

EXPLORING EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGIES IN ONLINE LEARNING

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Abstract: This article aims to describe the EFL students' listening difficulties and strategies in online learning. The researcher implemented a descriptive qualitative research method through semi-structured interviews. The data collection for this research is from five students of the English department at the University of Islam Malang through the use of voice note WhatsApp platform. The data were presented using figure and illustration. The result shows that the students have their unique way of dealing with online learning problems that they encounter. Each student also has different causing factors that influence difficulties in online listening. It is also found that not all strategies used by students are effective against the problems they encounter especially for the problems that are not under their direct authority. The researcher offer suggestion as follows: 1) For students, it is suggested to keep practicing and develop strategies in online listening that are suitable for personal needs. 2) For lecturers, it is suggested to maintain good communication in online learning with multi-directional communication to build a good online classroom environment. 3) For the other researcher, it is suggested to conduct deeper research about more specific listening strategies.

Key words: online listening, difficulties, strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Listening skill is the most basic and the first skill used at the beginning of language learning. According to Nation (2009), listening is a fundamental skill to learn to advance in the acquisition of another language skills. Listening skill plays an important role of language learning process as good language proficiency requires good comprehension in listening. Furthermore, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2011) added that listening is the most used skill in everyday life as about 40-50% of the process of communication involves listening. The skill of listening involves the process of giving attention to receive a message from hearing (Schmitt, 2016) on the other hand, Walker (2014) stated that the ability to listen is indeed significant in communication, as lacking skills in listening might result in misunderstanding and even failure to convey the message.

The significance of listening skills is without a doubt to ensure good communication in any language, but listening skill is considered to be a difficult skill to learn (Walker, 2014). There are many kinds of listening difficulties faced by language learners such as cultural differences, unknown vocabulary, the clarity of the speech as well as the length and speed of the speech (Maulida, 2018). Moreover, there are many studies dedicated to identify listening difficulties. According to Vandergrift (2011), the difficulties in listening are caused by not realizing the importance of focusing on the whole meaning instead of translating word by word. Moreover, Hedge (2006) found that the difficulties are caused by the lack of visual support as learners listen to the recording without seeing the expression and body language.

Nowadays, the use of online learning has been increased rapidly due to the global pandemic that affected many countries in the world (Bailey, 2020). However, the application of online learning is not always suitable for every learning teaching and learning as some learning might require direct interaction (Moorhouse, 2020). In term of technology implementation, Davidson (2015) stated that it is not a one fits all method as it depends on the types of technology and learning material, it requires decent development to meet the suitable pedagogic standard.

In terms of English learning and teaching, suitable and proper online learning method development is required to satisfy the needs in ELT online learning (Bailey, 2020). Moreover, According to Susilowati (2020), learning listening is considered to be complex to implement in online learning environments amongst the four English skills. Moreover, Milliner (2017) stated that effective listening has several challenges of online learning in listening class such as difficulties in getting the gist of the speaker, lack of vocabulary as well as rate and length of speech. Additionally, Susilowati (2020) also noted some challenges that online students encounter listening such as decoding information, grasping the speech, and speech comprehension and recognition.

To get good ability in listening suitable strategies are required, listening strategies involve a particular technique to receive information from the speech (Putri, 2019). According to Vandergrift (2012), listening strategies are defined as the combination of metacognitive and cognitive strategies to comprehend the spoken material. According to Richards (2008), metacognitive strategies involve thinking about the learning process while they are planning, monitoring, and evaluating based on their current capacity of knowledge. Meanwhile, cognitive strategies are related to comprehending and storing input in long-term memory, it involves two main aspects that are bottom-up and top-down strategies (Vandergrift, 2012). As stated by Oxford (1990), that cognitive strategy is

practicing, receiving and sending messages, analyzing and reasoning, creating a structure for input and output.

METHOD

This study is like agree to conducted using a qualitative method that analyzes data based on detailed factual information on the field. The qualitative research method is explained in the form of illustrations and textual data. In this study, the researcher will implement descriptive qualitative research to describe the real-life phenomenon collected during the collection of the data. The data collection will be conducted using online interviews via video call to get the data from the participants for further data analysis for the presentation in the finding.

In this research, the data were taken from 5 students, 3 females and 2 males as samples of fifth semester English department students at University of Islam Malang. 5th semester students are chosen because it is expected for those to have completed listening one to listening four courses. The 5 participants are chosen because they reported to have difficulties especially in online learning and met the criteria of being English department students, having completed all listening course and willing to participate in this study.

In this study, data collection will be carried out by using the online interview to gain detailed information about students' perceptions on strategies used and difficulties encountered in online listening classes. The researcher administerted the interview through online WhatsApp voice note due to social distancing. The data is collected from 5 students from the 5th semester as they have experienced listening classes both offline before the pandemic and online after the pandemic.

The research begins with the construction of the research methodology that is formulated based on the background of the study and literature review to get a suitable method to analyze and gain information about the issues. With the research design, the research continues with the data collection. The data was collected using an online interview with 5 sample students about difficulties and strategies in online listening. The data was analyzed based using qualitative data analysis according to Creswell's (2006). After all suitable data are analyzed, the data is presented in the findings using table and image support. In this study, the researcher uses the summarization of the finding and relate the analyzed data with theoretical studies and related literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of data analysis are described and discussed to solve the problem in research. In finding the answer to research questions, the researcher collected the

data about listening strategies in online learning as well as the factor causing difficulties in listening.

The study indicated many difficulties in regards to online listening, the first is related to the recording that is too fast. It can be seen from the following interview response:

“I seem to be quite slow in listening as I often left behind because the recording was too fast and difficult” S1

The factor causing this difficulty is a distraction that happened during online listening at home which was different from listening in a language laboratory facility.

Furthermore, S2 and S4 also found it difficult to comprehend the material, two students are complaining about having problems due to lack of explanation before practice and the time gap between explanation sessions to assignment. Lack of communication in online learning also causes this problem. The student's response can be seen in the following excerpt:

“My difficulties were about understanding the materials, this is due to the lecturer that seems to be in rush and unclear when explaining. Discussion session in this online learning was also a bit passive, thus results in the flaws of material delivery”
S2

In regards to this problem, two mentioned factors related to the tempo of material and recording that was being too fast for some students which caused difficulties in understanding learning materials as well as the limitation of the online learning platform and mostly about practice and lack of class interaction which caused the difficulties in understanding materials.

The next problem is about difficulties in regarding too many assignments that mentioned by S3, the students complained that the assignment in online learning are too many which results in days or more to complete compared to face to face learning when the task is over at the end of the class. In regards to this issue, the student's response can be seen in the following excerpt:

“In my opinion, the assignments I quite difficult, for listening activity in this pandemic time, there are more assignment compared to face to face listening class that” S3

This problem is caused by the impracticality of listening assignments in the form of recording to be delivered via an application that caused the difficulties in doing assignments.

The last problem in online listening mentioned by students is about honesty, according to S5 dishonesty often occurred at online learning, the student's response is presented in the following excerpt:

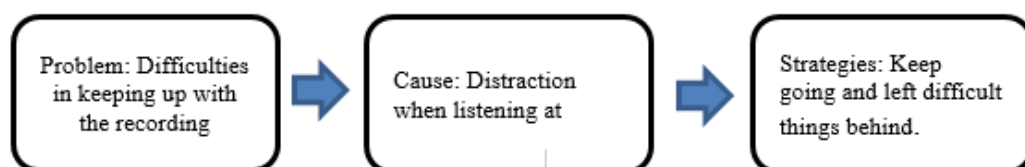
"Because being at home, some students can find the key answer and often used to cheat in pursuing higher score, many considered average to low achiever students are gaining a boost to their score above those of high achiever with an unbelievable score of ranging at 80 and 90". S5

The factor contributing to this problem is too flexible a learning system that causes ineffectivity in learning and caused an opportunity for cheaters in pursuing higher achievements.

Following the difficulties and their factors in online listening, the researcher aims to identify what kinds of strategies are used by the students to overcome those difficulties. The problem encountered by S1 is related to difficulties in coping up with the speed and recording, and the strategy implemented by S1 is to keep going following the track of the recording. The data is presented in the following excerpt:

"My strategy is just to keep going following the track and tempo of the recording, so I just left some details that I don't understand to avoid being left further, after all, has been done, I recheck what I have left". S1

Student 1 managed to deal with the problem regarding difficulties in coping with the recording. The problem solving is presented in the illustration as follows:



This illustration shows that student 1 managed to solve the problem regarding difficulties in coping with the recording and distraction by keep following the listening track.

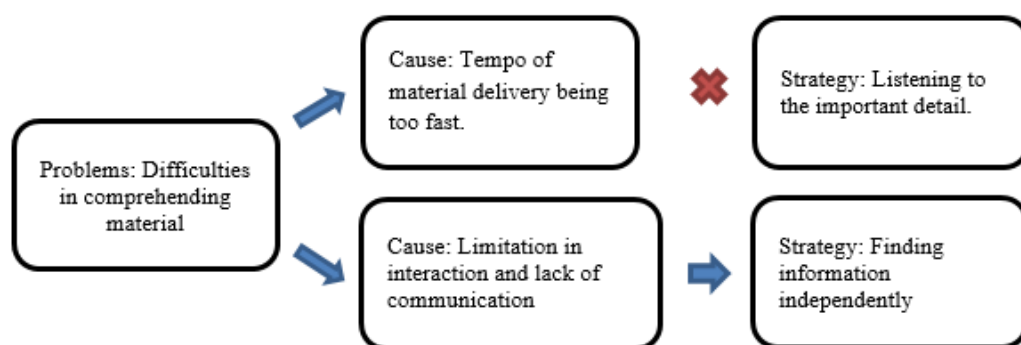
The student 2 and 4 strategies are used to deal with difficulties in understanding material. The student 2 strategies were paying attention to detail such as background and topics. This strategy seems unrelated to the problem that he has about understanding materials, but this might support him to listen effectively. The response is in the following excerpt:

"I use the strategies that have been taught by the lecturer such as focusing in keywords and paying attention to details such as background and topic". S2

Meanwhile, student 4 tends to utilize more time to practice and find additional information from an outer source outside learning instruction. Moreover, the strategies implemented are claimed to be successful in solving problems in understanding material. The data are shown in the following excerpt:

“There are no specific strategies, just a lot of practice and use find out existing related information on my own”. S4

Based on the data regarding difficulties in understanding material, the two students have a different way and result in dealing with the difficulties. The data are presented as follows:

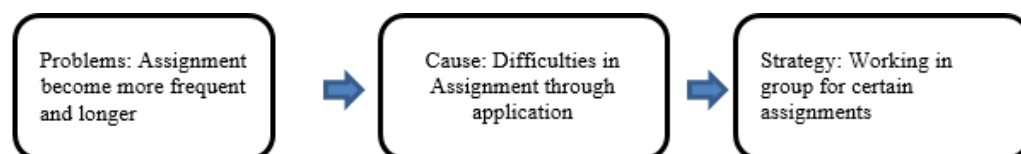


The data shows that student 2 and student 4 have the same difficulties in understanding material but have a different cause. The strategy used is also different and has a different result. Student 2 solution act as a personal strategy and did not aim to solve the problem while student 4 strategies are confirmed as successful in solving related problems and the cause of difficulties.

The next student's strategy is by working in a group that might help solve this student's problems in doing the assignment. The data is presented in the excerpts as follows:

“I spent much time in assignment by working in a group because doing an assignment with friends of a common goal is helpful compared to working the assignment myself”. S3

Regarding difficulties in doing too many assignment, the third student successfully implemented suitable strategy to overcome the problem. The data are presented as follows:

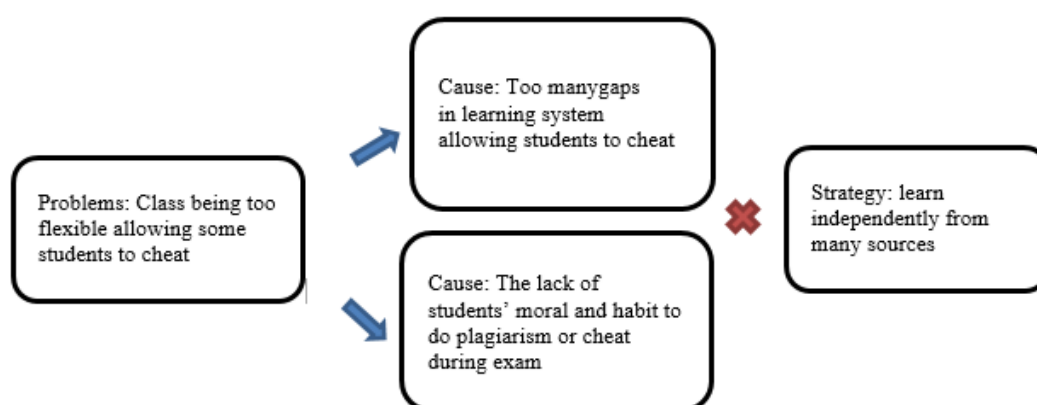


The data shows that the strategies implemented by student 3 works effectively in solving the difficulties in doing the assignment.

The student 5 strategy was a lot of practice and using an existing source of information on the internet to develop own's strategies. The responses are in the following excerpts:

"Many, I also learn strategies from YouTube and Internet, because the information in a group is lacking and we are directed to learn independently". S5

The strategies implemented by student 5 were not directly related to the problem, but it is confirmed to help student 5 during listening.



The data above indicated that the strategies implemented did was unrelated to the problem faced by student 5 with its 2 causes.

The students also mention some suggestions for the next following online listening class. First, in regards to the suggestion for an online listening class, it is suggested for the students to keep practicing because the first student perceives that to face to face learning was more effective. The second suggestion was related to how the material is delivered, it is suggested for the material delivered via zoom meeting which followed by the assignment via Edmodo and WhatsApp. Third, it is also suggested to explain slowly and provides more feedback so the students understand where they have made mistakes. The last, it is suggested to provide more supervision and monitoring for the students to achieve an effective learning environment.

In the finding the researcher managed to identify four main difficulties, those are difficulties in keeping up with the recording that is being too fast and unclear, difficulties in understanding the material, difficulties due to more frequent assignments, and difficulties due to the class system. According to Ali (2020) Difficulties related to the quality of recorded material and the quality of the sound system is the common difficulty in listening caused by noises, or unclear pronunciations. In terms of difficulties in understanding material, in the study of Susilowati (2020), the students perceive that the material was unclear if delivered online due to bad connection and noises. In terms of difficulties regarding assignments that are more frequent, and longer, Son and Hedge (2020) identified that many students are being

overwhelmed by rapid waves of assignments. In terms of difficulties regarding the learning system, Bailey (2020) indicated that developing a suitable learning environment in online learning is one of the biggest challenges for the instructors to take.

In regards to the factor causing difficulties in online listening, the researcher managed to find many factors causing listening difficulties. The first factor is a distraction that happened during online listening at home that causes difficulties in keeping up with the recording. Derwing and Munro (2009) noted many factors that might hinder learning activities in listening, those are external disruptions, noises in sound, and clarity of the recordings. The next problem is the tempo of material and recording being too fast as well as lacking interaction and communication. According to Brown (1995) being unacquainted with different language accents and speed of the speech plays a significant role in hindering language comprehension. About certain application impracticality for listening assignments, Susilowati (2020) found that one major cause of listening difficulties is lacking skills to utilize technology in learning. There is also factor such as too flexible learning system and lack of students' moral that caused many students to cheat. According to Dyer, Pettyjohn, and Saladin (2020), violation of academic regulations for any purpose shows a lack of intellectual morality.

In analyzing the strategy used by students to overcome difficulties in online learning, the researcher found different strategies implemented by students. In terms of overcoming difficulties to the recording, the first participant tried to keep going and ignore difficult things to avoid being left further. Guo (2009) stated that paying too much attention to something difficult might result in losing the grasp to comprehend the message as a whole. The researcher found two students who have difficulties related to understanding material and they have a different ways of dealing with the problem with different cause, the first strategy seems to focus on listening by paying attention to details as the cause related to material delivery that is too fast. According to Guo (2009) listening to specific detail is considered as a bottom-up method that works effectively in dealing with a long conversation. The second strategy is searching for information independently to deal with lacking communication and flexibility-related problem in the class. According to (Little, 1991), learner autonomy, involves the capability to be in control in learning, connects understanding, and being responsible for their learning practices. Regarding the problem about longer and more frequent assignments, the student who encounters this problem solves it by working in the group if possible. According to Laal and Ghodi (2011), there are four benefits of collaborative learning, those are social, psychological, academic, and assessment benefits.

The researcher also collects some suggestions from the students for the future online listening class as well as other students attending online listening classes. For future online listening classes, it is suggested for the lecturer to conduct a meeting via an application that supports group video interaction for better material delivery instead of just sending recordings and explanations via chat. It is also suggested to explain slowly and provides more feedback so the students understand where they have made mistakes. It is suggested to provide more supervision and monitoring for the students to achieve an effective learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The study concludes that students encountered many problems due to various problems in the implementation of online listening class. The researcher also found that the cause that differs from one to another even though some students are having similar difficulties. Each student also has a different way of dealing with difficulties. For the problems that students can do anything about is the problems that related on the students' own limitation such as difficulties in coping up with the recording by keep following the recording and left the difficult things for later and lacking information that can be solved by independent learning.

The suggestion for the students to keep practicing and develop strategies in online listening that are suitable for personal needs, it is necessary as each individual has their own needs and strategies suitable for them. For the lecturers, it is suggested to maintain good communication in online learning with multi-directional communication to build a good online classroom environment. For the researchers, it is suggested to conduct deeper research about more specific listening strategies such as bottom-up, top-down, and interactive strategies or cognitive and metacognitive strategies.

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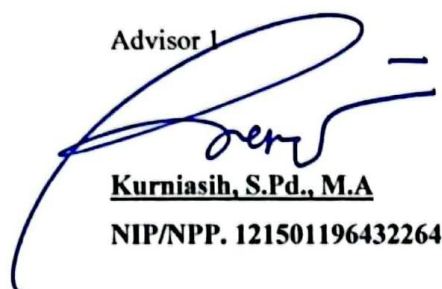
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