

LISTENING COMPREHENSION FOR TWELFTH GRADE STUDENTS IN SINAR HUSNI HIGH SCHOOL FOR MEN

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Abstract

The paper analyzes listening comprehension of English language skills for twelfth grade students at Sinar Husni high school in Medan. The paper answers the following questions: 1. what are the factors that determine students' interest in learning English? 2. How frequently listening educational instruments are used to improve the listening skills for student? 3. What are the common difficulties that face the respondents in the questionnaire implemented in this paper in terms of listening comprehension? Thus, the paper aims to find the factors influencing English listening comprehension and the strategies to be taken that might improve students' listening comprehension. The paper indicates that the current problems face students in developing listening comprehension skills are speed speech, limited knowledge of vocabulary, and limited knowledge of the subject in question. Further studies could be conducted to gauge the issue of listening comprehension at the university level-among university students-and the use of listening educational instruments.

Keywords: English language, Sinar Husni High School, listening comprehension, twelfth grade

Introduction

The demand for English speaking proficiency among students is rising. More specifically, listening comprehension has recently attracted considerable attention in Sinar Husni High School. Despite students having mastered the basic elements of English such as grammar and vocabulary, their listening comprehension is in general weak. Beginning in the early 70's, work by Asher, Postovsky, Winitz and, later, Krashen, brought attention to the role of listening as a tool for understanding and emphasized it as a key factor in facilitating language learning. Thus, listening has emerged as an important component in the process of second language acquisition (Feyten, 1991).

Language learning depends on listening since it provides the aural input that serves as the basis for language acquisition and enables learners to interact in spoken communication. Listening is the first language mode that children acquire. It provides the foundation for all aspects of

language and cognitive development, and it plays a life-long role in the processes of communication. A study by Wilt (1950), found that people listen 45 percent of the time they spend communicating. This study is still widely cited (e.g., Martin, 1987; Strother, 1987). Wilt found that 30 percent of communication time was spent speaking, 16 percent reading, and 9 percent writing. That finding confirmed what Rankin discovered in 1928, that people spent 70 percent of their waking time communicating and those three-fourths of this time was spent listening and speaking.

According to Howatt and Dakin (1974), listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. This process involves understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, the speaker's grammar and vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning. An able listener is capable of doing these four things simultaneously. In terms of language processing, it is now generally accepted that learners need access to both top-down as

well as bottom-up processing strategies. Bottom-up processing strategies focus on the individual components of spoken and written messages, i.e. phonemes, graphemes, individual words and grammatical elements which need to be comprehended in order to understand messages. Top-down processing strategies, on the other hand, focus on macro-features of text such as the writer's or speaker's purpose, topic of the message, the overall structure of the text (Nunan 1991:4).

Bottom-up listening involves the listener in scanning the input to identify familiar lexical items, segmenting the stream of speech into constituents, for example, in order to recognize that (a book of mine) consists of four words. In addition, bottom-up listening helps the listener in using phonological cues to identify the information in an utterance format. Finally, bottom-up listening helps the listener use grammatical cues to organize the inputs into constituents, for example, in order to recognize that in the book which I lent you (the book) and (which I lent you) are major constituents rather than (the book which I) and (lent you). Top-down listening strategies, on the other hand, involve the listener in assigning an interaction to part of a particular event, such as storytelling, joking, praying, complaining, assigning persons, places, and things to categories, inferring cause and effect relationships, anticipating outcomes, inferring the topic of a discourse, inferring the sequence between events, and inferring missing details (Richards 1990). In the context of English Academic Purposes (EAP), the listening skills required in a strictly academic sense are those needed for listening to lectures. However, the use of media is also of potential academic interest as news, broadcasting and documentaries are all potentially valuable learning aids (McErlain 1999).

Listening is often erroneously considered a passive skill. In fact, in order to decode a message that the speaker is delivering, the listener must actively contribute knowledge from both linguistic

and non-linguistic sources. The view of listening would involve the learner in listening to the message without paying attention to its component elements. Listening to a language can be defined as the ability to receive and decode oral communication by processing a language sample (McErlain 1999). Ronald and Roskelly (1985) define listening as an active process requiring the same skills of prediction, hypothesizing, checking, revising, and generalizing that writing and reading demand; and these authors present specific exercises to make students active listeners who are aware of the "inner voice" one hears when writing. In other words, listening is a two-way process involving reception, decoding of input, and production that involves predicting and compensating.

Methodology

In this paper, the author approaches listening skills from the perspective of students in classroom. A questionnaire is used as a neutral tool so as to find out the kind of methods used in teaching English skills and the kind of difficulties students face. The language used in the questionnaire is Indonesian and as such it was straightforward for students to answer the questions in the questionnaire. For purpose of the paper, the author distributed the questionnaire among Twelfth grade students in Sinar Husni High School for Men in Medan. There are 44 respondents. For the purpose of this paper, the author translated the questionnaire from Indonesian into English.

Like all other Sinar Husni students in high schools, participants in the questionnaire started learning English as a foreign language in the fifth grade. However, nowadays, students start learning English in the first grade. Participants in the questionnaire were homogenous in terms of linguistic skills, socioeconomic background, educational system, and field of study. The concept of this paper was given to students in the classroom through their teacher(s).

The author intentionally avoided conducting personal interviews with the students to give those participants the freedom to answer the questions and express themselves without any interference by the author.

Discussion and Data Analysis

By looking at the table below, it becomes clear that out of the total number of male students of (44) there are (21) who would like or have an interest in learning English language skill. In other words, these 21 male students constitute 47.7% of the total percentage of students. On the other hand, those male students do not have interest in learning English language skills amount to (23) students i.e. 52.3%. It is to be noticed that there is no big gap between those who expressed interest in learning English and those who did not show the same interest.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondent According to Interest in Learning English

Distribution of Respondents	Number	Percentage
Those who showed interest in learning English	21	47.7%
Those did not Express interest in learning English	23	52.3%
Total	44	100%

The paper highlights that the factors that affect students' interest in learning English include:

1. Importance of English in real life. The total number of respondents who gave the English language this importance in real life is (9) out of (21) who showed interest in learning English. In other words, the percentage for those (9) students is 40%.
2. Desire to learn foreign language because it is fun thing to do. The total number of respondents for this point is (7) out of (21) which amounts to 36%.

As for male students who expressed no interest in learning English, the total number of students is (23) i.e. 52.3% of the total number of the sample (44). The author

believe that this number is very high. Some of the reasons mentioned by these students for not being interested in learning English include: hardship they face in learning English; no enough time to learn; lack of continuity for learning English.

Table 2. Using Different Means to Enhance English Learning Skills

The means	Using the means				Total Number	%
	Answer yes Number	%	Answer no Number	%		
Radio	2	4.5%	42	95.5%	44	100
Tv	31	70%	13	30%	44	100
Tape recorder	8	18%	36	82%	44	100

The importance of utilizing learning tools, which is the topic of this paper, in mastering English language skills cannot be underestimated. Table 2 clearly indicates that using radio as a learning tool is low when compared with other tools or methods. More specifically, the percentage of respondents who used radio was 4.5% while 95.5% of the students do not use radio. It is expected that the rationale for the former students not to use the radio as a learning method can be contributed to their weakness in listening comprehension. TV occupies the first place among other learning methods. Around (31) students indicated that they use TV as learning method for listening comprehension. In other words, 70% of the total students use TV. The reason for this overwhelming use of TV can be contributed to the joy and entertainment one experience when watching TV so that students attention are attracted to the images displayed on TV.

According to the data displayed above, dependence on tape recorder to learn English language skills is low. As a matter of fact, just (8) students, i.e. 18%, said that they use this method to learn English. To put in a different way, 36 students said that they do not use the tape recorder method. The author believes that these statistics are disappointing as the percentage of those using tape recorder should be higher since this method

is easy to use, has low cost to own, and it can be easy moved from one place to another.

Moreover, using the tape recorder can help students record their own statements and hear again. It is unfortunate that the methods of radio and tape recorder are not well-used although they have so many benefits in helping students improve their listening comprehension. The presence of a teacher in a classroom is considered among the most important tools used in learning English language skills including listening comprehension. However, according the study conducted for the purpose of this article, it becomes clear to the author that teachers never use radio or TV as learning method. Somewhat, teachers use tape recorder. It is clear that there is weakness and limitation in using the different kinds of learning methods although some of these methods are easy to use and cheap to own. Therefore, using different learning methods should be inseparable part of the teacher's way of teaching English skills.

Analyzing the data collected for this paper points out that 54% of respondents have improved their listening comprehension via the teacher while the remaining percentage have not learnt much. In addition, students' listening comprehension based on the use of radio, TV, and tape recorder was very good (54%), good (30%), and weak (16%) respectively. As to the degree of satisfaction among students for the method used to learn listening comprehension skills for English language, about 30% of students were satisfied, 43% were moderately satisfied, and 27% less or minimally satisfied. The author is interested in knowing the issues students face in listening comprehension according to the following table 3:

Reasons	Yes	No	Total
1) Speech Speed:	22	22	44
Number	50%	50%	100%
Percentage			
2) Limited knowledge of vocabulary	29	15	44
Number	66%	34%	100%
Percentage			

and structures of sentences:			
Number			
Percentage	25	19	44
3) Limited knowledge in the discussed subject:	58%	42%	100%
Number			
Percentage			

Based on the data included in the previous table, it is to be noted that:

1. Speech speed by the speaker affect 50% of students in their ability to master listening comprehension of the English language while the other 50% of students do not consider speech speed an obstacle in the face of learning. The author believes that it is in the best interest of the first group of student to continue listening of the English language through the use of assisting tools to develop their listening skills.
2. Limited knowledge of vocabulary and structure of sentences constitute a hardship for 29 students i.e. 66% while 15 students i.e. 34% consider (limited) knowledge of vocabulary and structure of sentences do not amount to an obstacle in the face of developing their listening skills in English.
3. One of the reasons that students face a hard time in listening comprehension is limited knowledge of the topic in question. About 25 students i.e. 58% face difficulties in following up in discussion because they do not know fully the subject matter of discussion. On the other hand, 19 students i.e. 42% stated that their listening comprehension skill is not affected by their limited knowledge of the topic.

Conclusion

The paper has explored some of the factors that have influenced students' competence in English listening. The paper found that approximately 50% of respondents do not want to learn English because it is difficult.

Using learning aids such as radio could assist students in improving their listening skills. However, the paper highlighted the fact that students use these aids few times. In addition, the teacher himself/herself teach English without the use of any listening educational aids such as radio or TV while their use of recorder is very limited. Some of the obstacles that face the respondents in the questionnaire in developing listening comprehension skills include speed speech, limited knowledge of vocabulary, and limited knowledge of the subject in question. English listening comprehension is a complex process that needs gradual development. Improving students' ability as English speakers is a demanding process and there are still many factors, intellectual and cultural, subjective and objective, influencing language acquisition that need to be considered and further explored

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