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LISTENING AND NOTE TAKING SKILLS: CHALLENGES FACED BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN EFL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract- *This research paper examines the challenges faced by university students in listening and note-taking skills in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. As essential components of academic success, these skills are often hindered by various linguistic and cognitive factors unique to EFL learners. The study examines difficulties such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, fast-paced lectures, and inadequate note-taking strategies. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with EFL university students, revealing a lack of training, low confidence, and difficulties in processing spoken information while simultaneously writing notes. The findings underscore the need for pedagogical interventions that combine listening practice with explicit instruction in note-taking techniques. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the academic support required to improve listening comprehension and note-taking efficiency among EFL students in higher education.*

Keywords: Listening and Note Taking Skills; Students' Challenges; EFL Environment

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INTRODUCTION

Listening and note-taking skills are two different types of skills, but they have a close relationship with one another. The early phases of language development in a person's first language (as well as in the naturalistic acquisition of other languages) depend on listening, which is the natural prelude to speaking (Nation & Newton, 2009). For some individuals, developing effective listening skills can be quite challenging because learning to hear a language is a major part of learning to speak it. Some individuals might frequently struggle to interact with spoken language, understand meaning, and take part in communicative exchanges when they lack sufficient listening

skills. This emphasizes how important listening is for developing both receptive and productive abilities in English language instruction (Istiqamah, 2023).

The process of listening begins with detecting or capturing sound waves or vibrations around them, which then enter through the outer ear. Vibration of sound is transmitted to the ear canal until it produces pressure or a blow to the tympanic membrane (eardrum). The vibrations in the eardrum are transmitted to the auditory bone. The vibrations become strong in the auditory bone and are detected in the inner ear. When the sound vibrations reach the inner ear, they are converted into electrical impulses and sent to the auditory nerve in the brain. Finally, the brain captures and translates these impulses as sound (Sholehuddin et al., 2020). Listening skills provide aural input that acts as a foundation for language acquisition and allows a person to interact in both oral and written communication. Understanding oral language serves as the foundation for learning how to correctly read and write. In the end, the listening skills affect individuals capacity to speak, read, write, and argue (Worthington & Margaret, 2018).

There are four stages in the listening process that need to be known. The message is physically heard at the initial stage. In order to understand the message, individuals need to focus on the noises they hear. They identify unit boundaries phonologically at this stage. The second stage, in which individuals decode and comprehend the message, comes after the recognition of sound patterns. To do this, the coded message must be transformed into information so that it can be understood. Communication fails if the message cannot be deciphered or comprehended. In the third phase, individuals assess the message's importance and make the necessary deductions. Individuals must be able to distinguish facts from views, explicit information from implicit information, and pertinent information from irrelevant information for this to take place successfully. They should successfully assess and comprehend the speaker's aim and attitude. They must be conscious of their own biases and prejudices to accomplish this. This keeps individuals from drawing incorrect judgments. As listeners, individuals react to the messages they have received in the last phase. They must have accurately studied, interpreted, and assessed the message in the preceding step for our response to be suitable. Since individuals clarify the message and let the speaker know if they have gotten it correctly, the fourth step is especially crucial (Deveci, 2018).

In the context of learning, one of the skills that can help students learn is note-taking. Along with the listening skills, note-taking skills also play a role that is no less important in one's life. Note-taking skills are language skills used to communicate indirectly with others. It required the capacity to think creatively and develop ideas while eliminating any irrelevant information, as well as the ability to produce acceptable and proper words (Nadeak et al., 2021). Besides, the most crucial part of taking notes is that the reader identifies the key ideas that convey the essence of the text's paragraphs, separates it from extraneous information, arranges the pertinent information, and unifies and paraphrases it in a way that differs from the original (Ilter, 2019). In the Listening and Note Taking Skills course, students are required to be able to harmonize listening and note-taking skills at the same time. Of course, this is quite difficult to do, plus, this listening skill is carried out at the same time as the note-taking skill. Furthermore, there are several parts of the exercise in Listening and Note Taking Skills, such as vocabulary preview, note-taking preparation, first, second, and third listening, accuracy check, and expansion. From the researchers' observations during teaching, the most frequent difficulty faced by students is in the note-taking preparation section. In this section, students must listen thoroughly to what is conveyed by foreign speakers as well as record the contents of the message conveyed using the note-taking techniques that have been learned. The note-taking techniques in question are to apply the use of abbreviations, symbols, clues, cues in discourse, etc.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the problems faced by students in relation to listening and note-taking skills. The problems most commonly experienced by students were struggling to keep up with listening exercises. They felt compelled to comprehend every word. It indicates that the students are having trouble understanding what the speaker is saying. As a result, the information is delivered too quickly for them to remember what they have heard (Siswahyuni, 2020). Moreover, the speed of a lecture was cited by nearly half of the respondents as one of the challenges they faced. Regardless of their language proficiency, it was determined that the students occasionally struggled with taking notes (Malavska, 2017). Then, the inadequate mastery of the English language, difficulty comprehending the audio while taking notes, and lack of knowledge of effective note-taking techniques (Marpaung et al., 2025). Additionally, the quality of

recorded material, cultural differences, accent, unfamiliar vocabulary, length and speed of listening also encountered by the students (Saraswaty & Palembang, 2018). Another study also emphasized the internal and external factors that can affect the students' listening and note-taking skills. Physical conditions that worsen during listening classes, negative student perceptions of the listening material, and the attitudes and behaviors of students who don't practice listening to English outside of listening classes are all internal factors that impact students' ability to listen to English. Meanwhile, the content that is hard to grasp and the environment or classroom that is less conducive to students' listening activities are the external elements that affect students' English listening skills (Kurniawati, 2019).

The previous studies have focused on the problems faced by students in listening comprehension, but have not fully highlighted the findings on the problems that arise at the same time during listening and note-taking activities. Thus, by presenting challenges in both listening and note-taking abilities, this study seeks to close the current gap in the literature. To sum up, from the explanation above, this research aims to identify the main problems faced by students in listening and note-taking skills in the Listening and Note Taking Skills course. The researchers also hope that the results of this study will provide useful value for the development of teaching the Listening and Note Taking Skills for lecturers, as well as listening and note-taking skills for students who study English.

METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized the descriptive qualitative approach as described by (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It includes talking about the study's sample as well as the general methods for gathering and documenting data. It provides further detail on the procedures for data processing, as well as how the data is presented, interpreted, and validated, and outlines the study's possible outcomes. Moreover, the subject of this study was selected using purposive sampling, which selects sample components from the population that are thought to be typical or representative. It is assumed that mistakes in judgment during the selection process will balance each other out (Ary, Jacob, Sorenson, 2010). As a result, all students who had completed the Listening and Note-Taking Skills course during the

even semester were chosen by the researchers to participate in this study. For further details, the course had been completed by forty students.

Data Collection

The data was collected through focus group interviews with eight interviewees in each group. Semi-structured interview questions are used to elicit participants' ideas and perspectives (Creswell, 2017). The interview was recorded using a phone recorder for a clear recording of the interview then it was converted into a transcription.

Data Analyze

After the data was collected, the researchers prepared the data to be analyzed by reading and understanding, identifying and labeling relevant data segments, drawing conclusions, and providing meaning from the entire analysis process to understand the findings more comprehensively (Creswell, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results of this study show that the students face several obstacles while trying to improve their note-taking and listening skills in an EFL setting. Linguistic boundaries are one of the biggest challenges. Many of the participants stated that the lectures' rapid pace, strange accents, and restricted language made comprehension challenging. "*When the lecturer speaks too fast, I cannot catch the words, so my notes become empty or unclear*," noted one student. "*Some accents are very difficult for me to follow, and I lose focus quickly*," said another. During lectures, these language barriers frequently limited students' capacity to recognize and document crucial information.

It was also clear that controlling cognitive load was difficult. Over half of the participants acknowledged that it was difficult for them to listen, comprehend, and take notes at the same time. When faced with dense or cognitively complex material, students often reported feeling overwhelmed. This frequently led to notes that were disjointed or chaotic. "*I try to write everything, but when I do that, I cannot understand the meaning*," one participant said. My notes are lengthy yet useless.

The information also indicates that pupils were not sufficiently informed of efficient note-taking techniques. Only a small percentage used techniques like symbols, abbreviations, or structured outlines, despite the fact that many reported significantly depending on verbatim transcribing. Many admitted that they had never been taught how to take notes. "*I just write the sentences completely because I don't know how to make symbols or short forms*," said one participant. Later on, I am unable to comprehend what is crucial. This dependency on transcription hindered pupils' comprehension and slowed down the process.

Students' difficulties were also influenced by environmental and technological variables. While individuals attending large lecture halls cited issues with acoustics and background noise, more than half said that poor audio quality in online courses impacted their listening comprehension. "*Sometimes the audio is not clear, so I just guess the meaning and miss important points*," a student said.

The impact of affective variables was comparable. More than half of the participants reported that their ability to listen and take notes was adversely influenced by anxiousness and a lack of confidence. Students were frequently distracted and less focused due to the worry of missing crucial knowledge. "*I feel nervous because I think I will miss the main idea*," one student wrote. I can't listen well after that. In addition to impairing listening comprehension, these emotions also made pupils less inclined to practice and advance their abilities.

Lastly, the results highlight the significance of students' cultural and educational backgrounds. Because they had not been forced to take independent notes during their previous schooling, nearly half of the participants acknowledged that they relied on lecture slides or transcripts. One student said, "*I never practiced in high school because the teacher always gave us notes*." I'm not sure how to handle things on my own in university. The development of independent listening and note-taking techniques was constrained by this reliance on prepared materials.

When combined, these results imply that a variety of factors, including language competency, cognitive processing, strategy use, environmental factors, affective variables, and past educational experiences, influence listening and note-taking in an EFL context. In order to overcome these obstacles, clear pedagogical support is needed, which

not only gives students useful methods but also boosts their self-esteem and encourages independence in academic listening situations.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that note-taking and listening skills are still important yet difficult components of academic success for students in an EFL setting. The findings align with earlier studies that have identified hearing as one of the most challenging abilities for language learners (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The biggest impediments were found to be linguistic barriers, including issues with vocabulary, accents, and speech rate. This is supported by Field (2008), claimed that due to lexical unfamiliarity and decreased repetition in academic speech, authentic lecture discourse frequently causes processing challenges for EFL students. Learners may find it difficult to bridge the gap between classroom English and actual academic listening environments if they are not exposed to enough authentic information.

The results also highlight students' high cognitive burden. Participants in this study reported having trouble concurrently understanding, identifying major ideas, and taking notes, which is consistent with Carrell's (2007) findings. This demonstrates the intricate multitasking nature of academic listening, as students must summarize and selectively record while simultaneously processing spoken input in real time. Many students lack automaticity in these skills, which raises cognitive strain, as evidenced by the predominance of incomplete or unstructured notes.

The absence of efficient note-taking techniques was a major theme. The results of Salame et al., (2024) who found that students prefer to copy information straight from lectures or textbooks, reflects the propensity to rely on literal transcribing rather than paraphrasing or summarizing. Note-taking is still a neglected aspect of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) training, as seen by the lack of instruction in techniques like the Cornell method, the use of abbreviations, or structured outlining. In addition to promoting comprehension, explicit instruction in these techniques may help students manage information more effectively.

Technological and environmental variables also had an impact. The obstacles noted throughout the transition to digital learning settings are reflected in students' struggles

with subpar equipment, subpar tapes or disks, and the impression of sound reproduction at low frequencies in important listening areas (Stephenson et al., 2012). These results imply that institutional support, such as better audio equipment and easily accessible lecture recordings, could considerably lower understanding obstacles.

It is also important to consider the impact of affective elements, such as fear and insecurity. The study demonstrates that worry hinders comprehension by diverting cognitive resources away from processing input, which is consistent with Krashen (1982) affective filter hypothesis. This concern was made worse by the worry that important details might be missed, which led to a vicious cycle of diminished motivation and decreased focus. Improving listening results may therefore be greatly aided by interventions that create encouraging learning environments and boost student confidence.

Lastly, the impact of educational background draws attention to a systemic problem. Pupils from educational institutions where instructors supplied pre-written notes showed poorer autonomous note-taking abilities. This result is consistent with research by Fitriani et al. (2021), who claimed that learners' approaches to academic listening are significantly influenced by cultural and educational expectations. Therefore, it may be advantageous to promote autonomy by progressively lowering reliance on lecture slides and offering supervised practice in independent note-taking.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the challenges faced by university students in developing effective listening and note-taking skills within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment. The findings indicate that students encounter significant difficulties due to linguistic limitations, such as restricted vocabulary knowledge and unfamiliar accents, as well as cognitive challenges, including processing spoken input while simultaneously organizing written notes. Additionally, fast-paced lectures and the absence of systematic training in note-taking strategies further impede students' academic performance.

Many EFL students rely on inefficient or haphazard note-taking techniques and lack confidence in their listening skills, according to the semi-structured interview results.

These difficulties imply that taking notes and listening are interdependent abilities that need to be taught explicitly rather than implicitly. Overall, this study emphasizes how crucial it is to target both skills at the same time in order to improve students' academic understanding and engagement in higher education settings.

SUGGESTION

A number of pedagogical and research-related recommendations are put out in light of the study's findings. Alongside listening exercises, EFL instructors are urged to provide clear training in note-taking techniques such as outlining, identifying key words, and using acronyms. It may be possible to lessen cognitive overload and enhance comprehension by giving students guided listening assignments and letting them practice taking notes during lectures that have been recorded. Action research may be used in future studies to improve the listening comprehension and note-taking skills of EFL students. To further validate the results, mixed-method or quantitative methodologies with bigger participant samples can be used. Furthermore, experimental studies looking at the efficacy of particular note-taking strategies in EFL settings would offer insightful information for bettering instruction.

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