
ANXIETY ON STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN MALANG

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Abstract

This study aims at knowing the level of anxiety and factors related to listening anxiety encountered by the students of EFL learners in Malang. This study employs mixed research method, involving forty-eight participants. To gather the data, questionnaires and interview on students' anxiety are used as the instrument. The results of the study revealed that the students were mostly in moderate-level of anxiety. The anxiety frequently came from students' background knowledge, such as getting worry to miss important ideas, getting nervous if not understanding every word, getting anxious because of unfamiliar words and topic, and guessing the missing information. Additionally, students' low confidence in listening process and task, difficulty to concentrate, text speed, and confusion when listening to important information were related to listeners' characteristic theme. Both contributed to students' anxiety in their listening performance. Another finding addressed factors which cause students' anxiety. It can be summarized into four categories, such as teachers' factor, students' factors, listening material and process, and another factors. Teachers' factor related to teachers' characteristic and condition. Students' factors closely related to students' performance in listening activity. Listening material included listening difficulty and material. Other factors included environmental factors and other situation which was not mentioned in above three factors.

Key words: listening anxiety, listening comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Listening has been assumed as a difficult skill. Listening comprehension, however, involves an active process that enables the listeners form meaning. The listeners may use marks from appropriate information and their prior knowledge, whereas using various strategic resources to achieve the assignment (O'Malley, Chamot, and Kupper, 1989, as cited in Ahmadi, 2016). Listening comprehension complexity can frequently cause irritation and anxiety among second or foreign language learners (Graham, 2006, as cited in Pan, 2016). Moreover, anxiety is an affective factor that widely obstructs the learning process. It is associated with negative feelings such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension and tension (Fang, 2011).

In addition, second language anxiety may strongly affect motivation and generates a negative affective response to the language being learned (Gardner et al., as cited in Tahsildar and Yusoff, 2014). Listening anxiety affects not only

listening comprehension but also listening ability. Listeners' anxiety will dissolve their focus on the listening material, the sensitivity of auditory organ and reaction will be weakened, and such factors limit the amount of comprehensible input. Anxiety refers to the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (Spielberger, 1983, as quoted in Pan, 2016). Furthermore, language anxiety is defined as a fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language.

” Anxiety is one of the vital individual differences that is defined as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Pan, 2016). Concerning the impact of anxiety on foreign language learning, two types of anxiety exist, facilitating or debilitating. Facilitating anxiety can act as a motivator of the learners while debilitating anxiety linked to language skills like listening causes learners to avoid the language learning process (Ellis, as quoted in Zhang, 2012). Learners' listening anxiety varies according to their level of ability in foreign language listening. Additionally, the reasons of listening anxiety might be attributed to the problematic nature of listening, nature of the speech, level of difficulty, lack of clarity, lack of visual support, lack of repetition, spontaneous speech, fast speech, and unfamiliar accents/topics (Vogely, 1998 as quoted in Pan, 2016).

The objective of the study is to reveal the level of anxiety encountered by university students in Malang and describe the factors causing the anxiety.

Anxiety

Anxiety may develop in every individual's life. Freud, in early the nineteenth century, was the one who initially introduced that anxiety was a kind of unpleasant feeling associated with experience, physiology, and behaviors. In the upcoming years, in the twentieth century, psychologists describe anxiety as a condition of nervousness, a fear that is only indirectly linked with an object (Scovel, 1978, quoted in Shi, 2017). Some psychologists define anxiety as the strong and continuing negative feeling triggered by uncertain and dangerous stimuli from external factors as well as the unpleasant emotive experience involved, such as expectation, frustration and distress (Wen, 1998, as quoted in Lili, 2015). In addition, language anxiety is the fear or uneasiness happening when a learner is expected to accomplish the task in the second or foreign language (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope 1986; Macintyre & Gardner, 1993, as cited

in Lili, 2015). The anxiety may closely relate to the feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and tension.

Moreover, Ellis (as quoted in Pan, 2016) states that anxiety has been categorized into three types: state anxiety, trait anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. State anxiety refers to an experience of anxiety at a specific time in a specific situation. Trait anxiety is a long-lasting tendency to feel anxious. Situation-specific anxiety only arises in a certain condition.

Factors Influencing Listening Anxiety

Vogely (as cited in Pan, 2016) points out various factors effecting to listening anxiety. The factors may arise from the teacher, students, listening materials and the process of listening, and other factors.

1. Teachers factor

During the process of learning, teachers make arrangement and supervise the process. Teachers are viewed as authority in traditional classes and the classrooms are teacher-centered. Teacher plan the class' activities, which plays an essential part of the teaching and learning process. Another factor is teacher's personality affects student's anxiety in listening process. Some too-serious teachers may give pressure in the class. in other hand, the outgoing and easygoing teachers tend to be humorous in the class, and it helps the students to relax. Teacher's attitude toward students' mistake in listening will not make the students anxious and stressed.

2. Students factor

When students participate in listening activity, their performance determines the result. The first factor relates to listeners' listening comprehension ability. Studies reveal that the lower the learners' listening comprehension level, the higher the anxiety, the corresponding test scores are higher, and vice versa. Moreover. Listening ability covers two aspects: linguistic knowledge which contains lexical, syntax, grammar knowledge—they are basic parts of a language, and listening skill, which deals with the ability to catch the key words, to predicate the following information, etc.

The second factor relates to listener's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy determines the state of emergency and individual anxiety reaction. In listening class, students who have a strong sense of self-efficacy believe in their listening ability are more quick-minded and good at catching every moment of indirect information. On the other hand, the listeners of weak self-efficacy are skeptical of their ability, when met the difficult problems. They tend to give up due to struggling to survive the pressure and anxiety, which affect the listening comprehension.

Third, listeners' learning habit. Many language learners show little interest in listening; they rarely practice listening after class, and have lack of motivation in classroom, that result in inability to enhance their listening ability and absent-mindedness. Such behavior makes the students miss important information and this leads to an anxiety.

The last, listeners' achievement motivation plays an important factor affecting students' listening anxiety. In addition, achievement motivation is people's internal motivation of making success in the process of completing the task, which encourage them to make every effort to achieve goals. A positive expectation and higher learning goals must be set to reduce students' high anxiety level.

3. Listening Material and Process

Some attentions relate to listening material and process. The first consideration relates closely to the level of difficulty and listening anxiety. In addition, the more difficult the material, the more complex the syntax; the faster the speed, the shorter the pause. Those are the examples which may cause learners' listening anxiety. Furthermore, the content, length, speed, words of listening materials will influence the effect of hearing. If the content of the listening text is irrelevant with the actual life, the problems may exist. The listeners may feel boring or useless, the topic is unfamiliar, which lead to difficulties in understand the materials and catching important information.

The second consideration, similarly, is closely related to anxiety. During the process of listening, the material cannot be repeated. This causes listeners' anxiety, the feeling if they cannot catch the meaning. Moreover, the lack of time in processing the information results in anxiety too. Listeners feel anxious if they are asked to answer question immediately and they do not have enough time to process the information.

4. Other Factors

Beside above factors, there are many other affecting factors that result in listeners' anxiety. In some places when the school is not equipped with multimedia facility, the teachers have to play the listening material in recorder or other devices, which produce poor voice quality. The disturbing sound such as echo or noise may occur. This may cause anxiety among the listeners. Physical surrounding also contributes to learners' anxiety as well. Too noisy room which leads to the lack of oxygen, or uncomfortable room may become the source of anxiety.

METHOD

In terms of research method, this study employs mixed method. Mixed method covers both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data. Forty-eight students who join Basic Listening subject in one of university in Malang were involved in this study.

Moreover, as quantitative data, closed-question questionnaires are used as the research instrument. The questionnaire is based on Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Skill (FLLAS) developed by Kim (2002). In addition, 5 scale of Likert scale is applied.

In this case, students' anxiety is classified into three different levels of anxiety: high, moderate, and low level. Participants who reply with mostly Agree or Strongly Agree to the questions are categorized into high level of anxiety. However, when the major of the participants replied Disagree or Strongly Disagree, they are classified into low level of anxiety. As for Undecided, it is assumed that participants answer a neutral answer in the questionnaire. Next, the frequency and percentage are calculated to measure the level of anxiety.

Interview is conducted to gather the data by asking questions about people's opinion, belief, and feelings about situation using their own words (Ary et.al, 2010). This research employs semi-structured interviews which enables the interviewer to modify the interview process

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Level of Anxiety Encountered by the Students

The level of anxiety was revealed through the result of questionnaires and the interviews. Table below summarized the level of students' anxiety.

Table 1. Students' level of anxiety

Level of anxiety	No/ items	Percentage
High level of anxiety	8	17%
Moderate level of anxiety	34	71%
Low level of anxiety	6	12%

The tables showed that the students who chose Agree (A) and Strongly Agree (SA) for 8 items of the FLLAS showed a high level of anxiety. In this case, more than 50% of the participants choose the answer. Otherwise, they who responded with a neutral answer for 19 items indicating moderate level of anxiety. However, a low level of anxiety was described by 5 items which were answered with

Strongly Disagree (SD) and Disagree (D). It can be concluded that the students are mostly in moderate level of anxiety.

The high-level anxiety mostly arises from students' background knowledge. Most of the participants (75%) thought that they felt worry if they missed important information (Item number 4). They also got nervous and anxious if they did not understand every word (60%, item number 5). Unfamiliar topic also contributed to students' nervousness (58%, item number 2). Moreover, new topics in listening text also made the students anxious (54%, item number 7). The last, 50% of the students thought that it was easy to guess the missing information during the listening process (item number 3). It can be concluded that background knowledge is important to support students' listening activity. Knowledge which formerly retrieved may develop students' skill in understanding the text, even if they missed some information.

Related to listener's characteristic theme, most-anxious item found in listening process was understanding the very familiar word and hard to concentrate to what is being listened (58%, item number 18). The similar number related to understanding text because of the speed (58%, item number 24). It became a problem although the text speed was in normal speed. The students felt confused when they listened to important information (50%, item number 21). Focusing their attention made the students anxious, and they knew it was important message that must be comprehended. However, 67% (item number 28) of the students felt confident if they were in the middle of audience. They had no fear of listening the text if they were not alone, or they were part of the class.

The study illustrated that the students' anxiety was mostly caused by their lack of background knowledge. In addition, new vocabulary, new information in the text, unfamiliar topic, and the speech rate contributed to the anxiety. The findings are in line with Kim's (2000) investigation which found that unfamiliar pronunciation and speech rate, and low level of self-confidence were the main attentions of foreign language listeners. Fang (2011) also presented similar results and highlighted that listening input characteristics such as nature of speech, level of difficulty, and lack of repetition are the foremost sources of listening anxiety. Additionally, Fang suggested that using suitable listening strategies such as note taking during the listening process could improve the students' comprehension ability and decrease the level of anxiety.

Factors Related to Listening Anxiety

The information related to factors causing anxiety are gathered from interview. Teacher's factor, listening materials, students' factors, and other factors are mentioned as the cause of students' anxiety.

Teachers' factor

The role of teacher as a language instructor influenced the level of anxiety according to the students. Teachers needed to calm the class if the situation turned to be tense. Humors or jokes were expected to comfort the students who were under pressure. In this case, teacher should provide learners with encouragement and comfort which can help the students to build up confidence (Atasheneh and Izadi, 2012, as cited in Serraj, 2015). Teachers also suggested to provide warming up activities to give knowledge about the material. The purpose was to lead students to the topic and generate students' prior knowledge (Vogely, as quoted in Pan, 2016).

Students' factors

Students' factor dealt with students' habit, students' self-efficacy, and students' achievement motivation. Some students told that English was not their native language and they did not accustom to use English. The lack exposure of English text hindered their motivation to learn listen to English text as their habit. The next factor is students' self-efficacy. This related to how students view themselves in learning process. It can be said that it also associated to students' low confidence. The learners tended to give up that they were new learners and accepted the fact that English is hard to learn. The last, students' achievement motivation might arise, which was activated by the surroundings. Classmates' quick work might arouse others' uneasiness. Another thing might press the students' nervousness; they thought that they would run out of time. Kimura (as quoted in Serraj, 2015) mentioned that this emotional and nerves reflected in lack of confidence and other emotional reactions like discomfort, dislike and annoyance in engaging listening tasks.

Listening material

Listening material dealt with speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, accent, pronunciation, and the lack of repetition. Majority of the participants complained the speed of text. They believe that they become less anxious if the text is presented in lower speed. It is in line with a study conducted by Vogely (as cited in Serraj, 2015) mentioning that almost one-third of the participants reported that the nature of speech as a source of anxiety. The anxiety come up even if the text is played in normal speed, but the learners thought that the text seems to be fast. With the pace, they still are not able to catch the words that come to their ears, and consequently they feel anxious. The unfamiliar accent presented in the text may lead the students' listening anxiety. Comprehending the accent that is not familiar to them seems to be a hard task for the listeners. Learners are

accustomed to the accent used by their teachers in EFL classes. When they are facing the authentic text, they feel difficult to understand.

Other factors

Room condition, distraction from environment, peers, time limit may lead to students' listening anxiety. Conducive and silent room encourage the students to learn better. They can focus their attention to the text. Distraction from environment sometimes quite shocking. It can suddenly appear and make students' concentration gone. Someone who is coughing loudly shocked the class that is silent. Otherwise, someone who is passing by or entering the room may break students' concentration. Regarding this environmental issue, Oxford and Shearin (as cited in Serraj, 2015) point out that the listening classroom should be positive and nonthreatening. Moreover, to reduce listening anxiety, using some strategies before or during listening activity, deep breathing, listening to some relaxing music and positive affirmation can be effective suggestion.

Peers also effects students' anxiety; it can lessen students' nervousness if they are in one classroom with their classmates. Some students say that it is better to be in the classroom with people they know better. It means that if they are in the same room with other people, they do not know well may give negative impact in their listening task. They feel free if they are with their friends in the same classes as they have got usual to them.

The last, time limit arouses students' listening anxiety. During the test of listening time limit arouses students' anxiety. Students must complete the task in a rush. It may get worse when the peers finish the task earlier.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The findings of the study discovered that listening anxiety could disturb learners' listening comprehension performance. Although students' level of anxiety is categorized into moderate level of anxiety, several suggestions were addressed to English teachers.

First, using learners' background knowledge of the material guide the students to know the material better. It was shown that lack of background knowledge concerning to listening topic was one of the major factors which instigated listening anxiety.

Second, it is important to consider selecting the listening material suitable to the learners' level. Unfamiliar vocabulary and fast text speed were two main

apprehensions of the students' anxiety. In addition, the appropriate listening texts based on students' level will assist them to overcome their anxiety.

Third, students' low-level of confidence was another anxiety irritating factor. In can be assisted by generating an encouraging classroom atmosphere before the listening activity. It is expected that the learners' confidence would be improved.

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APPENDIX A

Result of questionnaire on students' listening anxiety

STATEMENTS	1SD	2D	3U	4A	5SA
1. When listening to English, I tend to get stuck on one or two unknown words.	4 (8.3%)	12 (25%)	12 (25%)	15 (31.3)	5 (10.4%)
2. I get nervous if a listening passage is read only once during English listening test.	2 (4.2%)	10 (20.8%)	8 (16.7%)	21 (43.7%)	7 (14.6%)
3. When someone pronounces words differently from the way I pronounce them, I find it difficult to understand.	2 (4.2%)	10 (20%)	12 (25%)	22 (45.8%)	2 (4.2%)
4. When a person speaks English very fast, I worry that I might not understand all of it.	0	8 (16.6%)	4 (8.3%)	25 (52%)	11 (22.9%)
5. I am nervous when I am listening to English if am not familiar with the topic.	1 (2.1%)	7 (14.9%)	10 (21.2%)	20 (42.5%)	9 (19.1%)
6. It's easy to guess about the parts that I miss while listening to English.	3 (6.3%)	9 (18.7%)	21 (43.7%)	14 (29.1%)	1 (2.1%)
7. If I let my mind drift even a little bit while listening to English, I worry that I will miss important ideas.	2 (4.2%)	8 (16.6%)	12 (25%)	21 (43.7%)	5 (10.4%)
8. When I'm listening to English, I am worried when I can't watch the lips or facial expression of a person who is speaking.	3 (6.3%)	20 (42.5%)	11 (22.9%)	12 (25%)	2 (4.2%)
9. During English listening test, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand	4 (8.3%)	10 (21.2%)	14 (29.1%)	11 (22.9%)	9 (19.1%)

	every word.					
10.	When listening to English, it is difficult to differentiate the words from one another.	4 (8.3%)	8 (16.6%)	23 (47.9%)	13 (27.1%)	0
11.	I feel uncomfortable in class when listening to English without the written text.	4 (8.3%)	9 (18.7%)	21 (43.7%)	13 (27.1%)	1 (2.1%)
12.	I have difficulty understanding oral instructions given to me in English.	6 (12.5%)	22 (45.8%)	15 (31.3%)	5 (10.4%)	0
13.	It is hard to concentrate on what English speakers are saying unless I know them well.	7 (14.9%)	21 (43.7%)	10 (21.2%)	9 (19.1%)	1 (2.1%)
14.	I feel confident when I am listening in English.	2 (4.2%)	5 (10.4%)	21 (43.7%)	14 (29.1%)	6 (12.5%)
15.	When I'm listening to English, I often get so confused I can't remember what I have heard.	0	14 (29.1%)	12 (25%)	20 (42.5%)	2 (4.2%)
16.	I fear I have inadequate background of knowledge of some topics when listening in English.	2 (4.3%)	13 (27.6%)	14 (29.8%)	17 (36.2%)	1 (2.1%)
17.	My thoughts become jumbled and confused when listening to important information in English.	5 (10.4%)	16 (33.3%)	17 (36.2%)	10 (21.2%)	0
18.	I get worried when I have little time to think about what I hear in English.	2 (4.3%)	8 (16.6%)	10 (21.2%)	24 (50%)	4 (8.3%)
19.	When I'm listening to English, I usually end up translating word by word without understanding the contents.	10 (21.2%)	21 (43.7%)	9 (19.1%)	8 (16.6%)	0
20.	I would rather not have to listen to people speak English at all.	30 (62.5%)	14 (29.8%)	4 (8.3%)	0	0
21.	I get worried when I can't listen to English at my own pace.	3 (6.3%)	8 (16.6%)	13 (27.1%)	20 (42.5%)	4 (8.3%)
22.	I keep thinking that everyone else except me understands very well what an English speaker is saying.	6 (12.5%)	10 (21.2%)	16 (33.3%)	13 (27.6%)	3 (6.3%)
23.	I get upset when I'm not sure whether I understand what I am listening to English.	1 (2.1%)	7 (14.9%)	19 (39.6%)	17 (36.2%)	3 (6.3%)
24.	If a person speaks English very quietly, I am worried about understanding.	0	4 (8.3%)	16 (33.3%)	19 (39.6%)	9 (19.1%)
25.	I have no fear of listening in English as a member of an audience.	7 (14.9%)	10 (21.2%)	9 (19.1%)	18 (37.5%)	4 (8.3%)
26.	I am nervous when listening to an English speaker on the phone or when imaging a situation where I listen to an English speaker on the phone.	2 (4.3%)	7 (14.9%)	17 (36.2%)	19 (39.6%)	2 (4.3%)
27.	I feel tense when listening to English as a member of a social gathering or when imaging a situation where I listen to English as a member of a social gathering.	1 (2.1%)	14 (29.8%)	17 (36.2%)	13 (27.6%)	3 (6.3%)
28.	It's difficult for me to listen to English when there is even a little bit of background noise.	1 (2.1%)	6 (12.5%)	9 (19.1%)	26 (54.2%)	6 (12.5%)
29.	Listening to new information in English makes me uneasy.	6 (12.5%)	19 (39.6%)	21 (43.7%)	2 (4.3%)	0
30.	I get annoyed when I come across words that I don't understand while listening to	0	10 (21.2%)	16 (33.3%)	21 (43.7%)	1 (2.1%)

	English.					
31.	English stress and intonation seem familiar to me.	2 (4.3%)	6 (12.5%)	21 (43.7%)	16 (33.3%)	3 (6.3%)
32.	When listening to English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the speaker means.	3 (6.3%)	8 (16.6%)	15 (31.3%)	20 (42.5%)	2 (4.3%)
33.	It frightens me when I cannot catch a key word of an English listening passage.	2 (4.3%)	10 (21.2%)	15 (31.3%)	18 (37.5%)	3 (6.3%)

APPENDIX B

Sample interview coding

The codes are mentioned in parentheses.

“She makes jokes to make us laugh. We can relax for a while,”

“Teacher gives the general description about the material today. We can guess what we will listen. We don't feel too sorry for this,” (Teachers' factor)

“It's not our language. And we don't get used with it,” (Students' habit – students' factors)

“I feel nervous if my friends finished the task. I am afraid if I missed and left behind,” (Student's self-motivation – students' factors)

“I feel anxious if I cannot catch the vocabulary. It's unclear and there're a lot of new vocabularies,”

“Due to my lack vocabulary, I feel nervous,”

“I feel anxious if I cannot catch the vocabulary. It's unclear and there're a lot of new vocabularies,” (Unfamiliar vocabulary - listening material and process)

“The accent seems so complicated,” (The accent - listening material and process)

“Perhaps the speed and the vocabulary. They're insufficient,”

“It's too fast,” (Speech rate - listening material and process)

“The pronunciation seems so different that we can't understand. I think we have different way to pronounce,” (Pronunciation - listening material and process)

“Sometimes, the text is only played once. It makes me nervous. It gets worse if I do not understand the words,” (Lack of repetition - listening material and process)

“Before listening, we are instructed to listen once. There is no repetition for the text. It makes me anxious. What happens next is, someone is coughing. It disturbs my concentration and I cannot listen well,”

“The cough sound shocked me and I lost my concentration, I forgot what I've listened,” (Distraction from environment – other factors)

“I prefer to work in the class with my usual classmates, with whom I usually work with every day,” (Peers – other factors)

“It happens in exam time. It’s like being chased by time. Then, I lost my concentration,” (Time limit and pressure – other factors)