

Teachers' Perspectives in Promoting English Listening Skills Among Young Learners in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how teachers' perspectives on improving English listening skills among young learners in Indonesia. In this context, where English is still considered a foreign language (EFL), developing listening skills becomes challenging for teachers. A qualitative approach was used to collect the data through interviews with six teachers from formal and non-formal education settings. The interview results were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify the main themes and patterns. The findings showed that common challenges include students' limited focus during learning, unfamiliarity with English, and lack of listening to learning media. To overcome this problem, teachers implemented strategies such as integrating mostly the English language in class, playing English songs frequently, and doing more kinesthetic activities like games to increase engagement. In addition, the role of parents was highlighted as important in supporting language acquisition. English could be taught at home through direct interaction and the use of child-friendly educational videos. A dual strategy that includes home-based support and school-based techniques is necessary to provide a comprehensive learning environment. This study fills knowledge to inform and improve future educational practices and policies on improving English listening skills among young learners in Indonesia.

Keywords: Listening Skill, EYL, Teaching Challenges

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Introduction

Language education begins as early as infancy, paralleling the development of the first language. As learners get older, they are gradually introduced to second languages, particularly foreign languages such as English. The primary objective of teaching English in the early stages of schooling is to prepare young learners to be prepared for and confident in learning English at the next level of education (Hashemi & Azizinezhad, 2011). Another reason that it is suggested that learners begin learning English at a young age because young learners's cognitive abilities are still at their most advanced throughout this era of growth. However, since learners are the intended audience for learning, the implementation of teaching English to young learners is not as widespread as one might expect. As a result, teachers face particular challenges.

Teaching English as a foreign language is challenging, especially in situations in which English serves such a limited role (Songbatumis, 2017). Teachers face the challenge of during the period learners through the complex process of linguistic development, especially in the field of spoken language acquisition. According to Aprilliani (2021), teaching English to young learners who have no prior knowledge, a different first language and diverse personalities is difficult. Some teachers struggle with how to connect the subject, suitable the technique, and explain effectively. Sometimes teachers are aware of the challenges. They assumed the topic would be simple for them, but learners unfamiliar with the language teachers would be confused. Those who study a foreign language, such as English, find it difficult to develop a large vocabulary. It is easy for teachers but challenging for learners.

Nevertheless, learning a foreign language, such as English, entails more than simply gathering a large vocabulary. It is also important for young learners to develop good listening skills. Effective listening improves not only their language comprehension but also creates a solid foundation for overall language competency. Listening comprehension, according to Allen (2014), is an active and dynamic process that relies on oral cues and builds on the student's background knowledge and experiences in various domains. The development of listening English skills in young learners plays an important role in the continually evolving field of language education. Kurita (2012) argues that learning how to build individual listening techniques helps learners become proficient listeners. According to Vandergrift (2004), learners should practice listening to improve their ability to listen while learning.

Young learners are already obligated to understand English, partially because of listening activities that their teachers offer. However, this presents some difficulties for teachers. Field (2003) highlights the following listening-related challenges: Students are aware of the word yet misunderstand it. The written form of the word is known to learners, but not the spoken form. It is challenging for learners to understand a word from a speech that is related, like a conversation. Kurita (2012) provides various recommendations based on a review of recent studies for both advanced and beginner-level listeners. She recommends dictation, particularly for younger learners, and believes that lowering anxiety can greatly benefit both learners' listening skills. To further the literature, this study investigates the teacher's views of teaching English listening to young learners in an elementary school level.

In this study, two research questions are addressed:

1. What are the challenges do teachers have when teaching English listening comprehension to young learners in elementary school level?
2. What are the strategies teachers must use for deal with the challenges?

Literature Review

Studies concentrating on challenges in teaching English language skills have received a great deal of consideration. Pertiwi and colleagues (2022), for example, investigated the teachers' perceptions of teaching English to young learners in Indonesia to discover what challenges teachers experience in the classroom. This study used a case study design and a qualitative approach. The data was gathered through interviews with six English teachers from different educational institutions. According to the interview results, teachers face several challenges in implementing instruction, including non-English prior knowledge, a lack of interest, negative attitudes toward English, a lack of suitable learning materials, a chaotic classroom environment, and speaking anxiety. The researchers found that the teaching and learning process may exist conditionally if there is collaboration among teachers and other people, as well as teacher creativeness.

In addition, Utomo and colleagues. (2019) carried out more focused study on English listening skills at the junior high school level. They outlined the method of teaching listening and noted the challenges associated with doing this in a junior high school in Kudus. This study investigated the English language teaching and learning process and indicates the demand for English language materials using an exploratory research design and qualitative approaches. The subjects of this study were five English teachers in Kudus with more than ten years of teaching experience. According to the results of questionnaires and interviews, most teachers believed that time management was the most difficult aspect of organizing classrooms. Although the lesson plans have been established, there were instances when the plans were not followed specifically. Teachers must deal with learners who come from different backgrounds, have learning limitations, and mixed levels of proficiency. It was their primary responsibility to accommodate all learners. While most learners can learn a foreign language to a certain extent, there were also several reasons why their progress is not made substantially.

Another earlier study by Alrawashdeh & Al-zayed (2017) investigated the challenges faced by English teachers in teaching listening comprehension as well as their opinions toward the topic. To meet the research's goals, the researchers employed two instruments: informal interviews with seven English instructors who responded to three questions, and teacher surveys that examined the challenges teachers have when instructing listening comprehension. The findings demonstrate the numerous issues with listening comprehension teaching in schools. First, issues with teacher competence. They realized that the teacher needed more lesson plans to help them improve their poor performance. Second, discussions about educational environments and the availability of learning resources and learning aids are related to the decreasing number of students in classrooms and the increasing number of students enrolled in summer school. These resources include learning resources, learning aids, teaching materials, and audio-visual facilities that serve as English language laboratories.

The three studies including this one was similar in that all of them identified the difficulties teachers faced when teaching English. However, it was focused on elementary school-level listening abilities at this point. With teacher participants who attend both formal and non-formal educational institutions.

Research Methods

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach. Structured interviews were conducted, and the data was collected in written form using a Google Form. The researcher asked participants to respond in either English or Bahasa Indonesia to eight open-ended questions on challenges in teaching listening to young learners.

Participants

The participants in this research were six English teachers at the elementary school level from both formal and non-formal education backgrounds. They were selected voluntarily through an Instagram story where the researcher invited interested individuals to participate. Their teaching experience ranged from one to four years.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data in the present study. The researcher identified the code based on the transcript of the written interview that demonstrates the challenges that teachers face when teaching listening English to young learners. In order for the researcher to gather more detailed information from the participants on how teachers manage all these challenges when teaching listening to their learners.

Results and Discussion

Teachers' Opinion About Teaching English Listening for Young Learners

According to the responses provided by the participants to the inquiry, "What is your opinion about teaching English listening comprehension at the elementary school level as you teach?", most teachers have the opinion that teaching young learners listening was fun but quite challenging.

- (1) "In my opinion, teaching English listening comprehension to elementary school learners is one of the fun learning activities. Most learners prefer listening learning comprehension because it is more interesting than monotonous activities such as teachers who continue to explain learning verbally."
- (2) "Teaching listening comprehension in elementary school is very important because it is at this age that they have to start giving lessons. But it's not easy to teach English at elementary school level, especially since they don't have any knowledge of English."
- (3) "My opinion as I teach; the learners happy but it's too hard to understand what the speaker speak."

Despite a variety of challenges, it was discovered from multiple perspectives that teachers enjoyed what they did and thought listening was important. The researcher then reposed the question to participants, "What are the factors that make you enjoy teaching English listening comprehension?" to ascertain why teachers persevere in the face of several challenges.

- (1) "It's a passion that comes from the deepest heart."
- (2) "It's easy to find the sources especially the children song."
- (3) "I love my children's joys. The way they are serious about listening to a song, the way they ask their friend to be quiet, and the way they wait for the chorus to sing the

song. I also think this way is one of a good step to improve their vocabulary and listening comprehension.”

The sample responses lead to the inference that teachers find happiness in their profession because they are sincere and engage with their learners and since it is not difficult for them to find materials for elementary level.

Teachers’ Challenges When Teaching English Listening for Young Learners

Following the teachers' opinions that there are many challenges in the classroom, the author attempts for information by asking the question "What challenges do you encounter when teaching English listening at the elementary school level?" to find out more about the challenges concern.

- (1) “Sometimes the challenges take from of conditions such as learners lacking concentration.”
- (2) “The learners are not familiar with the native pronunciation.”
- (3) “Learners have difficulties in some vocabulary and how to spell the words. (E.g.: We listen 'The Wheels on the Bus’s song, and they don't know how to spell 'Wheels'”

These responses indicate that the most frequently encountered challenges have to do with the skills of the learners. The researcher then asked, "Do the challenges teachers face come from the learners themselves?" for further verification.

- (1) “No, the challenges are not only face come from the learners, but also come from the other, for example the situation and the teacher.”
- (2) “Yes, those challenges can arise from the learners themselves when they don't get enough understanding about listening.”
- (3) “Sometimes it comes from learners because teaching in the current generation has its own challenges, and you have to be patient with them.”

The following analysis showed that, in these teachers' thoughts, most of the challenges began with the learners. However, this cannot imply that the teacher was the sole one who posed the challenge.

Teachers’ Attitudes Towards the Challenges in Teaching English Listening for Young Learners

The question "How do you as a teacher overcome the challenges?" was utilized by the researcher to reconsider the data regarding teachers' strategies for overcoming the challenges that they experienced. Quite a few of the answers can be gathered by the researcher from this question.

- (1) “I teach them using English for more than 50% during the lesson to improve their vocabulary and then influence their listening skill and their understanding.”
- (2) “I ask them to replay the song, if they have stuck, I give them a clue, or we guess the spelling together.”
- (3) “Usually, I introduce vocabulary, the meaning and way of pronunciation first. Then after that, I gave training by dictating/reading a sentence/paragraph that they had to write.”

The challenges that teachers have when teaching listening appear to be multifaceted. Since learners are still young, teachers must also use more inventive methods to stimulate their

interest in learning. Some of these methods include teaching basic vocabulary, helping learners learn how to spell and become familiar with speaking English, and having teachers repeat song screenings during listening sessions to ensure learners can more immediately remember every spoken word.

In addition to these methods, the researcher was intrigued to learn if these teachers need help while handling the class. Through the question "Do you as a teacher need other teachers' help in handling the challenges? Why?" The researcher can discover more specific methods for overcoming these challenges.

- (1) "No, I don't. Because I rarely meet another teacher, we manage our class by ourselves."
- (2) "Actually, I don't need other teachers to help me handle the challenge. So far, I can handle it by myself."
- (3) "Of course, especially the child's parents and homeroom teacher. Parents and homeroom teachers can work together with English teachers to use English vocabulary in every conversation both at school and at home."

Since they believe it is their responsibility, most teachers suppose they can overcome the challenges without assistance from others. Despite this, certain teachers also suggest that collaborating with fellow teachers is important. For young teachers, senior teachers with greater experience may have solutions to provide. Aside from that, this has an unbreakable connection to the parental role, as parents are expected to assist their learners in developing their skills at home.

Finally, after learning about the challenges that teachers face while teaching English listening to young learners, the researcher asked, "What are the suggested solutions to help your learners become good listeners and overcome negative attitudes?" to elaborate on the previous inquiry.

- (1) "Having as much discussions as you can with your peer, listen to English podcasts, and always listen to the advice from your parents."
- (2) "Learners can be accustomed to doing things they like, such as watching English movie, listening to English songs/podcasts. Of course, this must be supported by their parents at home."
- (3) "We're not just giving them material that we have, but we're also teaching them about manners, time management, independence, responsibility with everything that we already gave such as classwork and homework."

Learners' interest in learning will be stimulated more when teachers engage with them consistently. Teaching listening skills might involve simple conversations, watching child-friendly movies, and listening to music and podcasts. Along with transferring information, educators encourage learners to follow the advice of their parents to act as an example of good behavior.

Conclusion

Based on the interviews, the teachers seemed to be pleased with their profession despite the numerous challenges they encountered when teaching and learning English listening to young learners. Beginning with the young learners' limited knowledge of vocabulary. Since several learners still struggle with word spelling, teachers must go beyond what is necessary to help them understand. The next challenge is having issues concentrating in the classroom.

Particularly at this age when they still prefer to play over listening to lessons, young learners become easily distracted when learning in the classroom. Also, a lack of familiarity with the spoken language's pronunciation. Although almost all the listening material is provided by native speakers, EFL learners often have difficulty distinguishing accents that are still unfamiliar to them.

With this condition, the teacher tries to better understand each student's unique abilities. Listening and speaking in English can help with vocabulary growth and pronunciation practice. Following by playing the music more than once can help learners become familiar with the lyrics. To get learners motivated about learning, the instructor can offer hints when they are unable to determine the meaning of a word. If it is possible, the teacher can subsequently give a reward.

In addition to teacher roles, parents play a very important role in their children's education. Parents can help their children practice English at home and teach them the value of being polite to teachers and paying attention in class. Since they still spend a lot of time outside of school, which tends to be a setting that influences how they behave. Learning English, particularly listening, will be more effective if all parties involved are on board, including the parents of the young learners and the school.

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