

HOW STUDENTS DEEMED LISTENING AS THE MOST DIFFICULT ENGLISH SKILL DURING ONLINE LEARNING?

by

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Abstract:

Despite the growing interest in online learning over the past years, Indonesian students had to adjust to online interactions. Thus, Indonesian students, in general, still needed to be thoroughly instilled in this learning mode due to various challenges. This qualitative research aimed to discover the most difficult English skills during online learning from Indonesian students' perspectives. This research utilized a survey design to rank the complex English skills; Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Reading. There were 55 students from different majors as participants from various universities in Indonesia who already partake in English courses by undergoing online mode. The instruments in this research are questionnaires regarding how one of the English skills is regarded as the most difficult during online learning, including the cause and methods to lessen the difficulty of obtaining thorough explanations. Critical Discourse Analysis was utilized as a data analysis technique to comprehend multiple perspectives better; in educational and non-educational contexts. The findings discovered that the majority of the participants deemed listening as the most difficult one. This research also discovered the factors that made listening difficult among students and the methods devised to lessen the difficulties in listening during online learning.

Keywords: *critical discourse analysis, complex English skills, Indonesian students' perspectives, online learning*

INTRODUCTION

For the past years, the teaching and learning process has been compelled to adapt to online learning of swift technological development has compelled the teaching and learning

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process to apply to online learning. Since then, it has been widely practiced in higher education in a global context (Hassan, 2021). Besides, online learning was also recently deemed as proper modernization of the learning and teaching process due to educational institutions' intentions all over the world to instill online learning as a method to ensure lifelong learning (Jacobs, 2013). In addition, Covid-19 also forced learners to reduce physical contact with their peers or teachers, eventually leading to the rise of online teaching and learning. However, online learning also might not suit the needs of Indonesian students in learning English skills since only some students in developing countries possess similar traits and technological awareness.

In addition, students' readiness to adjust learning methods to online learning also becomes a concerning matter since online learning requires students to properly utilize gadgets to access learning materials and avoid unnecessary hindrances. However, despite the previous drawbacks, online learning significantly influences students' communicative skills because it urges them to be more proactive in accessing materials based on their interests (Lekawael, 2017). Especially during this tumultuous year of the pandemic, higher education students were also forced to undergo online learning, yet, only some students were ready to adjust to this relatively new mode of learning.

Therefore, during this turbulent era of the pandemic, adjusting to online learning is not easy as it sounds since only some can quickly adjust to this kind of learning mode, either the educators or the students. As for Indonesian contexts, adjusting to online learning, educators and students might suffer if they fail to adjust to online learning (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2021). It was because online learning requires extra effort from both. This kind of difficulty learning also exists in acquiring English skills; Writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Learning language skills, especially English skills, requires lots of effort from the learners.

Accordingly, mastering all aspects of English skills would be a daunting task. However, it will be incredibly beneficial for language learners to master the language they desire since all skills require to work in unity to serve their function as communicative devices (Wiraatmaja, 2021). Especially during online learning, it is hoped that English skills will significantly influence the teaching and learning process since online learning in the upcoming future will be the foundation of learning and teaching processes and has already been implemented in higher

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education in a global context. It is believed to positively impact education as lifelong learning while meeting the demand of modern society (Wiraatmaja, 2021). Listening, in that regard, is also deemed as one of the English skills that need to be addressed in its' complexity since this language skill possesses various traits that require the language learners to be physically and mentally prepared to master this passive skill. Another research also emphasized that one of the traits was that listening was considered to be acquired faster than other language skills (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Because due to the importance of listening, students were rarely taught how to listen appropriately, and students often ended up experiencing unsatisfactory results (Puspitasari & Hanur, 2016).

Mastering a language takes effort in English and any other language. Therefore, mastering English requires the learner to understand how to maximize their comprehension of English skills fully. English skills here are divided into four essential aspects; Writing, Speaking, Listening, and Reading. Each of them needs to work together to determine someone's language ability. Besides, those language skills complement one another and are indispensably related to constitute someone's language proficiency (Sadiku, 2015). In addition, English skills are also deemed as a means of communication, and they need to work together to determine language mastery (Kurniasih, 2016). More importantly, in mastering or learning languages, every learner was encouraged to maintain motivation (Songbatumis, 2017). Therefore, learning English skills is a lifelong and complex process since it has many aspects that must be considered.

In addition, although listening as one of the English skills is considered one of the complex language skills, language learners are greatly encouraged to get exposed to a considerable amount of exposure to listening materials to develop their listening skills (Purnamaningwulan, 2021). (Purnamaningwulan, 2021) also insisted that improving learners' English proficiency and listening skill requires much input by using authentic use of listening materials uttered in various accents. Another research also insisted that repetitive actions in listening materials will bear fruit if the learners are exposed to listening materials over time (Lekawael, 2017). Thus, (Nurani & Widiati, 2021) emphasized that mastering listening requires an effort that differs slightly from other language skills. It is because this skill urged the learners to access

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computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and additional online resources-based listening materials that meet the learners' interests. Also, using these sets of online and computer-assisted equipment positively affected the learners' listening skill development. In addition, listening is also regarded as a complex process since it requires learners to depend on listening proficiency and supporting apparatus (Hidayanti et al., 2020). Nevertheless, despite the complexity of listening, listening offers enormous benefits to language learners, including improving other language skills (Amalia et al., 2019). Therefore, listening also requires language learners to understand and get the text's information by relying on a keen sense of hearing.

In addition to the previous premises, improving students' listening skills was already challenging. However, nowadays, online learning offers a helping hand in reducing the difficulty of teaching listening. Online learning also urges students to be aware of technical and non-technical issues to support learning, especially during turbulent times. The swift change to online learning requires everyone involved to increase their awareness of online literacy to elevate the quality of online learning (Luyt, 2013). Henceforth, despite maintaining and improving educators' and students' awareness of online literacy, online learning has proven fruitful over the years. Higher education will likely rely heavily on online interactions (Allen & Seaman, 2014). Thus, online learning is regarded as promising due to its benefits to both educators and students, and it also requires people's awareness to realize its importance.

However, to ensure quality learning, online learning must manage to secure the quality of the following aspects; communication, technology, time management, pedagogy, and assessment (Limperos et al., 2015). Nevertheless, Fojtík, as cited in (Nurani & Widiati, 2021), clearly stated that online learning urged not only the teachers but also the learners to maintain their motivation and time management while managing the complexity of learning online, including expanding the breadth of listening materials and dealing with horrendous internet connections.

Based on the above, the researchers utilized Critical Discourse Analysis to understand the text-context relations on how listening during online learning was difficult from students' perspectives. Identifying the association of sociocultural contexts with discourse, power, dominance, and social inequality was one of the

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purposes of utilizing Critical Discourse Analysis (Van Dijk, 1977). Thus, the steps in the process of interpretation and analysis of the texts must follow eight principles of CDA by (Rogers, 2004). They are how CDA deals with social issues, how power relations are discursive, and how discourse constructs society and culture. Also, they cover how discourse exhibits ideological matters, how discourse is historical, how necessary is a socio-cognitive approach to understand texts and societies, how interpretive, explanatory, and systematic is the use of discourse, and how discourse regarded as a scientific pattern. CDA, thus, can also be perceived as a scientific concept to undergo more thorough text-context analysis.

Therefore, the authors devised a concept to assist them in analyzing the texts by delving deeper into contexts that underlie the texts. (Wiraatmaja, 2021) explains that Van Dijk's concepts not only practically analyze the texts but also investigate how the texts are being created by probing into the contexts to get more precise ideas since texts here regarded as the foundation principles of any sociocultural aspects in which these series of texts formed the contexts. Thus, CDA, as elaborated by (Rogers, 2004), delve deeper into the relationship between CDA and language since CDA's framework is to thoroughly investigate the multiple discourse and reasoning behind the relations of texts and contexts. Including how listening was deemed difficult to master during online learning by students or language learners from various reasoning or contexts.

During online learning, language learners, especially students, were bound to face difficulty mastering certain aspects of English skills, either technical or non-technical. Due to the premises mentioned above, this research aims to elaborate on how during online learning, listening, as one of the passive skills in language skills, poses significant adversity by language learners and how language learners made an effort to lessen the difficulty in learning listening encountered during online learning.

Based on the premises mentioned above, this research aims to discover the following:

- 1) How is listening perceived as the most difficult English skill during online learning?
- 2) What are the causes and methods devised by students to lessen the difficulty in listening?
- 3) How Critical Discourse Analysis perceived the causes and methods devised by

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students to lessen the difficulty in listening?

METHOD

Design

This research employed a qualitative method with a survey design by (Braun et al., 2020) that was chosen to determine the most difficult English skills, the reason for the most difficult ones, and its' methods to lessen the difficulty during online learning from Indonesian students' perspective. Hence, Critical Discourse Analysis (Krzyżanowski, 2016); (Baker et al., 2008) was chosen as the data analysis technique to constitute thorough explanations regarding the results taken from the survey.

Participant

Fifty-five students from various majors and universities across Indonesia participated in this research. The participants of this research comprised bachelor's degree students minimum in the second semester from any majors in various universities who have already taken English classes, either English for Specific Purposes or studying at English majors.

Instrument

The instrument used was an online questionnaire, and it was formulated in the form of Google Forms. There were approximately 11 questions, and they were displayed in English and *Bahasa*. The questionnaire, in the beginning, required the respondents to complete general information regarding their backgrounds; email, name, university, and primary/department. Next, the questionnaires oblige the respondents to rank their English skills' starting from the most difficult ones, followed by the second, third, and least difficult English skills during online learning. In addition, the survey also urged them to elaborate on the cause and the methods devised to lessen the difficulty.

Data Collecting Technique

The data collection techniques of this research were (1) distributing a questionnaire to the respondents, (2) classifying the most difficult to minor complex English skills during online learning, (3) determining the causes of the most difficult

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English skill, and (4) determining the methods devised by respondents to lessen the difficulty of the most difficult English skill.

Data Analysis Technique

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was chosen as the Data Analysis Technique of this research. Therefore, the researchers regard CDA as meticulously interpreting aspects of the educational and non-educational contexts represented in the most difficult English skills during learning, the causes, and the methods devised to lessen the difficulty (Krzyżanowski, 2016); (Baker et al., 2008). (Farah et al., 2022) also elaborated that CDA serves as a tool to aid researchers in discovering the association between language and society. This aid gives a keener description and interpretation and explains why and how the discourse about the issues works. Afterward, the researchers elaborate on those three variables' reasoning regarding educational and non-educational contexts. On the other hand, the arrangement of citation in the text and list of reference employed an automatic model using Mendeley cite(Turmudi, 2020)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

The current study seek to find answers by investigating some variables. 1). How is listening perceived as the most difficult English skill during online learning? 2). What are the causes and methods devised by students to lessen the difficulty in listening? And finally, 3). How Critical Discourse Analysis perceived the causes and methods devised by students to lessen the difficulty in listening?



Figure 1. Position of Difficult English Skills

This research’s first finding emphasized listening, which ranked first among others language skills in terms of the most difficult ones during online learning. Here, 55 respondents, mainly higher education students from various universities in Indonesia, ranked Listening higher than other language skills by wide margins. 22 higher education students preferred Listening first place as the most difficult one during online learning, followed by 16 students who chose Writing, 15 students who deemed Speaking as the third ones, and lastly, Reading picked two students as the least difficult one

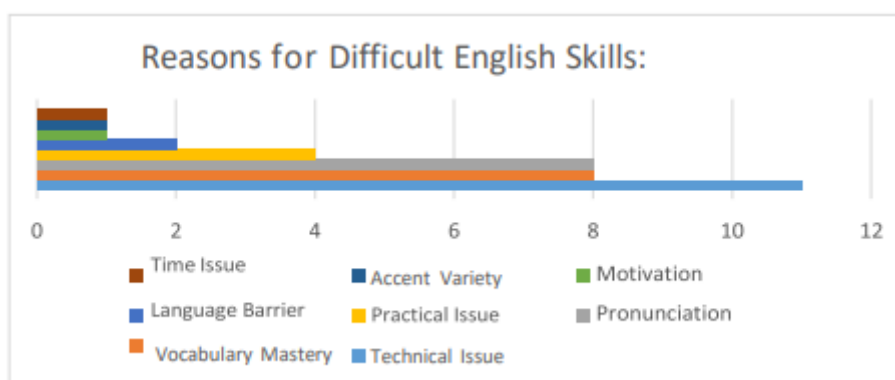


Figure 2. Reasons for Difficult English Skills: Listening

Following this category is difficult in speaking skill.

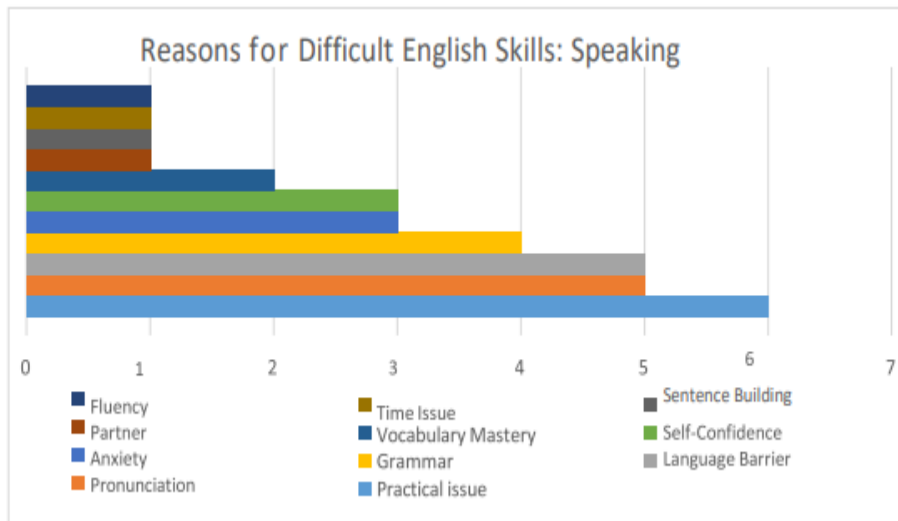


Figure 3. Reasons for Difficult English Skills: Speaking

Following this category is difficult in listening skill.

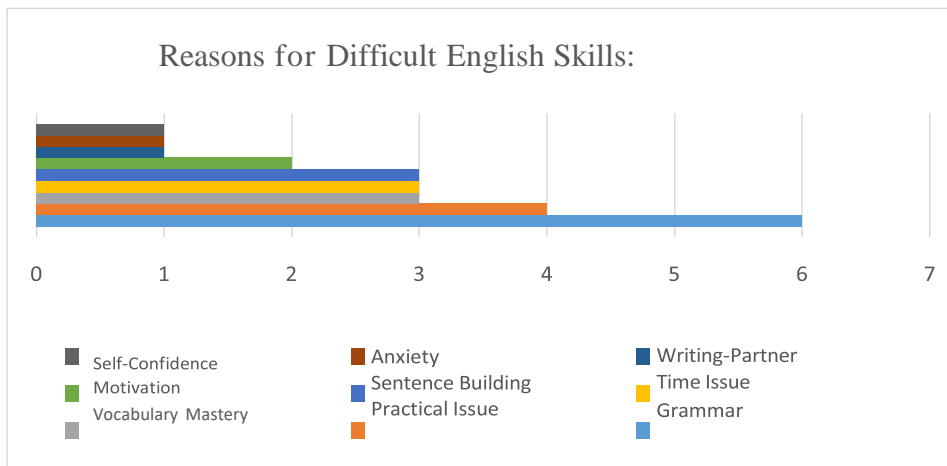


Figure 4. Reasons for Difficult English Skills: writing

Following this category is difficult in reading skill.

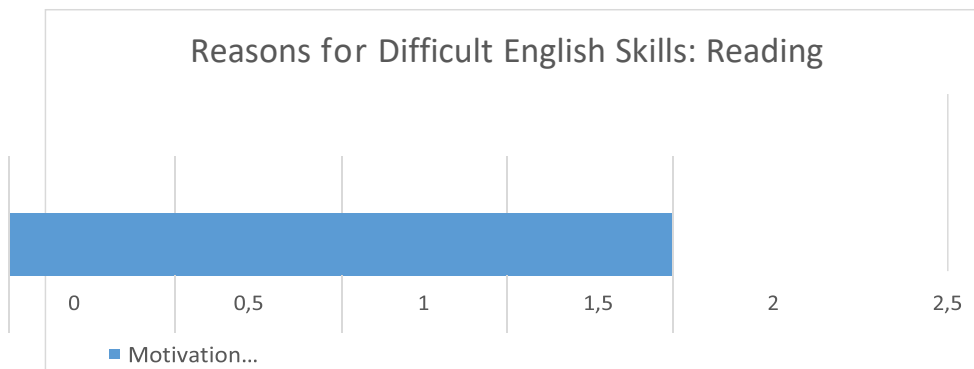


Figure 5. Reasons for Difficult English Skills: Reading

Afterward, in the questionnaires, the researchers also discovered the difficulties faced by 55 higher education students from various universities in Indonesia. The researchers here only highlighted the difficulty in Listening as the most difficult due to three major causes; technical issues, speakers' pronunciation in listening materials, and students' inadequate vocabulary mastery. However, the researchers also displayed reasons for the difficulty in English skills of three other skills; speaking, writing, and reading.

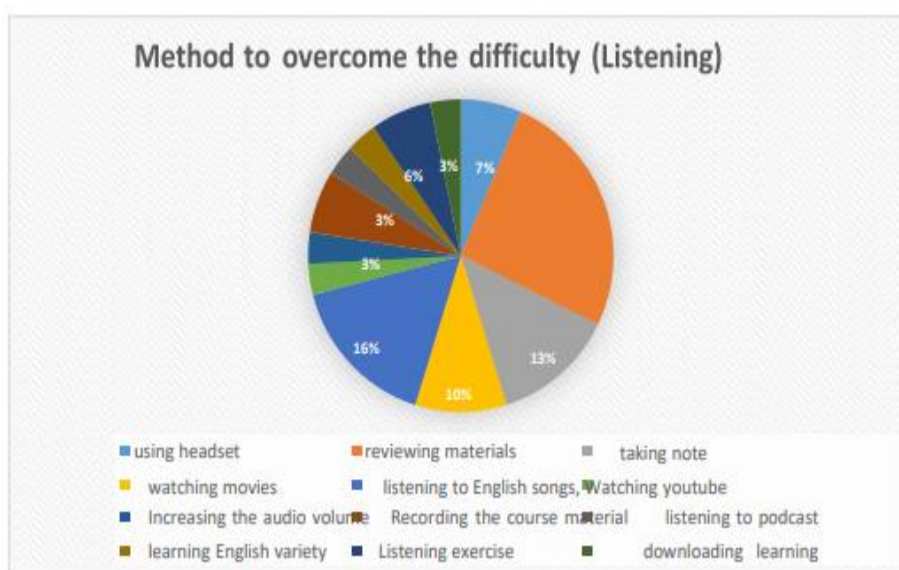


Figure 6. Methods to overcome Difficult English Skills: Listening

Lastly, the last findings of this research comprise the methods devised by the respondents. The students, as the respondents, also initiated efforts to lessen the difficulty in listening to those that suit their interest best when facing adversities, as mentioned in the previous sections. Therefore, the most dominant methods devised by students were reviewing materials, followed by listening to English songs, and learning how to take notes properly.

Discussion

This segment constitutes how Indonesian students' reckoned Listening as the most difficult during online learning. It is primarily the cause of Listening deemed as the most

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difficult ones, the methods to lessen those difficulties in Listening, and Critical Discourse Analysis regarding the cause of Listening as the most difficult ones and methods to lessen the difficulty in listening.

The cause of listening is the most difficult English skill during online learning.

A proper understanding of English skills enhances students' comprehension of language mastery and communication with each other (Sadiku, 2015). Significantly benefit students' comprehension of students' comprehension of English (Puspitasari & Hanur, 2016). As one of the receptive skills, regarded as the most difficult during online learning, listening is deemed an essential language skill because it helps people acquire massive aspects of information, ideas, and understanding, to support their language acquisition (Lekawael, 2017) In addition, compared to other language skills, students were significantly faster in improving their listening skills (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Mastering listening is a must-acquired skill for learners because they are required to understand and grasp the speaker's intention. When the students can grasp the input from listening, they will be able to use it well to master or improve other language skills (Amalia et al., 2019). However, although listening offers various benefits to language learners, listening was reckoned as the most difficult if the students or L2 learners were rarely taught how to listen effectively, resulting in poor listening comprehension (Berne in (Puspitasari & Hanur, 2016). Therefore, this research discovered that listening is the most difficult during online learning due to various issues mentioned in the previous section. However, the researchers here only emphasized the three most dominant ones; technical issues, speaker's pronunciation in listening materials, and students' inadequate vocabulary proficiency.

Firstly, since teaching listening during online learning require both the students and the lecturers to own and utilize internet and, any supporting devices, hence, technical issues was regarded as the most dominant ones. As one of the respondents clearly stated that if technical issues such as poor internet connection occurred, the sound of the listening materials uttered by speakers might be unclear. It led them to speakers' utterances and the utterances of the speakers. The use of technology was an excellent help for educators to shape the students to be further independent and maximize their learning outcomes through online learning. It may rapidly foster language learners' skills (Yaniafari & Rihardini, 2021). Besides, another research also discovered that virtual classroom possesses pivotal traits in

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increasing learners' communicative skills because it helps to create unique class interactions and participation (Al-qahatani, 2019). However, although online learning offers significant value, as previously stated, the respondents expressed their opinion on how technical issues often failed them during the learning process. Especially if the students do not have the luxury of time to adjust to the abrupt and swift change from face-to-face learning to online learning since online learning requires them to access materials from the internet as well as educators' and students' engagements that primarily rely on the internet and any other devices (Dwiyanti et al., 2020). In addition, during online learning, technical aspects, as well as the internet and supporting devices, were critically significant in listening since listening relies on the internet and audiovisual devices and supports learners' comprehension and prior knowledge development. Therefore, learners' prior knowledge or mental schemata was one language process that improved language learning comprehension (Hasan et al., 2017). If any technical issues related to the internet and the supporting devices arise, language learners will find difficulty learning and listening during online learning.

Speakers' pronunciation in listening materials is also deemed as one of the reasons why listening is considered problematic. The researchers discovered that pronunciation here refers to the speakers on the audio or audiovisual materials given by the lecturers to the students. This notion was also expressed by some respondents who pointed out that the speakers' pronunciation in the materials made them unable to hear the sound or the voice clearly due to the speed of the speakers' pronunciation and finally misunderstood specific vocabularies and the intentions of the speaker's utterances. As the speed of speech between native and non-native speakers varies, students tend to fall under confusion in determining the meaning of certain words, idioms, phrases, and speakers' pronunciation (Puspitasari & Hanur, 2016). In addition, the materials might contain a set of conversations or dialogues uttered by native speakers and non-native speakers.

Therefore, students might have difficulty comprehending the speakers' intentions due to distinctive qualities between native and non-native speakers. Besides, the speakers, either native or non-native, urged the respondents or listeners to carefully heed the speaker's accents, grammar, and vocabulary, as well as the speakers' intentions (Saricoban cited in(Lekawael, 2017). Therefore, the speakers' pronunciation in the listening materials plays a huge role in students' listening comprehension and may provide obstacles to most

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language learners' respondents. Besides, teachers, lecturers, and educators are most likely providing insufficient exposure to their students and themselves to various listening materials from various accents, native or non-native speakers. This notion is also recognized as a particular term, so-called World Englishes. According to (Kilickaya, 2009), World Englishes emphasized improving students' communicative ability by exposing them to various cultures, accents, and language varieties in English contexts all over the globe. He also pointed out the benefits of English as a Lingua Franca, a means of communication between English native speakers and non-English native speakers. Hence, it could be inferred that since people from various backgrounds already utter English, it may boost students' understanding of various accents from native or non-native speakers. However, insufficient exposure to pronunciations and accents from native and non-native speakers may hinder students' listening development.

Next, the third dominant one emphasized the students' inadequate vocabulary proficiency. One of the reasons listening was ranked first among other language skills in terms of difficulty in mastering was that students' vocabulary mastery was considered insufficient, which resulted in the disruptions of the learning process. One of the respondents stated that their vocabulary mastery was inadequate because the educators did not heed the well-being of students' vocabulary. Another respondent also said that because most of the materials were uttered by native speakers, they could not keep up with the pace of the conversation and, in the end, could not get the gist of the same vocabulary uttered by the speakers in the materials. Underwood also mentioned this notion, as cited in (Amalia et al., 2019).

It is about some difficulties that led to inefficient listening understanding. For example, listeners cannot control the speed of delivery, can only sometimes have words repeated, have a limited vocabulary, and may fail to recognize the signals indicating that the speaker is moving from one point to another and giving an example or repeating a point. Other examples are that listeners might need more contextual knowledge; it can be difficult for listeners to concentrate in a foreign language; students may have established certain learning habits, such as a wish to understand every word. In addition, other research also accentuated those language learners may face common issues in listening and one of which was an inadequate amount of vocabulary (Sadighi & Zere cited in (Hasan et al., 2017). In addition, due to inadequate vocabulary, students would likely need clarification in

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determining the meanings of the speech uttered in the listening materials (Puspitasari & Hanur, 2016). Therefore, an adequate amount of vocabulary may help students develop listening skills. (Hidayanti et al., 2020) state that listening requires listeners to possess three vital elements; comprehending, retaining, and responding. Thus, to comprehend, retain, and respond to the materials, students must possess an adequate vocabulary.

Methods devised by students to lessen the difficulty in listening

Despite the causes of listening regarded as the most difficult during online learning. The researchers also inquired about the methods devised by the students, the purpose of this inquiry was to discover the methods to lessen the difficulty in learning and listening during online learning. In addition, (Amalia et al., 2019) also emphasized that proficiency in listening also correlates to other language skills. Therefore, by improving listening proficiency, students will be able to improve other language skills as well. It was also pointed out that if students' listening proficiency improved or kept developing, it would be beneficial for them to concentrate on listening and their language skills in general (Puspitasari & Hanur, 2016). Based on that premises, only the three most dominant ones were selected to be further discussed here; reviewing materials, listening to English songs, and taking notes.

First, reviewing materials emerged as the first method devised by the students to lessen the difficulty. Reviewing materials here refers to exposing themselves to listening materials in English. The students also expressed that they devised and utilized this method to overcome or at least lessen the difficulty in listening. The respondents stated that due to varieties of accents in English, they exposed themselves to varieties of listening materials to increase their sensitivity or awareness of the context delivered by the speakers, including watching a variety of shows and movies and listening to songs without subtitles or lyrics. It was also mentioned by (Lekawael, 2017) that students or learners have to learn how to deal with issues by listening to simple expressions uttered by the speakers. It can be inferred that simple expressions uttered by the singer were translated by the students in order to improve their listening proficiency.

Next, the respondents also devised another method to lessen the difficulty when taking listening classes by exposing themselves to songs in English. One of the respondents clearly stated that they overcame their problems by listening to songs, and another

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respondent added that they tried translating the meaning while listening to the song. It was also elaborated by (Sari et al., 2019) that since the students are already familiar with song-listening materials, it will not be a burden for them to improve their listening proficiency. Besides, they added that using songs in the class effectively provided a fun experience, reducing students' anxiety while fostering their interest and learning motivation. Therefore, students would likely be less anxious if they studied in their comfort or tight areas.

Lastly, the respondents revealed that they also take notes, which becomes the third favorite among respondents to lessen the difficulty during listening. Regarding this aspect, some respondents explained that they wrote notes regarding important or challenging aspects of the materials and unfamiliar vocabulary to be looked up in the dictionaries later. The significance of taking notes, also expressed by (Hidayanti & Umamah, 2018), is that this method refers to input-output strategies that emphasize taking memos while listening to the listening materials in English, which may greatly assist the students in improving their understanding of the whole speech in the materials. They also mentioned that looking up dictionaries while taking notes is also part of learning strategies in listening, which is an interaction-based strategy that requires the students to concentrate and focus on the meaning of the words, sentences, and phrases in the listening materials.

Critical Discourse Analysis' Insight into the cause and methods devised.

Based on the premises mentioned above, three causes mentioned above were related, and one aspect might have led one to another. From CDA's perspective, the researchers argued that there were two significant hindrances; the first was a non-educational aspect, and the second was the educational aspect. In other words, non-educational aspects refer to technical issues, and the educational aspects discuss the speakers' pronunciation in the materials and students' inadequate vocabulary level.

First, by encountering non-educational aspects, prominently poor internet connection, the students need help understanding the gist of speakers' diction and utterances in the listening materials. Therefore, if the speed of the speakers' pronunciations and varieties of accents are varied, it eventually might hinder students' understanding of the speakers' intentions. To make matters worse, poor internet connection combined with the speed of pronunciations and varieties of accents of the speakers in the materials will surely hinder students' listening development, notably if students were already

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experiencing inadequate vocabulary proficiency to deal with such matters. Thus, during online learning, the non-educational aspects are regarded as the initial issues that need to be addressed by the students. Therefore, if this non-educational aspect cannot be solved, students might face more detrimental hardships when trying to overcome the educational aspects. In addition, related to previous statements, another study conducted by (Dwiyanti et al., 2020) also discovered that students might need more time to adjust to online learning. In other words, students' readiness to take on online learning is pivotal, especially those deemed lacking readiness on online literacy; internet self-efficacy, online communication self-efficacy, self-directed learning, learner control, and motivation towards e-learning.

Therefore, the researchers also argued that the methods mentioned earlier by the respondents above were necessary for online learning since it was based on the respondents' needs. As (Hidayanti et al., 2020) stated that to improve listening proficiency, they expressed that students or language learners must also consider the learning approach that suits them best. In addition, although online learning offers significant benefits, online learning also relies heavily on the internet connection, which is vital for continuing the sustainability of online learning (Nartiningrum & Nugroho, 2021). However; when internet hotspot is resolved, it is likely that OL face new challenge to solve.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Conclusion

The research discovered that listening was regarded as the most difficult during online learning, outclasses the other English skills by a wide margin. Listening is deemed as the most difficult ones due to several factors; inadequate technical issues such as gadgets and internet connection, unfamiliar with the pronunciation uttered in the listening materials and students' limited vocabulary mastery. In addition, this research also emphasized scrutinizing the methods devised by the respondents to lessen the difficulty in listening during online learning. When facing adversity in learning English, explicitly listening, students devised methods that suited their interest best to lessen the difficulty when undertaking listening classes. The methods were as follows; reviewing various listening materials, exposing themselves to materials, especially English songs, and learning to take notes properly when reviewing or doing listening tasks.

Implication

This study aims to discover and point out how online learning affects students' performance in mastering English skills, primarily listening. The result of this research hopefully sheds light on any educators to evaluate their teaching methods to lessen the students' difficulty in mastering listening. Future research involving more significant respondents and deep and more thorough analysis is required to provide better insight.

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