

# **STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN UNDERSTANDING LISTENING COMPREHENSION**

**(A Case Study At The Third Semester of English Education Program in University  
Muhammadiyah of Jember)**

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## **Abstract**

Listening is one of the language skills of the other four language skills such as writing, reading, and speaking. Listening is one of the factors in communicative competence, a very important skill because it is most widely used in everyday life. According to Dalyono (2005, p. 230) there are two factors that cause learning difficulties for students, namely internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include health conditions, talents, interests, and motivations. while the external factors are the environment, there is a family, school, and social environment.

Researchers used questionnaires and interviews to collect data related to students' difficulties in learning listening comprehension. This research uses descriptive qualitative. The subjects of this study were students of class A in the third semester of the English education study program. The data that has been taken, shows the difficulties faced by students in learning listening comprehension. The difficulties experienced are not being able to concentrate on listening to what the speaker is saying. Students also have difficulty in interpreting vocabulary or sentences that have difficult vocabulary and pronunciation. The results of this study can be seen that students have problems

**Key Word:** Students' Difficulties, Listening, factors.

English is the International language spoken in various countries. In this increasingly modern era, English has become a foreign language to study. In Indonesia, English has been studied a lot from kindergarten to university. At the junior high school level, they begin to learn the four components of language skills. Language skills have several components there are listening, reading, writing, and speaking. In gaining language skills starting from a sequential relationship and usually based on listening and will be followed by other skills.

Listening is one of the factors in communicative competence, it is a very important skill because it is the most widely used in daily life. Learning listening will help us to improve other skills considerably.

Teaching listening needs more attention in order to develop students' language. In some cases of the language classroom, listening was considered to be the most difficult language skill for students because it needs more attention and concentration to comprehend the material that includes understanding dialogue and monologue text. It also in studying listening we don't just

listen but try to find out its meaning and learn how to pronounce a word that we listen to. This makes students have difficulty in understanding listening comprehension. Even students who are majoring in English and have just carried out listening classes, there are still difficulties in understanding the message conveyed by the speaker. According to Lynch (1988, p. 4) we cannot practice listening in the same way as we can rehearse speaking or at least the part of speaking that has to do with pronunciation because we cannot usually predict what we will have to listen to.

Many factors cause a person to have difficulty understanding listening. According to Underwood in Kurniawati (2016, p. 29), there are several factors that cause a person to experience difficulty in listening : (1) Listeners cannot control the speaking speed of the person delivering the message, and they feel the message conveyed has been lost before they understand the message. The moment they understand one message, immediately another message disappears. (2) Listeners do not have the opportunity to ask the speaker to repeat or clarify the message conveyed, for example when

listening to the radio, watching TV, so that the listener must be able to understand what it is. (3) The limited vocabulary that the listener has, makes the listener misunderstand the contents of the text they hear and can even make them bored and frustrated. (4) The listener's failure to recognize and understand the signs sent by the speaker which causes the listener to misunderstand the contents of the message they receive. (5) Errors in interpreting the message received so that the contents of the message conveyed are received or interpreted differently by the listener. (6) Not being able to concentrate due to various things, such as unattractive topics, physical exhaustion, noisy environment, and so on. (7) Concerns about the difference in the way and material taught by the teacher with the material heard through audio devices or native English speakers.

In connection with Underwood's statement, Hermawan (2012, p.49) divides the factors that cause difficulty in listening into two, namely internal factors and external factors:

a. Internal factor

Internal factors that can affect the listening process are hearing problems and

physical conditions. In listening, the listener's senses are very important. When someone suffers from a hearing loss which can prevent the entry of waves in a certain volume, the listening process will be disturbed. The poor physical condition will also affect one's concentration level in understanding listening.

Motivation is also an internal factor in the listening process. Listeners will motivate themselves to listen effectively and will consciously understand the information they hear.

b. External Factors

There are several external factors that can affect the listening process, namely, environmental factors, material factors, and speaking styles and techniques. The style and technique of speaking will greatly influence a person to be able to understand the information he hears. With a good and clear pronoun, it will really help the listener to understand what the speaker is talking about. However, it is not uncommon for the speakers to speak quickly so that listeners have difficulty following and listening to the words spoken because they feel the pronoun is not clear.

The problem is what are the difficulties experienced by students and what factors that caused difficulty in understanding listening comprehension?

The result of the research is to find out students difficulty in understanding listening and to describe the factors that caused difficult in understanding listening comprehension.

## **RESEACH METHOD**

This type of research is qualitative research, especially in descriptive analysis research. According to Moleong (2007., p. 11) descriptive qualitative research, namely the collection of data used as research material is in the form of words, pictures, and not numbers.

The method used in this research is a qualitative research method with the type of case study research. Arikunto (1986) argues that the case study method is a type of descriptive approach, which is research carried out intensively, in detail, and in-depth on an organism (individual), institution, or specific phenomenon with a narrow area or subject. This method is used to find out why students have

difficulty understanding listening comprehension.

Sources of data were obtained from the results of filling out a questionnaire and interview conducted by students of the three semester of the English language education study program, University of Muhammadiyah Jember. In this study, the researchers chose the third semester of English class as research participants because they were still taking the course.

The data collected by the researcher was the result of filling out a questionnaire on listening given by the researcher to find out the difficulties faced by students in understanding listening comprehension.

The researchers also added interviews as a method to determine the difficulties in understanding listening comprehension experienced by students.

In the questionnaire, the researcher gave 10 statements through a Google form which was distributed using a link. Students give answers "True" which means agree and "No" which means disagree. The statements used in this questionnaire are taken from statements by

Dalyono (2005, p. 230) and Underwood (1990, p. 15). The researcher selects several statements and modifies them to be used as statements in the questionnaire.

The type of interview that used in this research is a structured interview. In the interview, students were given 5 questions that were still related to the questionnaire. The researcher modified the statements from the questionnaire to generate questions that were used in the interview. This is done so that the interview can explain the students' answers given in the previous questionnaire.

Interviews have been conducted with an estimated time of 5 minutes for each participant using the *Gmeet app*. In practice, there were some participants who were unable to attend the online meeting for several reasons, so the interview was conducted via private *WhatsApp chat*.

The students who were participants in this study were students who were in class A in the third semester of the English department, totaling 24 students. In collecting data, not all students can follow. Filling out the questionnaire

was attended by more students, namely 22 students, while in the interview, only 17 people participated. This is because it is easier to collect questionnaire data by simply opening the shared link and filling in 10 statements and is not bound by time. Meanwhile, in conducting interviews, students must attend a video meeting that has been scheduled at a certain time even though the schedule has been previously agreed upon.

Students who were unable to attend the meeting said that they had their own busy schedule or that the signal was not supportive, so some students conducted interviews at another time.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Explanation of the results of the questionnaire and interviews researchers understand that learning to listen has its own difficulties. We can know the difficulties in learning listening experienced by students by hearing directly from students who have these difficulties. Researchers get different responses from some students through the research conducted.

From the students' responses in this questionnaire, many gave a "true" response in

the first statement which discussed physical conditions as a internal factor that hindered them in understanding listening comprehension.

*S1 : I can't understand listening comprehension when I'm sick*

As many as 81% of students (18 students) agreed with giving the answer "True" while those who answered "no" were only the remaining 19% (4 students).

Unfavorable physical conditions will affect their concentration in learning because they have focused on what they feel physical so they will have difficulty understanding the material. Students who lack concentration will have difficulty understanding the material if they do not focus on what they are learning, especially in listening which requires high concentration in order to understand the content of the message conveyed.

From the students' responses to statement number 2,

*S2 : I can't understand listening comprehension because I'm not talented*

as many as 77% of students (17 people) disagree with the statement that talent affects their ability to learn listening. while 23% of students (5 people) think that talent affects their ability which makes them difficult to understand listening.

Then there is the factor of interest that is discussed. Interest to be internal factors in learning listening did not make students affected in learning listening.

*S3: I am not interested in listening courses so I have difficulty understanding these courses*

Almost all students gave the answer "No" and only 1 person gave the answer "True" which means they agree that interest affects students in understanding listening.

The next statement still about internal faacrtor discusses motivation.

*S4 : I can't understand listening comprehension because there is no motivation in learning listening comprehension*

77% of students (17 people) gave the answer "No" and another 23% (5 people) gave the answer "True". Motivation which is internal factor does not affect them too much in learning to listen because most students do not agree with the statement.

The environment is one of the external factors that make it difficult for students to learn.

*S5: The environment is one of the factors that cause me difficulty in understanding listening*

as many as 82% of students (18 people) confirmed this statement by providing their responses and another 18% gave the answer "no". The environment comes from the family environment, school environment, and social environment. An unsupportive environment can also affect student learning. A less supportive environment will cause students to not be able to study quietly.

Then there is the material that is a external factor in students' difficulties in learning to

listen. 68% of students (15 people) disagree with this statement.

*S6: The material given is not interesting so I don't understand listening*

Another 32% of students (7 people) responded with the answer "True" which means the material also affects their difficulty in understanding listening. In the statement regarding this material, many students did not feel that this would make it easier for them to understand listening, but there were also those who felt that the material caused them difficulty in understanding listening.

*S8: The facilities used in the listening comprehension course are inadequate, causing difficulties in learning Listening comprehension*

A total of 77% of students (17 people) agreed with the statement and 23% disagreed. Means as external factors can affect how students can understand well. The condition of the building, study room, and learning facilities are include in school enviroment. Students

mentioned that the means used in learning also affect them in learning. Sometimes the lack of facilities will reduce their ability to understand the material obtained.

Among the existing statements, the statement that discusses the speed of the speaker or audio being listened to is the most widely agreed statement.

*S9 : The speaker's speed makes it difficult to understand listening comprehension.*

91% (20 people) answered "True" which means they agree and only the remaining 9% (2 people) answered "No" which means they disagree. This speed of speaking will affect their vocabulary understanding which causes students to concentrate and eventually lag behind in understanding the content of the message conveyed by the speaker.

*S10: Limited vocabulary makes it difficult for me to understand the sentences or material given*

in this statement as many as 77% of students (17 people) agree. Many of them still find it difficult to memorize vocabulary making it difficult to understand what they hear. while the other 23% disagreed by giving the answer "No". Lack of understanding of vocabulary will make it difficult for students to interpret words before they understand the content of the message conveyed. Vocabulary pronunciation is also the cause of their difficulty in understanding the content of the message conveyed by the speaker.

To find out the difficulties faced by students in understanding listening, the researchers also asked questions directly through online interviews. In this interview, students were given 5 questions that were still related to the questionnaire.

The first question asked is about time.

*Q1 : How long did it take you to understand what you heard?*

The average student takes time to understand it. students answer 2-3 times the audio repetition until they understand what they



have heard depending on the audio, vocab, and pronounce the word they hear. Here are the answers from some students “*Depends on vocabulary*”, “*2-3 times depending on the material*”

Continue in the second question about the obstacles experienced by students in learning to listen.

*Q2 : Do you often lag behind to understand the sentences you hear? why?*

Almost all have experienced this in learning to listen, they gave the following answers “ *Often because I don't understand what vocab is being said, sometimes what's confusing is the new vocab that appears*”, “*Yes, often. Sometimes the speaker is too fast or not very audible*”

From these answers, students complained about the vocabulary they did not know, so they had difficulty understanding the listening material they heard. In addition to vocabulary, there were also those who answered related to their delay in understanding the meaning of the sentences they had heard. They answer the audio

that is too fast, the pronunciation to the accent used in listening also makes them lag behind in understanding listening, such as the answers “*Yes, because the speakers speak too fast or they use a British accent. I'm used to using an American accent*”

In the third question, students give different answers,

*Q3 : Does the material presented affect you in understanding listening? What kind of material do you find difficult to understand?*

There are students were not affected by the material and answered that there was no difficult material. There are also students who say that non-video material is more difficult. They give answer “*Not yet. Not affect*”, “*Non-video material*”. Then they also answered vocab and pronunciation as material that is difficult to understand in listening, and here are some answers from them. “*Understanding the material with vocab*”, “*Materials that affect my listening are pronouns and vocabs*”.

Vocabulary and pronunciation are the reasons why many students have difficulty

understanding listening. Many students answered so on the fourth question so that it is still connected to the third question.

*Q4 : What makes it difficult for you to understand listening comprehension?*

And here are the responses from some students *"I don't know much about Pronunciation, so when I listen to what I'm listening to, I can't tell what's being said", "Because my vocab is still small and the use of different accents sometimes makes me confused in differentiating sentences or words. also the speed in speaking is too fast"*. It turned out that from some of the answers, there are also students who mention the audio or speaker too fast and also have a different accent so it is difficult to understand listening.

In addition, the researcher also asked about how students faced difficulties in understanding what they experienced in the fifth question.

*Q5 : How did you deal with the difficulties you experienced and what exercises did you use to improve your listening skills?*

The students overcome their difficulties by practicing using songs or watching English films. Here are some student answers *"watching movies, listening to music", "I often listen to English songs while reading the text, practice is to increase vocabulary to master"*

There are also students who overcome their difficulties by practicing using the application to improve their abilities *"Repeat the material and focus more. Usually use the pronounce application to be more familiar with the pronunciation", "Focuses on vocab and pronunciation. There is one website that I use to practice listening, namely the British Council."*

Explanation of the results of the questionnaire and interview researchers understand that learning listening has its own difficulties. Students have some difficulty in understanding every word or sentence they have heard.

Actually, the problems experienced by these students are still related to each other. Starting from their discomfort in learning which has an impact on the way they understand the

material. Furthermore, there are external factors, namely the environment. Students choose an environment that is included in the cause of their difficulty in learning to listen. The environment comes from the family environment, school environment, and social environment. An unsupportive environment can also affect student learning. A less supportive environment will cause students to not be able to study quietly.

Students who lack concentration will be a little slow in understanding the content of the message from the speaker and they can be left behind to understand what the speaker is talking about next. Unfavorable physical conditions caused their concentration in learning because they have focused on what they feel physical so they will have difficulty understanding the material.

The lagging of students in understanding the content of the message is a problem that is often experienced by students. The speed of the speaker causes students difficulties in learning to listen. This speed of speaking will affect their vocabulary understanding which causes students

to concentrate and eventually lag behind in understanding the content of the message conveyed by the speaker.

Most of them have difficulty in interpreting the message conveyed by the speaker or the audio in listening because of their lack of vocabulary knowledge. In addition to vocabulary, the pronunciation of every word spoken by the audio is sometimes confusing so they have difficulty in interpreting and understanding the message content of the sentences they hear.

## **CONCLUSION**

The difficulties faced by third-semester English education students in learning listening are not being able to concentrate on listening to what the speaker is saying. Students also have difficulty in interpreting vocabulary or sentences that have difficult vocabulary and pronunciation. Because of this students are often left behind to be able to understand the content of the message conveyed by the speaker.

There are two factors that cause third-semester English education students to have

difficulty in learning listening, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors that make students difficult in listening are physical conditions that affect students' concentration in learning. Meanwhile, the external factor that causes students' difficulties is the environment and facilities that are less supportive make them not optimal in learning. Materials that are difficult to understand also make it difficult for them to learn listening. Apart from these two factors limitations in remembering vocabulary and how to pronounce it can make it difficult for them to understand the message conveyed by the speaker. Speakers who are too fast and also lack concentration make them often left behind to be able to understand the message conveyed.

Students need to prepare themselves before studying in order to concentrate on learning. Students also need to memorize vocabulary and how to pronounce them. In addition, students must also get used to listening to English audio to make it easier to understand listening.

For teachers, listening learning can be done by making learning stages, for example

using vocabulary from the simplest to a certain level until students are accustomed to listening.

For other researchers who are also interested in examining students' difficulties in learning to listen. This study was only followed by one class. Maybe it would be better if other researchers did research with more participants.

With that researchers can get more complete data for answers to what is being studied.

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