

BRING TO LIGHT STUDENTS LISTENING COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AT TERTIARY LEVEL IN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract: Listening Comprehension has been an obstacle for the students to learn English well. They have untold difficulties in understanding listening text. This paper tries to uncover this problem and the step stone to facilitate teachers finding solution to set the students free from their confinement. 56 students were the respondents of the questionnaire concerning about their listening difficulties. Their biggest responses were limited listening time allocation (10%-25% out of teaching time), failure in listening test (41 students), lack of practice listening at home (46 students), using the right learning media (50 students), No meta-cognitive strategy before listening (30 students), listening to word by word technique while listening (35 students), ignoring the difficult words during listening (29 students), speed of speech (38 students), unfamiliar topic (35 students), and long listening text (25). The conclusion is the awareness of listening comprehension difficulties resulted on identifying the problem. As their attitude toward learning was positive, they were able to apply the right strategy to help them reducing their listening problems.

Keywords: *listening comprehension, difficulties, listening, EFL context*

There are two opinions about listening capability acquisition. One is acquired passively and the other perceives as active process. Osada (2004) in Gilakyani, A P & Sabouri N B (2016) stated that listening skill can be acquired automatically and will develop without help. In the late 90's, David Nunan referred to listening as the "Cinderella" skill, meaning a skill often ignored in language learning research due to a greater emphasis on speaking. With a flood of books on the subject of second language listening appearing over the past few years, from the practical (*How to Teach Listening* by J J Wilson) to the slightly more theoretical (*Listening in the Language Classroom* by John Field), listening's Cinderella status might need an update.

Listening Myths is one of the most recent titles on second language listening and it proves to be an excellent overview for both the research-minded and the practicing teacher. Similar to two other books in a series from University of Michigan Press (*Writing Myths* and *Vocabulary Myths*), it is written around an interesting premise, which is to refute some common myths about teaching listening. The book explores eight myths in all. Each chapter contains three sections: In the Real World (an introduction to the chapter containing an engaging anecdote), What The Research Says (a concise overview of research relating to the myth), and What We Can Do (two or three suggestions for putting research findings into action).

This paper is trying to find out the problem of listening encountered by EFL students (students of Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya) and suggest the solution to overcome the problem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening is a concept that it is very complicated to be defined clearly (Hichem, 2013). Listening is similar to hearing but has different meaning; listening needs to activate the ability to choose the desired information or process the auditory input to get the meaning, and hearing is the condition of perceiving sound passively without trying to analyze the coming stream of sound. Sometimes we even do not understand the meaning sent from that auditory input, just hearing a sound without meaning.

Nadig (2013) listening comprehension is the various processes of understanding and making sense of spoken language. Furthermore, teachers get more observable meaning by the explanation of Alrawashdeh, A.I (2015) who provided apparent clarification to the meaning of various processes. These involve knowing speech sounds, comprehending the meaning of individual words, and understanding the syntax of sentences. Listening Comprehension is more than understanding words but it means understanding the meaning of the message delivered by the speakers. (Morley, 1992., Alrawashdeh, A I. 2015). Therefore, listening comprehension can be gained when listeners have good auditory sense, vocabulary mastery, and knowledge of sentence formations.

In language learning research, listening is a bit ignored as the focus is more on speaking and reading. David Nunan (1997) referred to listening as the “Cinderella” skill. It has two interpretations; one is listening has less attention in teaching English especially in EFL context and the other is the belief that listening can be mastered automatically. This listening skill is acquired unconsciously by getting input every day. It is just like a baby listening to the exposed language without even being aware of being learning. So, listening is viewed as a passive activity that will be acquired and embedded in speaking and reading activities. Second, another view concerning with listening attainment as they perceive that listening is active activities.

Some experts, who recognize listening as the active doings, suggest that training students in the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and learners is very crucial. Goh (2000). Training listening skills is suggested continuously until the learners can guide and assess their own understanding and answers. Vandergrift (1999) in Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016). Three views in active listening comprehension process are Cognitive Strategies, Meta-cognitive Strategies, and Socio-affective Strategies. (Conrad (1989), O’Mallay and Chamot (1990), Rost and Ross (1991), Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul (2014).

First, cognitive strategies are strategies not only to assist learners to process, keep, and remember new information. Goh (1998) but also to facilitate the learning knowledge or to solve problem of learning activities when it is necessary. Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, (2014). These strategies are divided into two kinds; bottom-up and top-down strategies. Bottom- up strategies is “word-for-word translation, arranging the rate of speech, repeating the oral text, and concentrating on prosodic characteristics of the text.” (Galakjani & Sabouri: 2016) Listeners tend to translate word by word instead of getting the meaning from the whole sentence or paragraph. Therefore they get the meaning from discrete word meaning. Usually this strategy is applied by the beginner learners. (Abdalhamid:2012). It is used usually in training fluency and acquiring correct pronunciation. Meanwhile, according to Abdalhamid (2012) advanced learners tend to use top down strategies. They forecast the content of the listening material. During the listening process they sometimes guess the whole meaning of the sentence or paragraph. By the end of listening activity, learners explain the content by using their own words and sometimes clarify their explanation by drawing. It means they are able to visualize the essence of the listening material.

Second, Meta-cognitive Strategies are learning management technique used by listeners to manage “their learning through planning, checking, assessing, and changing”.

(Rubin:1988) This can be done when listeners have already had clear objective of listening task and then utilize certain features of language input to help them catching the meaning of the message. By applying meta-cognitive strategies, listeners increase self confidence, motivation, and capability of completing the listening tasks. (Salataci:2002). Furthermore, meta-cognitive skills involve knowledge and regulation of cognitions that are the consciousness of what is going on and what should do to listen effectively. For the more skilled listeners apply more knowledge and regulation of cognitions and they employ more repair strategies to redirect their attention back to the activity when there is a comprehension failure meanwhile the less skilled listeners discontinue listening. (O'Malley et al:1989).

Third, Socio-affective Strategies is believed to be able to strengthen the listening capability. This skill is acquired through cooperation with others. In this situation, listeners reduce their anxiety or even work in stress-free circumstances. Certainly, it builds confidence and motivation in improving listening skills. (Habte-Gabr:2006)

METHODOLOGY

a. Description of Participants

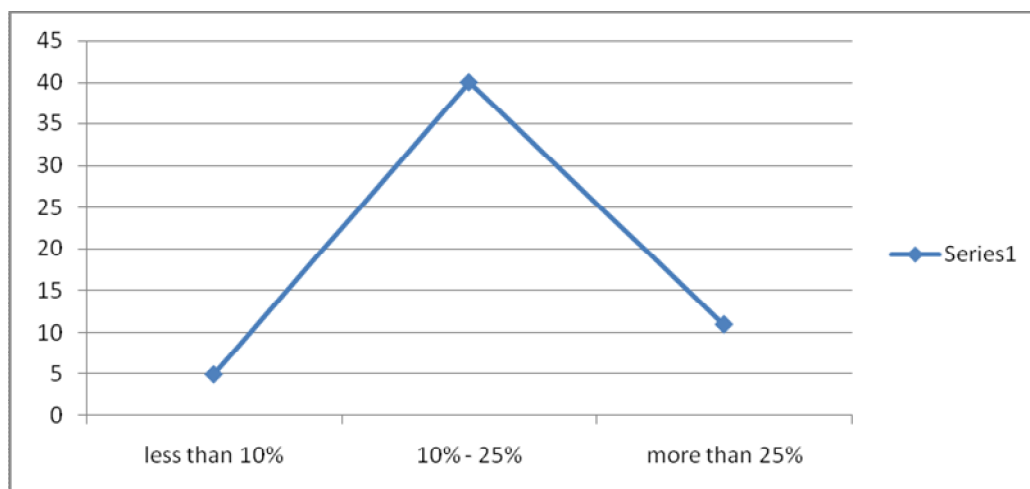
In this study, the researcher conducted “at the point in time (Cross sectional)”. (Creswell:2005:536) stated that cross-sectional designs consist of particular type. This research, related to program evaluation, is a survey that provides useful information to decision makers. The focus of this survey is students’ ability in understanding listening test.

Respondents of this survey were 54 students of the semester 6th of Business Administration Politeknik Negeri Sriwijaya in Academic Year of 2018/2019. This quantitative study, ready-made questionnaires were used to collect numeric data from participants, analyzed these number based on percentage of students’ choices. Then summarize the trends found in the collected data.

FINDINGS

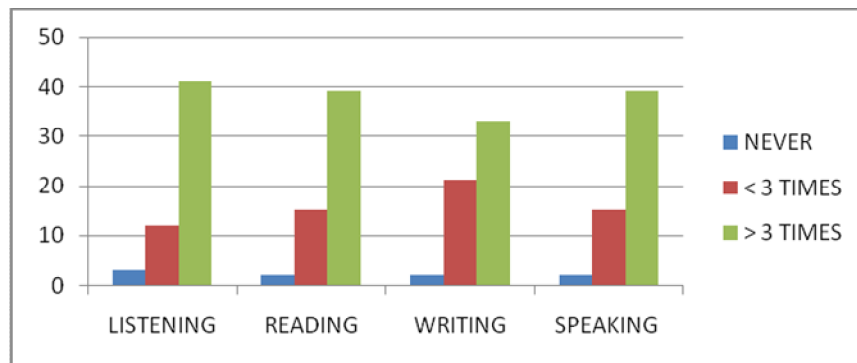
The Answers from Students concerning with Listening Difficulties.

Question 1: What percentage of the time on the course is spent on developing listening skills?



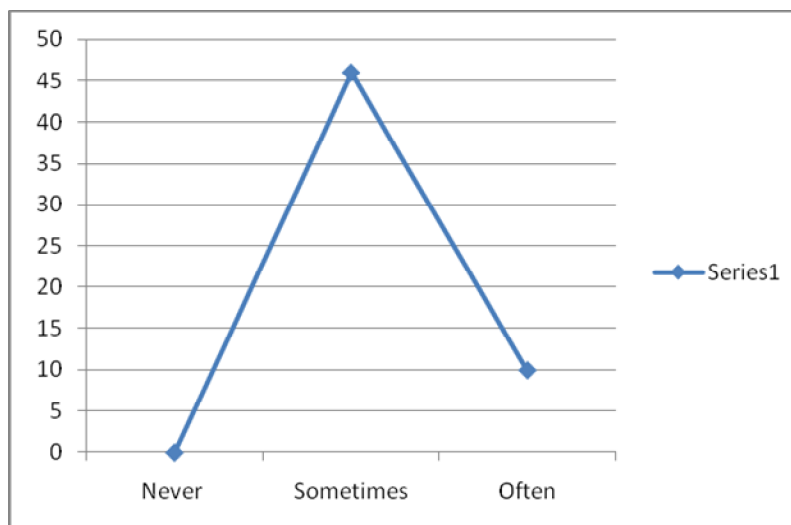
The chart reflects the students' observation about time allocation for increasing listening ability. There are 56 students participate in this survey. The finding shows that the most students' (40 students) perceptions are between 10% and 25% of the total amount allocated for listening. Five students mention that listening time allocation is less than 10% out of the whole English learning time portion. Other 11 students observe that time allocation is more than 25%.

Question 2: Have you ever failed your listening, reading, writing, speaking test?



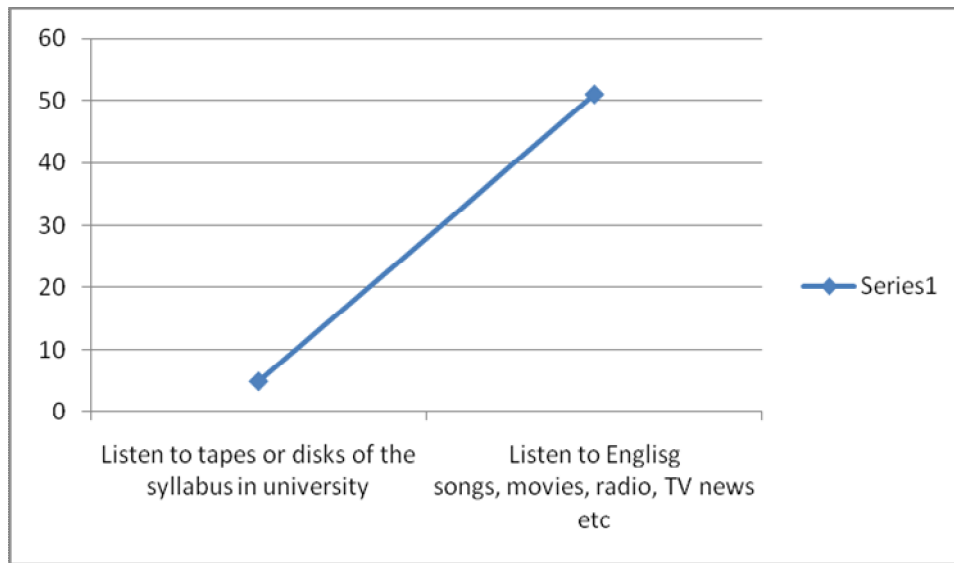
Most participants state that they failed in four language skills tests. Failure in listening test is 41 students, 39 students feel they failed in reading test, 33 students failed in writing, and 37 students failed in speaking test. The students who feel they fail two times in writing 22 students, 15 students fail reading and speaking test. 12 students fail less than 3 times in listening. Two students feel always succeed reading, writing, and speaking tests. Three students feel always succeed in listening test.

Question 3: How often do you self-study listening at home?



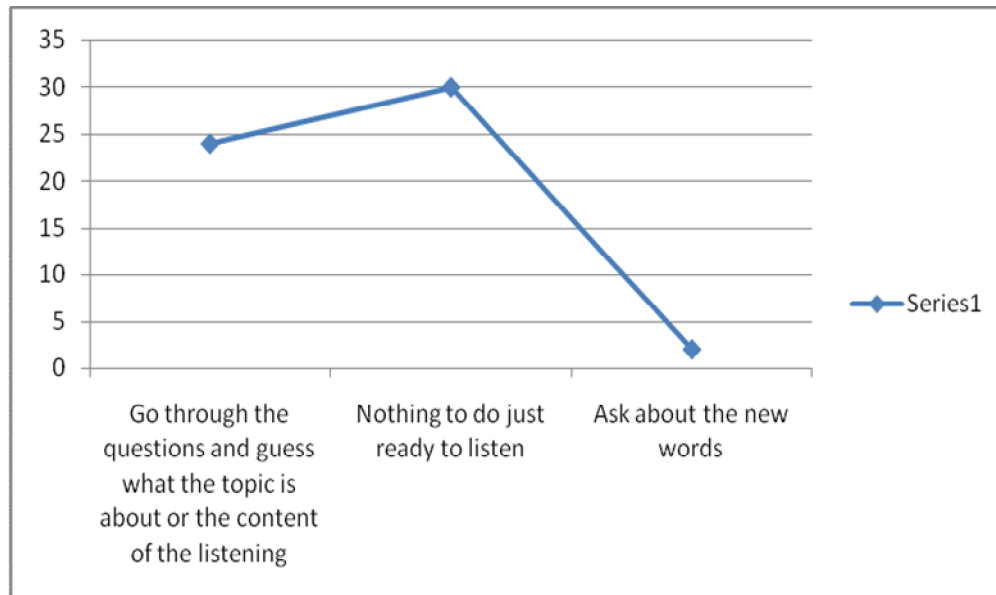
This chart shows that students do learning outside class. 45 students sometimes learn listening outside classrooms. The other 11 students often do learning listening outside the class.

Question 4: How do you self-study at home?



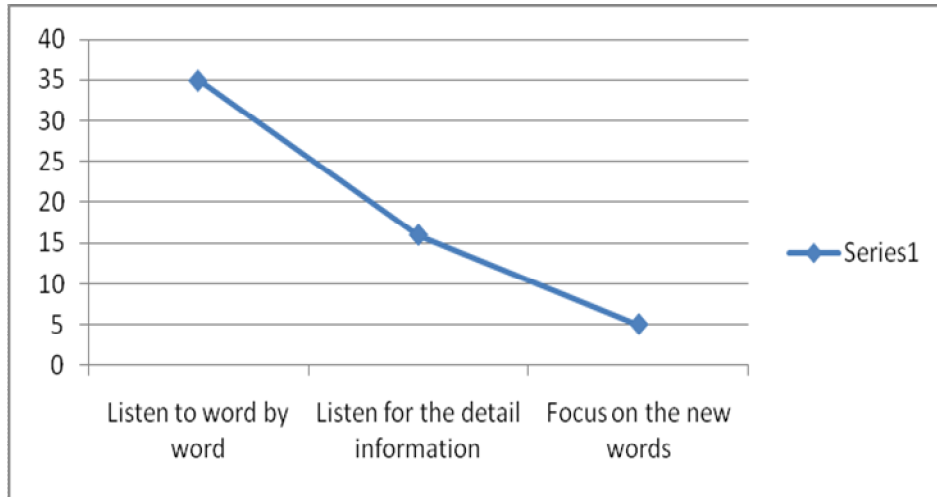
It can be seen that 51 students learn listening outside classrooms by listening to English songs, movies, radio, TV news, etc. Other five students learn listening using other kind of materials provided by the teacher.

Question 5: What do you do before listening?



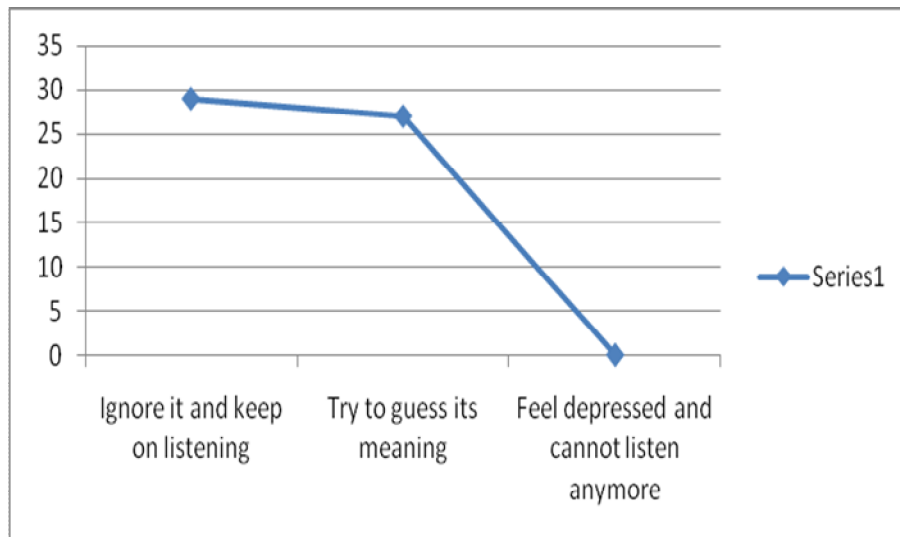
Students meta-cognitive strategy before listening are going through the questions and guess what the topic is about or the content of the listening. There were 24 students applied this strategy. 30 students did no preparation at all. The students who ask about the new words before listening were two.

Question 6: What do you do while you are listening for the first time?



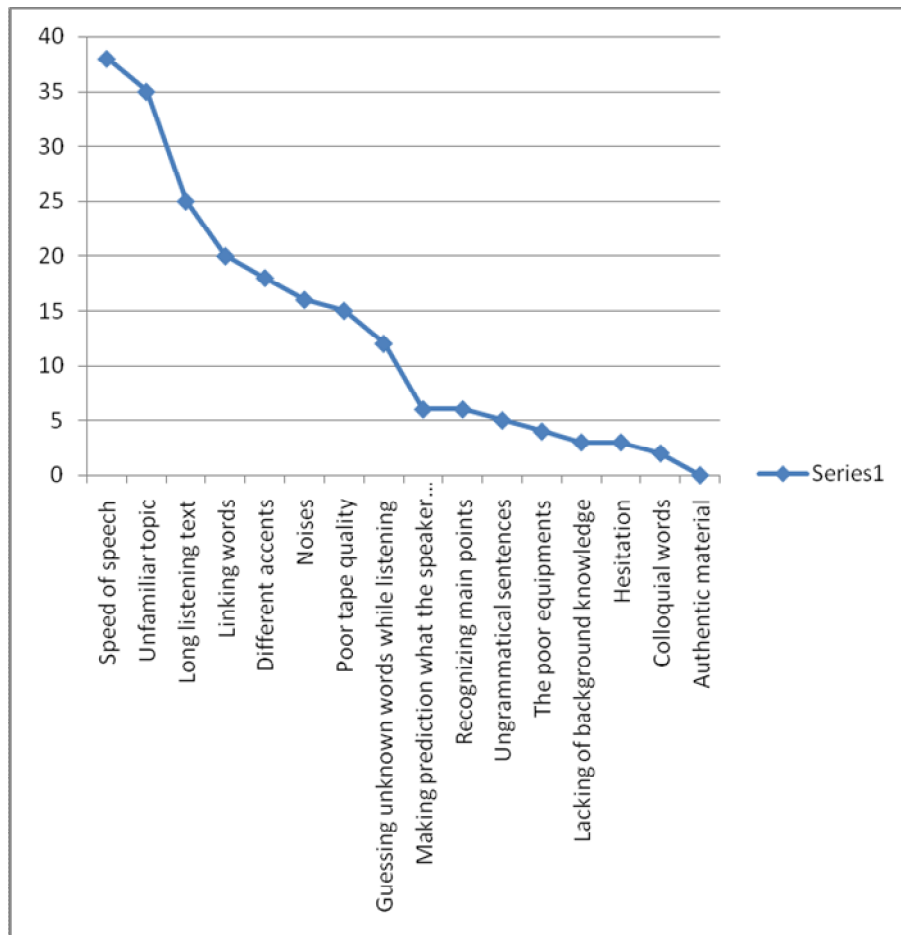
35 students listen to word by word when they listening for the first time. Other 16 students do listen for the detail information. The last, 5 students focus on the new words when they listen for the first time.

Question 7: What do you do if you cannot understand words or phrases while listening?



The answer for the question of “What do you do if you cannot understand words or phrases while listening?” is divided into two groups out of three optional answer. The first group (29 students) ignores the difficult words while listening and keeps on listening. The second group (27 students) tries to guess its meaning when they encounter difficult words while listening.

Question 8: The problems that you may encounter during your listening



The last question in the survey is asking the students to choose the problems when they do listening activities and they can choose more than one optional answer. The result of the survey was 38 students have difficulty with speed of speech. 35 students find problem with unfamiliar topic. Long listening text is also a barrier for the 25 students to understand listening text thoroughly. Another problem is linking words and it is a listening problem for 20 students. 18 students are still disturbed with different accent. Noises can make 16 students upset during their listening activities. Poor tape quality bothers 15 students when they do listening activity. 12 students states that guessing unknown words while listening is still problem for them. 6 students feel incapable making prediction what the speakers talk about. The problem of recognizing main point is stated by 6 students. Also ungrammatical sentences are the problem for 5 students. Poor equipments are chosen by 4 students as the listening problem for them. Background knowledge and hesitation have three answers respectively. 2 students are disturbed by colloquial words when they do listening activity.

DISCUSSION

Most students think that time allocation for listening is 10-15%. It means the time for teaching listening might be lengthen as the students need to accustom to the speed of the way how native speakers speak. For EFL students the speed is the main problem in listening comprehension. This reason is native speakers tend to link sound as they speak. That is why

they think that listening comprehension is the most difficult skill out of four language skills. For example: ...

The promising clue from this research is the eagerness of the EFL students to increase their capabilities by sometime learning outside the class. They make use of English songs, movies, radio, TV news and other media that provide English exposure to them.

In doing the task in the classrooms, they use the right technique of getting message from listening activities. Before listening, they go through the questions and guess what the topic about or the content of the listening. While listening for the first time, they listen word by word. This technique leads students to get meaning send from listening talk. When they encounter the difficult words during listening, their attitude helps them to keep on being high motivated as they are going on listening. This attitude is beneficial for students to strive to get the meaning for listening activities.

The three top difficulties that students complain of are speed, unfamiliar topic, and long listening text. These three complexities would be the concern of EFL teachers in choosing listening material, or else teachers find other strategies to avoid their students from boredom resulted on being less motivated in completing their listening tasks.

CONCLUSION

Conclusions that can be taken are : students are aware of their listening problem, students take action to get solution, students attitude are positive, and students are able to identify their difficulties.

SUGGESTION

Suggest the students to do listening 15 minutes/day and ask students to learn in the right way

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