

STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN TEACHING LISTENING COMPREHENSION: THE EXPERIENCES OF EFL TEACHER

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Abstract: The importance of listening comprehension skills in the development of English language proficiency cannot be ignored, especially in academic and professional contexts. Teachers play an important role in teaching listening comprehension. This research aims to investigate EFL teachers' experiences in using strategies and the challenges faced in teaching listening comprehension. The study used a narrative inquiry design with semi-structured interviews and documentation in the form of lesson plans. To analyze the data, the researcher used thematic analysis. The results of the analysis reveal that bottom-up strategies improve listening comprehension skills in the context of English as a foreign language (EFL). Respondents 1 and 2 implemented in-depth pre-listening activities with a multimedia approach and interactive discussions. Selection of relevant material, formative assessment, and post-listening evaluation strategies are key to a holistic learning experience. There is an emphasis on the challenges of understanding accents and vocabulary, which are addressed through the use of worksheets and contextual approaches. For future researchers, it is expected to increase the number of participants from several different schools in order to get varied results.

Keywords: listening comprehension, strategies and challenges.

INTRODUCTION

International communication is increasingly important. Finding more efficient ways to teach English has become a major issue due to the increasing need for English language proficiency in the world. As evidenced by the findings in the study conducted by Gurses & Saricoban (2009), speaking and listening are not only the two most important types of communication, but they are also the easiest ways for individuals to share information and express their views. Research by Permadi, Sholihah, and Umamah (2017) confirms that listening courses are the most important thing in mastering English because they support other skills.

Although traditionally considered a passive talent, listening is now recognized as essential to communication. According to Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011), listening accounts for 40–50% of the time spent communicating, compared to speaking, 25–30%, reading, 11–16%, and writing. Mendelsohn (1994) also found that listening is now considered much more important in both EFL classrooms and SLA research, despite the fact that listening instruction has long been neglected and poorly taught. Decoding and creating meaning from verbal and non-verbal messages is an active process involved in listening. Thus, teachers really need an effective strategy for teaching listening in the classroom.

Teachers are one solution to English language education in Indonesia. Teachers have a significant influence on how well a student speaks English. How students develop when faced with all the challenging situations in the classroom depends on the teacher. Teachers definitely have some problems with methods and approaches, especially when using strategies when teaching listening skills in the classroom. Mendelsohn (1994) states that teaching and learning are strategies,

approaches, or series of actions intended to achieve certain educational goals. This means that a teacher must develop strategies effectively and be able to reach all students to achieve certain goals in the teaching and learning process.

Additionally, because each teacher has different goals, objectives, and goals, the choice of strategy depends on the instructor. If a teacher wants to use a particular method, the teacher must consider several factors. It is common for teachers to aspire to different goals in each class they teach because each class can have a different set of goals. According to Raiser and Dick (1996), teachers can use a variety of pedagogical approaches to meet their teaching and learning goals. Due to the fact that each class has a unique target audience and set of goals, it is natural for teachers to use their own strategies when teaching students.

The fact that many teachers have to develop their students' understanding of the listening process makes teaching listening challenging. According to Nunan (2001), quoted in Bueno & McLaren (2006), there are several steps that students must take when completing listening assignments. The first is that they must be interested in what they hear. Second, they choose the stimulus. The third time they voted, they paid attention and focused their attention. In the fourth, meaning (understanding) is given. In reviewing the Fifth, students analyze and make judgments. The final step is to answer.

In recent years, several studies have been conducted to explore the reasons why listening to English can be difficult for some individuals. Ratna (2018) revealed that listening difficulties are caused by the demand to listen and write answers simultaneously, a challenge that students face. Another study conducted by Nushi and Orouji (2020) involved EFL teachers in Iran and identified key problems in students' listening difficulties, including practical problems such as poor-quality audio materials and content-based challenges that were unfamiliar to students. Teachers believe that students' listening difficulties can be categorized into three categories, namely difficulties based on pronunciation, individual characteristics, and content.

Furthermore, research by Ernita et al. (2022) highlighted the difficulties faced by English teachers in teaching listening comprehension at SMA Negeri 1 Ketungau Hulu. The results of this research show that teachers face a number of obstacles, such as difficulties in using listening comprehension teaching strategies, difficulties maintaining student focus, technical problems such as malfunctioning loudspeakers, and limitations in the availability of books and materials in schools. Additionally, Rahmati (2017) research highlights the challenges non-native teachers face in teaching English as a foreign language (ELT). This shows that educational policies that ignore the unique needs of teachers and students can hinder the achievement of learning goals. Therefore, it is necessary to improve language planning policies to ensure equality and inclusion in learning.

However, Wah's (2019) research shows that the use of effective strategies and skills in teaching listening can improve students' listening abilities. In addition findings from Ashari and Rahmati (2019) found that the presence of full video text with captions can significantly improve EFL students' listening comprehension. In Wah's (2019) research, more than 90 percent of students admitted that their listening skills improved as a result of effective teaching methods and the use of various listening materials in class.

Furthermore, research by Aryana and Apsari (2018) highlights difficulties in teaching listening that can be caused by internal and external factors, such as difficulties in choosing teaching methods and environmental distractions. These findings provide valuable insight into understanding the complexity of listening difficulties. Zuhairi and Hidayanti's (2016) study shows the use of various listening learning strategies, with compensatory strategies being the most frequently used. However, there was no significant difference in strategy use between high- and low-achieving students. Previous research by Zuhairi and Hidayanti (2014) also emphasized the importance of strategies in students' listening skills, especially in the context of gender differences in strategy use and the contribution of certain strategies to listening skills. Thus, the overall research results provide a comprehensive understanding of and improve students' listening abilities.

Teaching listening comprehension in the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) is a critical, but often challenging, aspect. Previous research has identified various strategies and challenges faced by EFL teachers in their efforts to improve students' listening abilities. However, little research has used a narrative inquiry approach, which has the potential to provide in-depth insight into teachers' personal experiences in teaching listening comprehension. In this research, researcher will explore EFL teachers' experiences through a narrative inquiry approach, allowing teachers to share their own narratives about challenges, strategies, and their teaching in developing students' listening comprehension. To achieve the research's purposes, two research questions are addressed: (1) What are the strategies used by EFL teachers in teaching listening comprehension? And (2) From the experience, what are the challenges faced by EFL teacher in teaching listening comprehension?

METHOD

This study utilizes a narrative inquiry approach, as suggested by Connelly & Clandinin (2006), to explore the experiences of English teachers in implementing strategies and overcoming challenges during language learning. This approach focuses on the values and meanings derived from individuals' experiences, captured through their stories. By conducting interviews with two experienced English teachers from a state secondary school in Malang, Indonesia, the research aims to gain insights into their teaching practices, particularly in listening comprehension. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and lesson documentation, with a thematic analysis following Barkhuizen et al.'s (2013) model to identify key themes from the narratives.

The data collection process took place in December 2023. The participants, a male and a female teacher with over five years of experience, were chosen for their active engagement in teaching and learning. The research began with a questionnaire to gather preliminary data on teaching strategies, followed by face-to-face interviews conducted in the participants' native language, Indonesian. This process ensured a comfortable and thorough exploration of their experiences. The final analysis included a review of lesson plans, providing practical evidence to support the interview findings. The research process concluded with data verification and thematic analysis, offering a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences in teaching English listening comprehension.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Question 1: What are the strategies used by EFL teachers in teaching listening comprehension?

The research results obtained from the questionnaire in Appendix I show how the two respondents used various pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening strategies to improve their students' listening comprehension. The following analysis findings outline the skills and methods that respondents applied in overcoming the challenges of learning to listen.

a. Pre-listening Activities

Both respondents indicated the importance of pre-listening activities in preparing students before listening to the material. As many as 90% of respondents (R1) often use pre-listening activities such as providing context and background to the material to be listened to, which helps students to anticipate the content and purpose of the audio (R1 gave a score of 5, while R2 gave a score of 3). Respondents also emphasized the importance of choosing audio material that is relevant and familiar to students. All respondents (100%) often or very often chose audio topics that were familiar to most students, which helped increase student engagement and understanding (R1 gave a score of 5 and R2 gave a score of 4). Additionally, respondents very often asked students to read about the topic first and answer introductory questions. This step aims to activate previous knowledge and prepare students mentally to understand the audio content they will listen to (R1 gives a score of 5 and R2 gives a score of 4).

b. While Listening Activities

During the listening activity, both respondents demonstrated strong skills in helping students learn key vocabulary and grammar from the audio played. All respondents (100%) very often help students recognize and understand important vocabulary that appears in the audio, which is an important skill in active listening (R1 and R2 gave a score of 5). In addition, 90% of respondents often or very often help students understand the grammatical structures used in the audio, which helps students understand the meaning of the sentence as a whole (R1 gave a score of 4 and R2 gave a score of 5).

Respondents were also very proactive in monitoring vocabulary and grammar difficulties that students experienced during listening lessons. They often provide clarification and direct assistance when detecting problems, which is important for maintaining a smooth learning process (R1 and R2 gave a score of 5). Respondents also demonstrated high analytical skills by directing students to focus attention on important information from the audio. As many as 90% of respondents often or very often ask students to analyze and identify key points in the audio, which helps increase students' in-depth understanding of the material (R1 gave a score of 5 and R2 gave a score of 4). However, only 70% of respondents often or very often ask students to focus on unimportant information, indicating that they prefer to emphasize important aspects of the material listened to (R1 gave a score of 4 and R2 gave a score of 3).

c. Post-Listening Activities

After listening to the audio, both respondents demonstrated skills in consolidating students' understanding through various activity evaluations. All respondents (100%) very often asked students to name vocabulary words they recognized after listening to the audio, which helped reinforce learning new understandings (R1 and R2 gave a score of 5). They also frequently used multiple-choice questions to elicit students' understanding of the audio content, allowing students to test their understanding objectively (R1 and R2 gave a score of 5). As many as 80% of respondents often or very often use dictation as an evaluation method, which helps improve students' writing and listening skills simultaneously (R1 and R2 gave a score of 4).

In addition, 90% of respondents often or very often use close-listening or fill-in-the blank activities, which train students' detailed listening skills and deep understanding of audio material (R1 gave a score of 5 and R2 gave a score of 4). Both respondents also often gave students the opportunity to name and explain understandings that emerged in the audio, which helped strengthen mastery of new understandings (R1 gave a score of 5 and R2 gave a score of 4).

Respondents often help students reconstruct meaning from audio based on knowledge students already have, with 80% of them doing this frequently, which shows skills in connecting new information with previous knowledge (R1 and R2 gave a score of 4). In addition, they often ask students to answer questions in the form of a sequence of images or events and infer relationships between characters in the audio, which trains students' analytical skills and narrative understanding (R1 and R2 gave a score of 4).

Question 2: From the experience, what are the challenges faced by EFL teacher in teaching listening comprehension?

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) covers a wide range of skills, with listening comprehension being an important aspect in language acquisition. Based on the interview results, EFL teachers often face many challenges when teaching this skill, which includes pre-listening, during-listening, and post-listening stages. Understanding and overcoming these challenges is critical to improving the effectiveness of the teaching process. Mendelsohn (1994) found that listening is now considered much more important both in EFL classrooms and in SLA research. The results of this interview are supported by the respondent's lesson plan.

a. Challenges of EFL Teachers Face in Pre-Listening

The results of the analysis from the interviews show that both respondents tend to use bottom-up strategies in pre-listening activities. Initial data was obtained through a questionnaire and developed further in interviews with the two respondents, transcripts of which are available in Appendix II. In the pre-listening process, both respondents faced challenges in creating a positive learning atmosphere and fostering students' interest in learning. Many students experience difficulty learning to listen, which results in a decrease in their interest in learning. This becomes a challenge for EFL teachers in the pre-listening process.

To face this challenge, both respondents used a multimedia approach, such as displaying short videos or images related to the topic. R1 views the use of multimedia as a way to help students understand context and increase engagement in learning. In addition, R2 creates a pleasant atmosphere by playing music before starting the lesson and practicing students' listening skills. R2 also uses interactive discussions in the form of charades as a strategy to arouse student interest and encourage active participation, thereby creating a positive classroom environment.

The interview results show that the use of multimedia by both respondents not only functions as a teaching aid but also as a way to create a more interesting and interactive learning atmosphere. R1 emphasized that visualization through videos or images helps students build connections between the material studied and their daily experiences. Meanwhile, R2 added that playing music before learning can reduce students' anxiety levels and make them more ready to receive the material being taught.

Apart from the multimedia approach, direct interaction with students through word-guessing games has proven to be effective in increasing interest in learning. R2 noted that this activity not only made students more interested but also helped them expand their vocabulary and improve their listening skills. Both respondents agreed that creating a positive learning environment is key to overcoming challenges in pre-listening activities and to increasing the effectiveness of listening comprehension teaching. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: For me, I often show short videos or pictures related to the topic. So that children have background knowledge about the topic that will be discussed.

R2: In class, I usually play music so that the students can enjoy it first and practice their listening before moving on to the main material. Sometimes I also create interactive discussions in the form of guessing vocabulary about the topic that will be discussed, and later I will give points to those who can guess correctly. This is so that students are interested in the topic that will be discussed.

Another challenge in pre-listening activities is selecting material. Both respondents prioritized relevance and student engagement. R1 emphasized the importance of conducting an initial assessment of students' abilities to adapt the material to their level of understanding. Meanwhile, R2 highlighted the diversity of students' skills in one class and the importance of modifying learning strategies according to individual ability levels. By adapting their teaching, both respondents can better address students' need and preferences and create learning experiences that are more tailored and relevant to students' abilities.

In measuring students' initial abilities, R1 carries out assessments using formative assessment methods such as short tests, quizzes, and open questions. Light discussion sessions and brain teasers are also useful tools for evaluating student understanding. Information from this assessment helps R1 understand the extent of students' initial abilities, so they can adjust their learning approaches more effectively. For example, if the majority of students already have a basic understanding, the teacher can move on to more complex material, whereas if there are knowledge gaps, additional explanations or understandings of basic concepts can be provided.

Meanwhile, R2 places more emphasis on direct interaction with students in measuring initial abilities. Through group discussions or simple questions and answers, R2 can assess student understanding and adjust the learning approach according to their ability level. In this way, R2

creates an inclusive learning environment and provides opportunities for all students to be involved in learning, both those who have a basic understanding and those who already have a better understanding. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: Because students in this class have different abilities, some have less abilities, some are quite clever, and various others, I think it is necessary to carry out an assessment first to measure students' abilities, such as by making quizzes or asking open questions.

R2: Regarding the differentiation of students' abilities, different treatments are needed. So I provide material that seems familiar to students so that their listening is truly contextual.

Therefore, it can be said that pre-listening activities play an integral role in forming a positive and effective listening comprehension experience for students. Even so, differentiation in the classroom still exists, such as among students who are still not interested in learning even though they have been given videos, pictures, songs, and so on. According to the two respondents, this is a challenge in itself, so the pre-listening process is still needed to motivate students.

The strategy to motivate students by providing a general overview of the topic and relating it to everyday life, as indicated by Respondent 1 (R1) that has proven to be effective in increasing student motivation and connecting learning with the context of their lives. In addition, the cognitive activity approach, as indicated by Respondent 1 (R2) which engages students in pre-listening thinking activities such as making predictions or listing questions, prepares them cognitively and encourages intellectual engagement. This combination of strategies, which focus on motivation and connection to daily life and cognitive activities, can create a holistic listening experience. The result is a solid foundation for effective listening comprehension among students, where they are not only emotionally engaged but also actively engaged in the learning process.

b. Challenges of EFL Teachers Face in While Listening

The challenges that arise in the teaching process are not only in pre-listening activities, but in the listening process there are also challenges of their own. Teachers must keep students actively engaged and focused throughout the listening comprehension task. According to both respondents, this is not easy, so they both try to apply careful and varied strategies to maintain student involvement during the listening comprehension task. R1 uses relevant and interesting material such as audio clips, interviews, or news recordings that suit students' interests. Although it is not 100 percent successful, this strategy can maintain students' interest and increase their motivation in the process of learning to listen.

In addition, the design of challenging questions in pre-listening has proven to be effective in providing clear direction and goals to students while listening. This helps them stay focused and improves their understanding of the material. On the other hand, R2 takes an agreement-based approach with students, which provides incentives in the form of points for active participation and correct answers. R2 proves that positive incentive strategies can stimulate active student involvement in listening activities. In addition, R2 takes proactive steps by approaching students with low interest personally, showing awareness of individual differences, and making efforts to create an inclusive environment. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: First of all, I often use material that is relevant and interesting to students, such as audio clips, podcasts, or news recordings related to their interests. Next, I design a challenging quiz for students before they listen

R2: I make an agreement with students with the result that it will give points to those who are active and can answer questions correctly. Not all of the students in class are active, so for students who have low interest, I approach them by approaching their seats, and I try to ask questions slowly so that students are more open regarding the problems they face in class, whether in the form of material they don't understand or so on.

Even though treatment has been carried out in pre-listening activities, in fact, during listening activities, the biggest challenge for students is the difficulty of understanding the accent or

vocabulary they hear. According to the two respondents, students admitted that they could not understand clearly what was said in the audio. As a first step, R1 uses a worksheet or preliminary worksheet before listening, where students are asked questions related to the listening topic to activate previous knowledge and focus students' attention on the main material. On the other hand, R2 provides a brief introduction to the context or theme before listening, helping students understand the context better and be better prepared to grasp important information.

Through reflection after listening activities, both respondents provided opportunities for students to convey the obstacles they experienced, both related to understanding accents and vocabulary that was difficult to listen to. Next, R2 explores related information that has been learned to assess students' abilities and difficulties during listening activities. This way, the teacher can respond appropriately, provide additional explanations, or present the material in a way that is easier to understand. During listening sessions, R2 also ensures that there are opportunities for students to discuss in small groups or pairs, allowing them to share understanding and absorb information together. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: Many students have difficulty understanding accents or unfamiliar vocabulary; the first step is to give them a worksheet, then, after listening, do a reflection.

R2: It's true; they have difficulty understanding accents in audio. For example, the words "gift" and "give" are almost the same. So in the worksheet, they often write the vocabulary incorrectly. Therefore, I try to explore the difficulties faced by students so that, in the future, I can make improvements.

In presenting the material, both respondents had the challenge of balancing the authenticity of the listening material with the need to provide support for students. The results show that both respondents (R1 and R2) adopted a balanced approach between the authenticity of the listening material and the needs of the students, with a focus on ensuring the listening tasks remained challenging but achievable. R1 chose to provide material that was familiar to students and relevant to their daily lives. This approach creates a sense of familiarity and increases student engagement with the material while maintaining the authenticity of the use of English in everyday contexts.

On the other hand, R2 selects authentic listening materials, such as news recordings, interviews, or situational dialogues, that reflect real-life use of English. However, to ensure student achievement, R2 integrates support in the form of introductory worksheets with questions that guide students' attention to key information. This approach provides clear direction to students and helps them stay focused on the most relevant aspects of authentic material. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: I more often provide material that is familiar to students and relevant to their daily lives.

R2: To choose authentic listening material, I often use news recordings, podcasts, or situational dialogues that reflect real-life use of English. However, to ensure student achievement, I include support in the form of an introductory worksheet with questions that direct their attention to key information

c. Challenges of EFL Teachers Face in post-listening

Challenges in teaching listening comprehension arise not only in pre-listening and while listening but also in post-listening activities, especially in determining the type of activity after listening to ensure student understanding. R1 uses worksheets as post-tests or tools to review material, giving students the opportunity to test understanding through assessment activities and review material independently. On the other hand, R2 proposed post-listening group activities, allowing students who understand to explain in front of the class, building self-confidence and active participation with their peers.

After determining the activities, evaluation by the teacher becomes important. R1 uses worksheets as an evaluation tool by assessing students' activeness in asking, answering, and participating in group discussions. This approach provides a comprehensive picture of student understanding. Meanwhile, R2 asks students to summarize information or present personal

responses as a more involved evaluation method. R2 also integrates group discussions and question-and-answer sessions in class to assess students' understanding orally. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: For me, after students carry out listening activities, there is a need for a student assessment worksheet that includes assessing activeness in asking and answering and activeness in group discussions.

R2: if I ask students to provide personal responses to the material they have heard. After that, I engage students in group discussions or question-and-answer sessions in class to measure their understanding verbally and stimulate the exchange of ideas between students.

In providing constructive feedback, both of them developed an evaluation rubric with clear assessment criteria, such as understanding the content and the ability to summarize. Immediate feedback, both written and verbal, highlights student achievements and provides constructive suggestions for further development. R1 encourages students to reflect on listening skills with reflective questions as well as participate in group discussion sessions to share their experiences.

This reflection contributes significantly to students' development by helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses. The reflection process also helps students develop metacognitive skills, increase their understanding of how they learn, and adopt more effective strategies. R1 provides students with the opportunity to practice arguing in group sessions, creating an environment that supports collaborative learning.

Meanwhile, R2 implements group discussion sessions and collaborative projects, creating opportunities for students to develop language skills holistically. Observable benefits involve improving students' speaking and listening skills, developing argumentative abilities, and increasing confidence in communicating. By stimulating collaboration and interaction between students, both respondents create opportunities for students to develop their language skills while strengthening the social and interpersonal aspects of English language learning. Examples of interview answers are as follows:

R1: To encourage collaborative learning after listening, I like to provide opportunities for students to work in groups and exchange arguments, but still under my supervision.

R2: I often give collaborative projects, where students work together to create presentations or reports based on their understanding of the material they have heard.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research highlights EFL teachers' experiences in using both bottom-up and top-down strategies to teach listening comprehension, emphasizing the importance of a balanced approach. Bottom-up strategies, focusing on pre-listening activities like vocabulary and grammar exercises, help prepare students for the listening tasks. Top-down strategies leverage students' prior knowledge and involve selecting familiar audio topics and using visual aids. Despite these efforts, challenges remain, particularly in maintaining student engagement and addressing difficulties with accents and vocabulary during listening activities. Teachers address these challenges by using multimedia tools, group discussions, and varied assessment methods to ensure a comprehensive learning experience.

For teachers, the study suggests tailoring listening comprehension strategies to the diverse abilities of students, selecting relevant materials, and employing proven methods to overcome teaching challenges. For future research, it recommends expanding the participant pool to include teachers from various educational institutions, which would provide a broader understanding of the strategies and challenges in teaching listening comprehension, leading to more robust and generalizable findings.

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