in Goctu, 2016) a force that animates and guides action toward a goal is known as motivation in psychology. Motivation may move a person in the same way that force can. If people are machines, motivation can be seen as the very force that propels and controls behavior in people. In every phase and activity of life at work, at home, with our families, etc. Third is Hearing Problems. Few students of the students had hearing problem on listening.

Hearing loss is one of difficulties by students in mastering listening skills. One way to fix this problem is students need to check by doctor and the doctor will suggest and give direction such as with using BTE tool or behing the ear.

Fourth is Anxiety Problem. Few students of of the students felt anxious on listening to the material presented. (Hilgard in Rajabi et al., 2021) said that a psychological trait, anxiety refers to an apprehension condition, an ambiguous and unknown fear which is only incidentally related to an event. Anxiety is thought to be a barrier in the listening teaching process that affects students' learning and listening abilities. It is crucial to learn more about students' anxiety levels and the causes of it in order to assist them in finding solutions to issues that arise during the listening learning process.

Fifth is Remember. Few students of the students quickly forget of what they just heard then had difficult to determine the answer. In this case, it can conclude that they should learn more about the material before they get the task from teacher. Because as long as we know the material, students will get easily understand and then answer it in correct way.

#### d. Environmental Characteristics

First is Temperature. More than half of the students felt uncomfortable with the temperature around them. Second is Noise. More than half of the students were disturbed by the sounds around them. Third is Media. More than half of the students felt that the sound from the audio device used was quite clear.

One factor that has a significant impact on fostering students' enthusiasm for studying is the surroundings. Students will be able to concentrate more on listening in settings where they can feel comfortable and there is minimal background noise. Yet, they are restricted to holding listening sessions in classrooms due to a shortage of facilities. They find learning to be unpleasant due to the noise and heat.

#### B. Interview

There are fifteen students who had interviewed by the researcher. The students were given 12 questions which were related to the difficulties in mastering

listening skills and factor that affect listening difficulties. The first question about students' difficulties related to the listening material. Three out fifteen students felt unfamiliar with words or sentences and eight out fifteen students didn't get the topics discussed because they lack of vocabularies.

The second question about students' difficulties related to speaker. Eleven out fifteen students felt that the speaker delivered message was too fast and Eleven out fifteen students felt unfamiliar with the accent used by speaker. They rarely listen the accent that used. The third question about students' difficulties related to listener. Most students hadn't motivated so that made them couldn't concentrate to the material presented and there was only one student that had hearing problems. Twelve out fifteen students had anxiety problem before they listen to the audio. When they get anxiety, they will lose focus and cannot listen to the audio clearly. And seven out fifteen students found listening to be challenging because difficult to remember. Therefore, it indicates that they immediately forgot what they had just heard. In listening, remembering is crucial. Because the audio was only played a few times, it was necessary for the students to be able to recall what the speaker had just spoke.

The fourth question about students' difficulties related to physical environment. Six out fifteen students felt uncomfortable with room that they were used. Due to inadequate facilities, they must participate in listening exercises in class at uncomfortable temperatures, which decreases their enthusiasm in learning. Twelve out fifteen students felt disturbed by the noise around. Both outside and inside the classroom may be the source of the noise. They won't be able to respond to the questions if the students didn't pay close attention while listening. Fourteen out fifteen students felt that there was no problem with the audio device. But one of them felt that unclearly to listen because sometimes it had something wrong.

## 2. Discussion

### A. Students difficulties in listening skills

The major goal of this study was to identify the difficulties that students had when learning listening skills. The finding of research indicated that students'

difficulties in listening skills related into four categories. There were related to the listening material, the speaker, the listener, and the physical environment.

a) Students' difficulties related to the listening material

Based on the findings, there were several difficulties that students faced related to the listening material. They were unfamiliar words, sentences and topic of english. These findings were similar with the research conducted by (Diora & Rosa, 2020), in research entitled "An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension: A Descriptive Study at English Language and Literature Department FBS UNP". This research found that complex grammatical structures, difficult to understand every single words of incoming speech, difficult to interpret the meaning of long spoken text, unfamiliar topic, and new vocabularies. It means they need to increase their vocabularies. The more vocabulary students acquire, the easier it is for them to enhance their english, therefore it is crucial to increase vocabulary.

b) Students' difficulties related to the speaker

Based on the findings, there were two difficulties that students faced related to the speaker. They were speed delivering messages and accent. These findings were similar with the research conducted by (Hardiyanto et al., 2021) in research entitled "Listening Comprehension Difficulties; A Case Study of EFL Students in Listening Class". This research found that speaker; visual needed, speed of speech, and variety of accents. The speaker is a component of the audio that helps students hear. (Tarisma in Hardiyanto et al., 2021) said that Due to the speaker's tendency to speak too quickly, students may have trouble listening. Listeners get disoriented and unable to continue processing the information, especially when the speaker talks with a slurred pronunciation that makes it difficult for them to understand the words. Furthermore, they had trouble understanding speakers with various accents.

c) Students' difficulties related to the listener

Based on the findings, there were several difficulties that students faced related to the listener. They were motivation, concentration, hearing problems, anxiety problem, and remembering. These findings were similar with the research

conducted by (Hardiyanto et al., 2021) in research entitled “Listening Comprehension Difficulties; A Case Study of EFL Students in Listening Class”. This research found that listener listener; less focus, lack in vocabulary, inability to understand meaning and inability to recognize familiar words. According to (Flowerdew and Miller in Hardiyanto et al., 2021) Inability to focus or concentrate is a major issue that students have in listening skills. Students who cannot focus will miss some of the materials, which will eventually affect how well they learn the subject matter. Moreover, (Prastiyowati, 2019) said that Students' motivation has a significant impact on their listening anxiety. Additionally, achievement motivation refers to people's inner motivation to succeed while completing a task, which motivates them to make all reasonable effort to attain goals.

d) Students' difficulties related to the physical environment.

Based on the findings, there were several difficulties that students faced related to the physical environment. They were uncomfortable temperature, noise, and media. These findings were similar with the research conducted by (Hardiyanto et al., 2021) in research entitled “Listening Comprehension Difficulties; A Case Study of EFL Students in Listening Class”. This research found that noise and physical settings. the environmental and other noises on the recording may distract the listener's attention away from the listening passage's content. They would still become distracted by noises despite their best efforts to concentrate. The difficulties may also result from listening tools like tape recorders, video cameras, or other gadgets. The listener's comprehension may also be irritated by poor or substandard recording quality cassettes or disks. And the lack of facilities made students must used class with uncomfortable temperature that would make students lost interest to listen.

B. Factors that cause students' difficulties in listening skills

Based on findings, there were factor that students have difficulties in mastering english listening skills. They are: unmotivate, lack of vocabularies, and lack of facility. Otherwise, (Febriana et al., 2018), there are seven major challenges in rural school, they are infrastructure, source of learning, language barrier, parent mindset, inadequacy of teachers, students' competence, students mindset.



## Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, the difficulties that the students faced in mastering English listening skills were related to four categories. They were related to the listening material, the speaker, the listener, and the physical environment. Each category has different difficulties. Students' difficulties related to the listening material, they were unfamiliar words, sentences and topic of English. Students' difficulties related to the speaker, they were speed delivering messages and accent. Students' difficulties related to the speaker, they were speed delivering messages and accent. Students' difficulties related to the listener, they were motivation, concentration, hearing problems, anxiety problem, and remembering. Students' difficulties related to the physical environment, they were uncomfortable temperature, noise, and media.

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