

INVESTIGATING THE LISTENING NEEDS OF ENGLISH EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITAS AHMAD DAHLAN

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Abstract: Listening is an essential skill for students of a second language to be mastered since it provides input. Without understanding inputs, students cannot learn anything. Constructing meaning that is done by applying knowledge to the incoming sounds, however, has made listening difficult for students. Dealing with the difficulties that the students encounter in their listening, it is the role of the lecturer to develop the curriculum. One of the important point on curriculum development is that the course should be based on an analysis of students' needs. Needs analysis is necessary to make sure that the course will contain relevant and useful things to learn. Therefore, this paper explores the listening needs and problems of the English students of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. The results also shows that the needs analysis plays an important role in ELT curriculum design. The recommendations based on the findings obtained is then proposed to further studies on searching for an appropriate curriculum design of listening skills for the Indonesian learners.

Keywords: *needs analysis, listening, English language teaching, curriculum*

Introduction

Background

For most people, being able to claim knowledge of a second language means being able to speak and write in that language. It means speaking and writing are primary skills while listening and reading are secondary skills of second language learning (Nunan, 2002). Another reason for downgrading listening is the difficulty of teaching it. It is widely seen as a 'passive' skill (Field, 2008). On the other hand, Rost (2011) stated that there is no spoken language without listening. It could be inferred that one of the crucial components of spoken language processing is listening. Listening is an essential skill for students of a second language to be mastered since it provides input. Without understanding inputs, students cannot learn anything. Having a good listening comprehension, they can generally follow talks and lectures in English. Furthermore, students with good listening skills generally more successful than students who are passive listeners. They can use information more productively in studies, careers, and bussiness, and they tend to have more successful interpersonal relationships.

In English Education of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, listening is one subject that the subjects must be learned in four semester, from semester one to semester four. However, it is unsurprising that students perceive listening as a complicated subject. This situation may be caused by the monotonousness—opening the text book and explaining new words, playing the recorder, and asking/answering questions. Hence, as a lecturer of listening, the writer is encouraged to solve the problems. It is essensial for a lecture to have an understanding of why listening is difficult for students and what some solutions may be so that it will not burden the teaching of listening in the next semester.

Problem Formulation

Based on the background of this writing, the main problem of this paper is that, "What are the difficulties that the English students of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan encounter in listening?".

Objectives

The objective of this paper is to investigate the listening needs and problems of the English students of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan; trying to find out their learning style, current deficiency, and alternative methodologies.

Literature Review

Needs Analysis

One of the basic assumptions of curriculum development is that a sound educational program should be based on an analysis of learners' needs (Richard, 2007). Need analysis refers to a family of procedures for gathering information about learners and about communication tasks for use in syllabus design (Nunan, 2002).

Need analysis makes sure that the course will contain relevant and useful things to learn (Nation and Macalister, 2010). According to Richard (2007) need analysis in language teaching may be used for a number of different purposes, for example:

- to find out what language skills a learner needs

- to help determine if an existing course adequately addresses the needs of students
- to identify a gap between what students are able to do and what they need to be able to do
- to collect information about a particular problem learners are experiencing

There are three types of needs (Nation and Macalister, 2010)—necessities (what is the necessities in learners' use of language?), lacks (What do the learners lack?), and wants (What do the learners wish to learn?). However, Hutchinson and Waters (1987) divide needs into target needs (i.e. what the learners needs to do in the target situation) and learning needs (i.e. what the learners needs to do in order to learn).

Methods

A study conducted by a needs analysis survey. The subjects of the study were 40 first-year students majoring in English in their second semester at Universitas Ahmad Dahlan. The survey was administered at the end of the class with 20 minutes to complete. The students were asked to complete all questions.

A needs analysis questionnaire was created with qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey began with 7 open-ended questions. Following these 7 questions were 25 Likert-scale questions regarding students' listening difficulties. A Likert-scale was used with the responses *Strongly Dissagree*, *Dissagree*, *Uncertain*, *Agree*, and *Strongly Agree*. In that order, the values 1 to 5 were assigned to the choices. Within these 25 questions were five factors—process, input, context, listener, and task. The needs analysis survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings

Students responded the questionnaire indicate that it is important to improve their listening comprehension. The main reason given was the students are able to speak and write when they have a good listening comprehension.

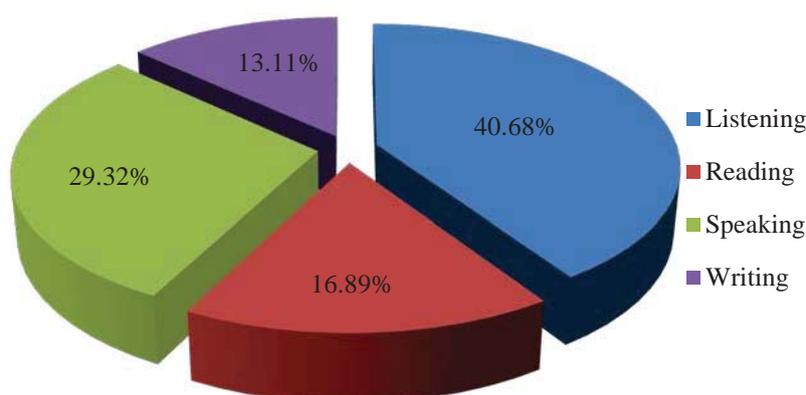


Diagram 1. Skill which need to be improved

The diagram above suggest that many students believe that they are not good at listening. That is why, the questionnaire also provided students to do self assessment, to record why listening is difficult for students and what some solutions may be.

Students have difficulties in listening since the speakers speak with unfamiliar accents. Students claimed that what speaker have said all sounded the same. Students tend to be used to their lecturer's accent or to the standard variety of British or American English. So, students find it is hard to undertsand speakers with other accents. Perhaps, it indicates a lack of exposure to authentic listening texts or a lack of awareness of pronunciation and intonation features.

In addition, speed of delivery was seen as an other important contributing factor to difficulties because other factors mentioned were difficulties caused by the speakers who do not pause long enough.

Students also claimed that listening is difficult since the students do not understand the meaning of words when the speakers were speaking. It is difficult to visualize words which are not pronounced clearly and there are too many unfamiliar words.

In some cases, students claimed that they can not predict what speakers are going to say, whether it is an everyday conversation, an interviewer's questions, news report, etc. It is difficult to use the context to guess parts of a listening text.

Frustration are other barrier to listening comprehension mentioned by students. The students can not focus when they have trouble on understanding the listening. It is tiring for students to concentrate on interpreting unfamiliar sound, words, and sentences. They reported panic if everything was not understood.

A number of students commented comprehension is distracted by physical factor. Noise is the environmental barrier to comprehend. Unclear sounds resulting from a poor-quality CD-player/recorder and conditions of the classroom interfere the students' listening comprehension.

The most frequently mentioned reason was lack of practice. According to the results of the questionnaire, as to learning strategies, the majority of the students show great enthusiasm in listening to music (49,46%) and lecturing (22,97%). It could be infered that 22,97% of students of English Education Department of Universitas Ahmad Dahlan have no more than two hours' regular training per week. They quite reluctant to watching movies (12,43%), listening to dialogue (11,89%), and listening to monologue (1,35%). Only 1,08% of students who learned from internet which approve that students have certain difficulties in learning independently.

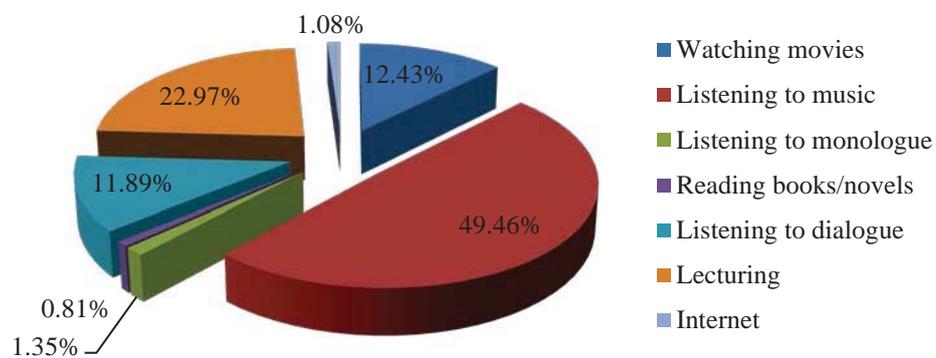
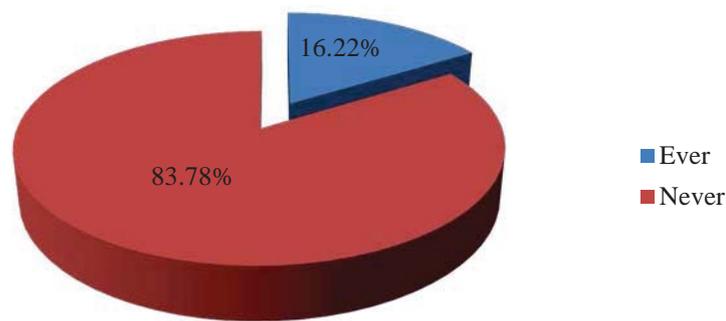


Diagram 2. Learning Strategies

Technology is changing today. It means that the styles and strategies of students' learning are also developing because of the increasing accessibility of technology. Keeping up with educational software is a new and demanding role for both lecturers and students. The World Wide Web could be an alternative for students to help in language learning. The sites are not only accessible to practice the listening but students are able to download audio and videoclips from sites, such as ESL Cafe Guide: Listening, The English Listening Lounge, Eviews: Accents in English, British Broadcasting Company, etc.

It is also common to observe on campus that students are texting their friends using cell phone, or searching on the internet using tablets, net books or laptops. They are often busy with their mobile devices while waiting for class to begin. Even during a class, their fingers and eyes are directed at these mobile devices. So, the interaction with handy devices become routine in their live. These potential growth of technologies—mobile technology are actually an opportunity to increase the efficiency of language learning. Students have greater opportunity to practice the target language. MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) can be an alternative of listening learning using portable devices.

Thus, it is important to students to use e-literacy as a tool for improving their listening skill. However, only 16,22% of students who claimed that they ever used any ESL websites/MALL to improve your listening skill. They tend to use their technology devices for playing games and using social media.



Concluding Remarks

The questionnaire find listening vital to their English studies. They can generally to follow talks and lectures in English. However, students claimed listening as a complicated subject. Students have difficulties in listening since the speakers speak with unfamiliar accents. Speed of delivery was seen as an other important contributing factor to difficulties. In addition, students do not understand the meaning of words when the speakers were speaking. Students can not predict what speakers are going to say. A number of students also commented comprehension is distracted by psychological factor (frustration) and physical factor (a poor-quality recorder and the conditions of classroom). The most frequently mentioned reason was lack of practice. Students have certain difficulties in learning independently. Students tend to use technology (websites and mobile devices) for playing games and using social media rather than for listening learning. Hence, as a lecturer of listening, the writer recommend to provide the listening curriculum design (selecting and sequencing materials and tasks, conducting classroom instruction, assessing, etc) based on the needs. Furthermore, the students should be encouraged to use e-literacy as a tool for improving their listening skill at home so that they will be an autonomous learners who always try and monitor their own progress.

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