

FACTORS CAUSING THE LOW LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF ENGLISH STUDENTS ON THE TOEFL TEST AT THE UNIVERSITY MUHAMMADIYAH OF BENGKULU

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Abstract

The objective of this research was to find out the factors which are causing and low listening comprehension and to determine the most dominant factor causing low listening comprehension of English students in answering listening comprehension questions on the TOEFL test. This research employed mix method design, which involved collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. The instrument used in this research were questionnaire and interview. After questionnaire done, the researcher interviewed the students to get secondary data. The results showed that there are two factors causing low listening comprehension which are internal and external factors. The results showed that external factors are the major cause of low listening comprehension with the total mean of 2.54. Three from four aspects presented was received positive respond from the students which are speech delivery, linguistic complexity, and physical setting. On the other hand, lack of experience seems the only one factor appeared from internal factors. The most dominant factor was linguistic complexity with mean of 2.62. The results from interview also confirmed that there are two main causes which are lack of vocabulary and unclear speech of what they heard. There are some suggestions provided in this research. First, it is suggested for teacher/lectures to encourage the students to improve their listening ability. Second, it is suggested for students to enrich vocabulary and their linguistic competences. Finally, it is also suggested to the next researcher to conduct similar research in larger scope.

Keywords: Cause, Listening Comprehension, TOEFL.

INTRODUCTION

English as International Language is the most dominant language used and studied in all parts of the world, including in Indonesia. Having proficiency in English is one of the things that must be owned by every student which will later be useful for continuing further studies at the tertiary level both inside and outside the country. English language skills are needed as capital to prepare competent and highly competitive generations of the nation. TOEFL, which stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language, is an international standard test used to assess English competence. TOEFL is intended to assess English language abilities of those whose first language is not English (Pratiwi et al., 2021).

TOEFL is also one of the standard requirements for entering tertiary institutions in Indonesia (Karjo & Ronaldo, 2019). Several universities in Indonesia require the TOEFL exam as part of their graduation criteria. TOEFL is not only for those who want to follow

or continue their studies at their dream campus but also one of the administrative requirements for students to complete their studies. Therefore, the development of English is in the form of TOEFL material training, which aims to prepare students to face global competition. TOEFL is a tool used to measure a person's English proficiency (Soali & Pujiani, 2020).

In the TOEFL test, there are 3 main sections that the students will work on, namely listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension (Phillips, 2001). From all the sections provided in the test, many students think that Listening Comprehension test is challenging for students (Fitria, 2021). In this section, the students must listen to various types of passages on the audio recording and understand the information provided. They will be asked to listen to conversations from tape recorders or other media, and it is important for students to be able to do this well. However, they fail when answering the listening part because they often misheard the information.

According to Lengkoan et al. (2022), listening comprehension is somehow different than hearing. The students must understand the information from utterances pronounced by native speakers delivered orally using English. Therefore, answering questions on listening comprehension section in TOEFL is challenging for some students. Surprisingly, listening comprehension is not prioritized in the English teaching and learning process. According to Burns and Richard (2018), most English teachers neglect listening in favor of other aspects of language proficiency such as reading, speaking, and writing. Listening is seen as a soft ability that may be acquired outside of the classroom and is not formally taught by instructors. This thinking has resulted in interminable difficulties with listening comprehension.

Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) argued that there are two major factors causing low listening comprehension which are internal and external factors. Internal factors are factors that come from within the learner. Factors that influence the listening process include the listener's physical condition and the listener's psychological condition. Internal factors such as hearing loss, lack of experience, lack of interest, and lack of concentration. On the other hand, external factors come from environment conditions such as speech delivery, linguistic complexity, quality of recording, and physical setting (Jaya et al., 2021).

Several studies have been conducted related to factors of low listening comprehension on TOEFL. First Fitria (2021) argued that unfamiliarity with vocabularies, complex grammatical patterns, and the duration of the sections uttered are among the most significant elements producing challenges for students' listening comprehension.. Second, Fajri et al., (2021) stated that there were several obstacles faced by participants in working on TOEFL questions such as in the listening section, especially in answering long conversations and almost the same voice. Pronunciation, speaking speed, insufficient vocabulary, lack of concentration, anxiety as major hearing comprehension problems.

Regarding the importance of mastering TOEFL test and its challenges which the students faced in the listening comprehension sections. In addition, studies about listening comprehension are overlooked and rarely being investigated. It is important to investigate more deeply to know better the factors causing low listening comprehension faced by the students. The result of this research will reveal the factors causing low listening comprehension on TOEFL faced by eighth semester students of Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu. Thus, researcher names this research answer the research questions about; (1) What factors are causing low listening comprehension of English students on the TOEFL test? (2) What is the most dominant factor causing low listening comprehension of English students in answering listening comprehension questions on the TOEFL test?

METHODS

This research used mix method design which involved both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. According to Creswell & Creswell (2017), qualitative design is focused with the subjective data produced by individuals' ideas, experiences, and feelings, and it is concerned with providing explanations of social events as they occur spontaneously, with no attempt to change the scenario under investigation. Quantitative design, on the other hand, refers to research that rely on statistical analysis to arrive at their conclusions.

In this study, the research subjects were eighth semester students of the English Education Study Program Academic Year 2022/2023. There were two instruments used in the research. They were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire followed the model of Likert scale in which each item of the questionnaire has alternative answer. Each respondent responded with a point value, and individual score was determined by summing the point for each statement. There were 5 open-ended questions that had been prepared by the researcher. The researcher used the theory of Arikunto (2019) in determining the number of students to be interviewed. The researcher interviewed 25% of the sample or 6 students to be interviewed to investigate the factors causing low listening comprehension on TOEFL faced them. The researcher used English-Indonesian while doing the interview to help the teachers understand the meaning and avoid misinterpretation.

The quantitative data was obtained from the result of questionnaire. Those steps were implemented in collecting data.

1. The researcher identified the result of questionnaire using percentage formula.
2. The results of the percentage then were described and analyzed.
3. The mean was analyzed based on the table of interpretation.
4. The researcher interpreted the result and write the conclusion.

The qualitative data was examined based on the interview results. The data was analyzed using data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and verification from an engaging cyclical process were three different sorts of this approach from Saldaña (2021).

a. Data reduction

In this part, the researcher explained how to examine data by choosing, concentrating, simplifying, and altering it. The amount and complexity of data obtained via interviews, observations, and documents was enormous. As a result, data reduction was required to make the information clear and easy to understand.

b. Data display

In this study, a data display was a systematic, compacted set of data that allowed inferences to be reached. We were able to understand what was happening on and act thanks to data visualization. The information in this study was given in the form of brief comments, seats, and description.

c. Conclusion drawing

Conclusion drawing was the final phase in which the results were translated into a conclusion. Data minimization and information presenting should take precedence over drawing. In addition, the analyst started to identify the significant aspects to include in the research's conclusion. As a result, the conclusion was backed up by information that was both legitimate and dependable.

FINDING AND DISCUSSIONS

There are two major factors about low in listening comprehension which are internal and external factors. Internal factors are related to problems which are from the learner themselves such as hearing loss, lack of experience, and emotional difficulties. On the other hand, external factors come from environment conditions such as speech delivery, linguistic complexity, quality of recording, and physical setting. The detail description of each aspect is described below.

Table 3. The Factors Causing Low Listening Comprehension

Factors	Aspects	Mean	Category	Total
Internal factors	Hearing loss	2.09	Disagree	2.37
	Lack of experience	2.54	Agree	
	Emotional difficulties	2,48	Disagree	
External factors	Speech delivery	2.57	Agree	2.54
	Linguistic complexity	2.62	Agree	
	Quality of recording	2.46	Disagree	
	Physical setting	2.51	Agree	

Based on the table above, the total mean score of internal factors was 2.37. In the internal factors, the mean score of hearing loss was 2.09 which means that the students disagreed that hearing loss was the cause of low listening comprehension. In addition to lack of experience, the mean score was 2.54 which means that the

students agreed that lack of experience was the cause of low listening comprehension. For emotional difficulties, the mean score was 2.48 which also means that the students disagreed that factor was the cause of low listening comprehension.

On the other hand, the total mean score of external factors was 2.54. The mean score of speech delivery was 2.57 which means that the students agreed that it was the cause of low listening comprehension. The mean score of linguistic complexity was 2.62 which means that the students agreed that linguistic complexity was the cause of low listening comprehension. The mean score of quality of recording was 2.46 which means the students disagree that it was the cause of low listening comprehension. Finally, the mean score of physical setting was 2.51 which means that the students agreed that it was the cause of low listening comprehension.

Based on the results above, there were four aspects which were the cause of low listening comprehension. They are such as lack of experience, speech delivery, linguistic complexity, and physical setting. In summarizing, the English students at Muhammadiyah University of Bengkulu agreed that external factors were affected their low level of listening comprehension. Furthermore, each of the aspect is described more in the detailed explanations.

There were four questions posted to related to the factors causing low level listening comprehension. The researcher took the participants randomly in order to take the secondary data. The first question was about the students' experience in having TOEFL test. The result of interview showed that the students have taken TOEFL one or two times already. It means that they already know their ability in answering listening comprehension.

Stress and fear about English hearing are related with a lack of experience. The listener may feel anxious while listening to the speaker. When students rapidly forget what they have heard, fail to recognize terms they are acquainted with, absorb the message but not the intended message, and fail to pay attention to the next step while pondering the meaning, there is a problem. Anxiety when listening is a more specific experience and setting in which anxiety happened. As a result, when kids are unable to listen adequately, they become uncomfortable or nervous.

The second question was about students' background knowledge of TOEFL test. The question asked the students if they already know and take any TOEFL test before. The results showed that more than half of the participants have never attended any TOEFL course program while the other two were have. It means that failing in answering listening comprehension sections frequently results from a lack of practice and a tendency to be unprepared. Despite the fact that the TOEFL tests were scheduled, numerous students began studying the day before the test. Students with poor TOEFL scores are less prepared for the TOEFL test, particularly in terms of hearing and memorizing vocabulary, and they seldom study TOEFL material.

According to the results of question number two, the majority of respondents did not obtain adequate instruction in English listening comprehension during their secondary and university education. This might be related to an insisting on teaching reading and writing abilities, which are tested in college entrance tests. Unfortunately, the majority of the respondents did not receive adequate instruction in English listening comprehension. According to the data gathered, the respondent had never heard of a listening strategy.

The third question was about the cause of low ability in answering listening comprehension on TOEFL tests. The results showed that there are two main causes which are lack of vocabulary and unclear speech of what they heard. In terms of new vocabulary in TOEFL sense of hearing, every topic struggle to grasp words that are rarely encountered. They were oblivious to the distinctions between terminology and idiom. Furthermore, because English is a foreign language acquired by pupils, they do not have a large vocabulary in English. Students may come across a new term that leads them to halt and analyze its meaning, causing them to miss the rest of the speech. Here is the excerpt from the respondent.

"Yang pertama itu dari kendala sistemnya kadang tidak kedengaran dari speakernya, terus offline speaker yang kurang jelas, karena offline suaranya campur sama mahasiswa lain didalam ruangan dan luar ruangan, kata-katanya tidak familiar jadi tidak paham artinya, audio hanya bisa diputar satu kali."

["The first is that the system constraints are sometimes not heard from the speakers, then offline speakers are not clear, because offline the sound is mixed with other students indoors and outdoors, the vocabularies are not familiar so you don't understand the meaning, the audio can only be played once.."]

(Respondent 1)

In addition, the students assumed to have vocabularies difficulties. They chose the erroneous selections because they couldn't discover synonyms due to a lack of vocabulary. Students also struggled with grammar, as seen by their responses to questions regarding detecting synonym keywords, double negative phrases, idioms, identifying primary idea and theme, and identifying specific information. Students struggle to comprehend the topic of the dialogue as a result of the complex syntax. The excerpt below shows the students difficulties in vocabularies.

"Kuranganya kekayaan kosa kata dimana kita ketika mendengarkan apa yang disampaikan oleh native speaker tapi kita tidak tau apa yang mereka katakan karena kosakata kita kurang, audio diputar sekali jadi rasa gugup itu membuat kita susah untuk mencerna apa yang dikatakan native speaker tersebut."

["Lack of vocabulary where when we listen to what native speakers say but we don't know what they are saying because our vocabulary is lacking, the audio is played once so feeling nervous makes it difficult for us to digest what the native speaker is saying."]

(Respondent 3)

As a result, it is difficult to interpolate the meaning of a long spoken text. Almost all of the students struggled to grasp the meaning of a long spoken text. It's possible they didn't master vocabulary. So that when they hear a long-spoken text, they get too tired to hear about it. They sometimes fall asleep while listening to a long-spoken text. Many students struggled to grasp what the speaker said because the subject was unknown to them. They found it challenging to understand a foreign topic since it had terminology that they did not understand. As a result, it is critical for students to read extensively in order to have a broad understanding.

"Saya kesulitan memahami apa yang spiker bicarakan karena ruangan yang terlalu berisik dan saya tidak mendapat ketenangan dalam mendengarkan, saya juga kesulitan karna spiker hanya mengucapkan kalimat itu dalam satu kali."

["I have difficulty understanding what the speaker is talking about because the room is too noisy and I don't get quiet listening, I also have difficulty because the speaker only says the sentence once."]

(Respondent 4)

Another example of the cause is presented in the excerpt below.

"Saat memutar audio kesulitan dalam memahami audio tersebut, karena kekurangan kosa kata"

["When playing audio, it is difficult to understand the audio, due to lack of vocabulary."]

(Respondent 5)

From the above result, it can be concluded that many students' listening comprehension is hampered by new topics. When the topic is unfamiliar, many students struggle to grasp the listening material. Knowledge of the lecture topic improves understanding. Because students establish their comprehension of the topic that they listen to on the basis of what they have learned, problems arise if there is a discrepancy between what is said about exposed and the student's preceding knowledge.

The fourth question was about the dominant factors causing low listening comprehension. The results also confirmed that vocabulary mastery is the dominant factors. It is challenging to comprehend every word of entering speech. Most pupils found listening challenging since they struggled to grasp every single word of incoming discourse. It suggests they did not master their vocabulary. As a result, they found it difficult to listen to every word spoken by the speaker since they did not know what all of the phrases meant. When they came across an unknown word, they couldn't stop and think about it since doing so would lead them to miss the next words. Furthermore,

the audio only played once.

"Kurangnya penguasaan vocab sehingga tidak paham apa yang didengar kurang familiar."

["Lack of vocabulary mastery, so you don't understand what sounds unfamiliar."]

(Respondent 1)

The following excerpts mentioned that vocabulary mastery is the most important factor.

"Masalah kosa kata, karena kita ingin mengisi listening comprehension susah karena kekurangan kosakata misalnya dia bilang bake (memanggang) kita kira itu back (kembali)"

["Vocabulary problems, because we want to fill in listening comprehension, it's difficult because of lack of vocabulary. For example, when he says bake, we think it's back."]

(Respondent 4)

Aside from a lack of vocabulary and the complexity of grammatical structures, the length of the listening text was one of the primary reasons why the students couldn't grasp most of the conversation. Many students reported that a long-spoken text hampered their listening comprehension. This study clearly demonstrates that the length of the text can be a crucial factor affecting the learners' listening comprehension. This explains why hearing comprehension is difficult, in part since the length of the listening text itself bores listeners and distracts their focus. As a result, it is plausible to conclude that extended conversations impede learners' listening comprehension.

Another respondent answered that time management is the most dominant factors. Students' primary concern while applying the TOEFL test in listening comprehension is their failure to keep up with time. Students are unable to complete questions within the time given. One student was revealed during the interview session. The excerpt is presented below.

"Waktu karena dalam test TOEFL listening itu dikejar waktu dan terbatas. jadi jika ingin memutar audio-audio itu maka tidak akan terkejar untuk soal-soal berikutnya"

["Time because in the TOEFL listening test you are pressed for time and limited. so, if you want to play the audios then it won't be overtaken for the following questions "]

(Respondent 5)

The inability to manage time is reported to be the most prominent element while executing the TOEFL exam in listening comprehension. Students are unable to complete questions within the time given. The time constraints imposed by listening to audio and searching for the correct answer make it difficult for certain students to manage their time, and as a result, pupils struggle to concentrate. There are various factors that contribute to their inability to finish on time, such as focusing on tough questions and missing other questions, as well as a lack of attention.

DISCUSSION

From the results of this research, it was revealed the detailed description of factors causing low listening comprehension. The data were taken from questionnaire and interview sections. The results showed that there are two major factors which are internal and external factors (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Internal factors are related to problems which are from the learner themselves such as hearing loss, lack of experience, and emotional difficulties. On the other hand, external factors come from environment conditions such as speech delivery, linguistic complexity, quality of recording, and physical setting.

The results showed that external factors affected low listening comprehension. The students agreed that speech delivery, linguistic complexity, and physical setting were the cause of low listening comprehension. The obvious characteristic that contributes to listening to passages harder is speech speed. Arfianti (2021) stated when speakers speak fast, students may struggle to grasp the words in the second language. Listeners are unable to alter the speed of speakers in this circumstance, which may result in major comprehension challenges. Unfamiliar accents, both native and non-native, can cause major issues with learners' hearing comprehension, whereas familiarity with an accent improves learners' listening comprehension (Fitria, 2021).

Soali & Pujiani (2020) argued that listeners will experience several listening difficulties the first time they hear an unfamiliar accent. Many students had difficulty listening since they did not comprehend the speaker's accent. Most students are accustomed to hearing in their accent, thus hearing the speaker with other accents will be difficult for them, and they did not comprehend what the speaker said. The final issue is delivery speed. The term "speed of delivery" refers to the speaker's tendency to talk excessively quickly at times. There were no breaks as the speaker spoke, and the student was unable to understand what was being said. Furthermore, the audio was only played once, making it more challenging for them.

Linguistic complexities are those caused by the English language. They are caused by both the lack of English competence among Saudi students and the usage of English in class by their teachers. According to research, certain difficulties in comprehending and recalling information from speakers may be caused by a lack of English language

proficiency. Hamouda (2013) identified numerous linguistic elements that make listening difficult, including the use of informal and slang language, the use of reduced forms, and unusual accents and pronunciation. Whenever they listen to conversations from tape recorders or other media, it is important for students to be able to do this well. However, they fail when answering the listening part because they often misheard the information.

Another cause is a lack of mastery of the TOEFL competences. As is generally known, the TOEFL test requires a variety of abilities, including listening comprehension, such as focusing on the second line, locating the synonym, negative expression, and so on. Students are unable to function effectively because of this aspect. Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) argued that learners must be acquainted with linguistic cultural knowledge, as this has a significant influence on their understanding of language. If the task of listening includes a wide range of cultural elements, the learners may struggle to comprehend. Teachers must offer previous knowledge about the listening activities prior to the test.

The findings demonstrated that students could quickly recognize known phrases in hearing readings. Understanding the meaning of words helps ignite kids' attention and motivation while also improving their listening abilities. According to Hamouda (2013), each word can have multiple interpretations, and if things aren't applied appropriately in their appropriate context, students might become confused. Low command of English language is seen as a factor contributing to their troubles. As a result, the person has the most responsibility for expanding vocabulary knowledge. The drive and desire for the words of a language are required for success in vocabulary mastery.

Other most most dominant cause of low listening comprehension while applying the TOEFL test in listening comprehension is their inability to manage time. Students are unable to complete questions within the time constraints. Rahmah (2019) mentioned that the time constraints imposed by listening to audio and searching for the correct answer make it difficult for certain students to manage their time, and as a result, students struggle to concentrate. Same line with it, Jaya et. al. (2021) also stated that there are various factors that contribute to their inability to finish on time, such as focusing on tough questions and missing other questions, as well as a lack of attention.

A lot of students stated that they frequently or always found it difficult to recognize terms they knew due to how they were sounded. And almost all the students in the research said they "sometimes, often, always" experienced such an issue. Because of the way the words are spoken, it is feasible to generalize that most students have difficulty recognizing the terms they know. When a phrase is uttered different ways than before it was learnt, the listener may not recognize it as the same language or may be ignorant of the fact that it exists. This problem is currently disrupting the student's ability to pay attention.

CONCLUSION

The research investigated the detailed description of the answers from research questions presented earlier. From the result it can be concluded that there are two factors causing low listening comprehension which are internal and external factors. The results showed that external factors are the major cause of low listening comprehension with the total mean of 2.54. Three from four aspects presented was received positive respond from the students which are speech delivery, linguistic complexity, and physical setting. On the other hand, lack of experience seems the only one factor appeared from internal factors. The most dominant factor was linguistic complexity with mean of 2.62.

The results from interview also confirmed that there are two main causes which are lack of vocabulary and unclear speech of what they heard. Lack of vocabulary mastery is the dominant factors. It is challenging to comprehend every word of entering speech. Most students found listening challenging since they struggled to grasp every single word of incoming discourse. They assume that they did not master their vocabulary enough. As a result, they found it difficult to listen to every word spoken by the speaker since they did not know what all the phrases meant while the audio only played once.

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