

PHARMACY STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION: PROBLEMS AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This study is aimed to find out students' listening problems and listening strategies. The research type is qualitative research using questionnaires and interviews as the instruments. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data obtained from the questionnaires, and interpretation of coding to analyze data from the interview script. The respondents were 31 pharmacy students involved in English for Pharmacy class and three of them were involved in a structured interview session.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is the ability to understand spoken languages. It is the process of accepting what is said by speakers, making and showing meaning, negotiating meaning with speakers and answering, and creating meaning with participation, creativity, and empathy (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

According to Tyagi in Ulum, the listening process itself includes hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding (Ulum, 2015). Hearing is the perception of sound waves where we are initially required to hear to listen, but we are not required to listen to hear; understanding means understanding the symbols that we have seen and heard, we must test the meaning of the stimulus we feel; remembering means that a person not only receives and clarifies a message but adds it to the storage in the brain; evaluating requires attentive listeners to gauge proof or facts from opinion and to decide the presence or absence of bias in a message; responding requires that the recipient complete all the process through verbal just as non-verbal feedback.

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Listening is important to be learned appropriately as a part of having good and active communication in English. Listening is a very important skill in language class because listening provides input for language learners. A person obtains language by understanding the linguistic information they hear, where language acquisition is obtained through receiving understandable input, and listening ability is a very important component in getting that understandable language input. Thus, listening plays a crucial role in both receptive skill and spoken language proficiency development (Hamouda, 2013).

However, apart from the importance of listening to improve English language skills, most English learners find it difficult to learn and master it. Listening is considered as a source of despair for language learners due to the difficulty of improving listening skills compared to other language skills. Various kinds of difficulties arise such as the speed of pronunciation of native speakers, the meanings that are not adequately understood, and cultural differences which include pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, reading, and other non-linguistic information (Bakar, 2018; Hamouda, 2013). Vandergrift in Chen stated that listening is the skill which is the least to understand. Listening is also the skill which is the least to master (C. W. Y. Chen, 2016). Furthermore, the study conducted by (A. Chen, 2013) about students' perceived listening problems and the listening strategies they developed showed that there were three major significant differences in students' perceived listening problems after the instruction of strategy including unfamiliar vocabularies, rapid speech rate, and linking sounds between words.

There are at least seven main problems in mastering listening as stated by Underwood, namely lack of control over a speaker's speaking speed, unable to capture repeated words, limited vocabulary from listeners, failure to recognize signals, problems with interpretation, inability to concentrate, and learning habits that are already formed (Yilmaz & Yavuz, 2015).

According to Goh, students also tend to have difficulty recognizing familiar words. Even though they are familiar with some words, they have a hard time remembering the meaning of the words quickly. They also found it difficult to understand the message in question even though they are quite familiar with the literal meaning of the words (Hamouda, 2013).

The following figure illustrates the difficulties of listening.

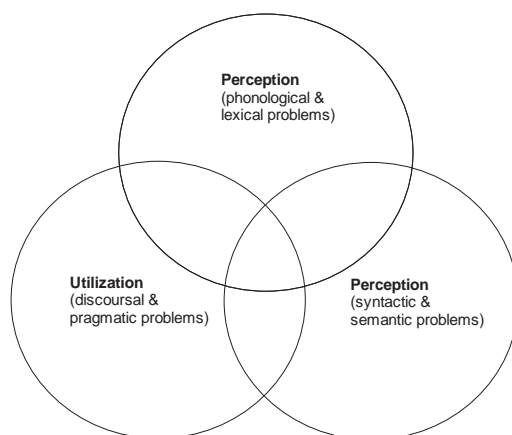


Figure 1. *A Taxonomy of Listening Comprehension Problems* (Adapted from Anderson, 1995; Goh, 2000, Vandergrift, 2003)

Perception problems are related to students' inability to distinguish sounds and words in speech flow, phonological problems and lexical problems are two different

challenges experienced by listeners at the perception stage. Phonological problems related to students' difficulties in understanding different intonations, stresses, and accents. It is related to the students' low language mastery. They found difficulties related to certain expressions commonly found in informal conversations such as hesitation, interruption, recurrent pauses and overlaps, as well as constant changes in the rhythm of speech. Thus there were five elements which were related to the perceptual listening phase, namely (1) not knowing the words they knew, (2) ignoring the next section when thinking about the meaning (3) being unable to cut the flow of speech, (4) missing the beginning of the text, (5) too concentrated or unable to concentrate (Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian, & Nimehchisalem, 2015).

Related to lexical problems, students tend to experience lexical problems in the perception phase. This is related to the vocabulary repertoire. Meanwhile, in the parsing phase, the difficulties students often face are syntax and semantics. Syntax difficulties are such as quickly forgetting what was heard, failing to form a representation of the word heard, and not understanding the next part of the input due to the difficulties previously faced. According to Goh in Nawrozi, the semantic difficulty itself arises when students are engrossed in even useless words so that they miss other parts of the message due to limited capacity in their short-term memory processing.

The next section is utilization as the last phase of the cognitive listening comprehension process. The most common difficulties are pragmatic and discourse. Pragmatic competence refers to the ability to communicate meaning in a socially appropriate manner and to interpret meanings - both explicit and implicit - based on the context. Pragmatic difficulties will arise when the listener understands the meaning of the word but fails to express the intended meaning. Meanwhile, difficulties in discourse arise when the listener is unable to understand the flow of ideas in the continuous nature of speech. For example, when students fail to recognize the overall arrangement of ideas in the text, they experience difficulties in discourse (Nowrouzi et al., 2015).

Regarding the listening problems, there are some strategies that students can use in improving their listening skills, namely cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and socio-affective strategies according to O'Malley and Chamot (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). A cognitive strategy is concerned with understanding and collecting input in both short-term and long-term memory for later use. Cognitive strategies are problem-solving methods that students can apply to complete learning activities and support knowledge learning and are used by students to acquire knowledge and expertise. Examples of cognitive strategies are bottom-up, namely word-for-word translation, setting the level of speech, repeating oral texts, concentrating on the prosodic character of the text; and top-down, namely predicting, guessing, explaining, and visualizing. The bottom-up is referred to as the "listener as tape-recorder"/listener as the recording device, while the top-down is referred to as the "listener as active model builder"/listener as the active model builder. Both are related to the students' level of English. For students at the expert level, top-down is more often used (A. Chen, 2013; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Meanwhile, Metacognitive strategies are strategies used to organize, plan, and evaluate the application of cognitive strategies. This strategy requires listeners to make a learning plan, think about the learning process to be carried out, dynamically supervise production and comprehension, and evaluate learning when the learning activity has been completed (Zheng, 2018). Students who use this strategy can learn faster and integrate the knowledge they have, they are also very constant recipients

and are very understanding of the situation, have the confidence to receive help from peers, teachers, and families, and can observe and assess themselves. On the other hand, students who do not have metacognitive strategies are students who do not have direction and the ability to review processes, accomplishments, and failures in their learning direction (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016; Zheng, 2018).

The third strategy is the socio-affective strategy which is related to community activities as well as activities to other people. Socio-affective strategies are techniques in which listeners work together with other people to check their understanding and to reduce their worries. They also have the greatest impact in the context of learning. Through socio-affective strategies, students know better how to reduce anxiety, have self-confidence during listening activities, and increase motivation to improve their listening skills.

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to find out the level of Pharmacy students' listening problems and listening strategy.

METHOD

A descriptive quantitative method was used in this research to answer the research questions and the survey method was used to collect the data. They were 31 Pharmacy Students who joined English for Pharmacy Students. The participants were all 100% female with a minimum and maximum age of 19 to 23. Those students were from the Institute of Health Science Surya Global Yogyakarta. The research used both questionnaires and interviews to collect the data. The questionnaire was adapted from (Hamouda, 2013; Lotfi, 2012; Nowrouzi et al., 2015). There were 15 items of listening problems, 15 items of listening strategies, and a five-point Likert scale (1=never, 2=rarely, 3=sometimes, 4=usually, and 5=always). An acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficient of (0.87) for listening problems and of (0.83) for listening strategies was obtained for the internal reliability of the questionnaire.

The students carried out a listening activity before administering the questionnaire. They could base their responses to the questionnaire on a real listening task they carried out. After the data were obtained, then they were analyzed by using a descriptive statistical method such as frequency, percentage, means, and standard deviations. This research used SPSS (Version 23). Then the results of descriptive statistics were categorized into three levels (low, moderate, and high). A mean of 1.65 or below was considered a 'low' level, a mean which ranges between 1.66 and 3.35 was considered as a 'moderate', and a mean of 3.36 or higher was considered as a 'high' level both for listening problems and listening strategies.

Meanwhile, besides the questionnaires, this research also used the interview to obtain the data. The results of the interview support the data obtained through the questionnaires. From 31 students, there were three students involved as respondents to interview. They were students getting the top score of listening test conducted before administering the questionnaires. The interview was conducted in a structured interview which means that the researcher had prepared lists of questions to be answered by the respondents.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The first questionnaire is listening problems and the second is listening strategies. The former is divided into three namely Perception, Parsing, and Utilization; while the latter is divided into Cognitive strategy, Metacognitive strategy, and Socio-

affective strategy. The results of the analysis can be seen in the following table.

Table 1.Listening Problems: Perception Phase

No Items	Statements	N	M	St. Deviation	*Level
1	I think the text is very fast to listen to.	31	3.23	0.99	Moderate
2	I often miss the beginning of a text.	31	2.68	0.87	Moderate
3	I find many unfamiliar words and expression	31	3.35	0.84	Moderate
4	I am unfamiliar with many words and sounds in English.	31	2.16	0.69	Moderate
5	I experience difficulty in concentration	31	3.23	0.99	Moderate
10	As I listen, I miss the next part while thinking about the meaning.	31	2.68	0.87	Moderate
Total			2.91	0.84	Moderate

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

From the table above, it can be seen that the mean value of each item is at the "moderate" level and the overall mean value is (2.91) which is also at the "moderate" level. It means that the learners have reported experiencing moderate levels of listening problems in the Perception phase as fast speech rate, concentration (missing the beginning of the text, missing the next part), and finding unfamiliar sounds & words. Meanwhile, learning difficulties in the Parsing section can be seen in the following table.

Table 1.Listening Problems: Parsing Phase

No Items	Statements	N	M	St. Deviation	*Level
6	I just easy to forget the phrase and words I have just heard	31	3.03	0.71	Moderate
7	I find it difficult to guess the accurate meaning of words in sentences.	31	3.19	0.87	Moderate
8	I get confused about the unfamiliar topic.	31	3.26	0.82	Moderate
9	I find it difficult in understanding a lot of new information in a short time.	31	3.39	0.76	High
11	I do not understand the certain meaning of the sentences	31	3.16	0.93	Moderate
14	I find it difficult to determine detailed information about what I just heard.	31	3.03	0.55	Moderate
Total			3.18	0.77	Moderate

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

From the table above, only items number 9 (I find it difficult in understanding a lot of new information in a short time) which fall into "high" level with the mean (3.39) whereas the overall means value in this category is (3.18) which falls into the "moderate" level. It means that the learners have experienced moderate to high levels of learning problems at the Parsing phase, including forgetting phrases & words that are just heard, guessing accurate meaning, unfamiliar topics, and understanding new information in detail. Regarding the listening problem at the Utilization phase, it can be seen in the table below.

Table 3.Listening Problems: Utilization Phase

No Items	Statements	N	M	St. Deviation	*Level
12	I experience difficulty in getting	31	2.9	0.7	Moderate

	the order of ideas in a text				
13	I get confused about the main idea.	31	2.94	0.68	Moderate
15	I experience difficulty in getting the relationship among ideas.	31	3.00	0.68	Moderate
	Total		2.95	0.69	Moderate

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

The table above shows that all items of listening problems at the Utilization phase fall into a “moderate” level with an overall means value is (2.95). It means that the students have experienced a moderate level of getting the order of ideas in the text, getting main idea, and getting the relationship among the ideas.

The summary of the mean and level of each phase of listening problems can be seen in the following table.

Table 4.A Summary of Listening Problems

Problems Phase	M	*Level
Perception	2.91	Moderate
Parsing	3.18	Moderate
Utilization	2.95	Moderate

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

Related to listening strategies, the following table shows the mean, standard deviation, and level of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies.

Table 5. Listening Strategies: Cognitive

No Items	Statements	N	M	St. Deviation	*Level
1	I try to picture the setting of the conversation to understand what the speakers are talking about.	31	3.45	0.72	High
2	I use the words I understand to help me guess the meaning of the words I don't understand.	31	3.81	0.87	High
3	I use the main idea of the text to help me guess the meaning of the words that I don't know.	31	3.9	0.91	High
4	As I listen, I compare what I understand with what I already know about the topic.	31	3.74	0.82	High
5	As I listen, I adjust my interpretation if I realize that it is not correct.	31	3.84	0.86	High
	Total		3.75	0.84	High

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

From the table above, it is seen that all items in Cognitive strategy fall into "high" level. It means that the students have applied strategies picturing (imagining), guessing the meaning, adjusting interpretation as part of cognitive strategy. Regarding metacognitive listening strategy, it can be seen in the following table.

Table 6. Listening Strategies: Metacognitive

No Items	Statements	N	M	St. Deviation	*Level
6	Before listening, I think of similar texts that I may have listened to.	31	3.48	1.06	High
7	Before I start to listen, I have a plan in my head for how I am going to listen.	31	3.97	0.95	High
8	As I listen, I occasionally ask myself if I am satisfied with the level of my comprehension	31	3.61	0.84	High

9	As I listen, I have a goal in my head.	31	3.94	0.93	High
10	When I guess the meaning of a word, I think back to everything else that I have heard, to see if my guess makes sense.	31	3.71	0.94	High
11	After listening, I think back to how I listened and about what I might do differently next time.	31	3.48	1.06	High
12	I focus harder on the text when I have trouble understanding.	31	3.9	0.83	High
13	I feel that listening in English is a challenge.	31	4.26	1.13	High
Total			3.75	0.96	High

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

From the table above, it is seen that all items in the Metacognitive strategy fall into a "high" level. It means that the students have applied Metacognitive strategies such as having planning, goals, and reflections of listening texts they heard. Related to socio-affective listening strategy, it can be seen in the following table.

Table 7.Listening Strategies: Socio-affective

No Items	Statements	N	M	St. Deviation	*Level
14	When listening, I try to relax	31	3.48	0.93	High
15	When I don't understand something, I try not to worry so much about it.	31	3.55	0.99	High
Total			3.52	0.96	High

*Means value ≤ 1.65 (low), 1.66-3.35 (moderate); and ≥ 3.36 (high)

The table above shows that the level of applying the socio-affective strategy is at the "high" level. The students have tried to relax and avoiding feeling worry (controlling anxiety) as part of the socio-affective strategy.

Regarding the results of interview, as already discussed previously, the interview was carried out with three students. It was structured interview asking about the issues of listening problems and strategies in the questionnaire. However, in the interview, the respondents would express their opinions to the interviewer freely. The interview was recorded through Voice Note on WhatsApp android application. The interview was carried out in Indonesian as the native language both giving questions by the interviewer and answering questions by the interviewee. It was to encourage the interviewee to express their opinion as honestly as they can. The results of the interview were then written in transcript and translated into English. The results of interview were divided into some categories including 1) level of skill, 2) opportunity, 3) previous listening experience, 4) listening problems, 5) listening strategies.

The first category is about level of skill. The students were asked to evaluate the listening proficiency level, from poor, medium, or good. Two students thought that their listening skill levels were 'medium' and the rest one thought that her listening skill level was 'poor'.

The second category was the opportunity in listening. The three students gave different opinions. Two students still deepen their listening skills through watching drama, films, speech, or listening to music in English, while one student only deepens her listening during English class because she does not watch movies or listen to music. However, related to the experience of having direct conversations with native speakers, all three have the same experience, that they have never interacted directly with native speakers.

I do not (deepen listening skills) recently. Because I have no time to restudy the old or new vocabularies. I also do not like watching western movies or listening to English songs, so (I) just watch videos or information in English then I try to find and learn the new vocabulary.

(R2.2)

In the third category, that is a past learning experience, two of them had pleasant experiences during learning English and one of them had no special experience related to learning English. Meanwhile, for the fourth category, namely listening problems, the three of them considered that the lack of English vocabulary they mastered. They also think that the way of pronunciation of native speakers are unfamiliar to them that they find it difficult to catch what the native speakers say. Besides, two students stated that the native speakers' rate of speech also affects their listening fluency. Two of them also considered that they had problems related to the length of the conversation/listening text they listened to. The longer the text, the more difficult for them to catch the content.

The difficulty is that vocabularies and pronunciation are different. I got confused. The word said was this, (but) the pronunciation was different.
(R1.6)

... (the problem) is, the native speaker speaks too fast, in my opinion, it is too fast that I find it difficult to understand quickly and exactly what he is saying. **(R3.6)**

Meanwhile, for the fifth category that is the listening strategies used by the students, they are to learn vocabularies and those with similar pronunciation one to another, to use translation application/Google translation to show meaning and pronunciation, to browse the internet to search and practice listening, to watch videos on YouTube, and to play listening play several times. One of the students also makes scripts from the play she heard to describe the difficulties she faced.

In facing listening exams, I watch YouTube about listening questions, and (I) often search for questions (from other websites) too. **(R1.7)**

The way I learn is to memorize some vocabularies. Then with the help of Google translation, I listen, so I do not only know the vocabularies in writing but also in pronunciation or how to speak (them) correctly.
(R2.7)

Besides, after I have listened to the record, I describe the conversation I heard. So I write the description (script) according to what I heard.
(R3.4)

Discussion

This study examined two research questions, namely the listening problems and listening strategies. Regarding the listening problems, the respondents experience difficulties in the Perception, Parsing, and Utilization phases at a “moderate” level. This means that students sometimes experience difficulties related to tempo, concentration, missing the beginning of the text (Perception) as seen in [Table 1](#), related to expressions, sounds, phrases, and words, as well as new meanings and information (Parsing) as seen in [Table 2](#), and also related to topics/ideas either guessing, sorting, or determining the relationship (Utilization) as seen in [Table 3](#). Meanwhile, from the results of the interview, listening problems are more related to the lack of mastery of similar pronunciation of some words (Parsing), followed by problems related to speed

rate & long spoken which often make them miss the play (Perception), and finally related to the topics and the organization of the topics discussed (Utilization).

Regarding the listening strategy, based on the results of the questionnaire, it can be seen that the respondents applied all strategies both cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Respondents used the words they understood in guessing the meaning of words they didn't understand. Respondents also did a search for meaning in their heads when listening to listening text (Cognitive strategy) as seen in [Table 5](#). Regarding recalling, respondents often remember similar texts that they have heard before and have a plan on how they will listen to the text, including thinking about the next step in listening to listening texts (Metacognitive strategy) as seen in [Table 6](#). The students also try to relax when having a listening test, and try not to worry when getting problems in listening (Socio-Affective) as seen in [Table 7](#). All is shown from the results of the total items for each category which are at the "High" level.

On the other hands, from the results of interviews, the students tended to apply more cognitive strategies, related to the word for word vocabulary translation, paying attention to spelling and pronunciation, reading subtitles to help in listening, repeating listening texts several times, which were parts of Top-down strategy and guessing the answers from the listening text played, explaining the contents of listening with the descriptions and scripts they compiled and visualized (imagined) which were parts of the Bottom-up strategy. The three students did not specifically explain Metacognitive or Socio-affective strategies in their answers.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, pharmacy students' listening problems were moderate, while pharmacy students' listening strategy were high. For listening problems, the students mostly experience difficulty in the Parsing phase, followed by the Utilization phase, and the Perception phase. They seem to do not fully understand the syntax, semantics, and ordering the topics of listening text.

However, most of Pharmacy students also applied the Cognitive and Metacognitive strategies than the Socio-Affective strategy seen from the result of mean showing that mean of Socio-Affective strategy is the lowest. It means that the students tend to focus on learning vocabularies, phrases, and all related to meaning rather than dealing with anxiety during listening test.

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