

EMPOWERING THE STUDENTS THROUGH LISTENING DIARIES TO MOTIVATE THEM TO IMPROVE THEIR LISTENING ABILITY

By Siti Mukminatun, M.Hum.
English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts,
Yogyakarta State University
Perum.Glodogan Indah, Jl. Wirabakti IV Rt 09/VII B 499
Glodogan, Klaten Selatan, Klaten
Siti_mukminatun@yahoo.com

Abstract

Menyimak (listening) dalam bahasa asing tidak sesederhana menyimak dalam bahasa ibu. Ketidakberhasilan siswa menemukan cara yang tepat dalam menyimak membuat nilai untuk mata kuliah ini sering tidak maksimal akibatnya semangat untuk belajar *listening* menurun. Proses belajar mengajar yang hanya mengandalkan pada pertemuan di kelas dirasa kurang memberikan hasil yang maksimal. Kendala tidak hanya secara teknis namun juga terletak pada materi yang diberikan. Input yang diterima siswa terbatas pada materi yang diberikan oleh pengajar yang tidak selalu sesuai dengan tingkat penguasaan, kebutuhan, dan keinginan masing-masing pembelajar. Mereka cenderung bertindak sebagai penerima yang pasif dan kendali sepenuhnya ada pada pengajar. Situasi formal di kelas sering membuat siswa tertekan dan kurang dapat berkonsentrasi. Pemberian tugas yang berupa catatan harian menyimak (listening diaries) diharapkan mampu mendorong mereka untuk meningkatkan kemampuan menyimak mereka. Mereka akan berpengalaman mencari dan memilih materi yang sesuai dengan keinginan dan kebutuhan. Mereka juga mendapat kesempatan mendengarkan dan melihat pemakaian Bahasa Inggris di dalam kehidupan sehari-hari melalui berbagai teks yang autentik maupun non-autentik dengan situasi yang lebih santai. Selain itu *listening diaries* memungkinkan siswa memantau perkembangan kemampuan *listening* mereka sendiri.

Kata Kunci: *Empowering, listening diaries, motivation,, listening*

INTRODUCTION

1. Background

Most people think that being able to claim knowledge of a second language means being able to speak and write in that language. From this assumption, it is known that speaking and writing are primary elements while reading and listening are secondary elements in learning second language (Nunan, 2002: 238). However, Goh (2002) stresses that listening takes up as much as 50% of someone's everyday communication time. It is the main channel of classroom instruction and the most used language skill at work and at home. Many learners want to develop effective listening comprehension because it is crucial to their success in studies, business, careers and personal relationships. Thus, listening is the important aspect in language learning that learner must cover.

In English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University listening is one subject that the students must learn in four semesters, from semester one to semester four. However, the result shows that the students do not work maximally or even do not pass their exam. This condition will burden the teaching of this course in the next semester. They will not only bother the stability of the class but also lose their motivation to learn. They often complain that it is a complicated subject. They also say that this situation is caused by the monotonousness in the use of teaching media, specifically audio cassette, and sometimes the materials taken from listening books are not always suitable for the students' need. In accordance with the goal of the implementation of genre approach in language teaching, they are necessary exposed to many different types of text. It is not simple because of the lack of teaching resource, specifically the suitable audio cassette. This situation is aggravated by the condition that the quality of cassettes is not good and the facility in each laboratory is not the same. They also get different treatments because each lecturer has taught more than one class in different laboratories.

As a lecturer of listening, the writer is encouraged to find alternative media to cope this problem. The use of listening diaries is expected to encourage the students

improve their motivation to learn to listen. By keeping these diaries regularly, they will be autonomous learners who always go on trying and monitor their own progress.

2. Problem Formulation

Based on the background of this writing, the main problem in this paper is that “How can listening diaries motivate the students to improve their listening ability?”

3. Objectives

The objective of this paper is to share an experience on the benefits of using listening diaries to motivate the students to improve their listening abilities.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. What is listening?

Related to the concept of listening, Richards (2008: 3) shows two concepts, namely listening as comprehension and listening as acquisition. The former deals with the traditional way of thinking about the nature of listening in which the main function of listening in second language learning is to facilitate understanding of spoken discourse. As a complementary to this view, the latter considers how listening can provide input that triggers the further development of second-language proficiency.

Most second-language listeners think that listening is a complicated skill. They have to listen spoken discourse whose rates vary considerable. Further, Richards states that spoken discourse is often unplanned and often reflects the processes of construction such as hesitation, reduced forms, fillers, and repeats. Spoken texts are context-dependent and personal, assuming shared background knowledge, are spoken in many different accents, from standard or non-standard, regional, non-native, and so on.

Listen to spoken English let the students to hear different varieties and accents- rather than their teacher’ voice with its own idiosyncrasies. Therefore, they need to be exposed not only to one variety of English but also to varieties such as American English, Australian English, Caribbean English, Indian English, or West African English (Harmer, 1998: 97). The introducing of these varieties will subconsciously

make students familiar with real English, thus they will be able to communicate with native speakers naturally. In addition, the more they listen the better at listening they are.

2. Problem in Learning to Listen to English

Most students always complain that from four language skills that they have to master, listening is the most complicated one. They usually blame the tape recorder as the only problem in their listening. Underwood (1990: 16-19) shows some potential problems that students may encounter while learning to listen to English:

a. Lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak

This is the common problem that the learners always complain. Goh (2002) adds that this perception of speed is really due to the students' inability to recognize phonological modification in a stream of speech.

b. Not being able to get things repeated

This problem is the one that differentiates listening from other subjects. The listener is not always in a position to get the speaker to repeat an utterance.

c. The listener's limited vocabulary

Due to the choice of vocabulary is in the hands of the speakers, the listeners can only just follow. If they do not know the meaning of a certain word, sometimes they try hard to understand it and they miss the next part.

d. failure to recognize the signal

The familiarity to signals in listening is really important both in audio cassette and in video. Thus, they need to learn the markers that are usually in a discourse.

e. Problem of interpretation

The unfamiliarity to the context will lead the students to the difficulty in interpreting the words. The problem of interpretation not only happens between speakers who have different background of culture but also those who are from the same culture.

f. inability to concentrate

Concentration is something crucial in listening; even the shortest break in attention can seriously impair comprehension. The interest toward the topic will influence the

concentration. In addition, the bad quality of recording and a poor inferior machine can make it hard for the students.

h. established learning habits

Most students have established learning habits in the sense that they were encouraged to understand everything by listening carefully to teachers who probably speak slowly and clearly. When they fail to understand every word while listening, they stop listening.

From the discussion that the writer always does in class, the students complain these difficulties. Although not all problems are experienced by all of them, they consider that listening is complicated.

3. The teacher's role

Dealing with the difficulties that the students pose in their listening, it is the role of the teacher to facilitate their learning. It is better to provide opportunities for them to consider the problems they encounter and to support them in their attempts so that they are likely to become better at listening. Richards (2002: 236) adds that teacher is not simply to check answer but rather to actively guide learners through the processes of listening, monitoring listening difficulties, and reshaping classroom tasks to provide maximum opportunities for learner involvement and to develop a better awareness of how to listen.

In addition, in performing his task, teacher is required to accomplish some following objectives (Underwood, 1990: 21-22):

- a. exposing students to a range of listening experiences
- b. making listening purposeful for the students
- c. helping the students understand what listening entails and how they might approach it
- d. building up students' confidence in their own listening ability

Meanwhile, Wilson (2007) assumes the teacher's role as eight metaphors, eight jobs. They are as a tailor who always knows what is fit for their students, as a doctor who can diagnose what his students want, as a storyteller who is the best source for his

students, as a sleuth who always ask whether his students will understand or not, as an engineer who needs a basic knowledge of the way in which the equipment works, and more pertinently, the way in which the equipment sometimes *doesn't* work, as a spy who always try to know what his students do, as a firefighter who always try to get his students out of the trouble, and as a tour guide who will show his students which are interesting or not.

4. Metacognitive Strategies

Asking the students to understand the content of the listening materials is inadequate. According to Goh (1997) in Goh (2002), teachers should also teach their students to think about their listening processes. It means that students should become aware of factors that influence their comprehension, the demands that different kinds of listening make on them and the skills and strategies they can use. Further, by having this ability, students will be ready to listen different texts using different strategies. They do not rely their activities on their teachers' control.

From many listening strategies that language learners can use, metacognitive strategy is the one that helps learners coordinate their own learning process (Amri: <http://www.squ.edu.om>). This strategy consists of three aspects, namely, identifying the purpose, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation.

In doing their task, listeners need to set a purpose for listening, that is, why they listen to a certain program. If they have done that, they will be well prepared. They do not listen without knowing what they are going to listen. Self-monitoring lead the learners to monitor their understanding as they are listening (Bacon, 1992 in Amri (<http://www.squ.edu.om>)). Lastly, listeners need to evaluate their comprehension and assess how well they have done after the listening process is completed. In doing self-evaluation, they must take into consideration the difficulty of the situation or the language. Therefore, they really work maximally.

5. Listening Diaries

a. *Definition of diary*

Cambridge Advanced Learners' Dictionary third edition shows that diary is a book with a separated space or page for each day, in which someone writes down his future arrangements, meeting, etc, or one used to record feeling or what has happened on that day. Similarly, Merriam-Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus states that it refers to a record of events, transactions, or observations kept daily or at frequent intervals. Meanwhile, Encyclopedia Britannica 2009 student and Home edition states that diary is a form of autobiographical writing, a regularly kept record of the diarist's activities and reflections. Written primarily for the writer's use alone, the diary has a frankness that is unlike writing done for publication. From these three sources, it can be concluded that a diary is a record of someone's daily activities and reflections.

b. *Listening Diary*

Listening diary is a task designed to help the learners develop their skills and strategies. Goh (2002) states that by keeping listening diary "learners become more reflective of their own learning processes as to develop greater sense of responsibility for their learning". Further, she emphasizes that this diary is more systematic than other learning diaries, which are often open and unstructured. It focuses on the selected aspects of listening. The objective of this diary is to enable the learners to reflect specifically on listening events they participate in and to consider of improving their listening. It also allows the learners to express anxieties about an area of language learning that many learners find stressful.

The first task of the teacher is to explain the concept of listening diaries. He should introduce the format of listening diary and give some important questions for the learners to reflect. Thus, the students know what they have to do. The second task is to give feedback. It is used to respond the students' self-observation. Through this feedback they will be motivated to learn more and feel that their works are appreciated. In addition, teachers can use their observations to encourage the students to use appropriate strategies for facilitating communication and developing their listening

outside class. This step can be done in class discussion or Goh (2002) calls it a process-based discussions. Therefore, teachers must be active to give suggestions for them to find the appropriate strategy in their listening.

By keeping this journal regularly, students can gradually cope the problems in learning to listen like stated in section 2. If in the class they cannot control the tape recorder or the recording, in their house they may repeat many times and they can select the appropriate materials that are suitable for their level. They can measure their own level. One interesting website focusing self-study materials for language learner, Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab, provides many listening activities based on specific topics designed for learners from different levels. The limited vocabulary can be overcome by repeating and checking. In principle, doing assignment not under pressure make students work maximally. They can concentrate well.

c. A Guide for Self Directing Listening

The empowerment of listening diaries in listening class leads the students to be autonomous learners. Therefore, they need to be equipped with a guide to direct them to do so (self directing listening). This guide is accordance with the stages in listening covering before and after listening.

Before listening covers two points; goal definition and action plan. The former leads the students to define their purpose for listening. The later shows the planning that the students anticipate in while listening. Some questions proposed in action plan could include;

- 1) What is the best way to achieve my goal?
- 2) What do I already know about this topic?
- 3) What information can I expect to hear?
- 4) What words can I expect to hear?
- 5) What difficulties can I expect?
- 6) What can I do to cope with these difficulties?

If the students prepare to listen with these questions, it is undeniable that they will be more ready to listen. They do not just listen without a purpose. They really start doing their work with a purpose. Therefore, they will not be nervous and try to be better.

Like what teachers do in the class, in these assignments students must pay attention to the last stage in listening that is after listening. In this stage, the students are suggested to evaluate what they have done. Some questions that may be proposed in this stage are:

- 1) How much have I understood?
- 2) What were the difficulties? Were they what I had expected?
- 3) Was my approach effective? Is there anything else I should do the next time I listen?

All these questions will enable the students to reflect what they have done in listening English. Therefore, they are always able to monitor their progress.

d. *Format for listening diaries*

Goh (2002) proposes a sample format for listening diaries. In the diary, student should write a) name, b) class, and c) date. Then, in the next section he can write about one situation or as many as he likes. For each situation, he should try to answer these questions:

- What was the listening event? (for example, TV news broadcasts, radio broadcasts, films, conversation with English speakers, explanations by lecturers)
- How much of it did I understand?
- What did I do to understand as much of it as possible?
- How did I feel about what you did?
- Am I pleased with the result?
- What do I plan to do to practice your listening this week?

Teacher's response

Teachers can modify their questions based on the need of the aspects they want to observe. Through listening diaries, there will be a communication between teachers and students intensively outside classroom. This situation will help the quiet students be more active. It also enables the teachers to monitor the progress and psychological condition of their students.

6. Listening Situations and Purposes

Many learners of English sooner or later will need to listen English in real life for a range of purposes. These depend on where they are living, working, studying, etc. The reasons for listening will vary and depend on what they need and wish to do. Galvin in Underwood (1990: 6 - 7) states that there are five reasons for listening; they are to engage in social rituals, to exchange information, to exert control, to share feelings, and to enjoy yourselves.

Further, Underwood says that most listening materials are in the form of conversation which does not take place in ideal condition. She suggests some other listening situations that teachers can prepare for the students:

- a. listening to live conversations in which one takes no part, announcements (at airport, railway stations, etc), news, weather forecast
- b. listening to radio for entertainment
- c. listening to records (song)
- d. following a lesson (in a school where English is one of the languages of instruction)
- e. attending a lecture
- f. listening to telephone (to take a message or simply to hold a conversation)
- g. following instructions (given, for example, by a sports coach)
- h. Listening to someone giving a public address.

Through listening to varieties of programs, students will be familiar with the language use in any discourse. This will help the students improve their language skills.

7. Authentic or non-authentic material?

One of the well-known surprises of arriving in a foreign country on a first visit is that the fact that even though someone has studied English for years, he is unable to understand what is being said (Underwood, 1990: 98). This is also lifted by L.G. Alexander (1994) in one of his funny stories “Do the English Speak English?” in his book *Practice and Progress*. The actor in this story wonders why English do not speak like his teacher in his school. It seems that lessons in the classroom are not prepared to face the real life.

Further, Underwood comments that due to this condition the students need to practice listening to the kinds of speech that they encounter in real life so they will be ready to communicate with English speakers. In other words, the teachers should introduce authentic materials.

However, a question will come up whether we have to use authentic materials in all of listening class. Harmer (1998: 98) says that it is not as a matter of authentic or non- authentic materials, but the use of materials depends on the level and the kind of tasks that go with a tape. There are some authentic materials which are appropriate for beginners such as pre-recorded announcements, telephone messages, etc. However, it is not appropriate if they are provided with a political speech. They will not understand a word. This material will not only be demotivating but also make the students switch off.

In principle, teaching listening means that the students must be introduced to many different kinds of speaking, e.g. announcements, conversation, telephone exchanges, lectures, plays, news broadcasts, interviews, other radio programs, stories read aloud, etc. Therefore, to motivate the students to empower listening diaries in teaching listening teacher can ask them to record any English programs or to download various English programs from many websites. They are free to select any materials.

Goh (2002) proposes some types of authentic material, namely videos, radio broadcasts, song, literary texts, interactive CD ROMs and the World Wide Web.

Videos

In line with the development of technology, the use of video as the integral part of language teaching is undeniable. The students will get advantages with the presence

of visual clues that they do not find from audio cassette. They can make use of this visual support to practice top-down strategies by contextualizing what they hear and making inferences about things that they do not hear clearly. They also can combine between auditory and visual clues in their language learning like what they do in their daily life.

The types of video cover TV drama, feature film, news program, documentary, game show, advertisement, film trailer, music video, cartoon, weather forecast, interview and talk show.

Songs

Songs are listening media that the students like most. They usually use simple natural language and contain repetitions. This is interesting because the students not only listen to music but also learn how to listen English sounds. For the purpose of learning text, they can be used to learn recount and narrative text. Some songs will deal with social issues and allow the students to apply their background knowledge and make personal inferences.

Literary texts

All genres of literary texts can be used for the listening class after some modifications. These texts can be in the form of poems and short stories. They can be used to arouse the students' critical thinking and also to learn types of text, namely, narratives, recounts, expositions and even procedural texts.

Interactive CD ROM

CD-ROMS provide a multi-media experience by combining video, images, sound, animation, and text. It also provides a special advantage: precise replay of textual-audio-visual sequences of information. Thus, the students can use it as a powerful tool to control language input. However, the weakness of this media is that not all aspects of listening can be practiced and developed with CD-ROMs. On the whole, CD-ROMs contain transactional texts.

World Wide Web

Nowadays, most students are familiar with the latest source of authentic materials, that is internet. From it, they can develop their listening competence. Many websites provides many English program. Among others are BBC World Service with its various program, VOA special English in the average speed of delivery, Randall Davis with gradable program so the students can adapt their level of competencies, Story Nory with its interesting stories ranging from classic to modern ones, etc.

Using World Wide Web will lead the students to be familiar with technology. It enables them to download and save a program so they can use it anytime they want to. The existence of transcript in many websites allows them to read it while listening to the program. It will be beneficial for the beginner and also for the ones who want to improve their pronunciation.

8. Criteria for selecting materials

A teacher often does not have much time to prepare or to record his own listening materials. Moreover, he is not sure with the quality of the recording, thus he determines to take from website or from cassette. However, not all materials provided in many websites are suitable for the class.

Similarly, in keeping listening diaries students are demanded to be able to select materials carefully. Underwood (1990: 102 – 107) proposes eight criteria for selecting recorded materials, e.g. language, length, content, the use of visual material, the style of delivery, the speed of delivery, spontaneity, and the quality of production. This is not as simple as someone thinks. Based on my experience, many students select complicated recording due to the fact that they are afraid of being considered as a stupid student if they listen to

9. Listening diaries in practice

In the implementation of listening diaries, the writer always starts the class by explaining the goal of this assignment to the students. This is crucial because they have to know what they are going to do and the significance of this task to their study progress, thus they will be ready to do this task. This is not simple due to the fact that most students think that the teaching of listening must be done in the language laboratory. They wonder about the possibility of doing homework in listening class, how teacher monitors and evaluates their works. In addition, this assignment means that they have to do something extra than what they have done up to now. They must work hard and they must be familiar with technology, something that not all students like to do.

The second step is that the students are assigned to record or download any English programs. They may record from radio, television, CD or download from web sites that provide spoken English. They are required to find the programs in different types of text, e.g. interview, song, talk show, speech, debate, story, advertisement, instruction text, and news. Each week they must listen one type of different texts. The aspects that they have to report cover 1) the identity of the programs (when they download, from what web site they download, and what type of the program they listen to), 2) the content of the material, 3) description on how far they understand, how they understand the recording and how they are pleased with what they have done, and 4) the planning they will do to cope their listening difficulties. To make them not confused, the writer lists English programs broadcast by radio and television and also web site that they can refer. In fact, they get many interesting materials, not only audio but also audio visual ones.

The problem arises when the students submit their work. Asking them to send their assignments via email made the writer busy to download although it is safe for her computer. However, the submission in the end of semester had a weakness that is some students downloaded the materials one night before the due date. Of course, this is not the final goal of this task. In this semester, the writer asks them to submit their report each week and they may submit all the recordings in the end of semester. The respond is

better than the previous semester. The students are enthusiastic to submit the reports although the formats are still varied and sometimes they have not been able to select the materials which are suitable for their level. They think that the more complicated their recording the better their mark will be. This is not true because the significance of this assignment is on the process of what they have done.

The next step is that giving evaluation to what they have done in their report. The first feedback is usually given in the beginning of the lecture because it is expected to give them a general overview, thus they will improve their diaries. Then, the next feedbacks are given in their diaries and sometime the writer discusses them in the class to know the strategy they have done in their stages of listening.

From the class discussion the students admitted that there are many benefit they get from doing this task. They say that it has broadened their mind in learning to listen in English. They can explore many kinds of language use in different texts either authentic or non-authentic materials. They are not nervous doing the task and can learn with a nice relaxed atmosphere. They are happy they can communicate freely with their lecturer through the feedbacks they have got. Moreover, by doing this task they are experienced with technology. It is useful for them because teacher of listening must be familiar with technology so that they can overcome the problem in language laboratory or they will be creative in preparing the suitable materials for his students.

Besides the benefits got from the implementation of this task, the writer still have a problem how to manage the students' assignments because of the number of classes she has to teach. Giving evaluation each week is sometimes time consuming. Therefore, it must be found out the practical way to manage them.

C. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the reflection of this teaching experience, it can be concluded that listening diaries:

1. enable the students to listen and to explore the language use in many different types of text, thus they can reduce the boredom of the monotonousness of the class,

2. give the students chance to recognize their need and problems in learning to listen in English,
3. motivate the students to always try to find the appropriate strategy in their listening, and
4. encourage the students to be active in coping their listening problems by having good communication with their lecturer, etc.

From these four or more roles that listening diaries can do to motivate the students to improve their listening ability, it is necessary to design the more systematic ways or research toward the implementation of this task because this is just an experience that the writer has done for more than three semesters and now she still uses this method.

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