

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This part presents the introduction. It covers the background of the study, the research questions, definition of the key terms, objectives of the study, significances of the study, and organization of the thesis.

A. Background of the Study

English proficiency is essential in the current global era, particularly in academic and professional contexts. Among the four fundamental language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening comprehension forms the foundation of effective communication in language learning (Vandergrift and Goh, 2012: 9). Despite its central position, listening is among the hardest skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to acquire and has not been given sufficient attention in traditional classroom teaching. Goh in Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016: 127) illustrates that 66% of learners mentioned the speaker's accent as one of the biggest listening comprehension challenges, revealing the role of accent familiarity in understanding spoken English.

The age of technology has changed language learning in revolutionary ways, providing a range of technological tools that can complement face-to-face classroom learning. Skehan in Lai and Li (2011: 507) warns that in online language learning activities, the learners could prioritize meaning over linguistic form excessively, an issue observed in both language and

intercultural learning contexts. Thorne and Payne (2005: 383) explain that web sites like blogs and podcasts provide language learners with the possibility of creating multiple linguistic and social identities by mixing academic and personal language use. These technologies, blended with pedagogic instruction, facilitate authentic communication and the creation of more sophisticated language. This shift presents both opportunities and challenges for Indonesian educational institutions, where English language proficiency is increasingly demanded by employers but continuously falls behind regional standards.

Indonesian vocational high schools (SMK) are facing particular challenges to provide English language education due to their dual mandate of preparing students for possible higher education studies as well as immediate job opportunities. A significant gap, however, exists between the outlined aims of the curriculum and actual implementation, specifically teachers' English language proficiency levels as well as the integration of this language into vocational education (Lie, 2017: 75-76). Lauder (2008: 14) states that English language proficiency is universally seen to be an important factor for job achievement in Indonesia, often equated with education, modernity, and status. Research shows that Indonesian English teachers apply grammar-translation methods at a minimum, thus providing few possibilities for students to practice true listening skills.

Voice of America (VOA) sites, particularly its Learning English section, are considered effective sources for EFL listening practice. These platforms provide authentic content delivered at a controlled pace, along with audio-

visual materials specifically designed for language learners. Hasan and Hoon (2013: 128) explain that programs like those produced by VOA are widely adapted into educational podcast formats to support English language learning. The VOA sites blend authentic materials with pedagogical features, helping to fill the gap between classroom learning and real-world language exposure in many Indonesian schools.

Based on preliminary research by interviewing English teacher at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Ajibarang, the writer identified several challenges faced by students in developing their listening skills. These challenges include difficulties in understanding words in context, limited vocabulary mastery, and insufficient facilities to support the teaching and learning process. As a result, students rarely have the opportunity to practice their listening skills, leading to low motivation and performance in this area.

In this case, the writer focuses on investigating the effectiveness of VOA sites specifically their educational content section in improving students' listening abilities. Therefore, the writer decided to conduct a study entitled "The Effectiveness of VOA (Voice of America) Sites to Improve the Students' Listening Skill at SMK Muhammadiyah 2 Ajibarang."

B. Research Questions

Based on the problem found in the background of the study above, the research questions are:

1. How effective is the use of VOA sites in improving students' listening skills compared to those who do not use it?

2. What are the students' perceptions toward the use of VOA sites in listening activities?

C. Definition of the Key Terms

To give a clear description and to avoid misunderstanding the key terms used in this research are explained as follows:

1. VOA (Voice of America) Sites

VOA sites refer to the official online platforms of Voice of America, particularly those that provide educational resources for English learners. This includes access to audio-visual materials, news stories, interviews, and structured language-learning content. Among these, the *Learning English* section is a notable sub-site that presents simplified English news and listening content designed for non-native speakers. These materials are widely used in educational settings to support English language development, especially in listening comprehension.

2. Listening Skill

According to Sree Vani and Naik (2023: 10-11), listening is a process in which listeners actively decode information and understand the underlying meaning of a message. Effective listening requires focus and engagement, enabling the listener to interpret the speaker's intent and respond appropriately. This skill is essential for successful communication and is particularly important in educational contexts, where it facilitates learning and comprehension.

D. Objectives of the Study

Based on the research questions, this research aims to:

1. Investigate the effectiveness of using VOA sites in improving students' listening skills compared to those who do not use it.
2. Describe the students' perceptions toward the use of VOA sites in listening activities.

E. Significances of the Study

The result of this study is intended to give contribution to three aspects of contribution, as follows:

1. Theoretically

The results of this study are expected to provide a reference for other researchers or educators who wish to explore the use of digital media, particularly online platforms like VOA sites in improving students' listening skills.

2. Practically

Practically, there are two significances of the study, as follows:

- a. For the Writer

This research is expected to deepen the writer's understanding of how to use digital resources effectively in teaching listening skills, especially through accessible and relevant content from VOA Sites.

- b. For the Readers

The results of this study are intended to encourage readers, particularly teachers and students to explore innovative and easy to

access learning tools, such as VOA Sites, in order to support students' listening comprehension and overall English language development.

3. Pedagogically

This study is expected to contribute academically to the field of English language teaching, particularly in developing effective strategies and learning resources that are both authentic and engaging. It is hoped that this research will motivate teachers to use content from VOA Sites to help students practice active listening in a meaningful and enjoyable way.

F. Organization of the Thesis

In this study, the writer presents the thesis in five chapters to ensure systematic writing. Chapter I is Introduction, which includes the background of the study, research questions, definition of key terms, objectives of the study, significances of the study, and organization of the thesis. Chapter II is Review of Related Literature, which consists of theoretical studies, previous studies, theoretical framework, and hypothesis. Chapter III is Method of Investigation, which covers the research design, source of data, technique of data collection, and technique of data analysis. Chapter IV is Findings and Interpretation. Chapter V is Conclusion and Suggestions.