KEY FACTORS EXACERBATE LISTENING OUTSIDE EFL CLASSROOMS: INSIGHTS FROM PAPUA INDONESIA

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Abstract
This study aims to explain key factors exacerbating listening outside EFL classrooms based on the perception of English major students in a Papua university. To facilitate a comprehensive investigation into a specific real-life scenario and to enrich the researcher's understanding of the individual or incident under study, a qualitative case study design was employed. We involved thirty students majoring in English education in a university in Papua, Indonesia. Data collection was carried out using the triangulation method including reflective journals, Focus Group discussions, and semi-structured interviews. The findings show some factors promoting listening difficulties perceived by the Indonesian students: accent, tempo, dialect, and intonation. Additional factors may exist that were not raised during the data collection process. These may have been identified if more participants were interviewed. However, the sample size was limited due to time constraints. Then, measuring the impact of each factor in a quantitative study may also yield useful data.

Keywords: *Listening Difficulties, EFL, Real-context*

Introduction

English serves as a crucial tool for communication in everyday interactions, acquiring knowledge, building interpersonal connections, exchanging information, and engaging with language learning within the context of English-speaking cultures (Ali, Hasanah, and Rosdiah, 2022; Dahlan, Ramdani, and Noni, 2024). In the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), developing proficiency in listening is essential, as it enables learners to comprehend spoken discourse and participate effectively in communication.

Underwood (1996) defined listening as a mechanism for receiving,

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constructing, and representing meaning delivered by a speaker. Therefore, listeners need to pay attention to understand the meaning of what is heard. Mechanically, listening is a comprehensive process that engages not only the physical tools involved in hearing (e.g., ears, cochlea, and auditory nerve) but also the brain's cognitive abilities to understand the message. While both listening and hearing involve the reception of sound, (Rintaningrum 2018) differentiates them based on the listener's degree of intention in these activities, highlighting that listening entails a deeper level of intention.

Compared to other skills like reading, writing, and speaking, listening is considered more challenging (Nushi and Orouji 2020) since the listener has more limited chance to assess the information to acquire. They could only listen to the message once unless they had the chance to ask the speaker to repeat it while in reading, the reader could go back to the text as many times as they wish until they understand the ideas delivered by the letters (Nunan, 2015).

(Abdulrahman and Abu-Ayyash 2019) emphasize that while a conversation may persist without perfect language mastery, effective communication demands a certain level of linguistic competence. Successful interaction relies on the listener's ability to grasp the speaker's meaning without linguistic barriers hindering understanding.

In the English for General Purpose program, students are immersed in daily conversations revolving around general topics. This approach utilizes frequently-used language (Szudarski 2018), categorizing it as a familiar situation – one in which a proficient English user should face minimal difficulty in understanding spoken English words. Paradoxically, numerous English education students at universities in Papua find it challenging to comprehend these routine conversations. Therefore, it becomes imperative to explore the factors contributing to the challenges faced by proficient English users when engaging in conversations outside the EFL classroom.

In addition, many studies have delved into factors impacting listening difficulties among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners e.g. (Herman 2021; Misbah et al. 2017; Rara Saraswaty 2018; Rintaningrum 2018), and very few focus on non-academic settings. The present research aims to fill a gap by shedding light

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on the challenges that students may encounter when applying their target language skills in real-world situations. The insights garnered from this study will aid English Education lecturers in understanding their students' real-world language struggles and provide valuable guidance for future researchers exploring similar areas or topics.

Before we go further, it is important to understand factors contributing to listening difficulties for foreign English users from pre-existence reference. The one we successfully found was (Rintaningrum, 2018). Although the data were collected from classroom contexts, some findings may have relevance to real-life contexts. (Rintaningrum 2018) found factors impeding listening difficulties including (1) the status of the language; (2) knowledge of the language; (3) familiarity; (4) lack of practice; (5) speed of the speaker; (6) speaker himself; (7) listening strategies; (8) anxiety; (9) translation; (10) the nature of test ; (11) lack of concentration; and (12) facilities. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of listening comprehension, emphasizing the importance of considering various factors in investigations related to this topic.

Hence, the present study aims to narrow its focus by centering the discussion on listening difficulties within the context of daily life. This targeted approach intends to contribute a nuanced understanding of challenges encountered in real-world situations, differentiating it from the broader studies that may not explicitly address everyday listening scenarios.

Method

To facilitate a comprehensive investigation into a specific real-life scenario and to enrich the researcher's understanding of the individual or incident under study, following (Creswell, 2018) guideline, a qualitative case study design was employed. The initial step in data collection involves reflective journals. (Torres, Higheagle Strong, and Adesope, 2020) defined reflective journal writing as justifications and explanations for a condition, by doing self-analysis on factors challenging their ability to understand oral messages. Thirty students studying at a university in Papua were invited to a seminar on reflective journal writing before starting to write their Reflective Journals. To navigate them providing data according to our research

question, we provided them with some guiding questions. We gave them around a week to complete their reflective journal in Indonesian language (to facilitate them delivering their idea more conveniently and instructed them to submit it for review.

Considering that all participants showed listening difficulties based on their reflective journals, all of them were invited to the next stage, Focus Group Discussion. In the focus group discussion, they were divided into five groups consisting of six students. They were facilitated with prompt questions mirroring the ones they had answered in the reflective journal. In this stage, we also allowed them to speak in Indonesian language to make them more free to share and discuss their ideas with their peers. It is important to generate data through intensive and effective interactions among group members.

The final data collection method was the semi-structured interviews. Selected students were invited for individual interviews, offering a more private platform for in-depth discussions. While this method may pose challenges in maintaining focus, it offers flexibility and the opportunity to pursue specific questions for enhanced clarity or understanding (Idrus, 2022).

Following data collection, interview, and focus group discussion recordings were transcribed. Data were analysed based on thematic analysis approach (Dawadi, 2020). All data were coded and classified based on the research question. Subsequently, these coded data were evaluated by connecting them with existing theories and previous findings.

Results

This section presents data obtained from reflective journals, focus group discussions (FGDs), and interviews. Below are data obtained:

1. Accent

The first aspect mentioned by the respondents was accent. In a reflective journal, we found the following fragment:

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> *"I think people in the movie talk with a different accent from my English teachers and lecturers use, like even the word of 'water', I usually did not understand, because they pronounce it differently".*

The student mentioned about the difference way of word pronunciation between in the movie and in the English classroom.

Furthermore, in the interview, we found:

> *"… maybe the first is about the accent, our English teachers speak using different accent …" (Sa)*

> *"For some words, the pronunciation is the same, but most of them is not the same, for example like 'faya'. Faya means, it can be faie in American accent, faie is the condition if there is faie, and they say faia, in an american accent it's like 'through', for example 'you go to the Nottingham, via this way', I was thinking faya means like there is something like burning, "*

It can be seen here that different accents had become interfering aspects for students. The most noticeable aspect was the pronunciation. It seems that the limited varieties of pronunciation exposed to students in the classroom makes them not ready with particular ways of articulating words and affects their comprehension.

2. Speaking Tempo

In all data collection steps, the respondents consistently mentioned that the rapid tempo of speaking had made it difficult to get the ideas or messages delivered by English speakers outside the class.

> *"… totally different from us, and then sometimes they speak very fast. They speak very fast …" (Sa)*

> *"… because of the way the tourist speak which is very fast …" (R)*

> *"… maybe because they are speaking too fast …" (N)*

Three respondents found that native speaker's speed of speech contributed to their difficulties in listening comprehension – when people speak quickly, it is harder for the students to understand what they are saying.

3. Dialect

Dialect refers to variations within a language distinguished by differences in grammar and vocabulary (Hughes and Trudgill 2013). For example, chips for potato fries. Si found that the vocabulary used by people in the UK often differs from that which she has heard in American English. In the FGD, a student stated that she had been eased to understand the conversation in the movie because the accent was familiar to her.

… because I get used to with, about, with their dialect … (Si)

Furthermore, in the interview, GB mentioned,

… I met a tourist in KFC, and she kept saying chips, chips, and chips, I thought she meant a cracker made of potato, but in fact, she meant French Fries … (GB).

The two fragments above represent respondents' perspective about how dialect could interrupt their understanding when listening to people in the real world.

4. Intonation

Natural dialogues are full of hesitations, pauses, and intonation (Ali 2020). In the interview, a student mentioned that the people in the British movies she usually watched have distinctive intonations.

"… the intonation was quite different, …"(R)

Furthermore, another respondent argued the following

"I think my teachers speaks with an American accent, but the tourist I met yesterday was from Australia, and their intonation was very Australian, I think. I asked them to repeat for 2 to 3 times to understand what they said... (AG)

R and AG identified differences between the native English speaker intonation and that which he had learned previously as one of the factors that made it difficult for them to understand the foreigners talking.

Discussion

In this section, the data presented above are compared and contrasted with former findings in relevant areas.

Accent

(Hughes and Trudgill, 2013) defined accents as variations in pronunciation. Some respondents felt that it was difficult to understand British style of speech as it differs drastically from American English. Sa usually experiences difficulties in listening to British movies due to the differences between her own pronunciation of English and that of the people in the scene. P said that that makes it listened uniquely so cannot be perceived clearly and leads to misunderstanding

Difficulties in understanding caused by different accents not only affects foreign learners but also native English speakers, as English has a wide variety of regional accents (Martin, Underwood, and Molinaro, 2019). a very obvious example related to this is the case which was delivered by S. S experienced difficulty when listening to a person who mention 'fire' as /fy/ since it is very different from what she usually listens (American's pronunciation: /fyƏ:/).

An accent is naturally inherent in every individual using any language in this world, regardless of the age at which they start using the language (Levis, 2022; Mesthrie, 2001; Yule, 2022), so it is not appropriate for us to judge whether an accent is correct or not (Levis, 2022). Therefore, imposing students with various English accents seems to benefit them in improving their English mastery.

Speaking tempo

Fayzullaeva and Davranova (2024) stated that EFL learners often encounter difficulties when conversing with native speakers because they tend to speak more quickly than the learner anticipated. The respondents to our survey found that the rapid tempo of speaking made it difficult to understand what people around them were talking about.

Rakhmyta (2019) found that speaking too fast is the main problem her high school students encounter when involved in listening. It is explained further by (Putra 2016) that it has been one of the main issues encountered by English students when they are able to follow the speakers' talking speed mainly performed by natives of the

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language. Therefore, in a different study, (Nurchalis, 2021) suggests the English teachers provide a slower listening tempo to facilitate students understand the recording easily. Unfortunately, in the real world, it is likely impossible to adjust the interlocutor's speaking tempo (Luwiti, Umar, and Mustapa, 2023). Therefore, it seems teachers must prepare their students to face such conditions.

1. Dialect

Dialect is a distinctive form of a language, it is associated with some social regional, group, and ethnic, it differs from other varieties of a language by its own linguistic features such as vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar. A dialect in its classical form refers to the linguistic variation of a specific region. Dialects are not uniform entities; instead, they are characterized by differences in speech and text based on the presence, absence, and frequency of numerous linguistic features. (Demszky et al. 2021)

The speech patterns of Americans differ from those of the British, and similarly, the way these two groups speak is distinct from the speech used in Australia. When a language is used in distinct ways by two different groups, it is often said that they speak different dialects of the same language (Pereltsvaig 2020). For example, chips for potato fries. Si found that the vocabulary used by people in the UK often differs from that which she has heard in American English. In the FGD, a student stated that she had been eased to understand the conversation in the movie because the accent was familiar to her indicating that the familiarity with the accent helps listener to understand a message being conveyed.

The respondents' unfamiliarity with regional dialects due to the limitations of their EFL course made it difficult for them to recognize the meaning of some sentences. (Hughes and Trudgill 2013) noted that exposure to a number of dialects is useful in creating a successful English learner.

2. Intonation

Intonation is a method of expressing information through speech that goes beyond the actual words used. At the core of intonation is the variation in pitch while

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speaking, and it is commonly understood as the manipulation of pitch throughout an entire spoken expression (Nolan 2021). In the interview, a student mentioned that the people in the movie she usually watched, people have distinctive intonation.

The lack of experience in a particular intonation can be argued as a factor promoting difficulties in understanding the meaning of an utterance since it is regarded as important to signal salient words or syllables (Nodira 2021). Moreover, Gilakjani and Ahmadi, as cited in (Ali 2020), noted that in informal settings or spontaneous conversations, communicative signals such as pauses, gestures, increased volume, noticeable pitch changes, or variations in intonation tend to be less explicit. These subtle cues can often go unnoticed, particularly by listeners with lower proficiency.

These challenges were also exacerbated by their limited exposure to diverse English accents. Participants voiced concerns about the repetitive nature of their experience with uniform audio materials, specifically textbook listening exercises.

Conclusion

There are some factors found that promote listening difficulties perceived by the Indonesian students: accent, tempo, dialect, and intonation. It is possible that additional factors exist that were not raised during the data collection process. These may have been identified if more participants were interviewed. However, the sample size was limited due to time constraints. Then, measuring the impact of each factor in a quantitative study may also yield useful data.

From these findings, it can be seen how important it is for an EFL teacher, especially an Indonesian teacher, to introduce a wider variety of English dialects and accents to the learners. When teaching vocabulary, an EFL teacher should demonstrate the way in which words are used differently in different English-speaking countries, so Indonesian learners do not feel shocked and unable to understand particular dialects. Furthermore, English learners should be offered listening material that more accurately represents the tempo at which native speakers converse in the real world. This would allow learners to practice understanding the meaning of a conversation regardless of the speed. Finally, it is also essential to introduce the wide

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variety of intonations used by English native speakers in different regions of English-speaking countries.

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