LISTENING TO REAL ENGLISH: HOW MUCH DO EFL STUDENTS IN INDONESIA UNDERSTAND A NATIVE SPEAKER'S SPOKEN LANGUAGE?

Mutia Megawati[*1], **Faisal Mustafa**[2] and **Syamsul Bahri Ys**[2]

[1]Sekolah Menengah Atas Qur'an Ar-Raudhah, Lhokseumawe, INDONESIA
[2]Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, INDONESIA
[*]*Corresponding author: mutiamegawati22@gmail.com*

Abstract

Listening is considered the most significant skill in language learning, but EFL programs at universities in Indonesia provide very limited credits for this skill, i.e. 80 hours all together distributed in three semesters. The purpose of this research was to find out whether this limited number of hours could help EFL students achieve advanced level in listening to authentic English spoken by native speakers. To collect the data 20 students majoring in an EFL program in an Indonesian university were tested with authentic material. The test results showed that the total score obtained by the EFL students was 49.6% in average. Therefore, it can be concluded that the ability of the EFL students in comprehending the authentic language spoken by a native speaker of English was very low. This result suggests that students are to be exposed more to listening practice such as watching movies or listening to podcasts to improve their ability in comprehending language produced by native speakers of English.

Keywords: Authentic material, listening comprehension, EFL students.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is one of the skills that should be mastered by the learners of English language. According to Widiastuti (2012), this skill is used more frequently than other skills. Therefore, the teacher of English needs to emphasize improvement of listening skills, particularly the listening comprehension, since the level of comprehension in listening also influences other skills (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011, p. 986). Furthermore, Nunan (2002, p. 238) agrees that listening is a very crucial skill for EFL students.

In EFL programs offered by Indonesian universities, listening comprehension is one of the core courses and it is usually taught in three to four semesters. For example, at Syiah Kuala University listening comprehension is divided into three levels, i.e. literal listening, interpretive listening, and advanced listening. Each level is taught once a week for every week of a 16-week semester. At 100 minutes a meeting, the classes total 80 hours of instruction time for all 3 semesters. This time is not adequate for students to reach advanced levels of listening proficiency. However, there has been no research suggesting how many hours are required to reach advanced levels of EFL listening proficiency. Therefore, the aim of this research was to confirm whether the number of learning hours offered by the EFL programs at universities in Indonesia is adequate to make students achieve high level of proficiency in listening. The success of learning listening comprehension skills by EFL learners is determined by how much they can comprehend language produced by a native speaker

of English (Karimi & Reza, 2014, p. 845). Therefore, authentic listening was used to find out the student's English proficiency in listening.

METHODS

This section describes research participants, instrument used to collect the data, the procedure of data collection, and the procedure of data analysis.

Participants

To obtain the data for this research, 20 EFL students studying at English Education Department of Syiah Kuala University, in Indonesia, were selected for this research. The selected EFL students had completed all listening courses offered by the department one or two years prior to this study with satisfactory grade, i.e. in merit. The following table explains the details of the research sample in terms of listening grade.

Table 1. Grades obtained by research participants in all Listening courses.

No	Number of participants	Grades		
		Listening 1	*Listening 2*	*Listening 3*
1	3	A	A	A
2	2	A	B+	A
3	1	A	B+	B+
4	2	A	B+	B
5	1	A	B	B+
6	3	B+	B+	B+
7	1	B+	B+	B
8	3	B+	B	B+
9	1	B+	B	B
10	1	B	B	A
11	1	B	B	B+
12	1	B	B	B

In Table 1, *Listening 1* represents the listening course that the students took in the first semester, while *Listening 2* and *3* were taken in their second and third semesters respectively. In terms of the grades, *A* is equivalent to *High Distinction*, *B+* to *Distinction*, and *B* to *Merit*.

Research Instrument

To measure their English proficiency in listening, the participants were given a listening test consisting of 25 questions. The test was composed of five authentic spoken texts, in terms of interview and long talk, obtained from *The Listening File* by Harmer and Elsworth (1997) and *English File* by Latham-Koenig and Oxended (2015) Each text was followed by 5 questions. Since many researchers have found that accent matters for EFL learners (Chao, 2013, p. 81; Sawir, 2005, p. 574; Talebloo & Baki, 2013, p. 141), audio with British accent was used.

The test was a multiple-choice test, where the options were designed by using TOEFL, which is a standardized test, as a template. Using a template from a standardized test has been proven to be a way of designing a reliable test, without even having to test for its reliability (Mustafa, 2015, p. 347). However, to make sure that the test was indeed reliable, a reliability test, i.e. test-retest reliability, was conducted to 20 students with the interval of 2 weeks, resulting in the reliability of 0.97, which is categorized into *high* reliability level.

Procedure of Data Collection and Analysis

The test was conducted online by using Moodle, which has been found to be the best course management system (Tuli, 2014, p. 19). Before the test, the participants read the purpose of the test, the procedure, and the rules of the test. The audio can only be listened to once and is followed by 5 questions. The participants were given unlimited time in answering the questions, and were allowed to consult the dictionary when they did not know the meaning of words in the answer choices. Dictionaries were allowed for this purpose so as to make sure that when students failed to answer a question correctly, it was because they did not comprehend the listening material, not because of other factors.

After obtaining the results of the test, the scores in the scale of 0 - 100 were analysed to find out the average score obtained by the students by using the following formula.

$$Average\ score = \frac{total\ scores\ of\ all\ participants}{number\ of\ the\ participants}$$

The result of the analysis is presented in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the data were collected, it was obtained that most of the participants could only answer less than half of the test items. The details are presented in the following table.

Table 2. Percentage of correct answer obtained by the participants

No	Number of participants	Number of Correct answer	Percentage of Correct answer
1	1	20	80%
1	1	19	76%
3	2	15	60%
4	2	14	56%
5	4	13	52%
6	1	12	48%
7	3	11	44%
8	3	10	40%
9	2	9	36%
10	1	6	24%
	Average	12.4	49.6%

The results provided in Table 2 indicate that students' proficiency in listening comprehension is generally very low. According to the grade scale in the department of English Education at Syiah Kuala University, which also applies to other Indonesian universities, the lowest acceptable score is 55%, and 70% of the participants obtained the scores lower than that 20% of the participants obtained low but acceptable scores between 55 and 64. Two participants (10%) obtained acceptable scores, i.e. 1 participant in the category of merit (65% – 74%), and the other in the category of distinction (75%-85%).

This finding is very alarming and, at the same time, disappointing considering all participants who should have been considered advanced EFL learners in listening proficiency was in fact unable to understand authentic language spoken by a native speaker. The participants can only be considered advanced should they understand such language (Rost, 2002, p. 229). The participants have been studying English in the English education department at their university for three to four years. They have passed all listening courses offered by the department with merit grades. Yet, even the best students in the class could not understand language produced by a native speaker at satisfactory levels. These results indicate the number of practice hours in the classroom is not sufficient to improve students' listening skills for the advanced level. Therefore, students need to be encouraged to practice listening outside the classroom because, according to Vandergrift and Goh (2012, p. 201), practice is what matters in improving listening skills. Considering technology and internet availability, which is free in the campus area in most of the universities, it is easy for the students to utilize this opportunity and improve their listening skills in English language. One interesting way of practicing listening is by watching movies (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005, p. 174; Rost, 2002, p. 196; Safranj, 2015, p. 172).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated whether the EFL students mastering English language teaching at one of leading universities in Indonesia were able to comprehend authentic language produced by a native speaker of English. The study revealed that 70% of the selected participants did not reach the merit level. Considering the fact that the students should have been advanced according to their listening grades, these results are unsatisfactory. It suggests that class practice was insufficient; therefore, it is

recommended that EFL students mastering English language teaching at universities also practice their listening skills outside the classroom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

REFERENCES

Chao, J. Y. (2013). Factors affecting college EFL learners' listening comprehension and listening problems. *NCUE Journal of Humanities*, *8*, 71–84.

Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (2005). *Second language listening: Theory and practice.* New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gilakjani, A. P., & Ahmadi, M. R. (2011). A study of factors affecting EFL learners' English listening comprehension and the strategies for improvement. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *2*(5), 977–988.

Harmer, J., & Elsworth, S. (1997). *The listening file: Authentic interview with language activities*. Essex: Longman.

Karimi, M., & Reza, H. (2014). Authenticity vs. practicality: Metacognitive awareness through authentic materials in EFL classroom. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *98*, 844–851.

Latham-Koenig, C., & Oxended, C. (2015). *English file: Advanced student's book* (3rd Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mustafa, F. (2015). Using corpora to design a reliable test instrument for English proficiency assessment. In *Proceedings of the 62nd TEFLIN International Conference 2015: Teaching and Assessing L2 Learners in the 21st Century* (pp. 344–352). September 14-15, Denpasar, Indonesia.

Nunan, D. (2002). Listening in language learning. In J. C. Richards & W. A. Renandya (Eds.), *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice* (pp. 238–241). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rost, M. (2002). *Teaching and researching listening* (2nd Edition). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Safranj, J. (2015). Advancing listening comprehension through movies. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *191*, 169–173. http://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.04.513

Sawir, E. (2005). Language difficulties of international students in Australia: The effects of prior learning experience. *International Education Journal*, *6*(5), 567–580.

Talebloo, B., & Baki, R. (2013). Challenges faced by international postgraduate students during their first year of studies. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, *3*(13), 138–145.

Tuli, K. (2014). Course management system - A planning for technologies. *International Journal of Advanced Research in IT and Engineering*, *3*(5), 14–20.

Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. C. M. (2012). *Teaching and learning second language listening: Metacognition in action*. New York: Routledge. http://doi.org/10.4324/9780203843376

Widiastuti, O. (2012). Enhancing students' listening skill through podcasts. *Jurnal Linguistik Terapan*, *2*(2), 42–49.