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Listening Comprehension Difficulties in Indonesian EFL Students

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Abstract Listening is one of language skills that must be mastered by the students, because by having a good listening skill, they can communicate much better to each other. In fact, there are many EFL students encounter some problems in listening class. This study is aimed at analyzing the students' difficulty in listening comprehension. The study used the descriptive qualitative design, and using the purposive sampling by engaging 85 students of Basic Listening Class at English Education Program in University of Indraprasta PGRI. The questionnaire were administered in collecting the data, and it was analyzed descriptively to know what kind of listening difficulties faced by EFL students. Based on the results, the most listening issues faced by the EFL students are the speaking speed of the speaker, the variety of accents used by the speaker, the lengthy description in listening text. Some strategies should be done to figure out these barriers in listening process. The lecturers need to identify what their students problem in listening exercises.

Key Words: Listening Comprehension; Listening Difficulties; Listening Strategies

Abstrak: Menyimak merupakan salah satu keterampilan berbahasa yang harus dikuasai oleh siswa, karena dengan memiliki keterampilan menyimak yang baik, mereka dapat berkomunikasi dengan lebih baik satu sama lain. Faktanya, banyak pemelajar bahasa asing (Inggris) yang menghadapi masalah di dalam kegiatan menyimak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesulitan siswa dalam kegiatan menyimak. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian deskriptif kualitatif, dan menggunakan *purposive sampling* dengan melibatkan 85 siswa Kelas *Basic Listening Program* Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Indraprasta PGRI. Pengumpulan data dilakukan dengan memberikan kuesioner, dan data dianalisis secara deskriptif untuk mengetahui kesulitan menyimak apa saja yang dihadapi oleh pemelajar bahasa asing ini. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, masalah dalam menyimak yang paling banyak dihadapi oleh siswa adalah kecepatan berbicara yang disampaikan pembicara, berbagai aksen yang digunakan oleh pembicara, deskripsi yang panjang dalam teks menyimak. Beberapa strategi harus dilakukan untuk mengetahui berbagai hambatan dalam proses menyimak. Pengajar perlu mengidentifikasi mengenai pelbagai masalah yang dihadapi para pemelajar dalam kegiatan menyimak.

Kata Kunci: Menyimak; Kesulitan dalam Menyimak; Strategi dalam Menyimak

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INTRODUCTION

Listening is a language skill that plays a main role to get the information or knowledge. It needs a close attention to have some understanding to what people are saying. Listening is an essential skill in obtaining some information in effective way (Tyagi, 2013). Just like reading, listening is a receptive skills which need input, and only by understanding the input precisely, someone will upgrade his or her knowledge, and the communication will run effectively. Rost, (2015) stated that listening is a complicated process which the listeners must understand the information from what they have heard, and listening also support us to know the world around us as one of the matters in achieving an effective communication. According to Wang, (2020), listening is a two ways of interactive activity. It is a process of receiving the audible symbols. The first step of listening comprehension is the receiving the sound waves through the ears and involving the nerves impulse in the brain to be transmitted.

Teaching listening in English Education Program is a challenging activity when many students in the listening class have been frustrated to get the precise information from what they have listened. It happens because some factors that cause listening comprehension is difficult for EFL learners. When someone is listening in order to get some information, he or she needs more level of concentration. According to Novika et al., (2020), teaching EFL listening to Indonesian students is not a simple way since the most students' main focus is on reading comprehension and writing the language grammatically. It makes the students put aside the listening skills. (Renandya & Farrell, 2011) identified that the speech rate in delivering the speech is one of the factors that obstruct in listening comprehension, and even the texts are spoken at normal speed, the EFL learners still face this problem since their level in comprehension is low. Azmi Bingol et al., (2014) added that the length of the texts can be a significant factor that affects learners' comprehension. The level of learners plays the important role when they listen to the long speech, and they must make the information stay in their mind. It would be very difficult for the lower level learners to listen more than three minutes, so the shorter speech is better for them to understand the meaning.

Azmi Bingol et al., (2014) stated that the record quality in some classes has not high quality sound system which can have an effect to the listeners' listening comprehension. They also stated that the cultural differences learners have a big impact on the learners' interpretation in listening process. The teachers should convey the background knowledge before they start the listening activity. Munro & Derwing, (1999) added that speakers' accent can subtract the learners' understanding. Buck, (2001) also explained that when the learners listen an unfamiliar accent for the first time since they only study about American English will face serious difficulties listening comprehension. It causes the learners' comprehension is impossible to achieve. In addition, Bloomfield et al., (2010) stated that different accent from some regional can have an impact in understanding the message, and familiar accent is easier for them to grasp the meaning of the speech. The unfamiliar vocabulary is also the other factor in listening comprehension (Azmi Bingol et al., 2014). If the learners know the meaning of words, it can raise their motivation and give good impact in listening process, so it would be easier for them to understand the speech. The restricted vocabulary, poor grammars also some factors that increasing the listening problems (Graham, 2006).

Other factors that affect students in listening comprehension activity are the speed of the speech, the quality of the audio system, the unfamiliar pronunciation, and the lack of vocabulary from the EFL learners. These problems are the most common encountered by the students in the listening process. Since the listening skills take a leading role in getting the information in a conversation, students must have this competency to support their study. A student with good listening skills will be able to interpret the message effectively. In fact, many students are still in the lower level in listening skills due to they encounter so many

problems dealing with this skill. Listening input is required in language acquisition; therefore, listening is necessary in learning the target language. By listening, the students will get the first input for their knowledge, and they can produce words or sentences orally to have an effective communication. The good listening skills can be achieved by having listening strategy, and identifying what are the obstacle in improving this skill.

According to Richards, (2001), there are some factors that often encounter by the students. They have some problems in understanding lecture, taking effective notes understanding the lengthy of description in English, understanding spoken language instructions, understanding informal language, understanding the subject matter of a talk. Al-Thiyabi, (2014) divided the listening problems into two major themes namely problem that students encounter and the reason behind the problems. Some studies have been conducted dealing with the listening difficulties. The study was conducted by Nushi & Orouji, (2020) This research investigated 208 teachers' views on listening difficulties among Iranian EFL learners. By using a mixed-method approach, the research finding is the teachers believed that the learners' listening difficulties have three categories: pronunciation-based, individual characteristic-based and content-based difficulties. This study suggests that listening difficulties can be figured out by knowing listening strategies.

Other study was conducted by Gilakjani & Sabouri, (2016), they stated that teachers should teach the students suitable listening strategies. Since there is no an ideal method, listening activities should be organized from the basic to more advance as the learners acquire in English language. Meanwhile Arianti & Ningsih, (2019) administered the study by using qualitative method. The findings revealed that the beginners need to enrich various listening text in different context to gain information from many kinds of genres. The lacking of vocabulary and how the words are pronounced and also recognizing main points become some obstacles for students in listening activities. So the teachers should have been more creative in providing materials and utilizing technology equipment. Other different factor was revealed by Avci & Doghonadze, (2017), that psychological aspect is involved. Students have more anxiety such as nervous when they are listening the English native speaker, and they think they do not understand it.

Regarding some listening difficulties occur in EFL learners, it needs some listening strategy to reduce those problems. Many studies have been conducted related to listening strategies. The study of Kassem, (2015) the using listening strategy frequently is good for FL listener in listening comprehension. The listening strategies (cognitive strategies, meta cognitive strategies, and sosio-affective strategies) are believed can improve the listening skills better (Namaziandost et al., 2019)

Considering how important that listening skills, and also many EFL students face some difficulties in listening comprehension, this research aims at analyzing what kinds of listening difficulties that EFL students faced, and can figure out or reduce the problem by looking for the suitable listening strategies. Therefore the EFL students' listening skills can be improved as well.

METHOD

The method in this study was descriptive qualitative method since the objective of descriptive research is describing the phenomenon and characteristic which focuses on what something has happened (Nassaji, 2015). The descriptive research is focused to make a description systematically and accurately based on facts about a certain object. This study was conducted to analyze the students' difficulties in listening comprehension.

Participants

There were 85 students who engaged in this study. They are the students of Basic Listening class in English Education Program. They were the first year students, and most of them were fresh graduated students. Some of them were never fully practice the listening section of their English subject. They almost never listen to the audio in order to get some information or answer some questions. This situation made some of them to adapt the new behaviour in listening for getting some information whether in general or in detail.

Sampling Procedures

The sample of the participant was using purposive sampling since the research objective is to analyze the students' listening difficulty. The participants were students of Basic Listening Classroom only.

Materials and Apparatus

In this study, the instrument is in the form of questionnaire dealing with the kinds of problems that students encounter in listening activities. The questionnaire has been adopted from Richard's work (Richards, 2001). The questionnaire aims to identify student's beliefs, opinion, and attitudes toward listening skills. There are two parts major themes: troubles that students often face, and the reasons behind difficulty of understanding in the listening activity.

There were 5 close questions about some difficulties in listening activity, and 4 questions about the reasons behind the listening problem. The students choosed only one out of four option about adverbs of indefinite frequency: always, often, sometimes, and never. In addition, there was 1 open-ended question about what other students' listening difficulties that faced by them according to their experience. The Google form was used in constructing the questionnaire, and presenting the students' response in the form of ghraps or charts.

Procedures

The procedures of this study were firstly, the observation was done during the semester for the two basic listening classes to identify the problems in listening class. Next, some literatures were reviewed as references to choose the appropriate theories. After reviewing the literatures, the purpose of the research was specified namely to analyze the students' difficulties in basic listening activity. The next step was organizing the instrument to collect the data. This study used the questionnaire to get the data from the students about their difficulties in learning basic listening. The Google form was choosen in building up the questionnaire since it is easy and accurate in getting the analysis along with the graphs or charts. The questionnaire was administered to the students in Basic listening class. After all the students finished in giving their respons, the percentage of students' respons was automatically presented, and the data will be analyzed and interpreted.

Data Analysis

In a descriptive qualitative method, the data will be analyzed by the answer given by the students. By using Google form the data were analyzed and it will be displayed and described in number and percentage in pie chart. The data will be categorized into two major themes namely problems that students face in listening activities and the reason behind the problems.

RESULTS

Based on the questionnaires administered to the students, there are some results displayed on pie charts.

Problems that students often face in listening activities



Figure 1 The data of difficulty in taking note

Based on the Figure 1, the data shows 2.4% or 2 students who got difficulty in taking note when they were listening to the audio. There is 12 students or 14.1% of them who often encountered this problem, and 74.1% of them who faced this difficulty sometimes. On the other hand, there are 8 students who never have such difficulty or it is equal to 9.4% from all respondents.



Figure 2 The data of difficulty in comprehending the length of description

According to figure above, there are 29 students or 34.1% who often found hard to understand if the description about the information they have listened was much longer which means more information that they have to understand. There are 48 students or 56.5% of them sometimes confronted with such problem. In addition, the students who never had such difficulty have the same number as the students who always faced it.

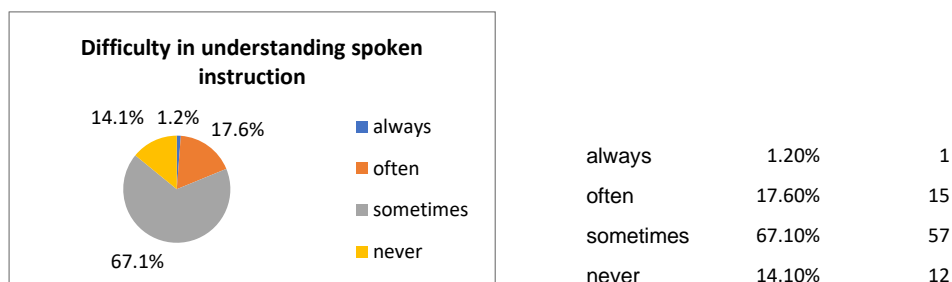


Figure 3 The data of difficulty in understanding spoken instruction

The Figure 3 shows the data about difficulty encountered by the students in understanding the oral instruction. There is only 1 student always faced it, and there are 12

students or 14.1% who never found this problem. Most of them sometimes were hard to understand the spoken instruction with 67.1% from all students.

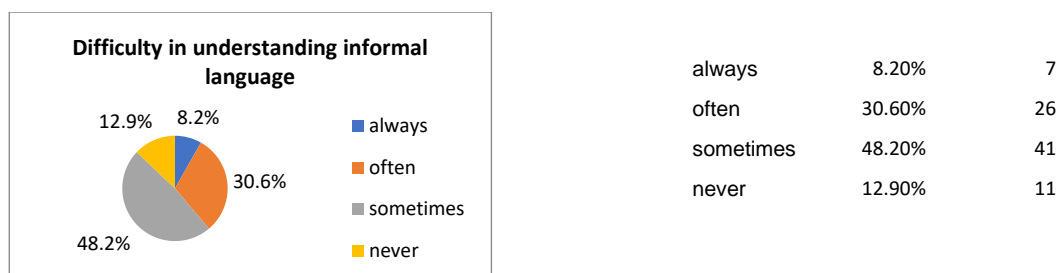


Figure 4 The data of difficulty in understanding informal language

Based on the Figure 4, it shows there are 11 students who never found the problem to understand the informal language such as some idioms or other phrasal verbs. The percentage of this is 12.9% which means there is 87.1% of the students ever faced this problem.

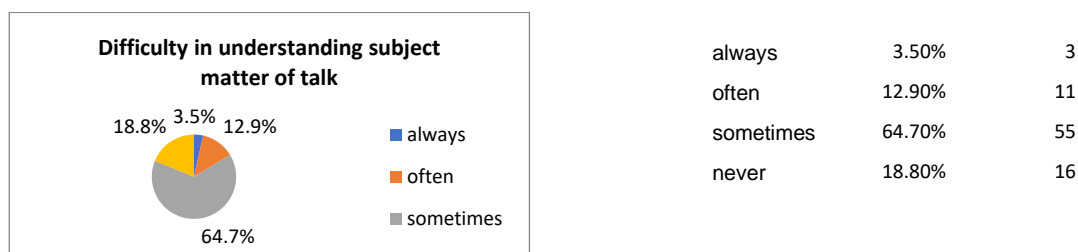


Figure 5 The data of difficulty in understanding subject matter of talk

The Figure 5 shows that 18.8% of the students never had the difficulty in understanding the subject matter of the talk they have been listened. Most of them with 55 students sometimes faced this problem and the number is 64.7% which means more than 50% of all respondent. While 11 students or 12.9 % are often had this problem, and only 3 students or 3.5% of them encountered such problem.

The reasons behind the listening difficulties

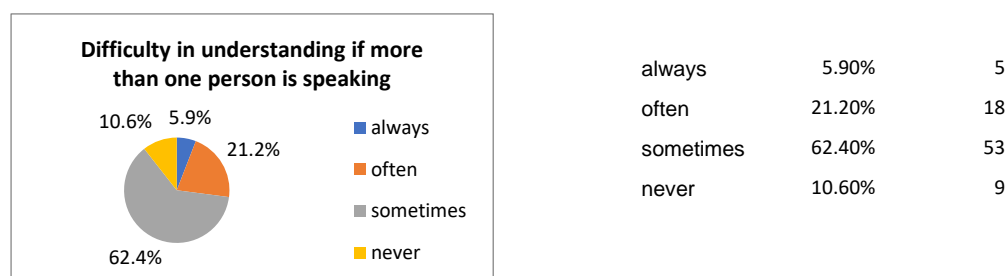


Figure 6 The data of difficulty in understanding if more than one person is speaking

The figure above illustrates the number of students who have problem in listening comprehension when the speakers are more than one. If the speakers are having a conversation, only 10.6 % or 9 students never faced some problem to understand what they are talking about. Meanwhile there are 5 students always suffered with this problem, 18

students often got such difficulty, and the rest is 62.4% or 53 students encountered this problem sometimes.

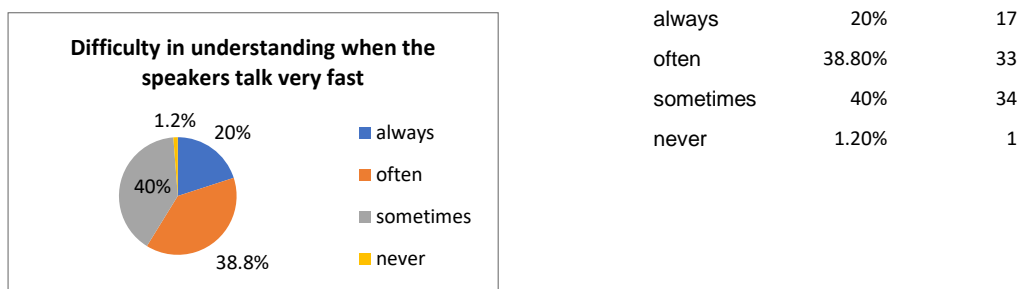


Figure 7 The data of difficulty in understanding when the speakers talk very fast

The figure above describes the percentage of the students faced the problem in listening when the speakers talk very fast. Most of them or 98.8% suffered with this problem with the detail: there are 17 students always encountered this trouble; there are 33 students often faced this problem, and there are 34 students found this problem sometimes.

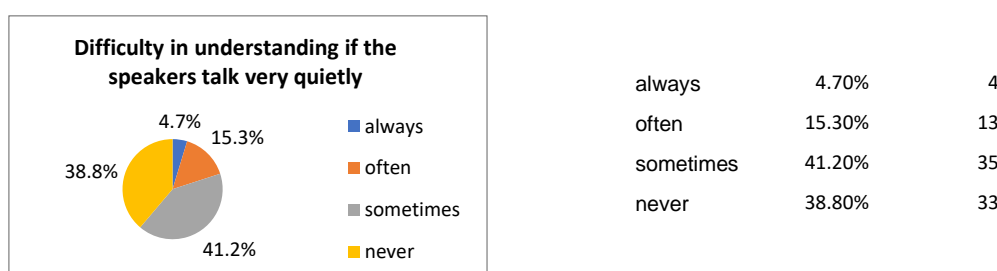


Figure 8 The data of difficulty in understanding if the speakers talk very quietly

The Figure 8 explains the number of students who were difficult to understand the talk if the speakers talk very quietly. There is 15.3% or 13 students often encountered his problem, and 33 students or 38.8% of them never faced this problem. In addition there are 35 students or 41.2% sometimes found it, and only 4 students always had the difficulty in listening comprehension when the speakers' sound is very quiet.

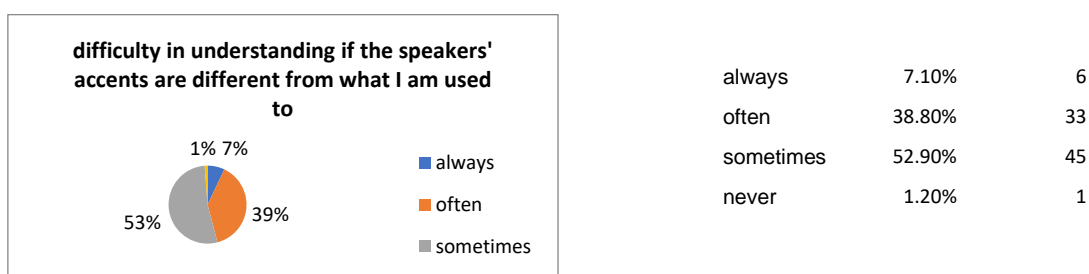


Figure 9 The data of difficulty in understanding if the speakers' accents are different

According to the figure above, the number of students who never faced this problem is only 1 student or 1.2% of all. There are 6 students who always had the listening problem with the different accents that used by the speakers from what accents the students used to. It is 38.8% of them that often encountered this problem, and there are 45 students or 52.9% sometimes found such problem.

The other information that has been found related to the listening difficulties are the audio quality often made the students frustrated to get the clear information when the speaker's voice is not clear enough; the limitation of vocabulary always made them stuck in understanding the talks; identifying the homophones causes them confused to comprehend the meaning of words in a sentence. Students often puzzled with the words with different spelling but similar in the pronunciation.

DISCUSSION

According to the data analysis, several listening problems have been identified. Most of the students ever faced the problem in taking effective notes. 16.4% of the students who always and often faced the difficulty in taking notes, and 74% of students sometimes faced this. It is not easy to take a note while they are listening some information in English since taking notes will distract their concentration in getting the gist of the talk. Nevertheless, taking notes is very important if we have to know the detail information, such as names, places, manners, or times. Comparing with a study conducted by (Al-Thiyabi, 2014), revealed that around 53% of the students encountered such problem. This percentage illustrates that EFL students in this study have inadequate listening skills. Teacher must make effort for the students to practice their focus in listening, and pay attention to write the details briefly.

The next difficulty in listening comprehension occurred when the students had to listen to the lengthy description in the listening text. The result reported that 56% of them sometimes encountered this problem. Meanwhile there is 34% students often faced it, and 4.7% of students always suffered with this problem. In line with (Al-Thiyabi, 2014), his study found 69% of students or about more than a half of the them were suffering with such problem. The lengthy of the description made most of students hard to remember the information, since there would be more information in the talk. Knowing this problem, the teacher must eager to find an effective strategy to reduce the students' listening difficulty in facing the lengthy description.

Other problem is students encountered a hardness in understanding spoken instruction. Based on the result finding, 17.6% of the the students often encountered this problem, meanwhile the research done by (Jyoti, 2020) revealed that 29% of the students often found this problem. The next listening problem is related to comprehend the informal language, the result reported that about 86% of the students confronted this trouble. They hardly understand the idioms, phrases, or colloquial expression used in the talk. It makes them wrongly understand the meaning or the intention of the talk. Similarly, the research done by (Al-Thiyabi, 2014) reported that 62% of the students or more than half of them strive in understanding English colloquial.

In understanding subject matter of talk or the gist of the talk, there are 64.7% of this EFL students sometimes got this problem, meanwhile 12.9% of them often faced it. This percentage indicates that the EFL students almost did not understand the topic of talk. In line with (Al-Thiyabi, 2014), he found that 70% of the students struggled with such problem. This percentage explains that the students' listening skills was inadequate.

Other listening problem was also emerged when there is more than one person is involved in having a conversation. The students will have more struggling to convey the content of the talk since they have to pay more attention to the interaction occurred between the speakers. It is proven from the result that 89.5% of them met this problem. Regarding from study of (Al-Thiyabi, 2014), the findind revealed 62% of the students confronted this

problem. Students were frustrated about ambiguous intention of the discussion between the speakers.

Most of the EFL students or 98.8% were arduously understand the meaning of the talk when the speaker are talking too fast. As (Wahidah, 2018) found that 85% of the students were suffered by the speaker's speed of speech. The students got difficulty to identify the words when the speaker talked too fast with omission, linking and assimilation. She exemplified the words "kill them all" sounds "kill themol" which made the students faced the difficulty to get the meaning of the words in the sentence. The EFL Students in one of university in Malaysia majority found the difficulty when the speakers spoke too fast. They hardly caught up what the speaker talked (Binti Abu Bakar, 2019). She stated that they have deficiency in controlling the speaker's speed. This statement is the same as Underwood in (Al-Thiyabi, 2014), he stated that speaking fast is the first reason for the students listening problem. This problem emerged, of course since the listeners cannot play the speed of the speaker's speech.

Speaker are speaking in different accents also causes the listening problem for the EFL students. For example, the students often faced a difficulty in recognizing the words when the speaker is speaking in British accent rather than American accent since most of the students often use American accent. This such difficulty is reported with 98.8% of the students who suffered in listening comprehension when the speaker spoke in different accent from what they are used to. This problem has been revealed in many previous studies. (Jyoti, 2020) found that there is 69% of the learners faced listening difficulty when the speaker talks in a variety of accents. Regarding to the study done by (Yahmun et al., 2020), twenty out of twenty five students often confused with the different accents used by the speakers. As an illustration given, the word "day" pronounced differently by different speakers. The first speaker said /*dei*/ meanwhile the other speaker said /*dai*/. The result also similar with the study conducted by (Erzad, 2020) study. Some participants said when they listened the recording material in British accent, it is hard for them to understand the words, and other said that sometimes they felt peculiar when listened to the words in British accent.

Other problems that EFL students faced was about the quality of the recording. Sometimes the speaker's voice is not clear which causes the listening problem for them. They cannot recognize the words are said by the speakers, as a result the students cannot get the subject matter of the talk, and it will make them miss the information. In line with (Syadiah, 2017) in her research finding that the poor quality of the old recording cassette resulted unclear sounds, and it caused the listening difficulties for the students. Next, data results reported is inability of the students in distinguish the homophones also became a listening problem, some students admitted this difficulty. Similar to the findings revealed that there was 37% of the students found the problem in identifying many sounds and words which some of words in English have the same sounds, and it is called homophones. This was one of the reason for the students got the listening difficulties (Zur, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Regarding to the data analysis, it can be concluded that there are many kinds of listening difficulties encountered by the Indonesian EFL students at English Education Program of Indraprasta University. More than a half of students faced the listening problems as explained in the discussion. The teacher and students should apply listening strategies to overcome some problems. In the case of the lengthy description in the English listening text, teacher should encourage the students by giving the lengthy listening text. In addition, students

should identifying the idioms, or colloquial language to over come the problem in understanding informal language. Moreover, students should pay more focus when the speaker talks too fast by identifying the keywords of a talk. Furthermore, the students must listen to the variety of accents in English to reduce the problem of different accents used by the speaker. By identifying the students' listening difficulties, the teacher can provide the listening strategies to overcome the problems, so the improving EFL students' listening skill can be achieved.

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