

The Use of VOA Special English: A Review of Studies on Benefits and Development of Students' Listening Skill

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Abstract

This research aims to (1) find out the benefits of using VOA to teach listening skill and (2) find out the development of students' listening skill through VOA. To obtain the data needed, this research employed library research. The researchers used documents as the data sources. In analyzing the data, the researcher used content analysis. The data were collected by reviewing the research related to VOA and listening skill. The findings of this research showed that VOA brought many benefits in the educational field, it also develops students' listening skill. It means that VOA is a useful platform for teaching and learning process.

Keywords: *Voice of America (VOA), Listening Skill, Review Studies*

Introduction

Listening is the very first thing people do before they can speak, read or write. This is in line with the statement of Alrawashdeh and Al-Zayed (2017) that listening comprehension is the primary skill among the four language skills. Listening is often considered as one crucial thing in communication competence. Siegel (2015) states that listening is an active process in which the listener must differentiate between voice, comprehend vocabulary and grammatical structures, analyze stress and intonation, and interpret them within the immediate of the larger socio-cultural contexts. In EFL context, listening is a highly notable skill. As what has been stated by Hamouda (2013), that the importance of listening skill in EFL learning is unquestionable since the key of acquiring a language is to obtain language input. Jafari and Hashim (2015) stated that more than 50 percent of the time learners spend in learning a foreign language is devoted to listening.

Teaching listening skill in EFL classroom can be difficult for teachers and particularly difficult for students to learn as well. The difficulties that learners experience are led by some problems, such as the difference between pronunciation that is uttered by the speakers and the written text. Learners who do not have many vocabulary knowledge may feel unfamiliar with them. In addition, the speed of the utterance also hinder learners listening practice. Some other listening problems are concerned to the listening materials (Seferoglu and Uzakgoren, 2004) cited in Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016). The listening materials do not reach real-life condition of the learners.

As what has been mentioned earlier, listening materials play an important role in the development of listening skill. Listening materials can be in the form of songs, radio programs, and news broadcast. One of the newest news broadcaster is the Voice of America (VOA). VOA is the US international multimedia broadcaster which produces more than 40 languages. VOA has a program namely VOA Special English, and later its service includes more materials to teach English. VOA is believed can help learners with their listening skills since the audio read in slower pace and clearer pronunciation. Yao and Zuo (2009) assumed that VOA exposes learners to vocabulary used to express recent issues that are widely discussed around the world and thus provides learners with what they actually need in terms of vocabulary for authentic communication.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher attempts to review some studies in respect with the use of VOA in developing students' listening skill. The researcher formulated the problems into: (1) What are the benefit of using VOA to teach listening skill? (2) How is the development of students' listening skill taught by using VOA?

Research Methodology

The research methodology used in this research is Library Research. Hamzah (2019) explains that library research is always identical to the activity of text analysis or discourse that investigates an event, whether in the form of actions or writings that are examined to find the facts until then concluded in the form of building new concepts or a new theory of terror. Therefore, the kinds of data used as the basis of this research are Qualitative Data, which is in the form of information in the findings of each data source. As stated by Siyoto & Sodik

(2015), he explains that qualitative data is data in the form of words, not numbers. For the data source, the researcher used the document. Nine documents were used by the researcher, namely journals, articles, and undergraduate thesis. Those documents are listed as follow:

First, a journal entitled *The Effectiveness of VOA News Video as the Teaching Media in Increasing the Listening Skills* by Misyfa Bayani Tasya, Tohidin, and Nana Priajana (2018). The reason why the researcher chose this journal is that this journal has the same variables that the researcher reviewed, which is related to VOA and teaching listening skills.

Second, an article entitled *Increasing Students' Listening Comprehension by Using VOA: Special English Video* by Kornelius Ujang Sabinus, Eusabinus Bunau, and Dewi Novita (2013). The reason why the researcher chose this article is that this journal has the same variables with this research, namely VOA and teaching listening. Besides, this article is an experimental journal which aimed to find out whether there is an improvement in students' listening skills when using VOA. It means that the purpose of this article is relevant to the research that the researcher examined.

Third, a journal entitled *Learning English Listening and Speaking through BBC VOA Podcast: An App Review* by Samaneh Abdi and Hossein Makiabadi (2019). The reason why the researcher used this journal is that the independent variable that researcher examined is the same with this journal.

Fourth, an article entitled *Teaching Listening Comprehension through Voice of America (VOA) Special English Broadcast* written by Wahyu Dwi Savitri Nuryadi (2013). The reason why the researcher chose this article is that this article used the same variables with this research.

Fifth, an undergraduate thesis entitled *The Application of VOA Special English to Teach Listening Skills to 11th Form Students in a Duong High School* by Nguyễn Thị Hoài Phúóng (2011). The reason why the researcher chose this thesis is because it has the same variables with this research. In addition, one of the purposes of the thesis is to find out the benefits of implementing the VOA application in learning. It means the purpose is relevant to the research that the researcher examined.

Sixth, an undergraduate thesis under the title *The Use of Podcast Voice of American Learning English to Improve Students' Listening Skills* by Dian Amalia Febriana (2017). The reason why the researcher chose this thesis is that the variables owned by this thesis are the same as this research. In addition, the second objective of this thesis is relevant to this research which was to find out how VOA can improve listening skills.

Seventh, an undergraduate thesis with the title *The Use of VOA Listening Materials and World News Metro TV to Teach Listening Skills* by Ainur Rohmah (2019). The reason why the researcher chose this research is that the variables between this thesis and this research are the same.

Eighth, a journal titled *The Use Of VOA Learning English Application As A Media In Teaching Listening To News Item Text At English Department In UIN Antasari Banjarmasin* by Suaibatul Aslamiyah (2020). The reason why the researcher chose this study is that the variable between this journal and this research is the same.

Ninth, a journal under the title *The Use Of VOA Learning English App In Teaching English Language To Improve The Students' Listening Skills* by Dina Sofia (2020). The reason why the researcher chose this journal is because the journal variables are the same as this research. In addition, the purpose of this journal is relevant to this research

For that reason, The technique used by the researcher in collecting data is the study of documentation. The documentation is looking for data about things or variables in the form of notes, transcripts, books, newspapers, magazines, inscriptions, minutes of meetings, lengths, agendas, and so on (Siyoto & Sodik, 2015). In analyzing the data, the researcher used content analysis. The data were collected by reviewing the research related to VOA and listening skill. Hence, data validation, this research used an External Audit. An external audit can be done by cross-checking with someone outside the research. Someone can be an expert who can provide an assessment in the form of an accurate examination of research reports. This involves describing the weaknesses and strengths of the research as well as studying different aspects of the research findings (Hamzah, 2019).

Results

1. Benefits of Using VOA to Teach Listening Skill

a) VOA makes students pay attention in listening class

Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018); Febriana (2017) observed the students while they are teaching listening to them using VOA. Based on their observation, they found that the students were orderly paying attention to the learning process.

b) VOA helps students to get motivated in learning listening

From the questionnaire that have been given to the students, Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018); and Phúóng (2011) found that the majority of students said that VOA increases their motivation in learning listening. Phúóng (2011) stated that the students get more motivation because VOA has interesting topics. Febriana (2017) stated that VOA could attract students' motivation since the students' listening skill are improved after she implements VOA in listening class.

c) VOA makes students interested in listening class

Phúóng (2011) distributed questionnaire to the students, and she found that most students agreed that VOA brought much interest to them.

d) VOA makes students focused on learning listening

After teaching the students using VOA, Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018) gave them questionnaire. From the results of the questionnaire, then it is found that more than half of the students agreed that VOA makes them focus on the listening session.

e) VOA makes students felt pleased in learning listening

Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018) used questionnaire to find out the students' preception on the use of VOA in listening classes. The majority of students agreed that the use of VOA video in teaching-learning listening makes them pleased.

f) VOA makes students felt enthusiastic in learning listening

From the questionnaire in the research that was conducted by Tasya, Tohidin, and Priajana (2018), it was discovered that more than 50% students said that VOA makes them enthusiastic in the listening process.

g) VOA helps students acquiring new knowledge

Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018); and Phóng (2011) found that VOA enables the students to widen their knowledge about the outside world, for example the cultural knowledge.

h) VOA helps students in acquiring new vocabulary

Abdi and Makiabadi (2019) reviewed the VOA application, then they found that VOA provides a considerable number of vocabulary items. In addition, from the questionnaire distributed by Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018), they discovered that VOA helps the students to acquire new vocabulary

i) VOA introduces students to a real life listening situation

Sabinus, Bunau and Novita (2013); Abdi and Makiabadi (2019); Phóng (2011); and Aslamiyah (2020), found out that by using VOA, the students are able to listen to the way native speakers speak. Hence, it can help them to get used to the real life listening situation.

j) VOA makes students more active in listening class

Febriana (2017) found that the students' activeness in the class is increased after she applied VOA in teaching listening. The students are braver to ask questions to the teacher if they were not understand about the material.

k) VOA decreases students' boredom in the class

Febriana (2017) observed the students' attitude in the class while she is teaching listening to them. From that observation, she found that VOA is useful to make the students not feel bored and sleepy in listening class.

l) VOA video and audio are free to access

In her teaching process, Sofia (2020) discovered that VOA provides free audio and video that can be used by the teachers and students in listening class.

m) VOA helps improve students listening achievement

Sabinus, Bunau and Novita (2013); Nuryadi (2013); Febriana (2017); Tasya, Tohidin and Priajana (2018); and Rohmah (2019) revealed that the students' listening achievement were improved after they implement VOA in listening classes. The improvement can be proven by the students' scores in listening test.

2. The Students Development in Listening Class through VOA

From the research that have been reviewed, the researchers found that the students' listening skill were developed after being taught using VOA. It can be proved by the increase of students' listening test score. The followings are the steps done by the researchers of the reviewed research in implementing VOA in the class.

Febriana (2017) used VOA to teach the students in one vocational high school in Central Java. In teaching, she used scientific approach. Before jump to the material, she gave the students apperception by giving them some questions related to the materials. After that, she explained the materials using PowerPoint. She used VOA podcast to give exercises which consisted of 15 *fill in the blank* questions and 5 *essay* questions. In the end of her research, Febriana (2017) gave post-test to the students. In the first meeting, the students' mean score of pre-test was 73.329, while the mean score of post-test was 73.970. In the second meeting, the students' mean score of pre-test was 73.970, while the mean score of post-test was 81.61. It can be concluded that the students' listening skill is developed after the implementation of VOA.

Rohmah (2019) also taught the students in a vocational high school in Central Java. She used the scientific approach and CLT method. Before explaining the materials to the students, she asked them to watch video in VOA related to the topic discussed. Then, she explained the materials and made sure that all of the students are understand. After that, she asked them to find some videos about the same topic and then find the detail information about the topic. As the last activity, Rohmah (2019) and her students draw a conclusion about the

material. Beside VOA, she also taught the comparison class using World News Metro TV. Hence, after she got scores from both students in experimental and comparison class, she compared the scores. The result showed that the mean score of students in experimental class was improved from 58.43 to 74.29, while the mean score of students in comparison class was improved from 56.14 to 74.14. It can be concluded that VOA is effective to teach students listening skill.

Discussions

1. Benefits of Using VOA Special English to Teach Listening Skill

From the results of the research, it is shown that VOA brought many benefits for students and teachers in learning, especially listening subject. In Indonesia, the language learning is limited to the school. This condition enables VOA to be implemented in classroom as an authentic material. This is in line with the statement of Beresova (2015); Tabatabaei & Gahroei (2011); Tomlinson (2012); as cited in Polat and Enristi (2019), that in countries where language learning is limited to classroom context, authentic materials provide students with an opportunity to acquire rich and concrete experiences in using the target language in real life. The researchers of the reviewed research have found that beside academic achievement, VOA also brought benefits to the students' learning motivation. The results are supported by the statement of Philips & Shettlesworth (1978); Clarke (1989); Peacock (1991); as cited in Richards (2001). They said that the main advantages of using authentic materials are the positive effect of the students on motivation.. The teachers can maximize the use of VOA special English as a platform which provide an authentic listening materials that can help students in mastering the listening skill.

2. The Students Development in Listening Skill through VOA

The review results reveal that the use of VOA can develop students' listening skill. The development can be seen from the students' scores in pre-test and post-test. Some researchers used scientific approach in teaching the students in the class since the current curriculum emphasized to modern learning, which is using the scientific approach (Kholifah, 2019). In implementing VOA, some researchers still use the video programs. this is in contrast with one of the listening principles proposed by Brown (2007) that the listening material should never be

shown in visual form in order to make the students familiar with the audio. However, the use of video makes students engage with the environmentally listening situation. It can make them understand better about the topic that the speakers discussed. Hence, their listening achievement also increases. The various topics, which are spoken by native speakers in clearer in slower pronunciation also contribute to students' understanding. This is supported by Muzdalifah and Van FC (2018) who assumed that VOA Special English could improve students' listening and speaking skill because of three reasons namely vocabulary; intonation and pronunciation; and grammatical structure.

Conclusion

VOA is an active media that can support the teaching and learning process, especially teaching and learning listening since it motivates students in learning listening. VOA can also make students more active, enthusiastic, and focused on listening to class. By using VOA, the students could gain new knowledge and vocabulary. Furthermore, the students will experience real-life communication when the teachers use VOA in their classrooms. Besides, all of the video and audio in VOA are free. It financially helps the teachers and students. For that reason, From year by year, several researchers have conducted some research related to the use of VOA special English in teaching listening and the research findings always state there is the development of students' listening skill after they are being taught using VOA.

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