

AN ANALYSIS OF THE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY NON-ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS IN LISTENING SECTION OF TOEFL

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Abstract: TOEFL is one of standardized test which have been applied by many universities especially for the graduation standard requirement for the students, including in University of Islam Malang. The aim of this study is to know students' difficulties in doing the TOEFL listening section both from external and internal factors. This study uses qualitative research with narrative inquiry design and collected the data by doing an interview. The study was conducted to 5 non-English Department students of UNISMA who were selected through purposive sampling technique based on criterion of students that have taken the TOEFL test in UNISMA. The data were transcribed into a form of words followed by the process of editing then the data were coded and organized in order to provide the final result accordance with the research questions. The finding indicated difficulty from the external factors include: the speakers' accent, the speakers' speed, the complexity of sentences, the length of sentences, idioms, unfamiliar vocabularies, extraneous noise, and room temperature. While the internal factors include: the lack of concentration and the difficulty in answering the restatement question, negative question, passive question, contrary meaning question, idiomatic question, long conversation and monolog part question. Therefore, listening skills cannot be improved just in a short time since the listeners need to prepare and take stages both from the external and internal way in order to comprehend the message delivered properly. In addition, it suggested for further researchers to explore the strategies to overcome the difficulties in passing listening TOEFL test.

Key Words: TOEFL, TOEFL difficulties, Listening comprehension

INTRODUCTION

TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) is a standardized academic English test taken by non-native speakers in measuring English comprehension. In Indonesia TOEFL is used in some purposes, such as admitting new students' requirements in certain universities, international job companies, government institutions, and overseas studying. Foreign Language Development Centre (P2BA) of University of Islam Malang who has the responsibility to developing students' mastery of English, accepts TOEFL as a requirement for graduation. With that being said, learning English especially in TOEFL

does not intend for English Department students only, assuming that TOEFL mastery has been increasing the opportunity for students in general of getting a good career.

Antoni (2014) affirmed that completing the TOEFL test is not simple as passing the English subject in general. Most of students are failing to fulfil the required score needed by University. Saifuddin (2012) mentioned that many students think that TOEFL is extremely difficult particularly for students who have never done the test before. Students encounter difficulties in doing TOEFL that influence the score result.

There are a lot of obstacles that listeners may encounter in the listening comprehension. The first problem is the quality of the recorder. The low quality of sound system can influence the comprehension of the listeners. The next obstacle is cultural difference. As accordance with the statement from Bingol et al., (2014), the listeners should be familiar with the cultural knowledge of language that has an important role on the listeners' view. Then, unfamiliar accents either native or non-native can influence the listeners to understand message spoken also. According to Goh (1999), 66% of learners expressed that speaker's accent is one of the most significant factors that influence listener comprehension.

The ability of recognizing the meaning of every word can cause the positive impacts and generate the interest of the listeners during the listening activity. Therefore, the used of the unfamiliar vocabularies is genuinely influence the listening comprehension activity. The last is the length and speed of speech. The listeners' level of listening can determine the ability to comprehend into long parts and keep all messages in their mind. According to Underwood (1989), the speed of the speaker can make listening passage difficult. The difficulties mentioned above are caused either by the speakers' issues or the listening materials itself. Furthermore, the listeners who have experienced the problems mentioned above might had the difficulties in doing listening

section of TOEFL often.

According to Mirhadizadeh (2016) the factors of learning language can be divided into 2 groups of internal factor and external factors. As accordance with Brown (2007), those 2 factors are specified by the individual students like motivation, attitude, personal practice and study habits. Based on Brown (2007), external factors can be different for each individual, but the common factors are usually come from the circumstances outside of the students' control. External factors are frequently deal with books, curriculum development, and course. Internal factors include cognitive and meta-cognitive as an intelligence factor, perception, self-esteem, learning model, etc (Mirhadizadeh 2016).

Previous study related to the difficulty of listening section of TOEFL entitled "Students Difficulties in Passing Listening Section in TOEFL Prediction Test" written by Chairuddin and Ulfa (2018) this research was mainly explore what are English students' of Samudra University difficulties in listening section of TOEFL. It was found that there are several categories of difficulty listening type as follows: catch the speaker idea, identify idiomatic expression, identify the cohesive marker, assign a literal meaning to the utterance, and retain the important information.

Written by Rahmati and Kurniasih (2019) entitled "Analisis Kesulitan Mahasiswa Jurusan Non Bahasa Inggris dalam Mengerjakan TOEFL Listening". This research was intended to identify the errors of non-English Department Students in doing the listening section of TOEFL based on the question items analysis. The result of this research indicates that the question items that students experiencing the difficulties in part A are mostly in restatement/meaning questions, idiomatic language, negatives, and suggestions/inference. While, the researcher found that the topics and details questions are the most difficult items in part B and C.

A study done by Hidayanti, Zuhairi, and Kurniasih (2021) entitled “Strategy Preference in Listening: A Profile of EFL Students to Answer TOEFL Test”. The purpose of this study is to know students’ profile of attainment strategy use and how usage of this strategy differs by gender. The subjects used in this study are the sixth English semester students from Faculty of Education at UNISMA. In collecting the data, the participants require to fill out the questionnaire of strategies used to answer the TOEFL. The finding indicates that the most frequently used strategy was put on whilst listening activity to focus on the answer. Furthermore, female students used all strategies more often and it was significantly different from males.

Another previous study written by Fitariana and Rohim (2021) entitled “Students Problem in Answering Listening Section of TOEFL at non English Study Program of UPN Veteran Jakarta”, this research was intended to investigate what are the problems that students did in answering TOEFL especially in listening section. The result of the research indicate that the difficulties experienced by students based on the interview are difficulty in their concertation while listening, difficulty regarding vocabulary meaning, difficulty incatching meaning in long and speed conversation, and difficulty in recognizing unfamiliar topic.

From 4 previous studies above, the first study was aimed to find out the listening TOEFL difficulties in twenty English students of Samudra University based on the external factors. The second study was intended to identify the errors of non-English Department Students in doing the listening section of TOEFL based on the question items analysis. The third study was focused to know students’ profile of attainment strategy use and how usage of this strategy differs by gender in sixth English semester students from Faculty of Education at UNISMA. Last, the forth study was aimed to investigate the students of English Study Program of UPN Veteran Jakarta in answering listening

TOEFL. While in this study, researcher focuses on the difficulties faced by Non-English Department Students of UNISMA in taking the listening section of TOEFL according on both external and internal factors.

METHOD

The researcher took qualitative research with narrative inquiry design because it record the life experience and reveal the particular perspective of an individual or a small group. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding human behavior and the reasons behind it. They are interested in the why and how, not just the what, where, and what. Yin (2011) stated that narrative inquiry is described as a research that constructs a narrative rendition of the findings from a real-world setting and participants, to accentuate a sense of being there.

Data collecting technique used by the researcher in this study is documentation and doing interview. According to Sugiyono (2015) documentation is a method used to obtain data and information in the form of books, archives, documents, writing numbers, and pictures in the form of reports and information that can support theresearch. The documentation that the researcher used is the data from Foreign Language Development Centre (P2BA)especially the listening section scores of the respondents. Interviews are used to gather data from people about opinions, beliefs, and feeling about situations on their own words. There are 5 sub questions asked during the interview; (1) The difficulties related to the speaker issues. (2) The difficulties related to the listening materials. (3) The difficulties related to the environmental condition. (4) The difficulties related to the experience and physical condition. (5) The difficulties related to the ability to answer the listening questions based on its types. The interview protocol was adapted from Fitria (2021), Brown (2012), Bingol et, al (2014), Rahmati and Kurniasih (2019).

Then the researcher modified them based on the needed analysis.

Miles and Huberman as cited in Sugiyono (2013) state that there are three stages carried out in the processing of qualitative data, namely data reduction, data display stages, and conclusions or verification. According to the statements above, the researcher started to collect the data by doing an interview with participants. The interview session were transcribed in a form of words. After the data were gathered, the researcher did an editing as a process of examining the collected data to reduce data that is irrelevant to be analyzed. After that, the researcher coded and organized the data. The last is the researcher interpreted and represented the data in order to get the relevant result and to answer the research problems.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

To find out the reason why the students faced the difficulties in TOEFL listening section, the researcher discussed the difficulties of the participants while doing TOEFL listening section related to the external factors that containing 3 sub questions they were, the speakers' issues, the listening materials, and the environmental condition.

The difficulties related to the speakers' issues were divided into 4 problems. They were the accent of the speakers, the speed of the speakers, the intonation of the speakers, and the pause of the speakers. From the finding found, the difficulties caused by the accent and the speed of the speakers are the most experienced by the participants. Furthermore, the difficulties caused by the listening materials were also divided into 4 problems, they were, sentences complexity, sentences length, idiom, and unfamiliar vocabularies. Most of the participants are almost experiencing the same obstacles including 4 problems mentioned above. Then, the difficulties caused by the environmental condition. The difficulties were concluded into 4 problems, they were the quality of the recorder, extraneous noise, set of the sitting position, and room temperature. The finding discovered

showed that most of the participants experienced the difficulties caused by 2 problem, they were extraneous noise and room temperature.

In discovering the reason why the participants faced the internal difficulties in doing listening section of TOEFL, the researcher discussed the internal problems in listening TOEFL that containing 2 aspects they were, experiences and physical condition, and the ability to answer the listening question based on its types.

The difficulties related to the experiences and physical condition were grouped into 4. They were the experience in TOEFL test, the frequency of practicing listening skill, and physical feeling (anxious or nervous). As the finding displayed, most of the participants experienced the lack of concentration during the listening TOEFL test. Also, the researcher indicated that the question items that students experiencing the difficulties in part A are mostly in restatement/meaning questions, idiomatic language, negatives, and suggestions/inference. While, the researcher found that the topics and details questions are the most difficult items in part B and C.

From the finding explained above, there were 3 major external problems that the listeners had in the finding, as follows: 1) the difficulties related to the speakers' issues 2) the difficulties related to the listening materials 3) difficulties related to the environmental condition.

First, Most of the participants stated that the difficulties in listening section of TOEFL related to the speakers' issues are: 1). The speakers' accent and 2). The speakers' speed. It has been claimed by Munro and Derwin(2005) as cited in Brown (2012), unfamiliar accent both native and non-native can cause serious problem in listening comprehension. Furthermore, the participants stated in order to catch what the speakers said in TOEFL listening section, the listeners need to get used in native spoken accent. Also, the finding stated that the speed of the speakers in TOEFL listening section have

influenced to the speakers' pronunciation. The speakers sound like mumbling since every word they have said flowing together in a smooth way. From the finding analysis, the participants are experiencing the difficulty to capture the message delivered related to the speakers' speed. It was explained by Hamouda (2013) that the faster speech rate gave negative impact since the listeners were difficult to grasp the spoken message when the speakers spoke rapidly.

Moreover, this research concluded the difficulties related to the listening materials in 4 main problems. The participants are almost experiencing the same obstacles toward the listening materials issues including: 1) the sentences complexity 2) the sentences length 3) idiom used 4) unfamiliar vocabularies. The previous study conducted by Dewi (2017), the result showed that listeners who have high grammatical knowledge have a higher TOEFL listening score than those who have lower grammatical knowledge. This problem occurred since the complexity of sentences had the relationship with the grammatical pattern and sentences structure which influenced the listeners to process the message spoken.

The result also indicated that the sentences' length affect the working memory of the listeners to catch the message spoken since the listening recorder played once and won't be repeated. As it claimed by Bingol et al., (2014) listening into long paragraph of task is very difficult since the listeners are required to keep all the information in their mind at once. Another difficulty also caused by the the speakers' idioms. According to the previous study from Chairuddin and Ulfa (2018) that mainly explore what are Non-English students' difficulties in listening section of TOEFL. It was found several difficulties one of them are the difficulty to identify idiomatic express. Idioms are a subjective meaning constructed by the native speaker itself and knowing all the meaning of words is not quite enough to analyze the idioms purposed. Beside, misunderstanding toward unfamiliar

vocabularies prevented the listeners to grasping the wrong meaning. As accordance with Gilakjani (2016) knowing the meaning of words would arouse the interest and motivation which gave the contribution for the listeners to grasp the message spoken.

Furthermore, the difficulties related to the environmental condition based on the finding above have concluded in 2 items problem, they were: 1) Noise from outside 2) room temperature. The result revealed that the noise from outside often disrupted the participants' concentration during the listening section begins. Also, the experience to deal with uncomfortable room temperature either have the correlation with the listeners' problem in TOEFL listening section. As stated by Bingol et al., (2014), sometimes the inconvenience of room affects the listeners to understand the message spoken well. It means that noise and room temperature influenced the listeners to grasp the spoken text in TOEFL listening section.

There were 2 major internal problems that the researcher found in the finding, they were; (1) The difficulties related to the experiences and physical condition. (2) The difficulties related to the types of question.

First, as the result displayed, most of the participants experienced the lack of concentration during the TOEFL listening section as the materials delivered were too long and the topic spoken was quite boring to comprehend. It supported by the statement from Bingol et al., (2014) when listeners find the topic of the listening text interesting so the comprehending would be easy. This problem also occurred because of the distraction from noises as accordance with Bingol et al., (2014) said that it needs a huge amount of concentration in order to not miss the meaning. It was also supported by the study from Fitriana et al., (2021). The result study found that one of the difficulties experienced by the students in doing TOEFL listening section is concentration disruption.

However, based on the finding above, the participants mostly found the difficulty in answering the restatement question, negative question, passive question, contrary meaning question, idiomatic question, long conversation and monolog part question. The previous study conducted by Rahmati and Kurniasih (2019) investigated the errors of non-English Department students in doing the listening section of TOEFL based on the question items analysis. The result of this research indicates that the question items that students experiencing the difficulties in part A are mostly in restatement/meaning questions, idiomatic language, negatives, and suggestions/inference. While, the researcher found that the topics and details questions are the most difficult items in part B and C.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the result of the investigation, the difficulties are caused by the external factors, involving accent of the speakers, speed of the speakers, sentences complexity, sentences length, unfamiliar vocabularies, idiom used, noise from outside, and room temperature. Most of the participants reveal that those problems occurred as the unfamiliarity to listen into native spoken. Also, environmental conditions have a big influence on the successness of the listening process. Moreover, the internal factors include the lack of concentration and the ability to master all the types of listening questions. Overall, the researcher claimed that listening skills cannot be improved just in a short of time since the listeners need to take process and preparation in order to comprehend the message delivered.

Based on the conclusion of the research, the researcher provides some suggestions. For English listening lecturers, the researcher hopes that the result of this study can be an evaluation to improve the English learning activities especially for listening skill. It also suggested for the lecturer to always take the advantages of various teaching listening strategies through movies, song, and games. For students, it suggested to be more

practicing listening activity as a reason of familiarity to comprehend the message spoken in TOEFL. Also, in order to optimize the listening activity during the TOEFL, the students require to prepare everything included the condition of their physical and environment properly. Furthermore, the researcher strongly suggests for the future researcher to expand the scope of the participant in order to get more varied sample. Also, for the future researcher who interested in similar study can develop the investigation by analyzing the strategies that should be done to overcome the problems.

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