Improving Listening Toefl Score Viewed from Students' Listening Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This research describes the students' learning strategies used for improving the listening TOEFL score. The goals of this research are to find out the students' difficulties in answering listening section of TOEFL and to discover students' listening strategies to improve their score in listening section. The research is held in TOEFL preparation class of English Language Education Department, University of Nusantara PGRI Kediri. This research used descriptive qualitative, and the data collected using questionnaire. The participants are 30 students of semester 8. This research found that the difficulties of answering listening section in TOEFL are speed, accent, unfamiliar words and word phrases, quality of audio and cultural knowledge. The learning strategies used by students in improving listening score are compensation strategy, cognitive strategy, and metacognitive strategy. Compensation strategy is used more than cognitive and metacognitive strategy. All of participants use compensation strategy and can help them in answering listening TOEFL questions.

Keywords: learning strategies, listening, toefl

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mendeskripsikan strategi pembelajaran siswa yang digunakan untuk meningkatkan skor listening TOEFL. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesulitan siswa dalam menjawab bagian listening TOEFL dan untuk menemukan strategi listening siswa untuk meningkatkan skor mereka di bagian listening. Penelitian ini dilaksanakan di kelas persiapan TOEFL Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri. Penelitian ini menggunakan deskriptif kualitatif, dan data dikumpulkan dengan menggunakan kuesioner. Partisipannya adalah 30 mahasiswa semester 8. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa kesulitan menjawab bagian listening di TOEFL adalah kecepatan, aksen, kata dan frase kata yang tidak familiar, kualitas audio dan pengetahuan budaya. Strategi pembelajaran yang digunakan siswa dalam meningkatkan skor menyimak adalah strategi kompensasi, strategi kognitif, dan strategi metakognitif. Strategi kompensasi digunakan lebih dari strategi kognitif dan metakognitif. Semua peserta menggunakan strategi kompensasi dan dapat membantu mereka dalam menjawab pertanyaan listening TOEFL.

Kata Kunci: streategi belajar, listening, toefl

INTRODUCTION

Listening is the first skill to have in learning language. At the same time listening is an important skill to develop in second language acquisition (Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). SLA studies have demonstrated that comprehensible input is critical for language acquisition as well as comprehensible output (Swain, 1995). Rost (2001) mentions that "a

key difference between more successful and less successful acquirers relates in large part to their ability to use listening as a means of acquisition" (p. 94).

Listening consists of auditory discrimination, aural grammar, choosing necessary information, remembering it, and connecting it to the process between sound and form of meaning (Morley, 1972 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Rost (2009) told that listening is an active mental ability.

In spite of its importance, L2 learners often regard listening as the most difficult language skill to learn (Hasan, 2000; Graham, 2003). As Vandergrift (2007) points out, one of the reasons might be that learners are not taught how to learn listening effectively. A narrow focus on the correct answer to comprehension questions that are often given in a lesson does little to help learners understand and control the process leading to comprehension. When learners listen to spoken English, they need to perceive and segment the incoming stream of speech to make sense of it. The listener cannot refer to the text in contrast to a reader who usually could refer back to clarify understanding. Moreover, as Stahr (2009) asserts, "spoken language is characterized by assimilation as well as unclear articulation, and lexical units are not necessarily as clearly marked as in written text; this lack of clarity of spoken language makes word segmentation an extremely difficult task for Second language (L2) listeners" (p. 582). Consequently, listening can become a cause of anxiety for L2 learners (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Students should comprehend what they listen and can determine the meaning of the talk. Listening difficulties have been defined by many authors. According to Goh (1999) listening difficulties are the internal and external characteristics that might interrupt text comprehending and daily life processing problems directly related to cognitive procedures that take place at various levels of listening comprehension. She stated that internal includes Interest and purpose, Prior knowledge and experience, Physical and psychological, Knowledge of context and etc. While, external characteristics involving phonological modifications, vocabulary, speech rate, accent, accuracy of pronunciation, physical conditions etc.

Listening strategy is one the ways to comprehend and achieve the target score in listening test, without strategies is like learning without clear purposes. According to Bao and Guan (2020)Listening strategies can be classified into four main types: cognitive, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Cognitive listening strategies refer to all mental abilities and processes related to knowledge (Von Eckardt, 1995), such as applying linguistic and sociocultural knowledge to resolve the problems. Some examples of cognitive performance include inferring, predicting, interpreting, storing, and recalling information, summarizing, translating, repeating, elaborating, resourcing, grouping, note-taking, substituting, and drawing images. Cognitive strategies are important for listening comprehension

because they help learners monitor and control their mental processing, identify comprehension breakdowns, and connect world knowledge to listening content. Metacognitive strategies refer to the ability to understand one's own method for learning and assimilating information, that is, thinking about one's own mental processes in a learning context (Goh & Taib, 2006). These skills are important because they play the role of managing and supervising learners' strategy use, and for planning, monitoring, and evaluating mental processes and for managing difficulties during listening. Such manipulation functions help learners define task objectives and propose strategies for handling them. They direct learners' attention to specific aspects of language input, such as discourse markers, content phrases, and main ideas. The process of using metacognitive strategies covers the acts of planning, monitoring, and evaluating the listening text. Planning refers to how one develops the awareness of what needs to be done to accomplish a listening task. Monitoring refers to how listeners can check, verify, and correct comprehension. Evaluating is about the need to check the results of learners' listening comprehension against the internal measure of completeness and accuracy. These acts can be performed through three stages of listening, including pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening. Affective strategies are concerned with managing emotions that can be either negative or positive. Negative emotions such as anxiety might cause learners to feel upset and interfere with listening results, while positive emotions such as relaxation, enjoyment, and a cohesive sense of community can encourage concentration and peer cooperation. Social strategies, in the meanwhile, refer to learning by interaction with others, such as appealing for help and asking for confirmation. These two types of listening strategies can be grouped together into social-affective listening strategies, which are applied to procure the assistance of interlocutors to help understanding and to facilitate students to overcome negative feelings such as anxiety. This practice is also known as the cooperative listening technique which is often preferred for teaching a group of learners.

TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language that is organized by ETS (Educational Testing Service). This is English language examination that conclude listening comprehension, structure and reading comprehension. Listening comprehension in TOEFL is one of the test that include dialogue, long conversation, and talk. Therefore, listening TOEFL has a purpose for learners to achieve the target in TOEFL score.

Listening TOEFL test will take the listener between 30-35 minutes to complete the answer. The listener should listen to several-minute long recordings and then answer questions on specific information mentioned in the recording. There are types of TOEFL listening question; Detail question, inference question, function question, gist- content question, gist- purpose question, connecting-content question, and organization question. With the

completing all those listening question type, the tester will get a high score on TOEFL listening. Although many students have finished listening classes, the students' still have a difficulty and problem to achieve the target in TOEFL score. It can be seen from their low TOEFL test in listening section. This raises questions about the effectiveness of listening class on students' listening competency. The students are still confused about the strategy that they can use to correctly answer the listening TOEFL questions. Therefore, the researcher wants to find out about listening strategies used by the eighth semester students of English Department in improving listening TOEFL score.

The listening comprehension section of the TOEFL paper-based test (PBT) has a three-part structure of 50 total multiple-choice questions, designated on the exam as parts A, B, and C. All listening passages and questions are delivered by audio recording. Part A includes very brief excerpts from two-person conversations. These conversations have one line of text for each of two speakers in the conversation (a man and a woman), followed by a narrator who asks a question about the exchange. Part A covers 30 of the listening comprehension section's questions, and each question deals with a separate dialogue. The remaining 20 questions are split about equally between parts B and C. Part B features longer conversations between two speakers (approximately 10 lines of text), and students answer several questions about each conversation, provided by a narrator on the recording. On part C, students listen to lecture excerpts approximately one minute in length, and then answer questions read by the narrator. On all three parts of the PBT listening comprehension section, test-takers are given 10- 12 seconds per question to record their answer choices on a provided answer sheet.

All the questions on the PBT listening comprehension section are multiple choice with four answer options and a single correct answer. Part A questions generally ask about the meaning of statements by the speakers or the actions that will be taken by the speakers according to the information given. Questions for parts B and C cover issues discussed as well as information in the lectures or conversations. The text of all questions is straightforward, such as "what does the woman mean?" "What does the man imply?" "what is the main purpose of the talk?," "based on the lecture, what is x?," or "why does the lecturer mention?".

METHOD

The researcher uses the descriptive qualitative to give a complete description and explanation in this research. Creswell (2008) stated "descriptive qualitative study aims at investigating detailed rendering of people, places, or events in a setting in qualitative approach" (p.254). For this research, it is aimed to get information and perception about students' listening strategies in listening TOEFL.

The population of this research is the 8th semester students of English Language Department in Nusantara PGRI Kediri. The participant of this study are 5 students who have taken the TOEFL test and get score 500 or more than 500. The main objective of this study is to know students' listening strategies in improving listening TOEFL score. Thus, it is important for the researcher to acquire the result and understand the listening strategies to listening TOEFL score.

The researcher uses interview to collect the data about listening strategies used by students and used to explore the detail information, perception, and experience of students' listening strategies in listening TOEFL test. According to Creswell (2012) "an interview is typically a face to face conversation between a researcher and a participant involving a transfer of information to the interviewer" (p.204).

The researcher uses voice recorder to be recorded and transcribed the conversation. In the transcribed interview, numbers were given to each participant. The data gained from the interview then the data was organized according to the questions so that it would be easy to be analysed. The data analysis was explained descriptively to answer the research questions.

Analysing the data gained from the interview, the author uses thematic analysis to analyse the data. According to Alhojailan & Ibrahim (2012) "Thematic analysis is a type of qualitative analysis. It is used to analyse classifications and patterns that relate to the data" (p.40). the researcher categorized, put it in order, manipulated and summarized the data gotten.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

There were 5 students who get the score 500 or more. The researcher gave codes for the students with S1 (student 1), S2 (Student 2), S3 (Student 3), S4 (student 4) and S5 (Student 5). The researcher divided into two points to answer the research questions.

Students' difficulties in answering TOEFL listening questions.

The Speed Of The Speakers' Talks

All of students have difficulties in catching up the vocabulary and the meaning because they think the speakers speak too fast.

> *"it is very difficult for us to understand and to catch even the key words in listening section."*

The Length Of The Dialogue.

Most of the students say that the length of the dialogue in part B and Lecturing in part C are too long. It s very difficult for them to understand the main idea, to get detail information and to infer the meaning of idioms.

S2 says: "the speakers speak too long in part B the dialogue consists of too much information and I can not remember most of the information given."

S3 and S4 explained that the dialogue in part B and part C are too long, in part C the lecture is too long and forget what the talk about.

The Room Situation.

Two of students mentioned that the difficulties because of the distractions come from their classmates.

S5 says*:" sometimes I have got the distraction from others such cough, the noise when they move the chair and open the test items.*

S1 supported the answer by saying*" a little noise makes me losing concentration".*

The Physical Condition.

One student said that the problem he had during the TOEFL test is he had stomach ache and needed to go to the bathroom.

S3 mentioned about the difficulties during the TOEFL test that he had a stomach ache and needed to go to the bathroom badly.

The Quality of The Audio.

Among 5 students only 1 of them mentioned that the quality of the audio is bad. The background of the recording is too noisy so that is difficult for him to understand the listening.

S3 mentioned that the quality of the audio disturbed him to understand the listening in part B. " it is too noisy the background".

Cultural Differences.

In cultural differences, from five students, three who give opinion that the cultural differences create a problem in answering the right one of the listening question in TOEFL test.

S4 explains that: "….*they use like they say no kidding, no kidding its doesn't mean like there is no joke or something else, but no kidding means that person is agree about what the statement she said before.*

S2 says "when the talk about seasons it's difficult for me to understand the context about it, what is it like, when is the winter start and what is before winter and so on."

S5 mentions" when they talk about food when they say dessert means sweet, we as Javanese is very difficult to understand about dessert is always sweet.

The students' listening strategies used in improving Listening TOEFL score.

There were three main points of listening strategies used by students in improving listening TOEFL score, they were: compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, and metacognitive strategies.

Compensation Strategies

The students stated various answers in the interview about strategies in improving listening TOEFL score. All participants applied compensation strategy. From 5 participants in this research, 4 of them said this strategy can help them in improving listening TOEFL score. Based on Oxford Strategy Classification system, the strategy set in compensation strategy is guessing intelligently and the specific strategy includes using other clue and linguistics clue. Most of them in this research use the clue to answer listening TOEFL test. S1 said that:

> "*Most the time I used clues in answering listening in TOEFL, I focused and the second speaker and some key words*"

S3 added *"I often practised on understanding question and focus on the second speaker*

> *Since the questions are often taken from the second speaker*"

Based on the responses above, it can be concluded that compensation strategy was one of strategies used by students in answering listening TOEFL. Based on the theory from Oxford Strategy Classification System as cited in Huy (2015, p.25) "compensation strategies could help learners make up for missing knowledge when they do not hear something clearly.

Cognitive Strategy

Most of students used cognitive strategy in dealing with improving Listening score in TOEFL. Three out ten stated that this strategy helps them in improving their listening score in TOEFL. They used note taking and grasp idea in listening. S4 stated "sometimes *I used to get the idea and used the idea to understand what the speaker are talking about*"

S2 stated that taking note help a lot in listening because by taking note she recognised the words used in listening.

Based the description above, it can be concluded that the students used cognitive strategy because it helped them to answer listening TOEFL. As stated by Huy (2015, p.25) "cognitive strategies were used to help learners to obtain knowledge, understand of linguistics system, for example, learners could understand the meaning of words from context".

Metacognitive Strategy

In interview, only two participants used metacognitive strategies in answering listening TOEFL. Metacognitive strategies have some specific strategies; one of them is paying attention. Paying attention helps the listeners focus their attention on listening test, material, and activity. two participants in this research used paying attention in answering listening TOEFL. S5 said that paying attention to the listening NOT to the optional is essential in answering listening in TOEFL, because the audio is played once.

> S1 said *"paying attention to the idea and the second the speaker, helps him to answer in listening TOEFL"*

From the statement above, it can be concluded that two participants used metacognitive strategy and it can improve their listening TOEFL score. Based on the theory Huy (2015, p.26) "metacognitive strategy could offer the listeners a holistic view of the ongoing listening process to avoid making their mistakes". However, the listening audio in TOEFL test was only played once, thus, the students should really focus on the voice from the tape.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this point the researcher would like to conclude that the students' difficulties in answering listening TOEFL PBT are length & speed of listening, physical condition, the quality of recorder, and cultural differences. Most of the participants mention that length and speed of listening is the most difficult cause in answering listening TOEFL questions. Almost half of participants state that the accent is also one of the problems in answering listening TOEFL questions. Few students also mention that physical condition, the quality of recorder, and cultural differences also became the source of problem in answering listening TOEFL questions.

The listening strategies used by students in improving listening TOEFL score have several points; there were, compensation strategies, cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies. All of the participants response that the compensation strategies can help them and improve the listening

TOEFL score, especially using the clue as the specific strategies in compensation strategies. More than half of the participants use cognitive strategies in assisting them in answering listening TOEFL questions and improve their listening TOEFL score. Less than half the participants give perception and opinion that they use metacognitive strategies in improving listening TOEFL score.

Based on the findings above the researcher suggest that the student should those listening strategies to improve their skills in listening and practice more on listening the native speakers. For the lecturers should introduce the topics of listening that relate to TOEFL preparation and other standardized test.

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