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Listening Difficulties and Needs of Grade 11 ABM students in Calatagan, Batangas

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Abstract: This descriptive analytic study aimed to determine the difficulties encountered by 59 (M=16; F=43) randomly selected Grade 11 ABM-strand students from Calatagan, Batangas. It also intended to identify their listening needs based on the problems they encountered when listening to an aural text. Using a mixture of two methods of data analysis, it quantitatively examined the listening difficulties of the participants and was expounded through the qualitative analysis of the data to provide a deeper understanding of the findings. The students were observed in an oral communication class using the observation checklist developed by Chang, Wu and Pang (2013) in order to assess their listening comprehension skills. Then they asked to were to complete a survey questionnaire adapted from Richards (2001) to identify their personal listening experience in their English classes. Lastly, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the students' responses to the two sets of questionnaires, a focus group discussion (FGD) was held with randomly selected students for validation purposes. The questions prepared for this procedure were crafted, informed and guided by Munfangati's (2014) studies. It is hoped that the findings of this study will benefit curriculum developers and classroom teachers in choosing the appropriate content for their ABM students.

Key Words: listening needs; senior high school students; language teaching; needs analysis; learning needs and difficulties

1. INTRODUCTION

Listening is an integral skill in communication yet among other macro-skills in English language, it is arguably the most neglected as it is seen as a "passive skill" (Field, 2008). Without efficient listening skills, students find it difficult to take down notes, follow instructions, and a challenge to communicate effectively. Effective listening usually manifests through learners' oral communication. Listening is a part of the ability to

express oneself fluently and grammatically in speech without giving it too much thought (Rost, 1994), and there is no spoken language without listening (Rost, 2011).

On a daily basis, students receive a gamut of listening instructions both in formal and informal setting. With majority of time spent in class, listening is a vital skill in participating in class discussion and exchanging information with teachers and peers. Thus, listening plays a major role in the academic learning and success of students. At home or elsewhere, listening skills are likewise put to use



for receiving messages to go about in their daily lives.

In the past, scholars have studied the challenges related to listening. Anderson and Lynch (1988) posits that the listening performance of students is affected by their lack of attention and concentration towards aural input. Other factors such as lack of prior knowledge on the topic discussed, as well as socio-cultural, factual or contextual knowledge of the target language can also contribute to the difficulties associated with listening comprehension. They suggest that the challenges may also be caused by the kinds of messages they receive such as the content of the input, the speaker's accent or volume of voice, and physical disturbances such as noise.

Language needs analysis studies on English, especially Business English, have mostly focused on speaking and writing skills. Listening is not often given attention, or it seems to be not given sole importance. Furthermore, South American and European countries are the usual sites of studies regarding Business English. The scarce amount of research situated in the Asian context was mostly case studies of particular companies, such as the studies conducted by Cowling (2007) and Prachanant (2012).

The Present Study

The current study aims to identify the difficulties encountered by the senior high school students from Calatagan, Batangas who are studying under the ABM strand of the K – 12 Curriculum of the Department of Education. It also intends to identify their listening needs based on the problems they encountered when listening an aural text. Specifically, it seeks to determine the listening difficulties and needs of Grade 11 ABM students in Calatagan Batangas.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study consist of 59 Grade 11 Accounting, Business and Management (ABM) students from a public senior high school in Calatagan, Batangas, Philippines. They belong to two different sections with 43 female and 16 male students with age ranging from 16 to 17 years old. The students were observed in an oral communication class in order to assess their listening

comprehension skills. In addition, they were randomly selected to complete a survey questionnaire and to answer questions through a focused group discussion. A probability sampling which is also referred to as a random sampling technique was utilized on this study as it gives every respondent an equal chance to be selected which will eventually provide a reasonable portrait of the distribution of the population at large (Curtice, 2015).

2.2 Instruments

2.2.1 Observation Checklist

The observation served as a preliminary analysis of the listening needs of the students. Items from an observation checklist which were taken from the questionnaire developed by Chang, Wu and Pang (2013) in their study on *Second Language-Listening Difficulties Perceived by Low-Level Learners* were used to keep the researchers guided during this phase.

2.2.2 Survey Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey is to fully understand the English language needs in listening of Grade 11 students under the ABM academic strand. In order to achieve this goal, the study adapted the survey questionnaire of Richards (2001) which required the students to provide honest responses by encircling the number that corresponds to their personal listening experience in an English class.

2.2.3 Focus Group Discussion

The last data gathering procedure for the research was done through a focus group discussion. The questions prepared for this procedure were crafted through the studies of Munfangati (2014). This method was used in the study as a qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the issues where the researcher adopts the role of a “facilitator” or a “moderator” by asking questions, controlling the dynamics of the discussion, and engaging in dialogue with a particular individual at a time (Nyumba, Wilson, Derick & Mukherjee, 2017).

2.3 Procedure



The researchers followed the following procedure:

1. Collected data through observation and video recording the classroom lecture/discussion;
2. Identified listening difficulties during an actual classroom discussion;
3. Conducted a survey using a questionnaire adapted from Richards (2001); and
4. Carried out a focus group discussion, which was participated in by randomly selected ten respondents to expound, develop, and improve on the quantitative data gathered through the questionnaires.

Table 1 outlines the range of responses of the participants in the survey form which serves as the basis of identifying the over-all listening needs and difficulties of Grade 11 ABM students.

Table 1. Range of Responses in the LNA survey

Response	Range
Never	3.25 – 4.00
Sometimes	2.50 – 3.24
Often	1.75 – 2.49
Always	1.00 – 1.74

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section comprises two parts of data analysis: (a) listening difficulties, and (b) listening needs. In each part, the data from the survey were analyzed using the mean scores and standard deviations with the findings from the observation and focus group discussions to provide in-depth understanding of the results.

3.1 Listening Difficulties of Grade 11 ABM students in Calatagan Batangas

Table 2 presents the responses of the participants (n=59) regarding the listening difficulty which they experienced in the class. In general, the findings reveal that grade 11 ABM students sometimes encounter listening difficulties (M= 2.58 -

3.02). It can be further noted in the results that majority of the students have almost equal responses in the survey (SD= 0.47 - 0.59). Noticeably, the results show that the fast speaking speed of the speaker is often the reason why they experience listening difficulties (M=2.49).

Table 2. Responses and Reasons for Listening Difficulty

	N	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1. I have difficulty understanding lectures.	59	2.90	0.36
2. I have difficulty taking effective notes.	59	2.95	0.54
3. I have to ask questions to clarify materials I have been taught.	59	2.58	0.59
4. I have difficulty understanding lengthy descriptions in English.	59	2.83	0.59
5. I have difficulty understanding spoken instructions.	59	3.02	0.44
6. I have trouble understanding informal language.	59	2.81	0.54
7. I have difficulty understanding the subject matter of a 'talk' (i.e. what is being talked about).	59	2.95	0.47
8. They talk very fast.	59	2.49	0.70
9. They talk very softly.	59	2.75	0.58
10. Their accents or pronunciation are different from what I am used to.	59	2.85	0.64
11. More than one person is speaking (e.g. in group discussions)	59	2.58	0.75

Occasionally, most of the participants have trouble understanding lectures (M= 2.90). One factor that could contribute to this listening difficulty of the students in this study is the speaker. In fact, during the interview four among ten participants asserted that their teacher has a huge role in helping them



overcome their listening difficulty (see excerpt 1). The teacher as the main speaker in the class lectures could greatly affect the student's ability to listen to an aural input.

- (1) *"Number one po dyan yung **teacher**. Dapat po yung pagsasalita po ng teacher ay **maayos, malakas at malinaw** po. Sa tulong po ng isang teacher mas ma-improve ng student ang kanyang listening skill" (Teacher is the number one factor. The teacher should speak **thoroughly, loudly and clearly**. With the help of the teacher, we can easily improve our listening skill.)*

Furthermore, the students sometimes find it difficult to take effective notes (M= 2.95). However, despite the rigor in note-taking, some students consider it as their strategy to overcome listening difficulty as stated by one of the participants in excerpt 2.

- (2) *Ang akin naman po ang ginagawa ko ay **nagsusulat** po habang nakikinig para po kapag di ko po naintindihan yung sinasabi pwede ko pong tingnan ulit yung mga napakinggan ko. (What I usually do is that I **take down notes** while listening so that when I could not understand the speaker, I could read again what I have just listened to.)*

Difficulties in understanding lengthy descriptions in English (M= 2.83) and spoken instructions (M= 3.02) are sometimes experienced by the students in this study. When English descriptions are too long, some students often ask their classmates to translate the descriptions to their L1 to understand the spoken texts (see excerpt 3). Storch and Wigglesworth (2003) explained that learners of English language primarily use their L1 to manage listening task and clarify something. On the one hand, students have sometimes trouble in understanding spoken instructions because of environmental noise. It was observed several times during the class discussion that since there was an on-going construction near the school, surrounding noise affected their ability to listen and comprehend the instruction of the teacher. This noise is

considered as an extraneous stimulus that makes the listeners easily get distracted.

- (3) *Ako po eh pinapatranslate ko na lang po sa magaling magtranslate pag nahihirapan na ako intindihin ang sinasabi ng teacher sa English. (I often ask someone who is good in English to translate it to Tagalog when I struggle understanding our teacher's explanation in English.)*

Lastly, majority of the students sometimes experience problems in understanding the informal language (M= 2.81) and subject matter of a talk (M= 2.95). It is not surprising that they sometimes have difficulty comprehending the informal language in English since all of them study and learn English as their second language through formal instruction. Another factor for this difficulty is the accent of the speaker (M= 2.85). During the class activity, the teacher played an audio with a British and an Indian English accent. The observation showed that the students most frequently struggle understanding the speaker when the accent is unfamiliar. Prachanant (2012) discovered that the most serious listening problem in an international workplace is being unable to comprehend foreign accents. Student's listening comprehension on the subject matter of talk can also be affected by the number of people speaking at the same time. The result shows in Table 2 that sometimes when there is more than one speaking in a group discussion for example (M= 2.58), some students experience listening difficulty. Ferris (198), on the other hand, noted that the students in her study experienced a little listening difficulty with small-group discussion and class participation.

3.2 Listening Needs of Grade 11 ABM students in Calatagan, Batangas

The present study examined the listening needs of the participants based on their identified listening difficulties. Basturkmen (1998) noted that identifying the difficulties and standard situations is important in analyzing the needs of the participants through observation, survey and interview. As a result of the analysis, three important listening needs of grade 11 students who study English for



Accountancy and Business Management purposes were identified.

3.2.1 Listening to note information

In this study, it was found that note-taking was a listening difficulty of the students; however, this was also used by them to improve their listening comprehension and overcome listening difficulty as stated by the participants in excerpts 2 and 4. Thus, it can be inferred that note-taking as a strategy should also be taught alongside with listening since it serves as a tool for the learners to better improve their ability to listen. In fact, lecture note-taking is considered to be one of the most important student's academic aural/oral skills (Ferris, 1998). In relation to Business English, note-taking can be an effective skill to employ when the employees are asked to understand clearly the lectures in a business seminar or presentation. Based on the listening needs analysis of Chostelidou (2010), students need to have training in comprehending presentations and seminars, comprehending recorded materials, and listening to follow instructions.

- (4) *Yung strategy ko po mag focus at mag take down notes habang nakikinig. (The strategy which I use is to **focus** and **take down notes** while listening.)*

3.2.2 Listening to focus on the spoken texts

Interestingly, seven out of ten participants in the focus group discussions emphasized the importance of paying attention to spoken texts (see excerpts 4, 5, and 6). Since they have the difficulty in listening to lengthy descriptions in English and lectures, they need to focus on the important details relayed by the speaker. This skill can be applied to telephone conversation with business partners since the listener needs to get the important information given by the speaker in the telephone. Aside from reading instructional manuals, writing emails, and translating business letter, telephoning is considered to be important in business activities (Li, 2014).

- (5) ***Focus** lang sa lahat ng sasabihin. Lahat po ng sinasabi dapat po naiintindihan, dapat walang hindi nauunawaan. (I need to **focus** on whatever the teacher is saying. I should understand everything.)*

- (6) *Kailangan ko po **nakatuon** lang yung sarili ko po sa sinasabi tsaka po kelangan po na wala pong ibang iniisip na di po kasali sa topic na pinaguusapan. (It is important that I must **focus** on what is being said, and I need to make sure that I'm not thinking about anything which is not relevant to the topic.)*

One student also noted that concentrating on the spoken tasks could help her learn easily and enrich her English vocabulary (see excerpt 7). A large repertoire of English words could be an advantage of any speakers in a business conversation. Wu's (2012) survey with Business English learners in college, employers and college graduates revealed that they considered business conversation and business negotiation as an important micro-skill for listening.

- (7) *Ahm... kapag po for example po yung isang bata nakinig ng **husto, masmadali po siya matuto at masdadami yung English words na malalaman niya.** (For example, when I **concentrate** while listening, it would be **easier for me to learn and increase my knowledge on English words.**)*

3.2.3 Listening to follow instructions

One of the listening difficulties of the participants is understanding spoken instructions. Therefore, students need to know how to effectively listen to follow instructions. When asked what are the common listening activities that they do in the class, one student in excerpt 8 mentioned that they listen to an instruction and follow it.

- (8) *Yung sa pag follow po ng direction ng teacher. (Following the instruction of the teacher.)*

4. CONCLUSIONS

In sum, the results of the study among 59 students of Grade 11 Accounting, Business, and Management reveal that listening difficulties occur in different learning situations inside classroom – lecture and class activities. Students experience difficulties in understanding the lecture, lengthy English descriptions, and spoken instructions during class in which a teacher as the main speaker



in the classroom discourse is usually the reason why students sometimes experience listening difficulties. Also, students in this study sometimes experience trouble in taking down effective notes while listening, understanding informal language and subject matter of the talk due to unfamiliar accent of the speaker, several speakers who simultaneously speak, and speaking speed and volume.

The analysis also shows the listening needs of the students. The foci of the listening activities for Grade 11 ABM students should be listening to note information, listening to focus on the spoken texts, and listening to follow instructions. Finding out the listening needs could greatly help learners prepare for important business activities. With this, students can be efficient in work and negotiate well in their field of discipline (Chostelidou, 2010).

The present study provides useful findings that could inform key person in the academe regarding the listening difficulties and needs of the students under the ABM strand. The teaching of listening would be more meaningful and effective if it targets the needs of the students in which they can see its relevance and importance to their future job. When students' effective listening skills are further developed, they can be more critical and analytical listeners which contribute to their success as future business professionals.

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