

# STUDENTS' OBSTACLES IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN TOEFL TEST

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**Abstract** : This research focuses on analyzing the students' obstacles in listening comprehension during the TOEFL test. This present research aims (1) to find out what problems are faced by the students in listening comprehension and (2) to find the students' strategies to overcome the problems faced in listening comprehension of English Education Department students of Universitas Muria Kudus. This qualitative case study is involving 53 participants who took the TOEFL course every semester in the academic year 2021/2022. The data was accumulated by using questionnaires and interviews. The result of the research showed that bad recording of the audio system during the listening section, the pace of the speakers when they speak, losing concentration, and the distraction from the non-technical side were the major obstacles in listening comprehension encountered by the students. This research also shows the strategies proposed by the students to enhance their listening skills. Despite the difficulty, the students agreed that listening comprehension skills are one of the most important skills that they had to learn as young learners because listening skills consist of language skills that they must master it. Knowing students' obstacles to listening comprehension may help the teachers to propose and develop effective learning strategies, and also for the Lab UPT Bahasa to improve the quality of the audio system. The suggestion is made for marking the obstacles regarding how students could help themselves and all the parties could help their students to overcome the obstacles encountered by the students in listening comprehension.

**Keywords** : *Students' Obstacles, Listening Comprehension, Listening Skills*

## INTRODUCTION

Listening is one of the language skills taught at English Education Department Universitas Muria Kudus. Listening skills are a crucial aspect of communication, and are the foundation of second foreign language learning. The importance of listening skills is undeniable. People follow a conversation by receiving language inputs. As a result, listening to a foreign language is more difficult than we may believe, especially in English which has irregular pronunciation. As stated by Buck (2001) that "listening is a complex process in which the listener takes incoming data, an acoustic signal, and interprets it based on a wide variety of linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge".

Listening comprehension aims to understand the native conversation at the normal rate in a spontaneous condition (Pfister & Chastain, 1973). Without comprehending the listening skill, learners will never learn to communicate or speak effectively.

According to Goh (2000) "Listening difficulties are defined as the internal and external characteristic that might interrupt text understanding and real-life processing problems directly related to cognitive procedures that take place at various stages of listening comprehension.". Aside from these, (Saraswati, 2018) discovered five major listening difficulties: speed, a cluster of sounds difficult for segmentation, obsession with the translation, an

association of sounds with words and meanings, and idiomatic expressions. Listening is not only difficult for the teachers in the way of teaching but also for students. Listening English is a difficult skill for English Foreign Language students because it is not their mother tongue. Listening needs a high concentration to comprehend the materials such as monologue and dialogue. Most of the students encountered some problems in listening comprehension. It was influenced by various factors.

In the case of the TOEFL, Roberts (2000) and Vu & Vu (2013) claim that this exam has been widely used to evaluate the English language proficiency of foreign students looking to enroll in programs in countries like Canada and the United States that speak the language. When considering whether to accept a possible non-English speaker to those countries' institutions, TOEFL exam results are a major factor Vu & Vu, (2013). This also applies in Indonesia, where many universities demand that students take the TOEFL exam to establish their English language competency and whether they will be admitted or graduate (Ermawan et al., 2014). For most students, however, getting the desired TOEFL score becomes an obstacle

Apart from those difficulties, there are some strategies proposed by some experts that can be applied to overcome the problems. According to (Graham & Oxford, 1993). listening strategies are one of the ways which makes successful in listening comprehension. Strategies will be thought of as the way in which a learner approached and manages a task, and listeners can be taught effective ways of approaching and managing their listening. Considering the difficulties faced by students and to promote students' English language proficiency, appropriate strategies should be implemented. One of them is Content and Language Integrated

Learning (CLIL). (Kurniati & Romadlon, 2021)

Based on the explanation above, the researcher in this study aims to achieve the following objectives; finding out what problems are faced by the students in listening comprehension and finding the students' strategies to overcome the problems faced in listening comprehension.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research design employed in this research belongs to qualitative methods. It refers to the guidance in researching to find out the answer to the statement of the problem in the research. (Creswell, 2003) states that "qualitative research is meant for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.". In more detail, the researcher used a case study to make the researcher more focused on the exploration of phenomena that occur within individuals.

The data in this research were the students' obstacles in listening comprehension. The researcher try to explore what problems are faced by students in listening comprehension. According to Arikunto (2002), the data source is the subject from which the data can be found. The data source was the feedback of the questionnaires and interviews field by the students of English Education Department. The participants in this research were all the students of English Education Department from every semester who took Keterampilan Wajib Bahasa Inggris (KW) and have been learning TOEFL course in this semester.

In collecting the data, the researcher used questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire was distributed to know the students' difficulties. The questionnaire consisted of ten categories, including students' general self-rating to listening proficiency, students' perception to the

importance of listening skills, using different means to enhance listening skills, listening problems related to the content of the listening text, listening problems related to linguistic features, the problem caused by the failure of concentrate, learners' perceptions of listening problems related to psychological characteristics, listening problems related to listener, listening problems related to the speaker, and listening problems related to the physical setting. In this research, the researcher used the questionnaire from (Hamouda, 2013). The answer from the questionnaire was accumulated on a 4 Likert Scale (never, sometimes, often, and always).

In conducting the interview, this study used one-on-one interviews. The "meaning condensation" method is used to assess the interview outcomes. Meaning condensation is the process of condensing the meaning given by interviewees into fewer words. Long statements are condensed into shorter statements in which the primary point is re-stated in only a few words. (Kvale, 1998).

In analyzing the data from questionnaire and interview, the researcher

followed the concept stated by (Miles & Huberman, 2014) in (Sugiyono, 2013), there are some components that build up the model of analyzing the data. Those are data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. After finishing counting the data, the researcher interpreted the data based on the percentage. The analysis will help the researcher to highlight some important conclusions from this research.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data regarding listening problems faced by the students in listening comprehension in the TOEFL test were collected through a questionnaire for the students of English Education Department Universitas Muria Kudus who have joined Keterampilan Wajib (KW) Bahasa Inggris in this semester academic year 2021/2022. The total number of questionnaires is 10 questions. The questionnaire is about the obstacles in listening comprehension during the TOEFL test. The researcher uses closed-ended Likert Scale questions of four choices. There are (1) Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Often, and (4) Always. The result of the questionnaire is presented in the following table:

Table 1. The Recapitulations of Questionnaire Results

No.	Questions	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	have you ever given a general self-rating to listening proficiency?	8 (15,1%)	39 (73,6%)	5 (9,4%)	1 (1,9%)
2	have you ever had a good perception to the importance of listening skills?	1 (1,9 %)	13 (24,5%)	28 (52,8%)	11 (20,8%)
3	have you ever used different means to enhance listening skills in listening section?	3 (5,7%)	18 (34%)	14 (26,3%)	18 (34%)
4	have you ever faced problems related to the content of the listening text during the listening	7 (13,2%)	30 (56,6%)	16 (30,2%)	0 (0%)

	comprehension section?				
5	have you ever had a listening problem that related to linguistic features?	3 (5,7%)	38 (71,7%)	12 (22,6%)	0 (0%)
6	have you ever lost concentration during listening comprehension?	3 (5,7%)	26 (49,1%)	18 (34%)	6 (11,3%)
7	have you ever had perceptions through listening problems that related to psychological characteristics?	12 (22,6%)	27 (50,9%)	11 (20,8%)	3 (5,7%)
8	have you ever had a listening problem that is related to the listener?	18 (34%)	19 (35,8%)	10 (18,9%)	6 (11,3%)
9	have you ever had listening problem that related to the speaker?	7 (13,2%)	23 (43,4%)	11 (20,8%)	12 (22,6%)
10	have you ever had a listening problem that related to a physical setting?	3 (5,7%)	20 (37,7%)	16 (30,2%)	14 (26,4%)
Results		65	253	141	71
Percentage		12,3%	47,7%	26,6%	13,4%

Data from the table showed the analysis of the questionnaire regarding the problem faced by the students in listening comprehension. From the data, the researcher focuses on finding the obstacles faced by the students. The obstacles that were mostly found in listening comprehension TOEFL test were questions number 10, which was about listening problems related to the physical setting with a percentage of 26,4% from 14 out of 53 students who answer always, and then followed by questions number 9 with a percentage of 22,6%, questions number 6 and 8 with the same percentage of 11,3%.

The researcher also used interviews and distributed the questions to amplify the questionnaire and explore the students' obstacles and students' strategies in-depth. The researcher used 3 questions in this interview. The question is (1) what

problems do you face when you are doing the listening comprehension section in Keterampilan Wajib (KW) Bahasa Inggris TOEFL course? (2) what strategies do you find to enhance your listening comprehension skill? and (3) what is your perception about listening comprehension?. There are 5 participants from English Education Department students who have joined Keterampilan Wajib (KW) Bahasa Inggris in this semester for doing this interview. The researcher also put the problems, strategies, and perceptions in the questions interview about Students' obstacles in listening comprehension TOEFL test. Almost all students have the same point of view when they are answering the questions in interviews.

Table 2. result of interviews of Students' obstacles in listening comprehension TOEFL test.

Questions	Results
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<p>1. What problems do you face when you are doing the listening comprehension section in <i>Keterampilan Wajib (KW) Bahasa Inggris</i> TOEFL course?</p>	<p>Almost all the students had a problem with the audio system that is not good so they could not hear the word clearly, and also the problems with the speaker that speaks so fast. There are also minor problems faced by the students like losing concentration sometimes and also the distraction from the non-technical side.</p>
<p>2. What strategies do you find to enhance your listening comprehension skill?</p>	<p>All the students agreed that listening to music, watching movies with subtitles, and also watching videos on youtube from native speakers could improve their listening skills. There are also other strategies proposed by the students like making preparation before the test, and also taking the TOEFL test from google or another website could also improve their awareness towards listening skills.</p>
<p>3. What is your perception about listening comprehension?</p>	<p>Despite the difficulty and the problems they face during the listening comprehension section, the students agreed that listening comprehension skills are one of the most important skills that we had to learn as young learners because listening skills consist of language skills that we must master it, especially when we want to go abroad.</p>

According to the data from the interview, almost all the students had a problem with the audio system that is not good so they could not hear the word clearly, and also problems with the speaker that speaks so fast. There are also minor problems faced by the students like losing concentration sometimes and also being distracted from the non-technical side. Otherwise, the students proposed their strategies and their perception about listening comprehension skills. Despite the difficulty and the problems they face during the listening comprehension section, the students agreed that listening comprehension skills are one of the most important skills that they had to learn as young learners because listening skills consist of language skills that they must master it.

Based on the analysis, the researcher discusses about the obstacles that were mostly found in listening comprehension TOEFL test were questions number 10 with a percentage of 26,4% from 14 out of 53 students who answer always, it was

about listening problems related to the physical setting. It can be said that most of the students faced the difficulties in listening comprehension due to the bad recording and problems with the audio system that is not good so they could not hear the word clearly. Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can also be interfered by the listeners' comprehension. The other problems that were found by the researcher were questions number 9 with a percentage of 22,6% from 12 out of 53 students who answer always, it was about listening problems related to the speaker. It can be said that the students also found the problem with the speaker due to the pace or speed when the speaker speaks may be too fast for the students, especially when the speaker was usually a native speaker who might have a different accent. The result of this research supports the previous research conducted by (Sa'diyah 2016) that is the result of the research showed that accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary,

different accents of speakers, lack of concentration, anxiety, and bad quality of recording were the major listening comprehension problems encountered by EFL students. Related to the previous research the students could enhance their listening skills by listening to the radio (English) and watching British or English Channel TV, or other activities.

Based on the interview, students found several problems during the listening comprehension in TOEFL test. Almost all the students had a problem with the audio system that is not good so they could not hear the word clearly, and also the problems with the speaker that speaks so fast. There are also minor problems faced by the students like losing concentration sometimes and also distracted from the non-technical side. Besides, the students proposed their strategies and their perception about listening comprehension skills. Despite the difficulty and the obstacles they face during the listening comprehension section, the students agreed that listening comprehension skills are one of the most important skills that they had to learn as young learners because listening skills consist of language skills that they must master it. Also all the students agreed that listening to music, watching movies with subtitles, and also watching videos on youtube from native speakers could improve their listening skills. There are also other strategies proposed by the students like making preparation before the test, and also taking the TOEFL test from google or another website could also improve their awareness towards listening skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the findings and discussions, the obstacles that were mostly found in listening comprehension TOEFL was about listening problems related to the physical setting, and also listening problems related to the speaker. It can be said that that most of the students faced the

difficulties in listening comprehension were due to the bad recording, or the poor quality of the audio system and also found the problem with the speaker due to the pace or speed when the speaker speaks may be too fast for the students, especially when the speaker was usually a native speaker who might have a different accent. Based on analysis, the researcher concludes that the audio system in Lab UPT Bahasa Universitas Muria Kudus needs to be fixed or to be upgraded in a better version since most of the students face the problem with the audio system. And also students to need to watch more videos on youtube from the native speakers to enhance their listening skills.

Reflecting on the students' strategies to overcome the obstacles, the students agreed that listening to music, watching movies with subtitles, and also watching videos on youtube from native speakers could improve their listening skills. It is related to the question from questionnaire, which is using different means to enhance the listening skills. There are also other strategies proposed by the students like preparing for the test, and also taking the TOEFL test from google or another website could also improve their awareness towards listening skills, which means that despite the difficulty and the problems they face during the listening comprehension section, the students agreed that listening comprehension skills are one of the most important skills that they had to learn as young learners because listening skills consist of language skills that need to be master.

From the statements above, the researcher concludes that listening skills is one of the important skill for the students to learn, and also important to improve their awareness of the listening comprehension skill if they want to master the English language as young learner. Besides, this research shows that the most frequent strategy used by the students is

the compensation strategy, by finding the strategies to overcome the obstacles during the listening comprehension.

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