

The Initial Listening Skill of the Undergraduate Students of English Education Department

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Abstract

This research is aimed to investigate the initial listening skill level of the undergraduate Students of English Education Department (EED) in Universitas Nasional Karangturi Semarang 2020/2021. The descriptive research method is applied in this research setting. The participants of the study are the undergraduate Students of EED in Universitas Nasional Karangturi Semarang 2020/2021. The technique of data collection is through administering IELTS listening. The data collected were analyzed descriptively by identifying the correct and incorrect answers in each section of the test. The result of the study shows that the average level of the students' listening skill is in the B1 level categorized as the independent user based on the CEFR standard. On average, the students are able to understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identify both general messages and specific details, provided that speech clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent. Moreover, they are able to understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives. Second, at the individual level, there is a big gap of listening skill between the students with highest and the lowest score. There are also several aspects of the undergraduate students listening skill that should get attention when it comes to the listening course design and development. The aspects are understanding and retaining some specific or key information, and recognizing the relationships and connections between facts in the listening text.

Keywords: CEFR, Descriptive study, IELTS, Listening skill.

Introduction

Listening activity takes a big portion of the time that students spend in the English language learning process. The activity can be in the form of listening to the learning materials such as songs, news, lectures, podcast, and so on. The reason behind that activity taken place in the EFL classroom is based on the undebatable fact that activity is seen as a way to improve students' listening skill which plays an important role in the oral communication. Moreover, the real verbal communication also requires the participants of the event to join in the listening activity most of the time.

The sufficient listening skill will enable students to get the optimal exposure in mastering the language which they learn naturally in the oral communication. In this way, listening skill will provide an input for the learner's language acquisition (Rost, 1994). Students will indirectly and naturally develop their speaking skill as well while they are participating the listening activity in the EFL classroom. The understanding of the language spoken by the other people can be good input for him/her to acquire good speaking habits (Harmer, 2001). Listening activity which is set in a communicative context includes hearing and understanding the English expressions will really help students' to develop their speaking skill as well.

They can get the proper example of acceptable use of English vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and socio-cultural knowledge in the verbal communication setting.

Based on the thought that teaching listening skill has an important role in EFL context, therefore, there should be a reliable data that can be used to design the teaching and learning program in the listening classroom. One of the set of data that can be utilized as a valid basic data is that the students' initial listening skill. The preliminary information on students listening skill will provide the sufficient information of the listening skill level of the students. The data will contribute to listening learning activity both the starting point and target of the learning program.

The English Education Department (EED) of Universitas Nasional Karangturi is still new and needs the data showing with students' initial listening skill. Consequently, there should be a systematic study which is aimed to identify the initial listening skill of EED students in Universitas Nasional Karangturi academic year 2020/2021. The result of the study hopefully can contribute to the listening courses development in the department. Moreover, the research data can also be used to measure the progress of the listening courses in the future.

Literature Review

The nature of listening skill

In developing a listening course, the knowledge about the nature of listening skill should be mastered. Basically, Listening skill is widely accepted as a receptive skill in EFL context. It includes the ability of perceiving the others message in the verbal communication setting. In the other words, listening is the ability to identify and understand what others are saying (Howatt and Dakin, 1974). This skill is seen as an important skill that can contribute big portion to the students in their English language learning process.

Related to its process, listening is a psychological process which begins with someone's awareness and attention to sounds or speech patterns (*receiving*), proceeds through identification and recognition of specific auditory signals (*decoding*), and ends in comprehension (*understanding*) (Smaldino, 2008). In short, there are three main steps involved in the listening process. The first, listeners focuses to the speech uttered by the speaker. The speech uttered by the speaker, then, is identified by the listener and the message from the speaker being comprehended.

From the communicative point of view, listening skill is a type of language skills that involves the discourse competence of its process. The discourse competence covers several sub-areas, namely, *cohesion, deixis, coherence, and generic structure* (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). The listening activity in a real communication setting requires the listener to find out the relation among expressions delivered by the speaker to understand the message comprehensively.

Testing listening skill

To develop a listening course, a listening instructor should also be able to identify the initial level of students listening skill. The level identification is done through a standardized listening test which will give the valid and reliable result. The test should assess the student's micro and macro skills of listening. The macro-skills isolate those skills that relate to the discourse level of organization, while those that remain at sentence level continue to be called micro-skills (Brown, 2007).

In this study, the standardized listening test used is part of the IELTS test. The sections in the listening test of IELTS have already been composed to test the students' listening skill comprehensively

both the macro and micro skills. In detail, all the sections of IELTS listening test are aimed to measure the test participants' ability to understand :

1. the main ideas and detailed factual information;
2. the opinions and attitudes of speakers;
3. the purpose of an utterance
4. evidence of their ability to follow the development of ideas

(<https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format>).

The listening test of IELTS consists of four parts. Four parts of the test require the test taker to listen to four recordings, monologues and conversations, related to the everyday social to the educational context of communication. After listening to the recoding, the test taker will be faced with several types of task used in the test.

Task types	Task focus
Multiple choice	The test taker may be required to have a detailed understanding of specific points or an overall understanding of the main points of the listening text.
Matching	Matching assesses the skill of listening for detail and whether a test taker can understand information given in a conversation on an everyday topic, such as the different types of hotel or guest house accommodation. It also assesses the ability to follow a conversation between two people. It may also be used to assess test takers' ability to recognise relationships and connections between facts in the listening text
Plan, map, diagram labelling	This type of task assesses the ability to understand, for example, a description of a place, and to relate this to a visual representation. This may include being able to follow language expressing spatial relationships and directions (e.g. straight on/through the far door).
Sentence completion	Sentence completion focuses on the ability to identify the key information in a listening text. Test takers have to understand functional relationships such as cause and effect.
Short-answer questions	Sentence completion focuses on the ability to listen for concrete facts, such as places, prices or times, within the listening text. (Source: https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format)

Table. 1 *The task types of IELTS Listening Test*

The Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR)

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was first created by the Council of Europe. The purpose of the reference is to set a standard that can be used by the language instructors to develop their language teaching curriculum. The examples of the curriculum product that can be made by referring to CEFR are language syllabuses, language curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, and so on.

With regard to the listening skill level, CEFR has already provided standardized level of students' listening comprehension. It provides the category of students' listening skill level. This level can help the

instructors of listening courses to identify the level of their students listening skill level by matching the result of the listening test to the sentence.

Level	Description
C2	Has no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, delivered at fast native speed
C1	<p>Can understand enough to follow extended speech on abstract and complex topics beyond his/her own field, though he/she may need to confirm occasional details, especially if the accent is unfamiliar.</p> <p>Can recognise a wide range of idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms, appreciating register shifts.</p> <p>Can follow extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly.</p>
B2	<p>Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics normally encountered in personal, social, academic or vocational life. Only extreme background noise, inadequate discourse structure and/or idiomatic usage influence the ability to understand.</p> <p>Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.</p> <p>Can follow extended speech and complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar, and the direction of the talk is sign-posted by explicit markers.</p>
B1	<p>Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent.</p> <p>Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives.</p>
A2	<p>Can understand enough to be able to meet needs of a concrete type provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.</p> <p>Can understand phrases and expressions related to areas of most immediate priority (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment) provided speech is clearly and slowly articulated.</p>
A1	Can follow speech that is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning. (<i>Source : CEFR, 2001</i>)

Table 2. The CEFR category of listening skill level

Therefore, in this study there are two research questions to answer:

1. What is the average level of the students' initial listening skill according to the CEFR listening level standard?
2. How is the individual profile of students' listening skill level?

Methodology

The research method used in this research is a descriptive research. Descriptive research involves gathering data that describes events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984). In this research context, the study focuses to identify and describe the students' initial listening skill.

The participants of the study are the undergraduate students of English Education Department (EED) in Universitas Nasional Karangturi Semarang in the academic year of 2020/2021. There are fifteen students who were involved in this research. They took the online test in November, 2020 via Learning Management System (LMS) Schoology.

The data of the students' listening score was collected by making use of the IELTS Listening test from Cambridge to assess the students' listening skill. The result of the test was, then, used to identify the students' both individual and classical correct and incorrect answers, highest and lowest scores, and the mean. The result of the data identification is used to show the level of students' listening skill level.

Findings

The data collected in this study are the students' listening skill scores. Students took the listening test taken from listening test battery. They took the test online via learning management system (LMS) Schoology. There are four sections of the listening test and the total number of the question is forty items. Each of section consists of ten items. Section one consists of activity filling a report form based on the information of a short dialogue. In section two, students responded to the items in the form of listing and matching questions. In section three, had to do a multiple choice and matching items. The last section, students were required to fill the blanks with correct words to complete a text based on the monologue recording.

The result of the listening test is summarized on the table 3. The data presents the correct (C) and incorrect (I) answer after finishing the listening test. The data mentions the list of item's number of the C and I made by the students.

Table 3

The detail list of item answered correctly and incorrectly by students per section

No	Students	S1		S2		S3		S4	
		I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C
1	S1	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	0	11,12,13,14,15,16, 18,20	17,19	24,25,27	21,22,23,26,28,29,30	31,32,33,34,35,37,38, 39,40	36
2	S2	2,4,6	1,3,5,7,8,9,10	13	11,12,14,15,16,17,18,19,20	22,25,27	21,22,24,26,28,29,30	0	31,32,33,34,35,26, 37,38,39,40
3	S3	5,6,7,8	1,2,3,4,9,10	13,14,17	11,12, 15,16,18,19,20	21,24,26,27,28	22,23,25,29,3	31,32,33,34,36, 37,38,39,40	35
4	S4	3,4,5,6,10	1,2,7,8,9	11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20	0	21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30	0	31,32,33,34,35,26, 37,38,39,40	0
5	S5	2,4,6,10	1,3,5,7,8,9	11,12,13,15	14,16,17,18,19,20	24,27,28	21,22,23,25,26,29,30	31,32,33,36, 37,39,40	34,35,38
6	S6	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10	1,9	11,12,13,16,17,19,20	14,15,18	21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30	0	31,32,33,34,36, 37,38,39,40	35
7	S7	1,6,10	2,3,4,5,7,8,9	11,12,14,17,19	13,15,16,18,20	21,25,26,27	22,23,24,28,29,30	31,32,33,34,35,36, 37,38,40	0
8	S8	3,5,7,8,9	1,2,4,6,10	14,17,18,19	11,12,13,15,16,20	21,22,23,24,25,26,28,29,30	27	31,32,34,36,37,38,39,40	33,35
9	S9	2,4,5,6,7,8,10	1,3,9	11,14,15,17,19,20	12,13,16,18	21,22,24,25, 26,29	22,23,27,28,30	31,32,33,34,35,36, 37,38,39,40	0
10	S10	2,3,4,5,6,8	1,7,9,10	12, 15,16,17,18,19,20	11,13,14	21,22,23,24,25	0	31,32,34,35,36, 37,38,39,40	33
11	S11	2,3,5,6,7,8,9,10	1,4	11,12,13,14,15,17,18,19	16,2	21,22,23,24,25, 26,28,29,30	27	31,32,33,34,36, 37,38,39,40	35
12	S12	1,2,3,5,10	4,6,7,8,9	12,15,16,18,20	11,13,14,17,19	21,22,24,26,27,28,30	23,25,29	32,34,35, 37,38,39,40	31,33,36
13	S13	2,3,4,5,7,8,9	1,6,10	11,12,13,15,18,19	14,16,17,20	21,22,23,25,26,29,30	24,27,28	31,32,33,34,35,36, 37,38,39,40	0
14	S14	2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10	1	11,14,15,18,19,20	12,13,16,17	23,24,25,26,27,29,30	21,22,28	31,32,34,35,36, 37,38,39,40	33
15	S15	2,3,5,6,8	1,4,7,9,10	11,13,15,17,18,19,20	12,14,16	21,22,24,26,27,28,30	23,25,29	32,33,34, 37,38,39,40	31,35,36

The recapitulation of the students' listening test result is presented in the table 4. It recaps the number of correct and incorrect answer made by the students who participated in the listening test.

No	List of the students	S 1		S 2		S 3		S 4		TOTAL	
		I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C	I	C
1	Student 1	10	0	8	2	3	7	9	1	30	10
2	Student 2	3	7	1	9	3	7	0	10	7	33
3	Student 3	4	6	3	7	5	5	9	1	21	19
4	Student 4	5	5	10	0	10	0	10	0	35	5
5	Student 5	4	6	4	6	3	7	7	3	18	22
6	Student 6	8	2	7	3	10	0	9	1	34	6
7	Student 7	3	7	5	5	4	6	10	0	22	18
8	Student 8	5	5	4	6	9	1	8	2	26	14
9	Student 9	7	3	6	4	5	5	10	0	28	12
10	Student 10	6	4	7	3	10	0	9	1	32	8
11	Student 11	8	2	8	2	9	1	9	1	34	6
12	Student 12	5	5	5	5	7	3	7	3	24	16
13	Student 13	7	3	6	4	7	3	10	0	30	10
14	Student 14	9	1	6	4	7	3	9	1	31	9

15	Student 15	5	5	7	3	7	3	7	3	26	14
Mean		5.9	4.1	5.8	4.2	6.6	3.4	8.2	1.8	27	13
Ave. Prec. (%)		59	41	58	42	66	34	82	18	68	32

Table 4. Recapitulation of students' correct (C) and incorrect (I) answer

Based on the data on the table 4, there are some information that can be described. Student 1 totally made ten correct answers out of 40 items. **Student 2** was recorded to have the highest score by having 33 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 3 had 19 correct answers out of 40 items. Then, **student 4** only made five correct answers out of 40, the lowest score of the class. Student 5 had 22 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 6 made six correct answers out of 40 items. Student 7 made 18 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 8 had 14 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 9 made 12 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 10 made 8 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 11 made 6 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 12 made 16 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 13 made 10 correct answers out of 40 items. Student 14 made 9 correct answers out of 40 items. The last, Student 15 made 14 correct answers out of 40 items. In summary, the list of student from the lowest to the highest score of listening test is student 4, 6, 11, 10, 14, 1, 13, 9, 8, 15, 12, 7, 3, 5, 2.

As a whole, the average number of incorrect answer made by students during the listening test in section 1 is 5.9 and the correct answer is 4.1. The data also show that the percentage of incorrect and correct answer in section 1 is 59% to 41%. In section 2, The average number of incorrect answer made by students during the listening test in that section is 5.8 and the correct answer is 4.2. The percentage of incorrect and correct answer in section 1 is 58% to 42%. Next, in section 3, the average number of incorrect answer gets bigger 6.6 and the correct answer is just 3.4. with the percentage of the incorrect and correct answer, 66% to 34%. The last section of the listening test, the average number of incorrect answer is 8.2 and the correct answer is 1.8. Therefore, the percentage of incorrect number is 82% and the correct answer is only 18%. Overall, the result of the test shows that students made averagely 27 incorrect and 13 correct answer out of 40 items that they answered. The percentage of incorrect answer is 68% while the correct answer is 32%.

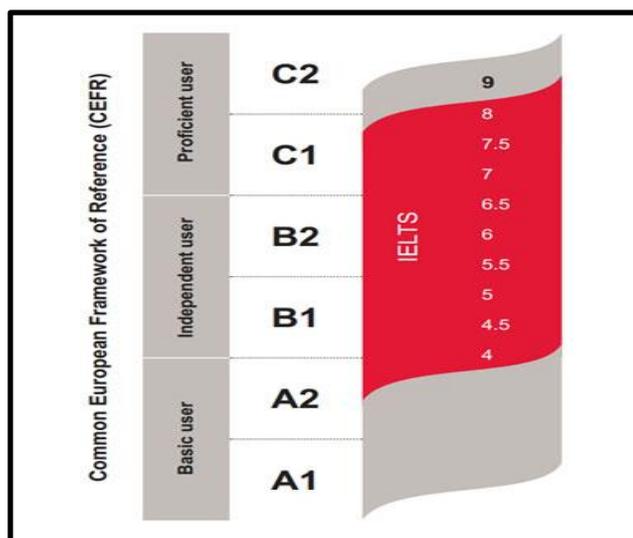
Discussions

The average level of the students' initial listening skill

The result of the listening test as a whole shows that the average number of the students giving correct answer is 13 out of 40 items. That result shows that the students who participated in the listening test, in average, get the score of IELTS, 4.5 in their listening skill. Moreover, if the average result of the test is being correlated to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the listening skill of the students who participated to the test belongs to the level of *independent user* (B1).

Picture. 1

The conversion graphic of IELTS score to CEFR



(source: <https://www.ielts.org/ielts-for-organisations/common-european-framework>)

Specifically, students who are in the level of B1 as an *independent user* of English, they are able to understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided that speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent. Moreover, they can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives. (source: *CEFR common reference level, global scale*).

The individual profile of students' listening skill level

Beside those classical data that shows the information about the students' listening level averagely, there is also individual data (table 4) that shows a big gap between the highest score student and the lowest. The highest score is 33 correct answers out of 40 items and the lowest is five correct answers out of 40 items. This kind of situation, the big gap of initial listening skill level in the classroom, can be caused by so many factors. It needs further study to identify the cause of the big gap. That data should, from different point of view, also give a valuable information to the listening courses development. There should be careful consideration process of developing the lesson plan for listening courses. The courses should be able to facilitate both groups in the listening classroom.

The result of the test shows not only the level of the participants' listening skill but also the specific area of listening skill being tested to get special attention to. All the sections of IELTS listening test are aimed to measure the test participants' ability to understand the main ideas and detailed factual information, the opinions and attitudes of speakers, the purpose of an utterance and evidence of their ability to follow the development of ideas (<https://www.ielts.org/about-the-test/test-format>).

Section one consists of sentence completion task which includes the activity of filling a report form based on the information of a short dialogue. In section two, students responded to the items in the form of listing and matching questions. Students, then in section three, had to do a multiple choice and matching items. The last section, students were required to fill the blanks with correct words to complete a text based on the monologue recording.

According to the data on the table 3 and 4, the section four of the listening test, items 31 to 40, is identified as the most difficult part of the test. There are four students that answered all the items incorrectly. Five students were only able to answer one item correctly. And there are five students could answer two until three questions correctly. Only one student succeeded to answer all the questions correctly. In short, based on the data in the table 4, the percentage of average incorrect answer made in section for is 82%. That percentage shows how hard the items to be answered correctly by students who participated in the test.

Section four of the listening test required the students to fill the blank of a note with the correct word based on the monologue. That section urged students to retain some specific or key information in their memory to complete the losing information in the note. If the test takers are not able to do that, they will fail to answer the questions correctly. It shows that the listening course development should put this aspect of listening skill in the top priority to handle.

The second most difficult part of the test is part three. The table 4 shows that the percentage of average incorrect answer made by the students is 66 %. Students avaragely only made three correct answer out of ten items in that section. This section deals with the aspect of a detailed understanding of specific points or an overall understanding of the main points of the listening text (table 1). Those aspects of listening should also take into account when it comes in designing the listening courses in the department.

Section one and two share the almost equal level of difficultly where, according to table 4, section one's percentage of average incorrect answer is 59 % and section two is 58%. Section one and two deal with the task activity of matching which has the target to measure the students' listening skill aspects of understanding information given in a conversation on an everyday topic, following a conversation between two people, and recognising the relationships and connections between facts in the listening text.

Conclusion and Implication

Based on the CEFR standard of listening skill, the average level of the students' listening skill is in the B1 level, *independent user*. They are identified to be able to be able to understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics, identifying both general messages and specific details, provided speech is clearly articulated in a generally familiar accent. Moreover, they can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives.

In the individual level, there is a big gap of listening skill between the student with highest and the lowest score. The listening courses development dealing with designing materials and learning activities should facilitate both parties. The listening learning course should not be too difficult for the lowest skilled students but at the same time not too easy for the highest skilled students. In addition, There are several aspects of the undergraduate students listening skill that should get attention when it comes to the listening course design and development. The aspects are undestanding and retaining some specific or key information, and recognising the relationships and connections between facts in the listening text.

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