

# POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING LISTENING

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***Abstract:** As it is known listening is one of the important parts of learning foreign language. Moreover two more problems faced by university students were limited vocabulary and paralinguistic issues. Students sometimes encounter unfamiliar words which caused them to stop and think about the meaning of those words and they missed the next part of the speech. In the same way, paralinguistic features such as the accent, noise, rate of delivery, pronunciation, and intonation caused students difficulties while doing listening exercises. This article defines difficulties of doing listening tasks and the ways of solving them.*

***Key words:** language, problems, difficulties, listening problems, students, listening tasks.*

## **Introduction**

Listening has been one of neglected skills in language teaching and learning among high school learners . There were many various causes that many students complained during the comprehending stage of the listening texts. So I aimed to find out the potential difficulties in listening and minimize the problems in order to increase listening comprehension rate by creating positive atmosphere. There are several problems which may appear during or before listening.

## **Main part**

### **1. Cultural Differences**

Being unfamiliar of cultural knowledge of language plays a great role understanding the context. The marriage between language and culture is indivisible (Brown, 1994). The topic may contain completely different cultural matter than the students have. In this case students may have difficulties to imagine what has been told. Here the instructors should give prior knowledge about the topic beforehand. For instance, if the listening part is about Easter Day and it is not

common in the area that language is being taught students cannot catch some points. Munro and Derwing (2000) claimed that too many genres of accented speech would result in a significant reduction in comprehension. Usually ESL/EFL listeners are used to “their teacher’s accent or to the standard variety of British or American English”. In this case teachers have to familiarize the students both British and American accent. It is an endless debate that what is the Standard English? Some says the British English is the standard. But English is spoken all over the world by Indian, Australian, Chinese, Turkish, and so on. In my opinion the best one is the one you can communicate

## **2. Quality of Recorded Material**

Even we are living 21st century which is that age of technology still there are some classrooms do not have computer, smart board, multimedia systems and so on. The quality of sound system also affects understanding of listening. Low quality of recorded material could be caused by noises, or unclear pronunciations. Based on the study conducted by Hamouda (2013) stated that the majority of the students think the difficulties they encountered in listening comprehension were due to the bad recording quality / poor- quality tapes or disks. For example, the cassette might be recorded while there were noises around or the cassette is used for such a long time so the quality was worn out. Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment could also interfere with the listener’s comprehension.

## **3. Unfamiliar Vocabulary**

Butt (2010) reported that the major problem hindering listening comprehension was that the students’ vocabulary was too limited to understand the message. Listening passages with known words are easier for learners to understand, even if the theme is unknown to them. Knowing the meaning of the words might arouse students learning interest and lead to a positive effect in listening ability. Another problem is here that many words have more than one meaning and if they are used their less common usage students get confused.

## **4. Length and Speed of the Listening**

The level of students plays a great role when listening long parts and keeping all the information in the mind. It is not easy for the lower level student to listen more than three minutes long listening then completing the desired activities. Short listening texts facilitate listening comprehension and diminish boredom, keep learners' concentration (Atkins et al 1995). If the text contains a lot of information, it is not easy to store everything in mind, exceptional listening ability and strategy required to understand (Carroll, 1977).

Another reason makes listening text difficult is the speed. If the speakers speak faster than normal listener may have difficulties to catch target words. Underwood states that on the contrary of reading comprehension the listener cannot control speed of the speaker and this cause the greatest difficulty with listening comprehension (Underwood, 1989). It is clear for most language learners and teachers that a slower speech speed would facilitate beginner learners' listening comprehension. Blau (1990) concluded that lessen the input speed is one of the effective technics that helps comprehension for second language learners.

## **5. Physical Conditions**

Not only the difficulties come from the message, the listener or the speaker but also come from the environment surrounding the students. According to Bloomfield et al (2011), noise or distortion in the audio signal interferes with listening comprehension for listeners. Sometimes inconvenience of classrooms affects students listening comprehension. In the large classrooms students who are sitting on the back rows may not hear the recording as students sit in front. Students who prefer to stay next to the windows also affected by the noise that come from outside. As a teacher we have to take into account all this conditions in a body. The size of the classroom also makes difficult for teacher to manage the all class in group activity or to get feedback from students. The temperature of class can be counted as a factor that makes listening comprehension difficult.

## **6. Problems Pertaining to Noise**

Noise is another environmental barrier to comprehension. Interior as well as exterior class noise is an obstacle to comprehension. Noise, including both

background noises on the recording and environmental noises, can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage. With the noise coming from corridors and other classes some students experience difficulty in listening to the teachers' voices. Because of the noise in classroom and the poorly preparation of lab, students cannot be concentrated on listening to the recording material. If the listening task is carried out with noises around, it is for sure they will not have a good result in listening. First, they are distracted by the noise no matter how hard they try to focus on the task. Otherwise, the noise makes a complex of sounds instead of the solo recording being played. This interrupts the students from hearing and focusing on the task.

### **7. Lack of Concentration**

Students' motivation is one of the crucial factors that affect listening comprehension. It can be difficult for students maintaining the concentration in a foreign language learning classroom. In listening comprehension, even the smallest pause in attention may considerably spoil comprehension. When students find the topic of the listening text interesting, comprehending would be easier. For all that, students find listening very boring even if they are interested in the topic because it needs a huge amount of effort in order to not miss the meaning.

### **Conclusion**

There were some conclusions that can be concluded. Conducting this study enabled the research to deduce that there are four factors caused students difficulties in learning and doing listening exercises. The first problem is limited time given to learn listening skill. They studied listening only twice or three times in one semester that why they did not have many opportunities to explore listening skill more. The second problem is unavailability of adequate facilities contributed to students' difficulties in learning listening. Equally important, students should learn the different accents in English and words' intonation. The best way to improve intonation is simply by listening carefully to a recorded conversation.

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