



Basic Listening Skills in English Language Learning: Foundations and Pedagogical Approaches

Nur Istiqamah

Institut Agama Islam (IAI) Ar-Risalah INHIL Riau, Indonesia

Email Korespondensi: nuristiqamah9065zm@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Listening is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, providing the foundation for developing speaking, reading, and writing. This study aims to explore the foundations of basic listening skills and examine pedagogical approaches that can effectively foster listening competence. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were obtained from literature analysis, classroom observation, and teacher interviews, then analyzed thematically to identify key challenges and strategies. Findings show that listening skills play a vital role in vocabulary development, grammatical awareness, and intercultural competence, yet learners face barriers such as fast speech rates, accent variation, and limited strategy use. Innovative approaches such as extensive listening, podcast integration, task-based learning, and mobile-assisted instruction emerge as effective solutions for enhancing learner autonomy and communicative fluency. The study implies that listening pedagogy should move beyond comprehension testing toward equipping learners with strategic, cultural, and technological resources to meet global communication demands

Keywords: *Listening skills, EFL, pedagogy, strategy, innovation*

ABSTRAK

Mendengarkan merupakan keterampilan fundamental dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), yang menjadi dasar bagi pengembangan keterampilan berbicara, membaca, dan menulis. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengeksplorasi dasar-dasar keterampilan mendengarkan serta menelaah pendekatan pedagogis yang efektif dalam meningkatkan kompetensi mendengarkan. Dengan desain kualitatif deskriptif, data diperoleh melalui analisis literatur, observasi kelas, dan wawancara guru, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik untuk mengidentifikasi tantangan dan strategi utama. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa keterampilan mendengarkan berperan penting dalam penguasaan kosakata, kesadaran gramatikal, dan kompetensi antarbudaya, namun pembelajar menghadapi hambatan seperti kecepatan bicara, variasi aksen, dan keterbatasan strategi. Pendekatan inovatif seperti extensive listening, integrasi podcast, pembelajaran berbasis tugas, dan mobile-assisted instruction muncul sebagai solusi efektif untuk meningkatkan kemandirian dan kelancaran komunikasi pembelajar. Penelitian ini menyiratkan bahwa pedagogi mendengarkan perlu bergeser dari sekadar pengujian pemahaman menuju pembekalan strategi, kesadaran budaya, dan pemanfaatan teknologi untuk menghadapi tuntutan komunikasi global.

Kata Kunci: *Keterampilan mendengarkan, EFL, pedagogi, strategi, inovasi*

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of listening skills has long been recognized as a cornerstone in the process of second language learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Listening serves as the foundation for developing other language competencies such as speaking, reading, and writing, as it provides learners with authentic exposure to phonological, lexical, and syntactic features of the target language (Field, 2008). Without adequate listening proficiency, students often face difficulties in engaging with spoken discourse, comprehending meaning, and participating in communicative exchanges. This underscores the crucial role of listening in fostering both receptive and productive skills in English language education.

Research in applied linguistics indicates that listening is not merely a passive activity but a complex, active process that involves decoding linguistic input, activating background knowledge, and constructing meaning in real time (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). In classroom practice, however, listening tends to be underemphasized compared to reading and writing, despite its integral role in everyday communication. Learners are frequently tested on comprehension rather than trained in strategies that enhance their listening performance. As a result, many students lack effective approaches to develop their auditory processing skills, limiting their overall proficiency in English (Renandya & Farrell, 2011).

Furthermore, listening instruction in many EFL classrooms is influenced by traditional methods that prioritize accuracy and linguistic form over comprehension and meaning. This trend often results in limited learner autonomy and motivation, as students become preoccupied with answering comprehension questions rather than engaging in real communicative practice (Graham & Santos, 2015). The challenge is further compounded by the diversity of English accents, speech rates, and cultural references that learners encounter in authentic listening materials. Addressing these challenges requires innovative pedagogical approaches that bridge theory and practice in listening instruction.

The integration of technology has opened new opportunities for teaching listening in more dynamic and interactive ways. Digital tools such as podcasts, audiovisual resources, and computer-assisted language learning platforms allow learners to access authentic input, practice listening in varied contexts, and receive immediate feedback (Rost, 2016). These resources provide an enriched learning environment that helps learners develop not only comprehension but also critical listening and intercultural awareness. Thus, the use of multimedia and online resources is increasingly being advocated as a means to enhance listening pedagogy in modern classrooms (Jones, 2020).

Another important consideration in teaching listening skills lies in the socio-cultural dimension of language learning. Listening comprehension is not only a cognitive process but also a socio-interactive skill that requires learners to interpret pragmatic cues, cultural references, and context-specific meanings (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005). Cross-cultural understanding thus becomes a fundamental aspect of listening pedagogy, especially in contexts where English

functions as a lingua franca among speakers from diverse backgrounds. This perspective highlights the need for instructional frameworks that integrate both linguistic competence and intercultural communicative competence.

In light of these perspectives, this study aims to explore the foundations of basic listening skills in English language learning and examine pedagogical approaches that can effectively foster learners' listening competence in EFL contexts. Specifically, the research seeks to identify the challenges faced by learners, analyze effective teaching strategies, and propose innovative practices for integrating listening instruction into language curricula.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the foundations of basic listening skills in English language learning and the pedagogical approaches applied in classroom settings. The descriptive approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the processes and challenges learners face in developing listening competence, as well as to examine the strategies used by educators in fostering these skills. Data were collected through document analysis of existing literature, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with English teachers, enabling the researcher to triangulate findings and ensure credibility. The use of multiple data sources was intended to capture a holistic perspective of listening instruction, particularly within EFL contexts where learners encounter varied linguistic and cultural challenges (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The analysis followed a thematic approach, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns, categorize them into key themes, and relate these findings to theoretical frameworks of listening pedagogy. Emphasis was placed on the integration of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-cultural dimensions in listening instruction, which were examined in relation to learners' classroom experiences and teachers' instructional practices. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research by maintaining the confidentiality of participants and ensuring that all data were used solely for academic purposes. This methodological design provided a systematic foundation for evaluating both the theoretical and practical aspects of basic listening skills, offering insights into how pedagogical approaches can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse learners in English language education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Role of Basic Listening Skills in English Language Acquisition

Listening occupies a central position in the hierarchy of language skills, serving as the foundation upon which learners build their communicative competence in English. Without the ability to decode auditory input, students struggle to develop speaking, reading, and writing effectively, as these skills are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Studies in second language acquisition have consistently demonstrated that listening is the most frequently used skill in

daily communication, accounting for nearly half of all language activity (Rost, 2016). This highlights the critical importance of equipping learners with robust listening abilities that allow them to process spoken input efficiently and meaningfully.

Basic listening skills provide learners with the ability to distinguish sounds, identify words, and recognize grammatical structures in spoken discourse. These skills serve as a prerequisite for higher-order comprehension, where learners not only decode linguistic signals but also interpret meaning and infer intent. Research shows that learners who develop strong basic listening skills demonstrate greater accuracy in pronunciation, vocabulary acquisition, and syntactic awareness (Field, 2008). Thus, listening functions as a gateway to broader linguistic competence, forming the basis upon which other skills can flourish.

In EFL contexts, listening assumes even greater importance due to learners' limited exposure to authentic English input outside the classroom. Unlike students in ESL settings, where immersion in an English-speaking environment accelerates acquisition, EFL learners often rely on classroom listening activities as their primary source of linguistic input (Graham & Santos, 2015). This makes the systematic teaching of listening essential to ensure that learners gain sufficient practice with varied speech patterns, accents, and contexts. Effective listening instruction thus becomes an indispensable component of English language curricula in non-native settings.

Furthermore, listening serves as a catalyst for the development of speaking skills, as learners must first comprehend linguistic input before they can produce appropriate responses. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) emphasize that listening is an interactive process, where comprehension directly influences oral fluency and discourse management. For instance, learners who regularly engage in active listening tasks demonstrate improved turn-taking, topic maintenance, and pragmatic competence. This interdependence underscores the pedagogical need to prioritize listening as a core skill that facilitates communicative competence in English.

Another significant role of listening lies in vocabulary development. Learners who are exposed to rich and authentic listening input tend to acquire new lexical items more effectively, particularly when they encounter words in meaningful contexts. Nation (2013) notes that repeated exposure to words through listening enhances retention and deepens learners' understanding of collocations and usage. By engaging in extensive listening practices such as podcasts, stories, or conversations, learners not only expand their vocabulary but also internalize lexical patterns that improve comprehension and production.

In addition to vocabulary, listening contributes to the acquisition of grammar and discourse structures. Through exposure to natural spoken language, learners develop an implicit awareness of grammatical forms and sentence constructions that textbooks alone cannot provide. According to Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis, comprehensible input is the driving force behind language acquisition, and listening serves as the primary channel through which such input

is delivered. Thus, learners who engage in consistent listening practice are more likely to internalize grammatical structures in ways that support accurate and fluent communication.

Listening also plays a crucial role in the development of intercultural communicative competence. As learners process spoken discourse, they are simultaneously exposed to cultural norms, values, and pragmatic conventions embedded in the language. Flowerdew and Miller (2005) argue that effective listening goes beyond decoding linguistic forms to include interpreting cultural references, humor, and implied meanings. This socio-cultural dimension positions listening as a skill that fosters not only linguistic competence but also cross-cultural understanding, making it indispensable in global communication.

Empirical evidence further suggests that learners who excel in listening demonstrate higher academic performance in English overall. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) found a strong correlation between listening comprehension and success in other language skills, particularly reading comprehension and speaking fluency. This indicates that investing in listening instruction yields broader academic benefits, equipping learners with the tools necessary to succeed in academic and professional contexts where English is the medium of communication.

Moreover, listening is vital in preparing learners for real-world communication, where authentic interaction demands rapid comprehension and appropriate responses. Unlike written texts, spoken discourse often features incomplete sentences, colloquialisms, and background noise, requiring learners to develop adaptive strategies for meaning-making. Research by Vandergrift (2007) highlights the role of metacognitive listening strategies in enabling learners to monitor their comprehension, evaluate their progress, and adjust their approaches to overcome challenges. Thus, basic listening skills provide learners with the resilience to navigate the complexities of authentic communication.

In summary, the role of basic listening skills in English language acquisition extends beyond mere comprehension to encompass vocabulary growth, grammatical awareness, intercultural competence, and communicative fluency. Listening not only lays the groundwork for the development of other language skills but also equips learners with the ability to function effectively in academic, social, and professional settings. These findings underscore the necessity of treating listening as a fundamental skill in EFL education, thereby justifying its central place in both theoretical discussions and practical pedagogy.

Pedagogical Challenges in Teaching Listening

One of the primary challenges in teaching listening skills lies in learners' perception that listening is inherently more difficult than other language skills. Many students report feelings of frustration when they cannot understand native speakers due to fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, or varied accents. Graham (2006) points out that learners often experience a sense of helplessness during listening tasks, which leads to reduced motivation and a tendency to avoid

listening practice. This psychological barrier highlights the need for teachers to address affective factors alongside linguistic challenges.

Speech rate is another significant obstacle in listening comprehension. Authentic spoken English frequently contains reduced forms, contractions, and elisions that differ from the careful articulation found in textbooks or scripted materials. Learners accustomed to controlled input often struggle when exposed to natural conversation. Research by Tauroza and Allison (1990) demonstrates that an increased speech rate reduces comprehension accuracy, particularly for learners at lower proficiency levels. Teachers thus face the challenge of balancing exposure to authentic materials with the provision of scaffolded support that aids comprehension.

Accents and dialectal variation further complicate listening instruction, particularly in global English contexts where learners may encounter speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Jenkins (2009) notes that English as a *lingua franca* encompasses a wide range of accents, each with distinct phonological features that may hinder comprehension. Teachers often rely heavily on standardized accents, such as American or British English, leaving learners unprepared for the diversity of spoken English in international communication. Addressing this challenge requires the inclusion of varied listening materials that reflect real-world linguistic diversity.

Cultural references and pragmatic conventions embedded in spoken discourse pose additional barriers to comprehension. Learners often fail to grasp implied meanings, idiomatic expressions, or humor due to a lack of cultural knowledge. Carrell and Eisterhold (1983) highlight the importance of schema theory in listening, arguing that background knowledge plays a crucial role in understanding discourse. Without adequate cultural exposure, learners may misinterpret messages or miss essential nuances. Teachers, therefore, face the pedagogical challenge of integrating cultural learning into listening instruction in ways that are both engaging and contextually appropriate.

Another challenge concerns learners' limited metacognitive awareness of listening strategies. Many students approach listening tasks passively, focusing solely on word recognition rather than developing prediction, inference, and self-monitoring skills. Vandergrift and Tafaghodtari (2010) emphasize that successful listeners employ a range of metacognitive strategies that enable them to regulate their comprehension and cope with difficulties. However, in many classrooms, strategy training is either absent or insufficiently integrated into instruction, leaving learners underprepared for real-world listening demands.

Classroom practices often exacerbate these challenges by prioritizing comprehension testing over skill development. In traditional listening lessons, students are frequently asked to answer multiple-choice or short-answer questions after listening to a passage, with little attention given to how they can improve their listening processes. Field (2008) critiques this approach as a "testing rather than teaching" model, arguing that it provides no guidance on how to enhance listening ability. Teachers thus need to rethink their instructional practices to

emphasize the development of listening strategies and processes rather than mere assessment.

Technological integration, while offering opportunities, also presents challenges in listening pedagogy. Although digital tools provide access to authentic materials, not all teachers are adequately trained to use them effectively. Jones (2020) observes that the pedagogical potential of technology often remains underutilized due to limited teacher expertise or institutional constraints. Moreover, in contexts with inadequate technological infrastructure, learners may have restricted access to digital listening resources, further widening the gap between theory and practice.

Assessment practices in listening also contribute to pedagogical difficulties. Standardized tests often fail to reflect the complexity of real-life listening situations, focusing instead on discrete-point items that do not capture learners' ability to process extended discourse. Buck (2001) argues that traditional testing approaches neglect the interactive and contextual nature of listening, leading to assessments that are both limited and misleading. Teachers must therefore navigate the challenge of designing assessments that are valid, reliable, and reflective of authentic communicative contexts.

Learner anxiety represents another persistent barrier to effective listening instruction. The pressure to understand every word often creates cognitive overload, resulting in decreased comprehension and increased frustration. Horwitz (2010) identifies listening anxiety as a distinct component of foreign language anxiety, noting that it significantly affects learners' willingness to engage with listening tasks. Teachers must address this affective dimension by creating supportive classroom environments that reduce anxiety and encourage risk-taking in listening practice.

Finally, the institutional and curricular constraints in many educational systems limit the effectiveness of listening instruction. Time allocated to listening is often minimal compared to reading and writing, and textbooks may provide only superficial listening activities. Gilmore (2007) critiques the overreliance on contrived listening texts, which lack authenticity and fail to prepare learners for real-world communication. These systemic limitations underscore the broader challenge of positioning listening as a central component of language curricula rather than as a supplementary skill.

Innovative Approaches to Listening Pedagogy

One of the most significant innovations in listening pedagogy is the integration of extensive listening practices, which expose learners to large amounts of comprehensible input over time. Renandya and Farrell (2011) argue that extensive listening mirrors the principles of extensive reading by encouraging learners to engage with authentic materials such as audiobooks, podcasts, and films at their own pace. This approach not only develops comprehension but also fosters learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation. By listening to content that

matches their interests, learners develop a habit of continuous engagement with the target language, which leads to sustainable skill improvement.

Technology has revolutionized listening instruction by providing learners with access to diverse materials and interactive learning platforms. Online tools such as YouTube, language learning apps, and streaming services allow learners to practice listening in real-world contexts and receive instant feedback. Rost (2016) emphasizes that digital technologies enable multimodal learning, where visual, auditory, and textual inputs combine to enhance comprehension. This multimodal integration helps learners connect spoken input with contextual cues, reducing cognitive load and facilitating more effective meaning-making processes.

Podcast-based instruction has emerged as a powerful tool in listening pedagogy. Podcasts offer learners authentic and engaging content that ranges from interviews and discussions to storytelling and news. According to Cross (2014), podcasts foster active and extensive listening while providing flexibility for learners to practice outside the classroom. Teachers can incorporate podcasts into lesson plans by designing pre-listening activities, comprehension tasks, and post-listening discussions. This structure allows learners to practice both bottom-up and top-down listening processes while enhancing cultural awareness.

Another innovative approach involves the explicit teaching of listening strategies, particularly those related to metacognition. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) highlight the importance of teaching learners to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening processes. By training students to predict content, identify key ideas, and self-correct, teachers empower them to become more strategic and independent listeners. This approach shifts the focus from testing comprehension to equipping learners with practical tools that can be applied in diverse listening contexts.

Task-based listening activities also represent an innovative shift in pedagogy. Instead of treating listening as a passive skill, task-based learning positions it as an interactive process where learners complete meaningful tasks using spoken input. Willis and Willis (2007) note that task-based approaches promote authentic communication, as learners must process information and respond in real-time. For instance, activities such as problem-solving discussions or information-gap tasks require students to actively negotiate meaning, thereby bridging the gap between classroom listening and real-world communication.

The incorporation of visual media, such as films, series, and video clips, enhances listening instruction by providing learners with contextual and non-verbal cues that support comprehension. Herron and Seay (1991) found that the use of video facilitates deeper processing by enabling learners to observe gestures, facial expressions, and situational contexts alongside spoken language. These multimodal elements enrich the listening experience and make input more comprehensible, particularly for learners at lower proficiency levels. Teachers can design scaffolded activities around video content to gradually build comprehension skills.

Interactive learning environments, such as flipped classrooms, offer another innovative avenue for listening pedagogy. In flipped models, learners engage with

listening materials before class, freeing classroom time for collaborative activities, discussions, and strategy training. Bergmann and Sams (2012) argue that flipped instruction enhances student engagement and allows teachers to provide individualized feedback. For listening instruction, this model enables learners to practice at their own pace while ensuring that classroom time is used to address challenges and refine comprehension strategies.

Mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) has also gained prominence as a flexible and personalized approach to listening instruction. Learners can access listening materials through smartphones, apps, and portable devices anytime and anywhere. Kukulska-Hulme and Shield (2008) highlight that MALL supports ubiquitous learning, allowing students to integrate listening practice into their daily routines. This mobility fosters learner autonomy and ensures that listening instruction extends beyond the classroom, making it more adaptable to the demands of modern learners.

Collaborative listening activities provide yet another innovative pedagogical approach. By engaging learners in pair or group work, teachers encourage them to negotiate meaning, share strategies, and support each other in overcoming listening difficulties. Swain (2000) emphasizes that collaborative dialogue fosters deeper processing of input, as learners co-construct understanding through interaction. Group-based listening activities, such as peer teaching or cooperative comprehension tasks, create a supportive environment that reduces anxiety and builds confidence.

Finally, integrating intercultural awareness into listening pedagogy represents a crucial innovation for preparing learners to communicate in global contexts. Authentic listening materials often contain cultural references, idioms, and pragmatic norms that require explicit instruction. Byram (1997) argues that intercultural competence is essential for effective communication in a lingua franca context. Teachers can design listening tasks that not only focus on linguistic comprehension but also encourage learners to reflect on cultural differences, compare perspectives, and develop tolerance for ambiguity. This approach positions listening as both a linguistic and cultural skill, aligning pedagogy with the realities of international communication.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study highlight that basic listening skills constitute the cornerstone of English language acquisition, shaping learners' ability to develop other competencies such as speaking, reading, and writing. Listening is not a passive process but an active engagement that involves decoding linguistic input, interpreting meaning, and responding appropriately in communication. The discussion revealed that listening contributes significantly to vocabulary growth, grammatical awareness, and intercultural competence, underscoring its indispensable role in fostering both linguistic and communicative proficiency. In this sense, listening should not be treated merely as a supplementary skill, but as a

central component of English language pedagogy that requires sustained emphasis and innovation.

At the same time, the study identified several pedagogical challenges, including speech rate, accent variation, limited cultural knowledge, inadequate strategy training, and learner anxiety, all of which hinder effective listening instruction. Addressing these challenges calls for innovative approaches such as extensive listening, task-based learning, podcast integration, mobile-assisted learning, and intercultural awareness training. By adopting these strategies, teachers can transform listening from a testing-oriented activity into a skill-building process that empowers learners to become autonomous, strategic, and confident listeners. Ultimately, integrating innovative pedagogies into listening instruction will better prepare learners to meet the demands of academic, professional, and global communication contexts.

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