Barriers to English Listening Comprehension for Indonesian University Students: Implications for Listening Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT

English has been considered an important means of international communication not only for education but also for career advancement. In general, students find it difficult to understand expressions or sentences in English. The same thing occurs when learning listening comprehension for EFL students in Indonesia. Listening is one of the most difficult skills experienced by students in learning English. The research in this paper aims to investigate the barriers to English listening comprehension of university students in Indonesia and their implications for listening curriculum development. Data were garnered through semi-structured interviews with eight Indonesian higher-education students. The results depict that the barriers experienced by students in listening comprehension include a lack of pronunciation understanding and different accents, a lack of English vocabulary, a lack of voice clarity quality, and difficulty in understanding the speed of pronunciation. To improve listening comprehension, students need to practice listening to audio from native speakers repeatedly, English podcasts, speeches, and inspiring videos via YouTube, English songs, and watching movies. The implications for listening curriculum development were discussed in this paper.

Keywords: barriers, curriculum development, Indonesian university students, listening comprehension

INTRODUCTION

English has been developed into a crucial medium of international communication for students, not only for education but also for career advancement. The importance of the role of English lies not only in the number of uses as a second language and the widespread of its use geographically, but also due to the political and economic influence of countries that use English as their mother tongue in various professions (Moradimokhles & Hwang, 2022). However, in other countries such as Indonesia, English has been considered as a foreign language.

Concerning English learning, it needs a process since English comprises four skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In English education, listening is the main skill that must be possessed (Ajmal & Kumar, 2020). Listening is one of the crucial aspects that students should acquire in building communication using English. Unfortunately, many EFL students especially in the Indonesian context have problems understanding words and sentences spoken by native speakers. Several factors hinder students' ability in listening comprehension such as speed, accent, equipment used, and anxiety. Moreover, different and strange accents are also a barrier for listeners to understand the words that are spoken.

Al-Azzemy & Al-Jamal (2019) explain that what limits students' ability to achieve listening comprehension is due to students' lack of awareness of understanding English. Therefore, students are required to have competence in learning English, as a progressive attitude towards technological developments and globalization. In addition, Kao & Kuo (2021) explain that the difficulty in listening comprehension is the speed of the speaker's utterances. When a student has good listening skills, he will have good speaking skills. Problems in listening comprehension according to Ali (2020) are caused by several factors such as the strategies used by lecturers in teaching, the different expectations of lecturers and students in learning, and the lack of vocabulary that students have so they do not understand listening material.

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Several studies in accordance with English listening comprehension have been conducted by some previous scholars. Thuy & Cam (2021) explained that lecturers must recognize learning techniques to provide listening comprehension to students who use English as their second language. Donglan (2004) elaborates on some problems faced by Singaporean students in English interaction including speech rate, speed accent, anxiety, and so on. Moreover, Sebina & Arua (2017) examine whether positive perception and knowledge possessed by teachers give impacts on their listening teaching in the context of Botswana secondary schools. Their study result demonstrates that their listening knowledge does not contribute to successful classroom implementation. In a specific way, Namaziandost et al., (2019) unravel the challenges of listening comprehension experienced by EFL students in Iran and strategies to overcome those challenges. The main findings of the study reveal that the students had challenges with poor input in listening. Moreover, a strategy to overcome the listening challenges is by using Meta-cognitive.

Referring to the elaborations, studies in line with English listening comprehension have been undertaken by some scholars. Nonetheless, the study of barriers to listening comprehension that offers implication for listening curriculum development has not been explored yet. This study, therefore, aims to explore barriers to listening comprehension of Indonesian university students and implications for listening curriculum development.

LITERATURE REVIEW
English Listening Skill

Listening is one of the productive skills in English teaching. It belongs to one of the most difficult skills in English acquisition. Some aspects are dealing with listening learning including numerous tasks such as differentiating various sounds and understanding stress and intonation. In addition, English learners use some mental processes to gain intention or meaning from the message they hear (Namaziandost et al., 2019). Sebina & Arua (2017) reported that listening is the most complicated language skill for English learners including in Batswana. Further, they emphasized that the acquisition of listening skills will give an impact on students' cognitive development. More importantly, listening skill becomes the foundation for acquiring other skills such as speaking, reading, and writing. Due to the essential role of listening skills, learners cannot neglect them (Vu & Shah, 2016). Besides, a fast speech rate also becomes one of the problems experienced by English learners (Masrai, 2020).

Another aspect that should be taken into account in teaching listening is the classroom environment. The supporting classroom environment will promote better listening teaching. In the process of teaching listening, teachers should pay attention to the three important activities in listening including Pre-listening activities, While-listening activities, and Post-listening activities. Pre-listening activities cover encouraging learners' motivation and interest by building background knowledge of listening. While-listening activities cover promoting instructional scaffolds during listening to passages or others. In this matter, instructional scaffolds refer to encouragement given by the teacher helping students to accomplish tasks they cannot do by themselves. Meanwhile, Post-listening activities belong to the evaluation of listening tasks allowing students to handle other English skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. The activities of Post-listening encompass writing something dealing with the experiences of students in listening and building personal connections with students after listening to a passage or others.

To have successful listening learning, some strategies are used in the process of English listening learning. These include metacognitive strategies dealing with mental tasks in the process of listening learning encompassing preparation of tasks, selecting process, focusing on attention, observing, and assessing. Cognitive strategies include searching for the main idea, interpreting, guessing, writing, and others. Meanwhile, social strategies deal with communication control in the process of learning such as asking for clarification and minimizing anxiety (Chou, 2016; Ngo, 2015).

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Intensive Listening and Extensive Listening

There are two kinds of listening namely intensive and extensive listening. Intensive listening (IL) deals with listening for correct voice, words, structure, and others. IL has been utilized by teachers in the classroom including filling the gap, answering dictation, and so on (Ahmadpour & Asadollahfam, 2018). In addition, in the process of intensive listening, learners are fostered to listen to passages repeatedly. Meanwhile, extensive listening promotes learners to obtain more understandable and engaging listening input. The activities of extensive listening could be self-directed listening for happiness conducted outside the classroom so that learners will have a more successful listening process (Renandya, 2015).

In this matter, extensive listening could be a meaningful source for gaining English listening input and vocabulary enrichment (Masrai, 2020). The benefits of extensive listening encompass fostering learners' skills to associate with normal speech rate, developing word acquisition ability, and promoting more chances to gain language understanding (Renandya, 2015). Some activities that can be used in extensive listening include encouraging students to foster themselves to participate in narrow listening through listening to audio like English songs, watching English videos outside the classroom, and so on. This kind of activity benefits students to know words, idioms, structures, and others.

METHOD

The present study used a qualitative case study method which describes a clear and accurate social investigation of one's experience of an event (Nyhan & Howlin, 2021). Data collection was carried out using the interview via the WhatsApp application. According to Gibson (2022), as technology continues to develop, the WhatsApp application is often used to conduct interviews with young people. The interview approach aims to gather as much information as possible from the researcher to the students. According to Knott et al., (2022), interviews are a qualitative research method by asking and answering questions.

This study was conducted at an Indonesian university on 12-18 December 2022 by emphasizing the problems experienced by students during listening comprehension learning. The sample of this study was eight students from the third semester who took a listening comprehension class. The age range of the research sample is 18-21 years. They were categorized as Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, Student 4, Student 5, Student 6, Student 7, and Student 8. Further, we also interviewed one of the lecturers teaching listening at an Indonesian higher education. She is about 35 years old and has teaching experience in listening classes for 7 years.

In conducting the interviews, we prepared a question instrument as an interview guide, a cell phone as a communication tool, and a book and pen to record things that were considered important. The steps taken for the interview were to determine the key informant as the participant to be interviewed, prepare the main issues to be discussed, initiate and open the interview via the WhatsApp application, carry out the interview flow, inform the interview results, write down the interview results and analyze the interview results.

The interview data obtained were analyzed and systematically arranged and divided into chapters and subchapters, selecting important points and making conclusions from the data results (Bdair, 2021). The data obtained from the research results went through three stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. In data reduction, we selected interview data that are by the research focus and then arranged them systematically. The presentation data was carried out in the form of complete and detailed narrative text descriptions according to the research theme (Johnson et al., 2021). After the data were presented, conclusions were drawn.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Barriers to English Listening Comprehension among Indonesian University Students

The present study elaborates on some barriers to English listening comprehension experienced by university students in Indonesia and the implications for listening curriculum development. The results of interviews with the participants depict that some barriers to English listening problems felt by the students include a de lack of understanding of the pronunciation of different accents, lack of English vocabulary, difficulty in the level of sound clarity quality, and the speed of pronunciation. For the sake of clarity, these

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findings are elaborated below.

Lack of Understanding of the Pronunciation of Different Accents

Based on the interviews, all students report that the most common barrier to English listening comprehension is the lack of understanding of the pronunciation of different accents. Commonly, they are used to American accents. Therefore, when they listen to British accents, they feel difficult to understand. As reported by the students below:

Student 1:

"As we know that the British accent is the most difficult in the English language. I have even seen a video on YouTube about the differences between British and American accents. The British accent is more difficult than the American accent. For example, in the pronunciation of water. If in an American accent, the pronunciation is enough to remove the "r" to become wote, if in a British accent, the pronunciation is much different, it sounds like whatcha (February 2023)".

This statement has been strengthened by Student 8 describing the same opinion of difficulties in understanding accents.

Student 8:

"Sometimes I do not necessarily understand using an American accent, because I am used to an American accent. Using a British accent is a challenge for me because the pronunciation is, of course, different from the American accent (February, 2023)".

This finding is in line with the study conducted by Jidong et al., (2021) reporting that students will understand better if they listen to an accent they are used to listening to, when learning to listen to a different accent, it will become a new challenge in listening comprehension.

Lack of English Vocabulary

The second barrier to English listening comprehension of students is the lack of new English vocabulary. A possible factor of this since their input restrictions in accessing English such as listening to English songs, watching movies, and so on (Chou, 2016; Ghanbari & Hashemian, 2014). In addition, most students tend to rely on their English language learning in EFL classrooms provided by their teachers. This is evidenced by the following excerpts.

Student 2:

"I have difficulties capturing information in audio because there are still many vocabulary words that I do not know the meaning (February 2023).

The statements from Student 2 are strengthened by Student 3 below:

Student 3:

"Yes, I think my English skills are at an intermediate level where I can still understand everyday conversations in English fluently, but I have a little difficulty understanding the vocabulary that I have not learned such as academic or scientific vocabulary (February, 2023)".

These responses are also following the research conducted by Masrai (2020) depicting that watching films with English dialogue can not only improve listening comprehension skills but also increase the amount of vocabulary that can be memorized and memorized. Increasing the number of vocabulary will enable listeners to understand listening comprehension. In addition, Madani & Kheirzadeh (2022) assert that learning a second language can be a very difficult lesson for students if they do not apply appropriate strategies. The methodologies commonly used include grammar translation, audiolingual, and direct methods. This method is usually used for the four skills, reading, listening, speaking, or writing. Interestingly, Cho et al., (2019) emphasized that to improve listening comprehension, students are supported to build English interaction with peers.

Difficulties in listening comprehension are generally caused by several factors including the emergence of new English vocabulary that is rarely heard and the complexity of language structures, the speed in delivering material by the speaker, and the listener's lack of training in listening comprehension. Referring to these factors, students are needed to have practiced listening to some English learning sources and speaking

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English with interlocutors. Besides, teachers should prepare English listening materials appropriately using various teaching methods and media. It is emphasized by Wang & Macintyre (2021) that lecturers must be able to provide interesting and fun media in giving listening comprehension material to students.

Difficulty in The Level of Sound Clarity Quality

Most students say that the clarity of voice and back sound affects listening comprehension. Moreover, the difficulty in the level of sound clarity quality can reduce the interest of students in participating in the listening comprehension class. This is probably caused by several factors including the lack of facilities in listening comprehension classes such as the limited number of English language laboratories provided by the university so that it cannot accommodate all students to access English listening comprehension classes appropriately. This is proven by the following excerpts:

Student 6:

"I have a very poor concentration range. Because of that, the slightest discomfort or obstruction can immediately disrupt my concentration. Conversational audio with back sound can only distract me. I prefer clear English audio that is not equipped with back sound (February, 2023)".

Furthermore, student 7 has the same opinion related to the difficulties in understanding sound clarity in English listening comprehension.

Student 7:

"The pronunciation in audio is usually directly from native speakers, and it affects our hearing if we are not used to listening. Besides, the back sounds that are too loud can also break our concentration in listening to the audio so that we can have difficulty getting new vocabulary and understanding it (February, 2023)".

In responding to this barrier, Bolibekova et al., (2020) pinpoint that multimedia devices, especially audio, play an important role in supporting the process of learning listening comprehension. In carrying out this process, visual materials and audio devices further strengthen the activation of the learning process. This is also supported by the study undertaken by Nicolaou et al., (2019) demonstrating that the world of education is a wide world that must keep up with the times, especially technology, in listening comprehension. The use of audio-visual media technology in educational procedures can generate motivation and stimulate skill and perception which will lead to increased learning outcomes. Moreover, Napikul et al., (2018) assert that improving students' listening comprehension skills can be done through subtitles. In this way, the listeners will find it easier to remember the vocabulary heard. Students will gain more knowledge when watching movies or listening to something in English with the help of subtitles.

Lack of Understanding of Speed of Pronunciation

The level of pronunciation speed also makes students reluctant to take part in the listening comprehension class. This is evidenced by the following excerpts:

Student 4:

"By now, I'm getting used to listening to English audio with normal pronunciation. But I cannot understand yet for the faster pronunciation (February, 2023)".

Student 5:

"Pronunciation plays an important role in critical listening because if the audio we hear has a high level of speed it makes us confused, dazed, and in the end, we do not understand what is being conveyed in the audio (February, 2023)".

Thus, students often complain about the difficulty of understanding spoken language since it is too fast (Renandya, W. A., 2011). The findings of the study are strengthened by the study undertaken by Erzad (2020) reporting that accents in pronunciation, speed of pronunciation, listening length, and new and unfamiliar English vocabulary have been major problems experienced by students in the listening class. Interestingly, she also emphasized that for the sake of creating a successful listening class, better facilities are badly needed for students and lecturers.

To respond to the barriers to listening comprehension, there are several ways to foster listening comprehension skills including listening and then doing activities that match what students hear. The second way is listening and then relaying the information received. Conveying this information can be done orally or in writing. In addition, it can also be done by playing a role with others. The third one is listening and then solving the problem. This can be done by playing word games, playing puzzles, and other things. The next step is listening, evaluating, and manipulating the information obtained. In addition, listening while telling stories about daily activities can be regarded as another way of improving listening skills. In this matter, stories can be personal stories or things that are liked by other students. The final way is listening to anything students like, for example listening to music, fairy tales, poetry, rhymes, and other things. This is in line with Brouillette (2012) emphasizing that music and song could be regarded as media to learn a language particularly listening through the internalization of rhythm and flow. More importantly, through sound and rhythm, students can eventually be more familiar with the intonation and construction of language.

Implications for Listening Curriculum Development

Following implications for listening curriculum development, there are three kinds of listening courses adopted in this study including Intensive Listening, Extensive Listening, dan Critical Listening. Due to the increased number of students in the English education department and English listening courses, the facilities such as infrastructure in enhancing teaching and learning activities should be improved. Having interviewed with one of the lecturers at an Indonesian Islamic university, the curriculum of the English listening course has been adjusted with the advancement of the current curriculum including the used terminologies. For instance, the term Listening for general purposes has been replaced by Intensive Listening, Listening for Professional Context has been changed to Extensive Listening, and Listening for Academic purposes has been replaced by Academic Listening as the new nomenclature used in the curriculum of English teaching in Indonesian universities. As pointed out by the lecturer below:

Lecturer:

"The lesson plans in listening courses have been associated with the new curriculum by replacing the nomenclature or terminologies. For example, the term listening for general purposes has been replaced by Intensive Listening, Listening for Professional Context has been changed to Extensive Listening, and Listening for Academic purposes has been replaced by Academic Listening. However, concerning the facilities of listening courses, the campus should provide better facilities by completing the number of English laboratories in enhancing the teaching and learning process. Not all students can access the laboratory for listening class (February 2023)".

In addition, having a look at the lesson plans of listening courses, repeated topics of listening material are taught in various listening levels including intensive listening, extensive listening, and critical listening. For instance, the topic of English news has been taught in three levels of listening course. Therefore, it needs evaluations in terms of the listening material selections appropriately. To respond to this, the present study offers several implications for listening curriculum development.

First, the need for considering appropriate listening materials selection for a better listening course. The use of appropriate listening materials is crucial to meet students' needs in listening practices. In this matter, lecturers can select the materials from easier to challenging materials to build the student's confidence and best experiences in listening. In addition, lecturers need to consider interesting and meaningful listening materials to create enjoyable and understandable listening classes. As reported by Renandya (2015) that it is important to emphasize that students need to listen and understand the listening material without any assistance from the educator. Therefore, creating enjoyable and understandable listening classes is needed for students. In more detail, criteria in selecting listening materials need to be taken into account including meaningful, interesting, and comprehensible materials. In addition, the listening material should consider linguistic features like words, phrases, and others.

Second, the need for providing an English language laboratory to enhance a better listening course. Creating successful learning needs supporting facilities provided by schools or institutions. To enhance a

better English listening class, an English language laboratory is needed. The results of interviews with a lecturer at an Indonesian higher education, reveals that there is a limited or insufficient English language laboratory causing all students cannot access it in English listening class. Therefore, providing a sufficient English language laboratory could be one of the solutions to enhance a successful listening class for students and lecturers (Erzad, 2020; Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020, 2022).

Third, the need for keeping up-to-date information, particularly on teaching media and methods in the listening course. The advancement of technology has urged educators to adopt it in the process of teaching and learning, especially in EFL classrooms. In the listening course, for instance, lecturers should keep up-to-date with the technology utilization in selecting appropriate listening materials from several sources including YouTube, videos, podcasts, English songs, and others. In addition, due to the diversity and backgrounds of students, lecturers should adopt various teaching methods and media to meet students' needs in listening classes. More importantly, they should develop their professional identity in teaching to meet students' needs, especially in listening classes. This is strengthened by Sebina & Arua (2017) emphasizing that integrating listening skill with other skills of language provide more opportunities to practice language. In more detail, the need to integrate listening materials with speaking skills and the need for technology utilization in the teaching and learning process is paramount (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2022, 2023; Wahyuningsih, 2021). More importantly, educators should upgrade their teaching quality and professional development using various teaching strategies (Ngo, 2015; Vu & Shah, 2016).

Fourth, the need for students to foster their listening comprehension through extensive listening. Extensive listening can be considered one of the ways to give listening practices in improving the target language. To improve listening skills, students can foster themselves to participate in narrow listening by listening to audio like English songs, watching English videos outside the classroom, and so on. This kind of activity benefits students to know words, idioms, structures, and others. In more detail, extensive listening can provide students' ability to associate with normal speech rate, develop skills of word recognition, develop the students' bottom-up listening skills, and provide more chances for students to have experience comprehending a language (Renandya, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The present study concludes that some barriers to English listening problems felt by the students include a lack of understanding of the pronunciation of different accents, lack of English vocabulary, difficulty in the level of sound clarity quality, and the speed of pronunciation. To respond to these barriers, the results of this study offer several implications for listening curriculum development including the need for considering appropriate listening materials selection for a better listening course, the need for providing an English language laboratory to enhance a better listening course, the need for keeping up-to-date information particularly on teaching media and methods in listening course and the need for students to foster their listening comprehension through extensive listening. This study focuses on an Indonesian university. Therefore, it is kindly recommended for future research to conduct studies of listening from a wider context and participants. By conducting the study, readers can have insights into listening barriers experienced by university students and their implications for listening curriculum development.

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