

EXPLORING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN LISTENING CLASSES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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Abstract: English is studied as a foreign language in Indonesia, making it challenging for learners to master the language, particularly in listening skills. This research aimed to explore the experiences of students in learning listening through Narrative Inquiry. This research investigated how are barriers of students in listening and strategies they employ to overcome them. The research was focused on the experience of two students in a listening class at the second semester of English Education Department of Islamic State University. In collecting the data, semi structured interview was used in this research. There were 20 questions of interview. The interview took around 20 minutes. After the data was collected, the writer transcribed the recording and analyzed it by using narrative analysis to narrate the stories of research subjects. Then the result of data was arranged based on interrelated themes through thematic analysis. The result of this research showed that it was found that two subjects of this research have different barriers in learning listening and they have same strategies to overcome the barriers. The findings suggest that while individual challenges in listening comprehension may vary, similar strategies can be effective in addressing these challenges across different learners. For further research, More diverse sample was recommended to gain a broader perspective on students' experiences in learning listening.

Keywords: *Listening Barriers, Listening Strategies, Narrative Inquiry, and Students' Experiences*

A. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is learned as a foreign language, and students must master four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learning English can be challenging due to the significant differences between English and Indonesian. Among the four skills, listening is particularly difficult, as it requires understanding spoken information by applying knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and content.

Purdy (1997) defines listening as a process where the listener receives, interprets, and responds to the speaker's verbal and non-verbal messages. Since listening is key to communication, students need to invest time in practicing it. Without focus, students may miss crucial information, which affects their comprehension. Factors like limited concentration, interaction difficulties, and feedback issues further hinder the development of strong listening skills. External issues like limited time and internal problems such as lack of vocabulary and focus contribute to these difficulties (Aldina, 2020).

EFL learners face additional challenges such as accent, speech rate, poor audio quality, and unfamiliar vocabulary (Nuridin, 2023). According to Gilakjani, difficulties in understanding English sounds, word stress, or pronunciation are common, especially when recordings are too fast for students to grasp the meaning (Gilakjani, 2016).

Additionally, there is also a shared experience of learning listening during college. Throughout the first three semesters, many students faced significant challenges in their listening classes. Prior to this, in Senior High School, listening practice often took place in a language laboratory, with a focus on listening to songs. However, with the shift to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the learning environment changed drastically. Students had to adapt to learning from home, and many encountered difficulties, such as unclear audio files sent through platforms like WhatsApp. These challenges were compounded by the speed of pronunciation in the audio, particularly when the speaker used a British accent, which was harder to understand. After two years of online learning, classes eventually returned to normal. In relation to this research, two participants also shared their experiences in learning listening, providing valuable insights into whether their challenges mirrored those faced by others in similar situations.

In relation to this research, there are several researches that has been done by previous researchers such as students' difficulties in listening and also listening anxiety by using descriptive qualitative (Diora, 2020., Atmowardoyo, 2022., Masduki, 2023). But little has conducted listening difficulties and strategies by using a narrative inquiry approach. So, the researchers was interested to conduct this research to explore students' experience in listening which focuses on students' barriers and strategies to overcome barriers in listening.

This research explores students' experiences with barriers and strategies in learning listening. Narrative inquiry is chosen as the method to capture and describe

students' experiences, focusing on how they feel and the strategies they use while learning. Narrative inquiry is effective for understanding personal experiences. Thus, this study aims to investigate students' experiences in listening classes, particularly focusing on the challenges they face and the strategies they apply.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative design is used in this research by using narrative inquiry design to analyze the students' experiences in learning listening. The qualitative research method is a research method based on philosophy of postpositivism that used for research natural condition of the object (Murdiyanto, 2020., Salim, 2012).

The research subject of this research is 2 students from the total population at the second semester of English language study program who have enrolled listening classes in Islamic State University. The reason why this research only take 2 students from class extensive listening is because they have the potential to provide deep insight into students' experiences of learning listening.

This research uses purposive sampling to select participants who meet specific criteria. In this case, participants must have experience in listening to contribute effectively to the study. The sampling process involved asking students with good listening skills to participate.

Data collection was conducted through narrative framework, which involves respondents filling in a story template based on their personal experiences (Barkhuizen, 2014) and semi-structured interviews with 20 questions (Holloway, I & Wheeler, S, 1996). Two students from the English Education program shared their experiences and strategies in learning listening. Each interview lasted about 20 minutes, recorded digitally, with notes taken as well. Participants were allowed to use either Indonesian or English for better comfort and detail.

For data analysis, thematic analysis was used. Interview recordings were carefully transcribed, and thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and subthemes. Thematic analysis is one way to analyze data with the aim of identify patterns or to find themes through data that has been collected by researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Participants collaborated throughout the analysis process, providing feedback on the transcriptions and final report to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of the data.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There were two subjects interviewed by the researchers in which from the second semester of extensive listening class. These samples were met in different places to be interviewed. Each of them was met in their house. This research employed an interview as the instrument. This interview aimed to find the students' barriers and strategies in learning listening. There were 20 questions in interview sheets. Pseudonyms of interviewee is used in this research to compile the research

findings and discussions.

Santi's story: Listening is difficult

Santi (pseudonym), a student from an extensive class, is originally from Bandar Lampung and now lives in Teluk. Her experience with learning listening started in Junior High School, where she initially struggled, particularly due to exposure to the British accent, which was unfamiliar to her. This created a kind of culture shock, making it harder for her to understand the material. At the Senior High School level, Santi continued to study listening, but less frequently, and it was no longer a primary focus after grade 10. When she entered college, she encountered listening again, finding it more challenging due to complex vocabulary and varied intonation. She believes that listening becomes difficult without a strong understanding of English vocabulary. She said,

"Regarding listening, the lesson is quite difficult if, for example, we don't know how to read each vocabulary word."

Santi experienced a difference in listening classes between the first and second semesters. In the second semester's extensive listening class, she faced new challenges with a different lecturer who required students to find their own materials based on the syllabus. Santi had to be more independent in sourcing and understanding listening materials. The class was divided into groups tasked with finding videos or podcasts on specific topics, summarizing the content, and presenting it. Occasionally, students searched for materials individually, and though some chose the same content, their summaries were always unique. The summaries were then submitted via Google Sites. She said,

"We were told to look for a video or podcast and then make a summary on google sites. It is divided into groups but sometimes also individually. If in a group, the summary result will be presented in front of the class but if individually, it is likely that the video or podcast you get is the same as my friend, but that is not problem because the summary will definitely be different."

"The listening class is just right, in the second semester it's a bit different, because the lecturers are also different, and the way they teach is also different, so we have to find the material ourselves. So, we're just given the syllabus, look for the theme like that."

The barriers faced by Santi in listening

Lack of Understanding of the Pronunciation of Different Accent

Santi has been accustomed to the American accent since Junior High School, finding it familiar and easy to understand due to the clear pronunciation. However, when listening to recordings with a British accent, she struggled. She found the British accent too fast and some words sounded very different compared to the American accent, making comprehension harder. From the first sentence, Santi felt the British accent was faster, with words seeming to rush by without pause. Despite

recognizing the words, the fast pace made it difficult for her brain to process the information, unlike the slower and more deliberate American accent she was used to. She said,

"Apart from that, I don't really hear much about the British accent, so I say it a bit too fast, because if it's in a British accent, it makes it difficult for me to listen."

Difficulty in distinguishing words that sound similar

In listening class, Santi often struggles with words that sound similar. She finds it challenging to understand conversations, especially when unfamiliar with the vocabulary. The difficulty increases with the British accent, which she finds fast and hard to catch. Santi frequently feels confused by words that sound alike but have different meanings, such as "ship" and "sheep." She has to focus intensely on the context to grasp the correct meaning, but even then, it's sometimes hard for her to differentiate between them. She said,

"Apart from not being able to learn to listen using a British accent, I also sometimes don't know, are there words that have the same vocabulary? It reads the same, it's similar, right? I'm confused whether he used word A or word B."

Difficulty in the Level of Sound Clarity Quality

Santi is used to listening to audio with good sound quality, usually through headphones or clear speakers. However, during mid-term and final exams, she noticed the audio played by the lecturer seemed faster and harder to understand. The muffled and crackling sound made it difficult for her to grasp important information, especially with the British accent, which she already found challenging. For instance, the word "ship" sounded like "sip," making her doubt what she was hearing, even with familiar words. She said,

"In the first semester, during practice it was pretty clear, but during the Mid Test and Final Test it started to be like, hah? Like that, that's how fast."

Lack of English Vocabulary

When Santi encounters unfamiliar vocabulary during listening activities, she faces various challenges. Her main issue is a limited vocabulary. While she starts off focused and ready to understand, unfamiliar words break her concentration. She said,

"I feel quite comfortable if I understand the meaning of each vocabulary when listening to the audio. But when suddenly words appear that I do not recognize, I cannot fully understand the information in the conversation."

The strategies used by Santi

Watching Film

Santi also uses several strategies to overcome her difficulties in listening. One of them is watching western films in English. Even though she does not like films

which use British accent, she still tries to watch Western versions of cartoons to improve her ability to understand these accents. She said,

"As for the British accent in listening, usually I sometimes like watching films, I prefer films rather than listening. As for films, they are also Western films, but there are a lot of British accents, but I don't like that genre, so I prefer to watch Western versions of cardboard like that."

Guess the Meaning of Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Apart from that, Santi also often guesses the meaning of vocabulary based on the context of sentence. Although this guess is not always correct, but with frequent practice, she feels that her ability to guess the meaning of words based on context is increasing. Usually guess meaning of the unfamiliar vocabulary according to the context of the topic being discussed. She said,

"It's just like guessing, but well, if you guess right, that's great, thank goodness."

Find the Main Idea

When she did not understand what the native speaker saying, Santi also tried to find the main idea of the conversation. She focuses on the main topic being discussed and catches key words that are often repeated to understand the essence of the conversation. She said,

"Yes, if for example I miss the native's discussion, sometimes I look for the main idea, for example he was talking about airports, if that means I catch him, oh he's talking about airports, which means that if for example it's a question, usually just fill in something related to airports."

"By Listening to what the native is doing, talk to him a lot about things like that, if I like it, then I'll write it down"

Write Unfamiliar Vocabulary

In addition, Santi noted important points and new vocabularies that she do not know while listening to the audio. She felt that by taking notes, she could more easily remember and understand the material she had studied. She said,

"Yes, sometimes, but it's more like vocabulary in my opinion, new words, I just wrote them down. But if, for example, someone isn't caught, they won't be caught."

Make Themselves to Feel Comfortable

Even though she felt nervous when she first started learning listening, Santi found that by being in class with her friends, she felt less nervous. She feels more comfortable and focused when studying with her friends than studying alone. Santi also often listens to English songs as a way to practice her listening skills. She feels that listening to English songs can help her to improve understanding of English vocabularies. She said,

"For me, sometimes, for example, to overcome my nervousness, I want to be in

the same class with my friends, right? So, if I have friends, it reduces my nervousness."

Ask to the Lecturer to Repeat the Listening Material

Santi also often asks the lecturer to repeat the audio played in class if she finds it difficult to understand. Lecturers usually allow audio repetition and this really helps Santi to catch information that she might have missed on the first viewing. She said,

"Yes, what's that? Sometimes I ask the lecturer to repeat it."

Discuss with Friends

Santi tends to discuss with her friends after listening class. She felt that discussing the topic in audio before with friends could help her understand the material being presented. However, when asked if she had ever evaluated deficiencies in her listening skills, Santi admitted that she had never done so. She finds it difficult to know her strengths and weakness in listening. She said,

"Yes, I like discussions like that, like discussing what this is about. That's what natives were talking about."

"As for evaluating, I have never evaluated my shortcomings in listening."

"I want to, but I also don't know what my strengths are in listening, what my weaknesses are in listening"

Rani's story: Listening is important

Rani (pseudonym) is a second semester English education student. She lives in Bandar Lampung. She has been learning listening since she entered college in the first semester in Islamic State University. She had learned listening twice when she started college. When she first learned listening, she found it quite difficult. But after that, she started to be confident when learning listening. She believes that listening is important because it can help to understand everyday conversations and also improve communication skills. She said,

"In my opinion, listening is very important because it can help us understand everyday conversations and improve our ability to communicate."

The barriers faced by Rani in listening

Lack of Understanding of the Pronunciation of Different Accent

During the listening learning process, Rani often faced quite significant difficulties. The main difficulty that she faced was British accent which used by the native speaker. The British accent has a different pronunciation and intonation compared to American accent which is more common to hear and learn. She said,

"The accent is difficult too"

"For example, I've never heard those words, right? Like, for example, watcher becomes "watcha" like that, it's confusing. But after a while I found out. It's still very foreign to me."

Lack of English Vocabulary

Lack of English vocabularies also becomes a difficulty for Rani during learning listening. When listening to the audio in the class, she often finds out words that she has never heard before. These new vocabularies often make her confused, especially the context is unclear or the words are rarely used in everyday conversation. She said,

"New vocabularies can sometimes be confusing, especially if the context is unclear and rarely used."

Difficulty in the level of Sound Clarity Quality

Apart from difficulties with vocabulary and accent, poor audio quality also becomes another difficulty in listening according to Rani. When she listens to the audio with low sound quality, for example with a lot of background noise or unclear sound, the challenge in understanding the conversation becomes even greater. Sound interference like that makes it increasingly difficult for her to catch the words being spoken by the native speaker. She said,

"Yes, it's hard to hear, right? So, sometimes I just guess, keep asking friends. Find out what that means."

Lack of Understanding of Speed Pronunciation

The last difficulty faced by Rani is the speed of the pronunciation of native speaker in the audio. When she listens to conversations or audio material which delivered by the native speaker, she often feels that they are speaking too fast. This makes it difficult for her to catch every word spoken. She said,

"Usually it's difficult to pronounce it, what's it called? The speed is like everyone's speed, just a few words that I never knew."

The strategies used by Rani

Watching Films

To enrich her vocabulary and get used to various accents, Rani also watches films and listens to English songs. This activity is not only fun but also very helpful in improving her listening skill. Watching films makes her familiar with the variations in intonation while listening to songs helps in recognizing and understanding the sung lyrics quickly. She said,

"Watching English films really helps to practice listening and understanding new vocabulary, so I often watch English films too."

Take Notes While Listening

Apart from using the strategy of slowing down the audio, Rani also notes down important points and unknown vocabularies. She makes small notes that can help to remember and learn new vocabulary. She said,

"Yes, I highlight important points that I don't understand so that I remember."

Guess the Meaning of Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Rani also guessed the meaning of the vocabulary if she do not know what the meaning is. When she finds out words she do not know the meaning, she tries to guess the meaning by looking at the surrounding words and understanding the overall context of the conversation. She said,

"Once. Once, when I was guessing, I usually tried to relate it to the context of the sentence being discussed."

Find the Main Idea

Rani also tries to find out the main idea of the conversation by paying attention to keywords or phrases that are often repeated. In many cases, this helps her to understand the essence of the conversation which she is listening to. She said:

"Usually, I always look for the main idea of the conversation so that it can still be meaningful from what is being discussed."

"Because usually the main idea is always repeated in conversation, so I usually hear keywords or phrases that are repeated like that."

Make Themselves to Feel Comfortable

However, the difficulties faced by Rani did not stop there. She also often feels tense and afraid when she has to listen to conversations in English. To overcome this feeling, she tried to find a comfortable sitting position and moved closer to the audio to make it easier to listen. She said,

"Looking for a comfortable position, usually it's like looking for a comfortable seat, a comfortable sitting position."

"By looking for a comfortable sitting position, don't be too far from the speaker so you can hear what is being discussed."

Ask to the Lecturer

When taking listening class, Rani often faces difficulty when the speaker speaks too fast. This makes it difficult to follow and understand the material presented. When audio is played in the class, it is usually only played once or twice so Rani does not have much of chance to review it and fully understand it. She said,

"Yes, it's hard to understand what is being said. Because sometimes it can be repeated. And it can't be repeated, right?"

Discuss with Friends

When Rani listen to audio with low sound quality and the native speaker speaks too fast during listening in the class, the challenge in understanding the conversation becomes even greater. Sound interference like this makes it increasingly difficult for her to catch the words being spoken. Sometimes poor quality audio makes her has to focus more and try harder to capture the information conveyed. She said,

"Usually I ask friends around me. Or there are also several friends who ask the lecturer directly. So, I don't know so I know better."

Find Out the Meaning of Unfamiliar Vocabulary

Lack of English vocabularies also becomes one of Rani's difficulties in listening. Rani has some different strategies to solve the lack of English vocabularies such as try to find out the meaning of unfamiliar vocabulary by using google translate. By using google translate, she can quickly find the meaning of words that are new to her and understand the context of the conversation better. She said,

"Yes, usually I just look for it on Google Translate. "

Evaluate Deficiencies of Listening Skill

Self-evaluation is also an important part of Rani's learning process. After each listening sessions, she will reflect on the difficulties she faced and look for ways to improve herself. Discussions with her friends and repeating listening material at home are part of this effort. In this way, Rani feels more confident in facing the next listening session. She said,

"Usually after the class, as soon as the class is finished, it's like talking with my friends about the material of listening in the class."

D. DISCUSSION

This research explores students' experiences in learning listening, focusing on the challenges they face and strategies they use. The study involved two second-semester students, Santi and Rani, who both prefer American accents over British ones, finding the latter harder to understand. This aligns with Gilakjani's theory that students comprehend accents they are familiar with more easily, making British accents more challenging. Santi specifically struggled with distinguishing similar-sounding words, especially in British accents, and noted that poor audio quality during exams worsened her listening comprehension. Both students faced issues with fast pronunciation, which made it hard to keep up with conversations.

Vocabulary limitations also posed a significant barrier for Santi, who found that unfamiliar words broke her concentration, leading her to miss key information. Rani shared this difficulty, particularly with new or rarely used vocabulary, and also found poor audio quality disruptive. To address these challenges, both students used different strategies. They watched films to improve their understanding of British accents, with Santi preferring cartoons. This method allowed them to repeatedly hear and grasp the pronunciation of British accents. They also asked friends for help when audio quality was poor, using socio-affective strategies to manage technical obstacles. Overall, the study highlights the importance of socio-affective strategies like reducing anxiety, seeking social support, and maintaining a positive learning environment in overcoming listening challenges.

E. CONCLUSION

Based on the finding of research, the conclusion can be drawn as follows listening is one of the English skills that is more challenging for students. Learners try to understand the information that is given and heard. The barriers faced by the two research subjects during learning listening are similar. Both Santi and Rani faced the four barriers mentioned including lack of understanding of the pronunciation of different accent, lack of vocabularies, difficulty in sound clarity quality, and lack of understanding of speed of pronunciation. The difference is that Santi feels that words with similar sounds are also difficult for listening. Another theme that has been analyzed from the research subjects is strategy which is used to overcome the barriers. In addition, there are two types of strategies commonly used by both subjects to overcome the barriers in learning listening. They both shared that socio-affective strategies and cognitive strategies were effective strategy to overcome the barriers during learning listening.

F. SUGGESTION

Based on the conclusion above, the researchers would like to give some recommendation as follows. Firstly, the findings of this research recommend that students should try various strategies to overcome the barriers in listening. Secondly, the findings of this research imply that teaching strategies and materials should be designed taking these barriers into account. For example, introducing various accents in listening exercises can prepare students to understand a variety of pronunciations. Additionally, addressing issues related to voice clarity and speed pronunciation can help students improve their listening skills more effectively. Second, the result of this study cannot be generalized to all students because the sample consisted of specific individual from the same university. These limitations highlight the need for caution when applying these findings to broader context. However, the researchers recommended to other researchers to explore more diverse sample, perhaps including students from different universities to gain a broader perspective on students' experiences in learning listening.

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