

## **Investigating Listening Difficulties encountered by first year Non- English specialization students at Meiktila University**

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### ***Abstract***

Nowadays, listening is one of the most important skills in EFL and ESL classrooms. Listening is the respective skill and it helps learners improve their speaking skill. Language learners face a lot of difficulties in listening. This study aims to investigate the listening difficulties encountered by first year non -English specialization students at Meiktila University. To achieve the aim of the study, the data collection instrument, the questionnaire based on KAZOUZ Ismail (2014-2015) research, was developed. This questionnaire was distributed to a sample of first year students specializing in Chemistry. Most of the participants responded that seven perceptions such as listening materials, linguistics aspect, lack of concentration, speaker, listener, psychological category and physical setting are common barriers to improve their listening.

**Key words:** EFL (English as a foreign language), ESL (English as a Second Language), listening, listening difficulties, listening strategies.

### **Introduction**

Listening skill plays an effective role in learning English as a second language. Students' main factor of speaking is charging with listening as much as possible. Hamouda(2013) stated that listening is essential not only as respective skill but also for the development of spoken language proficiency.

#### **Aim of the study**

The aim of this research is to investigate listening difficulties encountered by first year non- English specialization students from Meiktila University.

#### **Research Question**

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

- (i) What are the first year non-English specialization students' perceptions to English listening skill?
- (ii) What kind of difficulties do they encounter while they are listening English?

#### **Definitions of Listening**

Rost (2002) defined listening as a complex process of interpretation in which listeners match what they hear with what they already know.

#### **Definition of Listening Comprehension**

According to Rost(2002) and Hamouda(2013), listening Comprehension is defined as an interactive process in which listeners are involved in constructing meaning. Listeners comprehend the oral input through sound discrimination, previous knowledge, grammatical structures, stress and intonation, and the other linguistic or non-linguistic clues.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

A descriptive research design is used in this

research to collect data so that we can get the answers for the research questions that guided this research.

#### **Participants**

In this study, a sample of fifty students specializing in Chemistry is selected to serve as participants. The participants are chosen randomly so that all the students have an equal chance to be chosen.

#### **Instrumentation**

In the research, the questionnaire is based on KAZOUZ Ismail (2014-2015) research which is about the factors that are barriers of listening comprehension. The questionnaire consists of two sections. In section one, students' perceptions to the importance of the listening skill are stated and in section two, the listening problems which students encounter in terms of seven perceptions; listening materials, linguistics aspect, lack of concentration, speaker, listener, psychological category and physical setting are described.

#### **Validity and Reliability**

As the random sampling strategy is used in this research, it is sure that the sample represents the population as whole. This can increase the validity of the present research.

#### **Data Collection Procedure**

The data were collected at the end of the second semester of the academic year (2018). The students were asked to answer the questionnaires in English during 50 minutes without any preparation. Through this questionnaire, the data about the students' perceptions to English listening skill and their difficulties in listening English were collected.

**Data Interpretation**

**Table 1: Students' perception to the importance of the English Listening skill**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
1	I am more aware of perceived importance of English listening skills.	0%	80%	18%	2%
2	I find that listening comprehension is difficult.	0%	40%	48%	12%
3	I find that listening comprehension is boring and not interesting.	30%	60%	8%	2%
4	I find that listening comprehension is exciting	10%	20%	36%	34%
5	I received sufficient training in English listening comprehension during your school	42%	48%	6%	4%
6	I never heard about listening strategy.	2%	28%	6%	64%

According to Table 1, 80% of the students were aware of the importance of listening skill. At that time only 2% of students were aware that the role of listening is important. 48% of the students found that listening comprehension is difficult. At that time, there was no one who never found the difficulty. 60% of the students felt bored at their listening time. At the same time, 36% of the students felt that listening comprehension is exciting .42% of the students didn't receive sufficient training in listening and 46% of the students said that they sometimes got sufficient training. 64% of the students never heard about listening strategies.

**Table 2: Listening problems related to the content of the listening text**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
7	I find it difficult to understand listening texts in which there are too many unfamiliar words.	2%	18%	32%	44%
8	Complex grammatical structures interfered with my listening comprehension.	0%	24%	38%	38%
9	I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long spoken text.	0%	30%	24%	46%
10	I use my experience and background knowledge of the topic to understand the spoken text.	6%	76%	16%	2%

According to Table 2, 44% of the students responded that it is difficult to understand listening texts as there are too many unfamiliar words. Only 2% of the students never found difficulties because of unfamiliar vocabulary. 38% of the students responded that difficult grammatical structures always interfered with their listening comprehension. The majority of the students, 46% of the students, stated that they were not comfortable when they were listening long spoken text. So, it is found that they were difficult to interpret the long spoken text. Most of the students, (76%) stated that they sometimes use their experiences and background knowledge of the topic to understand the spoken text.

**Table 3: Listening problems related to the linguistics features**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
11	I find the pronunciation familiar but can't recognize the words.	0%	54%	38%	10%
12	I do not often pay attention to the intonation of the speaker.	0%	34%	50%	16%
13	I find it difficult to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another.	2%	44%	30%	20%
14	I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening	2%	68%	24%	6%
15	When encountering an unknown word, stop listening and think about the meaning of the word.	14%	46%	30%	10%

As shown in Table 3, 54% of the students sometimes relate their comprehension to intonation pattern and 38% of the students often do that. 50% of the participants couldn't often pay attention to the intonation of the speaker. There was no one who could pay attention to the intonation of the speaker. 44% of the students were difficult to recognize the signals

which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another. Only 2% of the students could overcome this kind of problem. 68% of the students couldn't infer the meaning of the unknown words while they were listening. Only 2% of the students couldn't find such kind of difficulty. 46% of the participants stated that they sometimes stopped listening and thought about the meaning of the word when they encountered unknown words.

**Table 4: Problems caused by the failure to concentrate**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
16	I lose focus of the talk when I have got an expected answer in my mind.	12%	48%	18%	12%
17	I lose my concentration if the recording is in poor quality.	0%	12%	18%	70%
18	I lose my concentration when I think about the meaning of new words.	0%	22%	54%	34%

According to Table 4, 12% of the students stated that they often lose focus of the talk when they have got an expected answer in mind. 48% of the participants sometimes felt similarly. There were only 12% of the students who did not lose the focus of the talk when they got the answer. Most of the student, 70% of the students lost concentration when the recording was in poor quality. There was no one who did not lose concentration because of poor quality recording. 54% of the participants stated that they always lost concentration when they think about the meaning of the new words. 34% of the participant claimed that they always encountered such kind of problem.

**Table 5: Listening problems related to psychological characteristics**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
19	I find it is difficult to understand the spoken text which is not of interest to me.	0%	22%	28%	50%
20	If I don't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text, I feel disappointed.	2%	32%	34%	32%

According to Table 5, 50% of the participants found that it was difficult to understand the spoken text which was not interesting. 28% of the participants often encountered the same difficulty. No one could overcome this difficulty. 32% of the participants felt disappointed if they couldn't arrive at a total comprehension of an oral text. 34% of them often had the same feeling.

**Table 6: Listening problems related to Listeners**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
21	I find it difficult to get a general understanding of the spoken text from the first listening.	2%	18%	36%	44%
22	At the time of listening, I found it difficult to predict what would come next.	0%	24%	4%	72%
23		2%	2%	36%	60%

24	I find it difficult to quickly remember words and phrases I have just heard.	2%	24%	26%	28%
25	I found it difficult to recognize the words I know because of the way they are pronounced.	4%	20%	38%	38%

As shown in Table 6, 44% of the participants found that it is difficult to understand the spoken text from the first listening. 36% often found this problem too. Only 2% never found this problem. Most of the students, 72% of the students, stated that it is difficult to predict what will come next. Most of the participants, 60% of the participants, found that it is difficult to quickly remember words and phrases they have just heard. Rarely 2% of the participants did not find such kind of difficulty. 28% of the students described that they are difficult when they are listening to English without transcript. 26% of the participants found this difficulty. As the way the words are pronounced, 38% of the participants noticed the difficulty in recognizing the words they had already known. Merely 4% of the participants did not find such difficulty.

**Table 7: Listening problems related to speaker**

Items	Statement	Never	Sometimes	Often	Always
26	I find it difficult to understand the natural speech which is full of hesitations and pauses.	6%	26%	28%	40%

27	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of the words which are not pronounced clearly.	0%	20%	50%	30%
28	I find it difficult to understand well when speakers speak too fast.	0%	8%	10%	82%
29	I find it difficult to understand well when the speakers speak with variety of accent.	0%	8%	28%	68%

According to Table 7, 40% of the participants couldn't always understand the natural speech which is full of hesitations and pauses. 28% of them often encountered this problem. Only 6% of the participants never encountered such kind of problem. Half of the students couldn't often understand the meaning of the words which are not pronounced clearly. There was anyone who did not face such difficulty. It was also found that 82% of the students always faced with the difficulty in understanding well when the speaker speaks too fast. There was no one who could overcome such kind of difficulty. Moreover, 68% out of the whole member always found difficulty in understanding well when the speaker speaks with variety of accent. No one could overcome this problem.

### Findings and Discussion

When the students were asked about their attitude towards the importance of English listening skill, it is found that most of the students are sometimes aware of the importance of English listening skill. A few

students were always aware that problem. Many students stated that listening skill is difficult and they sometimes felt it is boring and uninteresting. It can be assumed that they find difficulties in listening comprehension because they feel bored and uninterested at their listening time. 42% of the participants did not receive sufficient training in English listening comprehension during their school and 48% sometimes receive such training. Most of the participants never heard about listening strategy. This is because of the reason that listening is not an important part of many course books and it is not focus in the classroom and in the exam.

One of the difficulties of many students is that there are many unfamiliar words such as jargon and idioms in listening text. Grammatical structures also cause many barriers to the students. To overcome such kind of difficulty, new vocabulary and grammatical structures which will be found in the listening text should be introduced to them before listening to the text. The other problem of listening comprehension is that many students couldn't interpret the meaning of long spoken text. As the listeners pay more attention to get the meaning of the text, they miss the rest of the text. Most of the students can't always use their own experiences and background knowledge of the topic. So, the background knowledge is an important barrier for the students to improve in listening comprehension.

More than half of the students couldn't recognize the words although the pronunciation is familiar. Moreover, half of the participants do not often pay attention to the intonation of the speaker. It is also found that stress; rhythm and annotation play vital roles in listening comprehension. Some of the students can't organize signal words. Signal words help the listener to guess what will come next. Half of the students sometimes find difficulty to infer meaning and they stop listening and think about the meaning of the words. This interrupts their listening process.

Most students stated that the bad recording quality was one of their problems in listening comprehension. As a result, poor-quality tapes or disks effect on listening comprehension. More than half of the students often lose their concentration when they can't hear each and every word clearly. Moreover, half of the participants couldn't understand the uninteresting spoken text. To improve their listening comprehension, teachers should motivate their students to pay more attention on the listening text and good quality recording materials should be used in the class.

The learners stated that some of them couldn't always understand in their first listening. Most of them have difficulties to remember words and phrases. It is also found that it is difficult to recognize the words because of the way they are pronounced. Learners need to know the correct pronunciation. Some of the students' difficulties are because of full of hesitations and pauses. Pronunciation greatly affects in listening comprehension. Unclear pronunciation of the speakers is also considered as a source of listening problem.

Almost all the student noticed that speakers' speed must be considered as an obstacle in listening comprehension. As they do not have much exposure in various accents, Different accents become difficulties to students in listening comprehension.

### **Limitation and Suggestions**

The present research collects data only through questionnaires because the researcher did not have enough time to interview with the sample. Therefore, further studies should organize interviews to support discussion. The present research only emphasize on listening skill, the next research should focus on the other three skills, reading, writing and speaking. This research only investigates about listening difficulties of the students and the other researcher should learn the effective listening strategies to overcome their difficulties.

### **Conclusion**

The aim of this research is to investigate listening difficulties encountered by first year non- English specializing students. This research based on the research question "What kind of difficulties do first year non-English specialization students from Meiktila University encounter while they are listening to English?" The questionnaire used in this research referred to KAZOUZ Ismail (2014-2015) research. In this study, it is found that only few students aware of the importance of listening skills because listening is not focus in the classroom and in the exam. This study stated that students have negative view on listening because they stated that listening is difficult and boring. They also pointed out that they did not receive sufficient training and they never heard about listening strategies. They said that their listening problems also related to the content of the listening text. Their limited vocabulary and weakness in grammar make them difficult in listening. They can't always use their background knowledge while they were listening. Listening problems related to the linguistics features are also their barriers in listening. Most of them can't pay attention to the stress and intonation of the speaker. The bad recording quality was one of their problems in listening comprehension. To improve their listening skill in English, students should know what their difficulties are and they should try to overcome these difficulties. It is sure that this research will help not only the teachers but also the students to know the barriers in listening skill in EFL classrooms.

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