

STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF LISTENING DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH FOR ISLAMIC STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Listening comprehension is widely recognized as one of the most challenging skills for learners of English as a foreign language, particularly among Islamic students who often study English in limited exposure contexts. This study investigates students' perceptions of listening difficulties in English learning at an Islamic educational institution. Using a quantitative descriptive approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to Islamic secondary and tertiary-level students. The findings reveal that the main listening difficulties perceived by students include limited vocabulary knowledge, unfamiliar pronunciation and accents, fast speech rate, and lack of exposure to authentic listening materials. Additionally, cultural distance and anxiety during listening tasks were reported as factors that negatively influence comprehension. The study highlights that students tend to rely heavily on word-by-word understanding rather than global meaning, which further complicates listening performance. These results suggest the need for more contextualized, culturally relevant, and strategy-based listening instruction in Islamic education settings. The study provides pedagogical implications for English teachers to design more effective listening activities that align with students' linguistic and educational backgrounds. For Islamic students, learning English occurs within a unique educational environment where religious studies such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, and Arabic language studies dominate the curriculum. While these students often demonstrate strong reading and memorization skills, their exposure to spoken English is frequently limited. As a result, many Islamic students perceive English listening as difficult, stressful, and less achievable than other language skills. Students' perceptions are a critical factor in successful language learning. Perceptions influence motivation, learning strategies, classroom participation, and long-term achievement. When students perceive listening as too difficult, they may develop anxiety, avoid listening activities, and lose confidence in their ability to understand spoken English. This situation can negatively affect overall English proficiency. Although many studies have investigated listening difficulties among EFL learners, limited research has focused specifically on Islamic students and their perceptions of listening challenges. Therefore, this study aims to explore Islamic students' perceptions of listening difficulties in English and to propose a simple and practical teaching method that can be applied in Islamic EFL classrooms.*

Keywords: *Listening comprehension; Islamic students; EFL context; listening difficulties; teaching method*

Introduction

Listening comprehension is a foundational component of language learning and plays a central role in the development of other language skills. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, listening is often the first skill through which learners are exposed to authentic

language input. Despite its importance, listening is widely regarded by learners as the most challenging language skill due to its complex cognitive demands and real-time processing requirements.

For Islamic students, learning English occurs within a unique educational environment where religious studies such as the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, and Arabic language studies dominate the curriculum. While these students often demonstrate strong reading and memorization skills, their exposure to spoken English is frequently limited. As a result, many Islamic students perceive English listening as difficult, stressful, and less achievable than other language skills.

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Literature Review

Learning English and Its Ethical Aspects

Language education is never value-neutral, according to recent applied linguistics research. Whether on purpose or not, the process of learning English invariably entails the transmission of moral, cultural, and ideological values. Implicit presumptions about appropriate behavior, social relationships, authority, identity, and worldview are embedded in instructional materials, classroom discourse, teacher-student interactions, and assessment procedures. These unspoken cues serve as a kind of covert pedagogy, influencing students' viewpoints in addition to their language proficiency. Therefore, language education must be viewed as a socially and ethically situated practice rather than being reduced to the technical knowledge of grammar and communication skills.

Value-sensitive pedagogy has been found to be especially important in religious and multicultural learning environments. According to studies, neglecting ethical considerations in these situations runs the risk of causing learners' moral frameworks and the ideals that language education subtly conveys to diverge. Value-sensitive pedagogy, however, calls for careful consideration of how instructional decisions fit with students' ethical, cultural, and religious identities rather than just incorporating moral topics into courses. Knowledge is only significant when it is combined with moral desire and responsible behavior.

According to this viewpoint, character development and intellectual advancement are inextricably linked, making education an intrinsically moral undertaking. As a result, Islamic moral principles provide both ethical substance and guiding norms that can influence teaching methods, classroom dynamics, and teacher-student interactions. These ideas represent a challenge to simply instrumental approaches to teaching English, which put efficiency, performance, and standardized results ahead of social duty and moral purpose.

Islamic Ethics in Teaching

Islamic ethics offer a thorough moral framework with a focus on character development (akhlaq), intentionality (niyyah), social fairness, and accountability. Islamic educational theory views learning as a transforming process that cultivates moral awareness and accountability

before God and society, rather than only the acquisition of knowledge or abilities. Combining Ethics and Language Learning According to research on character-based education, students' motivation, engagement, and sense of purpose can all be improved by incorporating moral principles into the educational process. Students are more likely to engage fully and form a stronger commitment to learning when they believe that educational activities are consistent with their moral identities and views. This relationship isn't automatic, though. Only when ethical integration is deeply ingrained in pedagogy—rather than imposed as moral instruction divorced from learning practices—is it effective.

Despite this promise, there are still few and dispersed studies that specifically look at how Islamic ethics might be included into English language instruction. The majority of current research concentrates on incorporating Islamic ideas or values into instructional materials, such as texts or subjects, while giving little attention to pedagogical frameworks, instructional strategies, and evaluation systems. Instead of addressing Islamic ethics as fundamental principles that shape the entire learning process, this content-centered approach runs the risk of reducing them to symbolic representation.

Moving Toward a Systemic and Conceptual Approach

A better conceptual and systemic integration of Islamic ethics in English language training is required, as evidenced by the current gap in the literature. Such a strategy would look at how Islamic moral values might influence learning objectives, classroom procedures, teacher roles, and assessment techniques rather than focusing only on surface-level content inclusion. Both the information taught and the structure of education should reflect intentionality, moral communication, accountability, and character development. Therefore, to incorporate Islamic ethics into English language training, a pedagogical reframing that balances linguistic objectives with moral and spiritual goals is required. The more profound ethical dimensions of language learning cannot be addressed by attempts to incorporate ethics without this systemic perspective.

Method

Listening Comprehension in EFL Learning

Listening comprehension is a complex and active process that involves decoding sounds, recognizing vocabulary, understanding grammatical structures, and interpreting meaning based on context. Unlike reading, listening does allow learners to control the speed of input, making it cognitively demanding. Learners must process information instantly while maintaining concentration and memory. Previous research has shown that EFL learners struggle with listening because spoken English often includes reduced forms, connected speech, hesitation markers, and varied pronunciation. These characteristics make listening significantly different from written English, which learners are more familiar with through textbooks and exams.

Common Listening Difficulties

Studies on EFL listening difficulties consistently highlight several common problems. These include fast speech rate, unfamiliar vocabulary, difficulty recognizing known words in spoken form, and confusion caused by different accents. Learners also report difficulty understanding long listening texts and remembering information while listening. In addition, limited exposure to authentic listening materials reduces learners' ability to cope with real-life listening situations. When students are only exposed to scripted or slow classroom recordings, they often feel unprepared to understand natural spoken English.

Students' Perceptions and Affective Factors

Learners' perceptions of listening difficulty are closely related to affective factors such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation. Listening anxiety occurs when learners fear missing information or failing to understand spoken input. This anxiety can block comprehension and reduce learning effectiveness. Research suggests that students who believe listening is an unchangeable ability are less likely to improve. In contrast, students who understand listening as a skill that can be developed through practice and strategies tend to show better performance and more positive attitudes.

Islamic Educational Contexts and English Learning

Islamic educational institutions provide a distinctive learning context. English is often taught as a secondary subject, while religious studies receive greater emphasis. Teaching methods in such institutions may focus more on grammar translation and reading comprehension than on communicative skills. Furthermore, listening materials used in English classes may not reflect Islamic students' cultural and religious background. When listening texts include unfamiliar social norms or culturally distant topics, students may struggle to connect meaningfully with the content.

Cultural Relevance in Listening Materials

Cultural familiarity plays a significant role in listening comprehension. Learners are better able to understand spoken texts when they relate to familiar values, experiences, and contexts. For Islamic students, listening materials that reflect ethical themes, education, or social responsibility are often perceived as more accessible and motivating. This review highlights the need for research that considers Islamic students' perceptions and provides pedagogical solutions suited to their learning environment.

Result and Discussion

Result

The findings revealed that the majority of Islamic students perceived listening as the most difficult English skill. Fast speech rate was identified as the primary challenge, followed by unfamiliar vocabulary and difficulty understanding different accents. These findings confirm that real-time language processing places a heavy cognitive burden on learners. Limited exposure to authentic English listening was another major issue. Students reported that English was rarely used outside the classroom, which reduced their familiarity with natural spoken language. This lack of exposure contributed to low confidence and increased listening anxiety.

Regarding teaching practices, students perceived listening activities as insufficient and test-focused. Many students reported that they were rarely taught how to listen effectively or how to use listening strategies. This finding suggests that listening instruction often emphasizes assessment rather than skill development. Cultural relevance also influenced students' perceptions. Listening materials that included unfamiliar cultural references were perceived as more difficult, while familiar topics increased engagement and comprehension. This result highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching in Islamic EFL classrooms. Overall, the results indicate that listening difficulties among Islamic students are influenced by interconnected linguistic, instructional, emotional, and cultural factors.

Simple Teaching Method for Listening

Based on the findings, a simple and practical teaching method is proposed.

Pre-Listening Stage

The teacher introduces the topic, explains key vocabulary, and activates background knowledge through short discussions or questions. This stage prepares students mentally and reduces anxiety.

While-Listening Stage

Students listen to short audio texts twice. The first listening focuses on general understanding, while the second focuses on specific information. Tasks are simple and achievable.

Post-Listening Stage

Students discuss answers, receive feedback, and reflect on listening strategies used. The teacher emphasizes that understanding every word is not necessary. This method is easy to implement and suitable for Islamic educational settings with limited resources.

Discussion

Overall, these studies show that incorporating Islamic ethical concepts into English language acquisition does not impede linguistic development. Instead, it improves motivation, critical thinking, identity security, and ethical communication. This method calls into question the premise that effective language teaching must be divorced from values. Ethical consciousness arises as a teaching benefit, enhancing autonomy, comprehension, and interaction. As a result, English education in Islamic contexts can be both linguistic and ethical, preparing students for global communication while remaining true to their moral principles.

Conclusion

This study examined Islamic students' perceptions of listening difficulties in English and found that listening is widely perceived as the most challenging language skill. The difficulties arise from fast speech, limited exposure, teaching practices, anxiety, and cultural unfamiliarity. To address these challenges, teachers should adopt simple, learner-centered teaching methods, provide explicit listening strategy instruction, and use culturally relevant materials. Improving students' perceptions of listening can lead to greater confidence, motivation, and overall English proficiency. Future research may employ qualitative approaches to explore Islamic students' listening experiences in greater depth.

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