

Teachers' Experiences and Challenges in Implementing Listening Test in English Language Teaching at Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

This study explores teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests within English Language Teaching (ELT) at Afaada Islamic Boarding School. Although listening assessment has received considerable attention in ELT research, limited studies have specifically examined teachers' experiences in conducting listening tests in Islamic boarding school contexts, where educational facilities and students' exposure to English may differ from those in mainstream schools. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation involving three English teachers who were directly responsible for administering listening assessments. The findings reveal that teachers generally perceive listening tests as essential for assessing students' comprehension and promoting active listening skills. However, they encounter several challenges, including limited technological resources, inconsistent audio quality, students' low vocabulary mastery, and time constraints in preparing appropriate test materials. To address these challenges, teachers employ various strategies such as conducting pre-listening activities, simplifying instructions, and utilizing alternative audio sources to support students' understanding. The study concludes that enhancing institutional facilities, providing professional development opportunities, and improving listening test design are crucial for promoting more effective listening assessment practices in Islamic boarding school settings.

Keywords: *Listening Test, English Language Teaching, Teachers' Experiences, Listening Assessment, Islamic Boarding School*

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INTRODUCTION

Listening plays a fundamental role in English Language Teaching (ELT) as it serves as the foundation for developing other language skills such as speaking, reading, and writing. In many educational settings, including Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, teachers face various challenges when implementing listening assessments. Therefore, listening is considered one of the essential components of successful language learning and communication.

Although numerous studies have examined listening comprehension and listening instruction in EFL contexts, relatively limited research has focused on teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests in Islamic boarding school settings. This context deserves particular attention because differences in facilities, learning environments, and students' exposure to English may influence assessment practices. Therefore, this study investigates teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests at Afaada Islamic Boarding School. By exploring teachers' perceptions, assessment practices, and problem-solving strategies, this study aims to provide insights into improving listening assessment practices in pesantren-based educational contexts.

According to (Brown, 2004), listening is a complex receptive skill that requires learners to process, interpret, and understand spoken language in real time. In language assessment, listening tests are essential for measuring students' comprehension and their ability to interpret meaning from audio input (Buck, 2001).

However, despite its importance, listening remains one of the most challenging skills to teach and assess, especially in contexts with limited learning resources. In many educational settings, including Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia, teachers face various challenges when implementing listening assessments. These challenges may include limited technological tools, poor audio quality, students' low vocabulary mastery, and constraints in preparing appropriate listening materials (Field, 2008).

Students in rural or boarding school environments often have limited exposure to authentic spoken English, which makes listening comprehension more difficult (Nation & Newton, 2009). As a result, teachers must employ various strategies to support students, such as pre-listening activities, scaffolding, simplified instructions, and multiple audio repetitions.

Teachers' experiences play a crucial role in shaping their assessment practices. (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) emphasize that teachers' personal beliefs, professional background, and classroom experiences significantly influence how they design and implement assessments. Understanding teachers' challenges is essential because assessment quality directly affects students' learning outcomes and the overall effectiveness of English instruction.

In the context of Islamic boarding schools, where English exposure may be limited and facilities vary widely, exploring teachers' perspectives becomes even more relevant for improving teaching quality. Given these circumstances, this study investigates teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests at Afaada Islamic Boarding School. By examining teachers' perceptions, daily practices, and problem-solving strategies, this research aims to provide insights into how listening assessments can be improved within ELT in boarding school settings.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on listening as a receptive skill and language assessment principles. (Brown, 2004) defines listening as an active process of receiving and constructing meaning from spoken language, while (Buck, 2001) emphasizes that listening assessment should measure learners' ability to comprehend and interpret spoken input accurately. Listening is a fundamental component of English Language Teaching (ELT), serving as the foundation for developing other communicative skills. According to (Brown, 2004), listening is a complex cognitive process involving receiving, processing, and interpreting spoken input in real time. (Rost, 2016) further emphasizes that listening is the key to communication, as successful interaction depends largely on learners' ability to understand oral messages. Effective listening instruction is therefore crucial for enabling learners to participate in communicative tasks and develop overall language proficiency.

The Importance of Listening in ELT

As a receptive skill, listening requires learners to process, interpret, and understand spoken language in real time (Brown, 2004). Through listening, learners receive linguistic input that supports language acquisition and helps them develop communicative competence (Rost, 2016). Listening is a vital part of learning a language. It's how learners get exposed to the language in a meaningful way. According to (Krashen, 1985) Input Hypothesis, language acquisition happens best when learners get input they can understand, making listening a key skill for developing speaking, reading, and writing. Through listening, learners pick up the sounds, rhythms, and intonation of the language, which is crucial for pronunciation and communication. In English Language Teaching (ELT), listening is often how learners get new vocabulary, grammar, and language patterns (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Listening isn't just passive; it's a complex process involving decoding sounds, recognizing words, and making meaning in real-time (Brown, 2004). This makes it both essential and tough for EFL learners, especially those who don't hear much authentic

English. Effective listening is key to successful communication, helping learners understand and respond in conversations (Rost, 2016). Without it, learners struggle to join in, even with good grammar or vocab. So, developing listening skills is a critical part of ELT, directly impacting learners' language proficiency and ability to communicate.

Listening Assessment and Listening Tests

In language assessment, listening tests are important tools for measuring students' comprehension and their ability to interpret meaning from spoken input (Buck, 2001). Effective listening assessment provides valuable information about students' listening abilities and helps teachers evaluate the effectiveness of instructional practices. Listening tests play a vital role in evaluating learners' comprehension of spoken texts. (Buck, 2001) explains that listening assessments measure how well students process speech, identify key information, and construct meaning from auditory input. Effective listening tests require appropriate audio materials, clear instructions, and reliable delivery tools. (Field, 2008) highlights that listening assessment should consider learners' cognitive demands, including decoding sounds, recognizing vocabulary, interpreting context, and predicting meaning.

However, reliability and validity often depend on factors such as audio clarity, environmental conditions, and students' familiarity with listening formats (Alderson, 2000). Teachers frequently face significant challenges in administering listening assessments, especially in contexts with limited resources. Technological limitations, such as low-quality speakers and insufficient audio equipment, can hinder learners' comprehension and reduce test fairness (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Challenges in Implementing Listening Tests

Implementing listening tests in English Language Teaching (ELT) presents various challenges, particularly in EFL contexts where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. One of the most significant difficulties faced by students is limited vocabulary mastery, which hinders their ability to recognize words and interpret meaning during listening tasks (Nation & Newton, 2009). When learners lack sufficient lexical knowledge, they often struggle to follow spoken texts, especially when the speech rate is fast or the pronunciation differs from what they are familiar with. This condition frequently results in anxiety, misunderstanding, and reduced confidence during listening assessments.

In addition to student-related factors, teachers also encounter challenges in preparing and administering effective listening tests. Time constraints and heavy teaching loads often limit teachers' opportunities to design appropriate listening materials that align with students' proficiency levels and curriculum objectives. Furthermore, a lack of professional training in listening assessment may affect teachers' ability to select suitable audio materials and develop reliable test items. (Field, 2008) emphasizes that listening assessment requires careful consideration of learners' cognitive processing demands, which can be difficult to address without adequate pedagogical support.

Technological and institutional limitations further complicate the implementation of listening tests. In many Islamic boarding school contexts, facilities such as audio players, speakers, and language laboratories are often limited or unavailable, leading to poor audio quality and inconsistent test delivery. As noted by (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016), inadequate technological resources can significantly reduce the reliability and validity of listening assessments. Moreover, the dense academic and religious schedules commonly found in boarding school settings reduce the amount of time available for listening practice and assessment. Variations in students' exposure to English also contribute to unequal listening proficiency levels, making it challenging for teachers to design listening tests that are fair and accessible to all learners (Ma'rif & Amalia, 2020). However, despite its importance, listening remains one of the most challenging language skills to teach and assess, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts (Field, 2008).

These challenges may include limited technological resources, poor audio quality, students' low vocabulary mastery, and difficulties in preparing appropriate listening

materials. Furthermore, students in boarding school environments often have limited exposure to authentic spoken English, which may affect their listening comprehension and performance during listening assessments (Nation & Newton, 2009).

Teachers' Experiences and Assessment Practices

Teachers play a crucial role in addressing these challenges because their experiences, beliefs, and professional knowledge influence how listening assessments are designed and implemented. According to (Richards & Lockhart, 1996), teachers' classroom experiences and pedagogical beliefs significantly affect their instructional and assessment practices. Understanding teachers' experiences is therefore essential for improving the quality of listening assessment and supporting students' language development. Teachers' professional experiences play a crucial role in shaping how listening tests are designed, implemented, and evaluated in English Language Teaching (ELT). Teachers' beliefs about language learning, assessment purposes, and students' abilities influence their instructional decisions and assessment practices. (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) argue that teachers' cognition—comprising their beliefs, pedagogical knowledge, and prior teaching experiences—strongly affects how they plan lessons and assess students' language skills. In listening assessment, these factors determine the selection of listening materials, test formats, and the strategies used to support learners during the assessment process.

Experienced teachers tend to develop greater sensitivity to students' needs and classroom realities, enabling them to adapt listening tests more effectively. Through continuous classroom interaction, teachers gain insights into students' listening difficulties, such as problems with vocabulary recognition, speech rate, and unfamiliar accents. As a result, they often modify listening activities by simplifying tasks, adjusting difficulty levels, or providing additional scaffolding to ensure that assessments remain accessible and meaningful for learners. (Harmer, 2007) highlights that experienced teachers are more flexible in adapting instructional materials and assessment procedures to match students' proficiency levels and learning contexts.

Moreover, teachers' assessment practices are influenced by institutional constraints and available resources. In contexts with limited technological support, teachers rely heavily on their professional judgment and experience to make practical decisions, such as repeating audio recordings, using alternative listening sources, or integrating pre-listening activities. These adaptive practices demonstrate that teachers' experiences not only shape assessment design but also contribute to maintaining the validity and reliability of listening tests in challenging teaching environments. Therefore, understanding teachers' experiences is essential for improving listening assessment practices, particularly in EFL contexts such as Islamic boarding schools where teaching conditions and student exposure to English vary significantly.

Strategies to Support Listening Assessment

To address the challenges commonly encountered in listening assessment, teachers employ a range of pedagogical strategies aimed at supporting students' comprehension and reducing listening anxiety. One of the most widely used strategies is the implementation of pre-listening activities, which include introducing key vocabulary, activating students' prior knowledge, and providing contextual information related to the listening text. (Underwood, 1989) emphasizes that pre-listening activities play a crucial role in preparing learners cognitively and emotionally, enabling them to anticipate content and focus on essential information during the listening process.

In addition to pre-listening support, teachers often simplify test instructions to ensure that students clearly understand the tasks they are required to complete. Clear and concise instructions help minimize confusion and allow students to concentrate on comprehending the spoken input rather than struggling with task interpretation. (Field, 2008) argues that reducing cognitive overload through simplified instructions is particularly important in listening assessment, as learners must simultaneously process sounds, recognize words, and

construct meaning in real time. Providing multiple audio repetitions is another strategy frequently used by teachers, especially in EFL contexts where students have limited exposure to authentic spoken English. Replaying audio materials allows learners to confirm their initial understanding, identify missed information, and gradually improve their listening accuracy. According to (Field, 2008), repeated listening can enhance learners' ability to decode spoken language and develop more effective listening strategies. This approach is particularly beneficial for students with limited vocabulary knowledge or pronunciation awareness.

These pedagogical strategies are especially essential in educational settings such as Islamic boarding schools, where students' exposure to English outside the classroom is limited. By employing pre-listening activities, simplifying instructions, and allowing multiple listening opportunities, teachers can create more supportive and equitable listening assessment conditions. Such strategies not only help students perform better in listening tests but also contribute to the development of their overall listening competence and confidence in using English.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests in English Language Teaching (ELT) at Afaada Islamic Boarding School. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, perceptions, and practices within their natural context (Creswell, 2012). The purpose of this design was to describe and interpret real classroom situations related to listening assessment without manipulating any variables.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Afaada Islamic Boarding School, where English is taught as a compulsory subject at both junior and senior high school levels. The participants consisted of three English teachers who were directly involved in designing and administering listening tests. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who could provide rich and relevant information regarding the research topic (Patton, 2002). The selection criteria required participants to (1) have at least one year of English teaching experience and (2) have prior experience in conducting listening assessments. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient knowledge and practical experience related to listening test implementation.

Data Collection

Data were collected using three methods to obtain comprehensive and credible information regarding teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests at Afaada Islamic Boarding School. The use of multiple data collection methods enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and to cross-check information from different sources. First, in-depth interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format to explore teachers' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in implementing listening tests. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences while allowing the researcher to address predetermined topics relevant to the research objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview focused on teachers' perceptions of listening assessment, challenges encountered during test administration, strategies used to overcome those challenges, and their views on students' listening performance. The interviews were conducted individually, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Second, classroom observations were conducted using a non-participant observation approach. In this role, the researcher observed classroom activities without directly participating in the teaching and learning process. Observation sheets were used to

systematically record listening assessment procedures, classroom conditions, technological resources, teachers' instructional practices, and students' responses during listening activities. Particular attention was given to how teachers administered listening tests, managed classroom interactions, handled technical difficulties, and supported students during listening tasks. These observations provided direct evidence of actual classroom practices and served to complement and validate data obtained from interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Third, documentation analysis was conducted to obtain additional information related to listening assessment practices. Relevant documents, including listening test materials, lesson plans, audio recordings, assessment guidelines, and other supporting teaching materials, were collected and reviewed. The purpose of document analysis was to identify how listening assessments were designed and implemented, as well as to verify information obtained from interviews and observations. Documentation served as supplementary evidence that strengthened the overall findings of the study (Bowen, 2009).

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed in accordance with qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from interviews, classroom observations, and documentation. The researcher examined the consistency of findings across these different data sources to identify recurring patterns and reduce the possibility of bias. By comparing participants' statements with actual classroom practices and supporting documents, the researcher was able to strengthen the credibility of the findings. Second, member checking was carried out to verify the accuracy of the collected data and interpretations. After the interviews were transcribed and summarized, the participants were given the opportunity to review the interview summaries and preliminary findings. Participants were invited to confirm, clarify, or correct any information that did not accurately represent their experiences and perspectives. This process helped ensure that the findings reflected the participants' intended meanings and viewpoints.

Third, peer debriefing was conducted through discussions with academic supervisors and colleagues who were familiar with qualitative research methods. During these discussions, the researcher presented the coding process, emerging themes, and interpretations of the data. Feedback from peers helped identify potential biases, improve analytical rigor, and enhance the overall quality of the findings. Finally, thick description was applied by providing detailed explanations of the research setting, participants, data collection procedures, and contextual factors influencing listening assessment practices. Such detailed descriptions enable readers to understand the research context more clearly and determine the potential transferability of the findings to similar educational settings. Through the implementation of triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and thick description, the study sought to ensure the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the research findings.

Data Analysis

The study employed thematic analysis following (Braun & Clarke, 2006) framework. Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents were first transcribed and organized systematically. The analysis involved several stages. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by repeatedly reading interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents. Second, open coding was conducted to identify meaningful units related to teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening tests. Third, similar codes were grouped into broader categories. Fourth, these categories were reviewed and organized into themes that represented recurring patterns across the data. The analysis resulted in three major themes: (1) the gap between the importance of listening and its practical implementation, (2) contextual constraints in Islamic boarding school settings, and (3) teachers' experiences and adaptive strategies in listening assessment practices. The

themes were then interpreted using relevant theoretical perspectives, including teacher cognition theory (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) and constructivist learning principles (Field, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). Through this process, the study identified how teachers adapted listening assessment practices to address contextual challenges such as limited technological resources, students' vocabulary difficulties, and time constraints. These findings highlight the interaction between teacher cognition, institutional context, and students' learning needs in listening assessment practices.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing listening assessments at Afaada Islamic Boarding School. Listening is a core skill in English Language Teaching (ELT) that supports both comprehension and the development of other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing (Brown, 2004; Buck, 2001). Despite its importance, practical implementation of listening tests often faces challenges, especially in resource limited contexts like Islamic boarding schools (Field, 2008; Nation & Newton, 2009).

The study explored three key areas related to listening assessment at Afaada Islamic Boarding School: (1) the gap between teachers' recognition of the importance of listening and the practical challenges they face in implementing listening tests, (2) the influence of contextual constraints, such as limited facilities and resources, on the design and execution of listening assessments, and (3) the role of teachers' professional experiences and adaptive strategies in addressing these challenges. The following sections present the findings and discussion aligned with these aspects, supported by relevant theories and previous research.

Finding 1: Discrepancy Between the Importance of Listening and Its Practical Implementation

The study revealed that teachers at Afaada Islamic Boarding School highly recognize listening as a fundamental skill in English Language Teaching (ELT). Teachers agreed that listening is crucial for developing other language skills such as speaking, reading, and writing, which aligns with (Brown, 2004), who describes listening as a complex receptive skill requiring learners to process, interpret, and understand spoken language in real time. Similarly, (Buck, 2001) emphasizes that listening assessment is essential for evaluating students' comprehension and their ability to interpret meaning from audio input. Despite acknowledging its importance, teachers reported substantial challenges in implementing listening tests effectively. These challenges include designing tasks that are suitable for students' proficiency levels, measuring comprehension accurately, and managing classroom dynamics during assessments. This confirms (Field, 2008) observation that listening is one of the most challenging skills to teach and assess, particularly in environments with limited learning resources. The findings are consistent with previous studies by (Field, 2008) and (Nation & Newton, 2009), which highlight that listening assessment in EFL contexts is often influenced by resource limitations and learners' exposure to English.

The discrepancy between the theoretical significance of listening and its practical assessment highlights a critical issue in English Language Teaching (ELT): the gap between ideal teaching objectives and classroom realities. Teachers often recognize the importance of listening as a foundational skill, yet translating this awareness into effective assessment practices can be challenging due to limited resources, student proficiency variations, and time constraints. According to (Richards & Lockhart, 1996), teachers' assessment practices are shaped not only by theoretical knowledge but also by their classroom experiences, personal beliefs, and perceptions of students' needs.

In this study, teachers' difficulties in applying listening assessments effectively demonstrate that understanding the importance of listening alone is insufficient. Bridging the gap between theory and practice requires practical strategies, appropriate tools, and adaptive approaches tailored to students and the teaching context. These findings emphasize the necessity of targeted teacher training and ongoing professional support to equip

educators with the skills and confidence needed to implement listening assessments successfully in real classroom settings.

Finding 2: Contextual Constraints of Islamic Boarding Schools Affect Listening Assessment

Teachers reported that limited facilities, insufficient technological resources, and restricted access to authentic English listening materials significantly affect the implementation and quality of listening assessments. For instance, audio devices are sometimes unavailable or unreliable, and students' exposure to native or authentic English speech is limited. These contextual limitations are consistent with Nation and Newton (2009), who argue that learners in rural or isolated environments often struggle with listening comprehension due to limited exposure to authentic English input. The findings are consistent with previous studies by (Field, 2008) and Nation & Newton (2009), which highlight that listening assessment in EFL contexts is often influenced by resource limitations and learners' exposure to English.

This finding illustrates the impact of the educational context on assessment practices. In Islamic boarding schools, or pesantren, environmental and institutional constraints such as limited equipment, classroom size, and access to multimedia materials require teachers to adapt assessment methods to fit available resources. (Field, 2008) supports this, noting that listening assessments in resource limited settings often require creative solutions to maintain validity and reliability. Consequently, this finding emphasizes that contextual factors must be considered in both the design and implementation of listening assessments. It also highlights the gap in research on listening assessment practices specifically in pesantren environments, suggesting the need for context sensitive approaches in both teacher training and curriculum planning.

Finding 3: Teachers' Experiences and Strategies Shape Listening Assessment Practices

The study found that teachers' professional experiences, beliefs, and adaptive strategies play a central role in overcoming challenges in listening assessment. Teachers employ various strategies such as pre listening activities to activate students' prior knowledge, vocabulary support to improve comprehension, simplified instructions, and multiple audio repetitions to enhance students' understanding of listening tasks. These strategies are in line with the scaffolding approach proposed by (Vygotsky, 1978), where teachers provide guidance and support to help learners achieve tasks slightly beyond their independent ability. The findings are consistent with previous studies by (Field, 2008) and (Nation & Newton, 2009), which highlight that listening assessment in EFL contexts is often influenced by resource limitations and learners' exposure to English.

This finding highlights that teachers' experiences and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping how listening assessments are conducted. As (Richards & Lockhart, 1996) note, teachers' personal beliefs and prior classroom experiences strongly influence the design and implementation of assessments. In the present study, teachers were observed to adapt their assessment practices according to students' proficiency levels, classroom conditions, and the availability of resources, reflecting active teacher agency in responding to contextual challenges. Moreover, the use of scaffolding and other adaptive strategies aligns with constructivist learning principles, in which learning is mediated through guidance, repeated practice, and gradual support. These practices demonstrate that teachers can enhance students' comprehension and engagement even in resource-constrained settings. Therefore, providing teachers with professional support, training, and opportunities to develop effective assessment strategies is essential for improving the overall quality and fairness of listening assessments.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights that teachers at Afaada Islamic Boarding School recognize listening as a crucial skill in English Language Teaching, yet they face multiple challenges in implementing listening tests, including limited technological resources, low student vocabulary mastery, time constraints, and inconsistent audio quality. Despite these obstacles, teachers employ adaptive strategies such as pre-listening activities, simplified instructions, repeated audio exposure, and alternative listening sources to support students' comprehension. The findings underscore the significant role of teachers' professional experiences and beliefs in shaping assessment practices, particularly in resource-constrained contexts like Islamic boarding schools. To enhance the effectiveness of listening assessment, the study recommends improving institutional facilities, providing professional development for teachers, and designing context-appropriate listening tests that address both pedagogical goals and students' needs. This study contributes to the literature on listening assessment in Islamic boarding school contexts by providing empirical evidence of how teachers adapt assessment practices under resource constraints. The findings may inform curriculum developers, school administrators, and teacher educators in designing more context-sensitive listening assessment practices. This study contributes to the literature on listening assessment in Islamic boarding school contexts by providing empirical evidence of how teachers adapt assessment practices under resource constraints and offering practical implications for curriculum developers, school administrators, and teacher educators.

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