



Developing Academic Listening Skills in English Language Learning at Higher Education

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Abstract. Academic listening is a crucial skill for university students, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where English is widely used for academic purposes. This skill enables students to understand lectures, follow academic discussions, take effective notes, and process spoken information critically. However, many EFL students still experience difficulties in academic listening due to limited exposure to authentic academic input, lack of listening strategies, and linguistic challenges. This conceptual article discusses the concept of academic listening, its characteristics in higher education, common challenges faced by EFL students, and pedagogical strategies for developing academic listening skills. Drawing on relevant theories and findings from previous studies, this article emphasizes the importance of strategy-based instruction, the use of authentic academic materials, and the active role of lecturers in supporting students' academic listening development. The discussion is presented using clear and accessible academic language to support English language teaching practices at the university level.

Keywords: Academic listening; EFL; higher education; listening skills.

Abstrak. Kemampuan mendengarkan akademis merupakan keterampilan penting bagi mahasiswa, khususnya dalam konteks Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di mana bahasa Inggris banyak digunakan untuk tujuan akademis. Keterampilan ini memungkinkan mahasiswa untuk memahami perkuliahan, mengikuti diskusi akademis, membuat catatan yang efektif, dan memproses informasi lisan secara kritis. Namun, banyak mahasiswa EFL masih mengalami kesulitan dalam mendengarkan akademis karena terbatasnya paparan terhadap masukan akademis otentik, kurangnya strategi mendengarkan, dan tantangan linguistik. Artikel konseptual ini membahas konsep mendengarkan akademis, karakteristiknya dalam pendidikan tinggi, tantangan umum yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa EFL, dan strategi pedagogis untuk mengembangkan keterampilan mendengarkan akademis. Dengan mengacu pada teori dan temuan yang relevan dari penelitian sebelumnya, artikel ini menekankan pentingnya pengajaran berbasis strategi, penggunaan materi akademis otentik, dan peran aktif dosen dalam mendukung pengembangan kemampuan mendengarkan akademis mahasiswa. Diskusi disajikan menggunakan bahasa akademis yang jelas dan mudah dipahami untuk mendukung praktik pengajaran bahasa Inggris di tingkat universitas.

Kata kunci: Mendengarkan dalam konteks akademis; EFL; pendidikan tinggi; keterampilan mendengarkan.

INTRODUCTION

In higher education, students are required to engage with various forms of academic discourse, both written and spoken. One of the most important yet often neglected language skills is listening, particularly academic listening. Academic listening refers to the ability to understand spoken academic texts such as lectures, seminars, classroom discussions, and academic presentations. This skill plays a vital role in students' academic success because a large proportion of academic information in university settings is delivered orally.

In many universities, English functions either as a medium of instruction or as an essential academic language. As a result, students are expected to comprehend complex spoken input delivered at a natural speed and in formal academic styles. Academic listening involves high-level cognitive processes, including understanding meaning, making inferences, recognizing discourse patterns, and evaluating spoken information (Rost, 2011). Students must not only hear the words but also interpret ideas and connect new information with their prior knowledge.

Despite its importance, listening is often perceived as a passive skill and receives less instructional attention compared to speaking, reading, and writing. Brown (2007) notes that listening is frequently assumed to develop naturally without explicit instruction. This assumption results in limited listening practice and insufficient training in listening strategies. Consequently, many university students experience difficulties in understanding lectures and participating in academic discussions in English.

Previous studies have shown that EFL students often struggle with academic listening due to unfamiliar vocabulary, fast speech rate, and lack of exposure to authentic academic materials (Graham, 2006; Astika & Kurniawan, 2020). These challenges highlight the need for systematic instruction in academic listening at the university level. Therefore, this article aims to discuss the concept and characteristics of academic listening, identify common challenges faced by EFL students, and propose pedagogical strategies to develop academic listening skills using clear and accessible academic language.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

This section discusses the theoretical foundations underlying academic listening in English language learning at higher education. The discussion focuses on the concept of listening comprehension, academic listening, listening processes, and listening strategies in EFL contexts.

1. Listening Comprehension in EFL Contexts

Listening comprehension is a fundamental skill in second and foreign language learning. According to Rost (2011), listening is an active process that involves receiving, constructing, and responding to spoken input. In EFL contexts, listening comprehension is particularly challenging because learners have limited exposure to authentic language use outside the classroom.

Listening comprehension requires learners to process spoken language in real time, recognize sounds and vocabulary, interpret grammatical structures, and construct meaning based on context. Brown (2007) emphasizes that listening is not a passive skill but a complex cognitive activity that demands attention, memory, and interpretation.

2. Academic Listening

Academic listening refers to the ability to understand spoken language used in academic settings, such as lectures, seminars, academic discussions, and presentations. Flowerdew (2013) states that academic listening involves identifying main ideas, understanding supporting details, recognizing discourse markers, and following the structure of academic speech.

Unlike everyday listening, academic listening involves formal language, discipline-specific vocabulary, and complex ideas. Therefore, learners must develop higher-level comprehension skills, including inference-making and critical evaluation of spoken information.

3. Listening Processes

Listening comprehension involves two main processes: bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing focuses on decoding linguistic elements such as sounds, words, and sentence structures. Top-down processing involves using background knowledge, prior experience, and contextual information to interpret meaning (Field, 2008).

Effective academic listening requires the integration of both processes. Learners who rely solely on bottom-up processing may struggle with fast speech or unfamiliar vocabulary, while those who use top-down strategies can compensate for linguistic gaps by predicting meaning based on context.

4. Listening Strategies

Listening strategies refer to conscious actions taken by learners to enhance comprehension. Vandergrift (2004) categorizes listening strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies, such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening performance, are particularly important in academic listening contexts.

Research shows that strategy-based instruction can significantly improve learners' listening comprehension and confidence (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Therefore, teaching listening strategies is essential in developing academic listening skills at the university level.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a library research design. The article is conceptual in nature and does not involve field data collection. The data consist of theories, research findings, and scholarly discussions related to academic listening in English language learning.

The sources of data include books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies that discuss listening comprehension, academic listening, and listening strategies in higher education contexts. The data were collected through systematic reading and note-taking of relevant literature.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive-analytic techniques. The selected literature was analyzed to identify key concepts, common challenges, and effective strategies for developing academic listening skills. The findings were then synthesized to

construct a coherent discussion that supports English language teaching practices at the university level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Concept of Academic Listening

Academic listening can be defined as the ability to comprehend spoken language used in academic contexts, including lectures, academic discussions, conference presentations, and seminars. According to Flowerdew (2013), academic listening requires learners to identify main ideas, understand supporting details, recognize discourse markers, and follow the organizational structure of academic speech.

Unlike everyday listening, academic listening involves more complex linguistic and cognitive demands. Academic spoken texts often contain specialized vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and abstract concepts. Students are expected to maintain concentration over extended periods while processing large amounts of information. Field (2008) emphasizes that listening is an active process in which listeners construct meaning rather than simply receive information.

Academic listening also involves the integration of bottom-up and top-down processes. Bottom-up processing focuses on decoding sounds, words, and grammatical structures, whereas top-down processing involves using background knowledge and contextual clues to interpret meaning. Effective academic listening occurs when learners can balance both processes to achieve comprehension.

Furthermore, academic listening is closely connected to other academic skills such as note-taking, summarizing, and critical thinking. Students must be able to select important information, organize ideas logically, and use the information for academic tasks such as examinations, presentations, and written assignments (Lynch, 2011).

Characteristics of Academic Listening in Higher Education

Academic listening in higher education has several distinctive characteristics. First, the language used is generally formal and academic. Lecturers frequently use discipline-specific terminology and academic expressions that may be unfamiliar to EFL students. Limited academic vocabulary knowledge can significantly hinder listening comprehension.

Second, academic spoken texts are typically information-dense and well-structured. Lectures usually follow a logical sequence, including introductions, explanations of key concepts, examples, and conclusions. However, the density of information may overload students' cognitive capacity, especially when listening in a second language (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Third, the speed of delivery in academic settings can be challenging. Lecturers usually speak at a natural pace without frequent repetition. Students are required to understand the content while simultaneously taking notes, which demands efficient listening strategies to identify key points rather than focusing on every word.

In addition, academic listening often occurs in interactive situations such as classroom discussions and question-and-answer sessions. Students are expected to respond appropriately, ask questions, and clarify their understanding. These

characteristics indicate that academic listening is a complex skill that requires explicit instruction and continuous practice.

Challenges in Developing Academic Listening Skills

EFL students in higher education face various challenges in developing academic listening skills. One major challenge is limited exposure to authentic academic listening materials. Many students are accustomed to simplified listening tasks in textbooks rather than real academic lectures, which reduces their preparedness for actual academic contexts (Astika & Kurniawan, 2020).

Linguistic difficulties also play a significant role. These include unfamiliar vocabulary, complex sentence structures, and different accents. Field (2008) explains that difficulty in recognizing words can interrupt comprehension and cause listeners to lose track of the overall message. Accent variation and intonation patterns may further complicate understanding.

Another challenge is the lack of listening strategies. Many students listen passively without planning how to listen, monitoring their comprehension, or evaluating their performance. Graham (2006) found that learners who lack effective listening strategies often experience anxiety and low confidence during listening tasks.

Affective factors such as anxiety, fear of misunderstanding, and low motivation can negatively affect listening performance. When students feel overwhelmed by academic listening tasks, they may lose concentration and give up trying to understand the message. These challenges demonstrate the importance of supportive and structured listening instruction in higher education.

Strategies for Developing Academic Listening Skills

To overcome these challenges, academic listening instruction should emphasize strategy-based learning. One effective approach is teaching metacognitive listening strategies, which help students become aware of their listening processes. Research shows that metacognitive instruction enables learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening more effectively (Vandergrift, 2004; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Pre-listening activities play a crucial role in preparing students for listening tasks. Lecturers can introduce the topic, explain key vocabulary, and activate students' background knowledge. This preparation helps students predict the content and reduces listening anxiety.

During listening activities, students should be guided to focus on main ideas rather than attempting to understand every word. Tasks such as completing outlines, answering guiding questions, and identifying key points can help students maintain focus. Effective note-taking strategies, including the use of abbreviations and symbols, also support comprehension.

Post-listening activities are essential for reinforcing understanding. Students can summarize the lecture, discuss key ideas with peers, or reflect on their listening difficulties. These activities encourage deeper processing and help learners improve their listening strategies over time.

The use of authentic academic materials is highly recommended. Authentic resources such as recorded lectures, academic videos, podcasts, and TED Talks expose

students to real academic language and prepare them for actual university listening demands (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Cross, 2014).

The Role of Lecturers in Academic Listening Instruction

Lecturers play a vital role in developing students' academic listening skills. As facilitators, lecturers should provide explicit instruction on listening strategies and design tasks that gradually increase in difficulty. Explicit guidance helps students understand how to listen effectively rather than merely testing their listening ability.

Providing constructive feedback is also essential. According to Brown (2007), feedback helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses in listening and encourages continuous improvement. Lecturers can discuss common listening problems and suggest practical solutions based on students' performance.

In addition, lecturers can promote learner autonomy by recommending online resources such as open-access lectures, academic videos, and educational podcasts. Technology allows students to practice listening independently and repeatedly, increasing their exposure to academic English outside the classroom.

CONCLUSION

Academic listening is a key skill in English language learning at the university level as it supports students in understanding lectures and engaging in academic discussions. However, EFL students often face challenges related to limited academic vocabulary, lack of effective listening strategies, and insufficient exposure to authentic materials. Therefore, academic listening instruction should emphasize strategy-based learning and the use of authentic resources to better prepare students for academic demands in higher education.

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