

# **A STUDY OF TEACHING LISTENING**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The objectives of this study were to investigate the process of teaching-learning listening at the English Language Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry in terms of (a) preparation, (b) teaching materials and media used, (c) teaching method/technique/strategy, (d) and evaluation. The subjects of this study were two lecturers who taught listening II classes. The data was collected through observations, interviews and documentation. The collected data was analyzed and interpreted through qualitative procedures by using data reduction, data presentation, verification and drawing conclusions. The results showed that the two lecturers organized and prepared the lesson plans well before starting the lessons in terms of preparing the listening lessons. However, they did not do the same preparation. The teaching materials were selected from various sources and taken from authentic resources with appropriate media. The teaching methods and techniques used by the English lecturers were various and in accordance with theories for the teaching of listening. In addition, only one lecturer used a scoring guide to evaluate the listening assignments. Meanwhile, the other one used percentage scoring to evaluate the listening tests. Moreover, both lecturers conducted formative and summative assessments when teaching listening.

**Keywords:** *Process, Teaching, English, Listening*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Listening is one of the skills that need to be mastered by university students. The ability to listen and understand a person talking in English to communicate with other people is important. Students who are good at listening will understand more of what the speaker says. Morley (1991, p.82 in Celce-Murcia, n.d.) states that “they expect to listen twice as much as they speak, four times more than they read, and five times more than they write”. Listening is the ability to accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. “Listening is not only hearing something”. Schwartz (2004, p. 2) argues that “it has been estimated that adults spend almost half of their communication time listening. Students may receive as much as 90% of their information through listening to instructors and to one another”. Listening is the language modality that is used most frequently. Listening must be done in real time. There is no second chance, unless, of course, the listeners specifically ask for repetition when they listen to speakers.

Yet, for the language learner who is often unable to process information quickly to make sense of what is said, listening can be a stressful activity (Goh & Taib, 2006, p. 222). Using variety when teaching listening can develop students’ motivation in comprehending the material. Teaching listening in the English department is different from teaching at junior and high schools. The implementation of appropriate methods and techniques by the lecturers in a classroom will influence the outcome for students. For example, by giving suitable listening materials, good classroom atmosphere, appropriate teaching methods and meaningful exercises will help students to achieve good listening skills.

Teaching listening for ESL students is not an easy job. Teaching listening is not only related to the language laboratory as a media but also how to comprehend the information from the speaker. However, EFL students have minimal exposure to the target language outside the classroom and a lack of interaction with native speakers. A similar problem is also faced by new students at the English Language Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry. Moreover, the English Language Education Department students are being prepared and expected to become EFL teachers upon completing their studies. Therefore, they need to master English well including mastering listening skills to be effective teachers in the future.

### **Research Question**

1. How are the processes of teaching and learning listening conducted in the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry in terms of (a) preparation, (b) teaching materials, (c) teaching methods and (d) evaluation?

### **Research Objective**

The objective of this research is to investigate the processes of teaching-learning listening in terms of (a) preparation, (b) teaching materials, (c) teaching methods and (d) evaluation.

In this research, the researchers focused on the processes of teaching English listening. The subject of this study was two English lecturers from the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh. The researchers analyzed the lecturers' preparations, teaching materials, teaching methods, evaluation and assessment through observation sheets, interviews and document analysis.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Teaching of Listening Skills**

Listening is one of the most important skills. As we know, listening is the skill of understanding spoken language. The skill of listening is an essential part of communication and a basis for second-language learning. According to Nunan (2003, p. 26), listening is a process of decoding the sounds that are heard from the phonemes to the text completely. Brown (2001, p.263) suggests that learning to listen really means learning to respond and continue responding to listening as a chain. Listening skill means the skill of listening in order to understand the meaning of what is being listened to. The process of listening will help learners to respond to what is being asked/said. Moreover, listening is the key to all effective communication; without the ability to listen effectively messages are easily misunderstood, communication breaks down and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated.

In addition, Hughes (1991, p. 134) mentions two skills involved in listening, they are micro-skills and macro-skills. In micro-skills, to understand what someone says, a listener has to interpret intonation patterns, recognition of functions and structures, cohesive devices,

detect sentence constituents and recognize discourse markers. In macro-skills, to understand what someone says, a listener has to be involved with listening for specific information and obtaining the gist from what is being heard or the listener should get the general idea of the information from following instructions or directions.

### **Preparation by Lecturers**

Preparing lesson plans makes it easier for a lecturer to meet the goals of a course. Their plans will help to remind the teachers of what they intend to do. McMullin (1992, p. 29) asserts that the essential components of a lesson plan are; warm-up/review, introduction to a new lesson, presentation - introducing new information, practice and apply the new language or information, and evaluation to assess how well they have grasped the lesson.

Cruickshank, Jenkins, and Metcalf (2013, p. 177) say that teacher preparation is the process by which teachers decide about what to teach, how to teach, and how to assess what the students have learnt and whether to be satisfied. When a plan is ready, teachers can focus on its implementation.

### **Listening Materials**

Listening materials means things that can be used for the teaching-learning processes of listening. Wilson (2008, p. 40) states that there are several sources of listening materials. They include: teacher talk, student talk, guest speakers, textbook recordings ie. talking books, tape recordings, television, video, DVD, radio and the internet. Porter and Roberts (1987, p. 179 in Long & Richards, 1987) warn us that teachers cannot handle types of language that they have never heard or used before, they should only use authentic listening materials in the classroom to teach their students.

### **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

CLT is a dominant methodology. Wilson (2008, p. 19) states that CLT uses real (i.e. authentic) communications rather than demonstrations or displays of vocabulary and target grammar. It uses information-gap activities, role plays, games, discussion of real issues, etc. The passages students listen to in a communicative approach lesson tend to be closer to real-life use of language than is the case in other methods. The lecturer can be a facilitator for learning by students in CLT activities (Alexander, 1992, p. 131). Listening in CLT has a

communicative purpose in that students are expected to use the information they hear, just as we do when we listen outside the classroom. These techniques can be used with all students. Learning with the CLT method uses recordings of students' conversations, transcription and small group exercises.

### **Co-operative Learning in Listening**

Co-operative learning in listening is defined in terms of its purpose for using various learning activities that accommodate different learning styles to enhance students' participation and understanding of the topic by creating an atmosphere of achievement. "It also promotes and enhances students' self-worth and communication skills which leads to academic achievement and interpersonal skills" (Motlhaka, 2012, p. 20). In other words, students orally explain how to solve problems or discuss concepts being learned.

Co-operative learning through group work or pair work encourages a non-threatening, collaborative environment for learning, in which students work together to ask each other questions, debate topics, share ideas and learn from each other. Some popular strategies that can be used with all students to learn using co-operative learning strategies are round-table, write around, numbered heads together and jigsaw.

### **Assessing English Listening Skills**

There are two kinds of listening assessments, namely formative and summative assessments (Brown, 2004, p. 13). On the one hand, assessments that are on-going and take place informally every time students engage in listening are called formative assessments which are used by teachers diagnostically. On the other hand, summative assessments, which are the type required by schools, colleges and governments, include quizzes, achievement tests, proficiency tests and standardized tests and are more high stakes in nature.

The assessment of listening skills should have validity, reliability, authenticity and washback. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010, p. 30) state that validity means to what degree assessment measures accurately what you want it to measure. Reliability means to what degree it is dependable. Authenticity means to what degree it is representative of real-life language use. Wash-back means to what degree it provides useful feedback for the learner and influences the teaching process.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research study used a descriptive qualitative method. Tomal (2010, p. 8) states that descriptive research attempts to describe the existing nature of the phenomena. It tries to describe important aspects that can occur in the classroom. In this case, the researchers observed how the lecturers at the English Language Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry taught listening II. This research was conducted to investigate the teaching learning processes conducted by the lecturers in listening classes and to refer them to the theories for the teaching of listening. The aspects which were looked at were the lesson preparation, the materials, the teaching methods, and the assessment of the students' achievements.

### Data Collection Technique

To get the data, the researchers used observations, interviews and documentation which were appropriate for the purposes of this research.

### Observations

The observations were made from May 2 to 15, 2016. The researchers chose two classes to be observed with two different lecturers. For these observations, the researchers acted as non-participant observers. The observations were done to collect data or information during the teaching-learning processes such as the learning activities, the use of media, the performance of the lecturers, the teaching materials and the methods which were used by the lecturers and how the lecturers assessed the students' listening skills. They were made using a modified observation sheet from Brown (2001), which had 57 aspects to be observed.

Throughout the observations, field notes were taken to record what was occurring in the class-room setting such as the behaviours, activities, methods and other features. Through the field notes, the researchers were able to describe the experiences while making the observations. The researchers also used a camera to take some pictures of what was happening during the teaching-learning processes.

### ***Interviews***

Interview can provide information that cannot be obtained through observations. The interviews were done directly face to face between the respondents and the researchers. In this case, the two respondents were the English lecturers as the interviewees. In the interviews, the researchers gave 15 questions to each of the lecturers. The questions covered all aspects of the lecturers' behaviour, experiences and beliefs related to teaching listening, especially on how they prepared the teaching materials, how they taught listening, what techniques they used in teaching listening and how they assessed the students' listening skills. To avoid losing important information during the interviews, a recorder was used to record what the respondents said.

### ***Documentation***

Documents were collected by the researchers to get richer data about the way listening II was taught in the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry. The researchers wanted to see whether the teaching activities, materials, method, techniques and assessments applied in the classroom were based on the lesson plan or not. In addition, whether the teaching materials were connected with the syllabus. The researchers obtained those materials by getting permission from the lecturers to copy their teaching materials and documents eg. the syllabus.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Lecturer 1**

#### ***Preparation***

In a separate interview, it was found that the English lecturer made the preparation at the beginning of the semester before starting to teach it. The lecturer said:

“Actually I make a syllabus and then a lesson plan. And the lesson plan is for every meeting: I prepare the materials before teaching; usually I take the materials from the book, the course guide book or sometimes from the Internet. Yes, I prepare the material beforehand and when I come to the class, I'm ready with the materials and the media”.

Based on the documentation, the lesson plans were designed for each meeting for the whole semester. It was found that this lecturer, who taught listening, made preparations for the whole course and

selected all the materials to be used in the teaching processes. The teaching materials were connected with the syllabus.

### ***Teaching Materials***

In teaching listening, the lecturer said that she made good preparations of the materials to be used before coming to class and she chose interesting and authentic materials in order to motivate the students. She said:

“I prepare my students to listen to authentic materials, because it’s more natural and real life for them. Yes, I take them from the Internet, such as news, movies, and songs. The Internet itself plays an important role for preparing teaching-learning materials”.

This lecturer also combined teaching materials from textbooks with other resources, such as news, movies, songs, etc. She copied the material and gave it to the students. Besides, she used multi-media for teaching listening, such as a tape recorder, a laptop and a projector. The lecturer pointed out, “Sometimes I use a tape recorder, sometimes a laptop or a projector and yeah a computer”.

### ***Teaching Method***

According to the lecturer, she used many strategies in teaching listening. The lecturer likes to combine the strategies to avoid boring students. The teaching methods and techniques that the researchers observed were also interesting. She created a good atmosphere and a very comfortable situation. The lecturer added that her students were more motivated to learn English when she applied the communicative approach dominantly and used pair work or group work or discussions and/or role play as her techniques for teaching listening. She also usually used games to make the students more interested in learning listening. In her listening class, the students participated actively while the lecturer led and controlled them during the listening activities.

### ***Assessment***

The lecturer assessed the students by giving them a task in every meeting. She says, “Every meeting, there is - we can say - a task. So a task, sometimes I collect the task. Sometimes we discuss it with the students”. It was formative assessment. She also uses a scoring guide for listening assessment to evaluate the listening test as adapted from iSICollective.com. The scoring rubric is presented overleaf.



The lecturer gave a test to the students and looked at the students' understanding of the aspects of listening (ability to focus, general understanding, listening for details, and accuracy of answers). The test consisted of ten WH-questions related to the news the students heard from the audio. The students heard some general information, details and inferences about a famous person. In the questions, the students found some questions related to general understanding, details and inferences. Regarding the scoring rubric used to measure the students' listening assignments, the aspects focused on the ability to focus, general understanding, listening for details and accuracy of answers.

**Table 1. Scoring Guide of Listening Assignment**

Excellent to Very Good 100-90	Excellent at identifying the main idea, general, and specific information. Accurately infers implied information. No problems at recognizing vocabulary and expressions.
Very Good 89-80	Very good at identifying the main idea, general, and specific information. Shows good ability to infer implied information. Almost no problems at recognizing vocabulary and expressions.
Good 79-70	Good at identifying the main idea, general, and specific information. Shows some ability to infer implied information. Some minor problems at recognizing vocabulary and expressions.
Fair 69-60	Still able to identify the main idea, general, and specific information. Still shows ability to infer implied information. Some problems at recognizing vocabulary and expressions.
Unsatisfactory 59 or Below	Unable to identify the main idea, general, and specific information. Fails to infer implied information. Many problems at recognizing vocabulary and expressions.

## **Lecturer 2**

### ***Preparation***

Lecturer 2 prepared her own syllabus for her listening class. From the documentation, it was found that this lecturer taught based on the syllabus that she had prepared. Moreover, in the interview, lecturer 2 stated:

“So, I don’t have the same syllabus each semester. Everything is going to be different, what I did it. I will go straight to get to know my students first, to see what they need because you know, some students, they don’t like to have much theory. They love to have practice so I’m going to be in the classroom first and then see what they need. And when I get home, I’ll take maybe like 2 or 3 hours to think about what I’m going to do with them. But basically, we aren’t going to be far from the things in the basic syllabus. We just modify what the subject is, - what the topic they love is in the classroom”.

The lesson plans were arranged relevant to the students’ needs. The lecturer prepared the lesson plans with a high level of the subject listening 2 such as TOEFL preparation. Different lecturers had different styles of teaching. The way that they taught the students was based on their point of view but it still had a connection with the syllabus.

### ***Teaching Materials***

The materials she selected for teaching listening were taken from the Internet. She also prepared authentic materials to support the students in learning listening such as current issues, because they would be familiar to the students. She stated:

“Yeah, the current issue, whatever is famous at that moment is going to be a great thing for teaching”.

During the process of teaching and learning listening, she also combined teaching materials and other resources suitable for students in Aceh, so it must be familiar to them. She said, “I do have the textbook all-inclusive for listening because I brought it from the United States. But again, most of them we cannot use here because it’s not familiar to them”.

In addition, the lecturer liked to use current media because it is very helpful in teaching listening. She stated, “If we keep talking all day, or all we do is give out hand-outs it’s going to be boring”. She also varied her techniques and media too such as by bringing a foreigner as a speaker to the class. A native speaker can be used as a different kind of media too. She asserted, “When they can listen to somebody speaking English with their accent, it is worth more than having more recorded media in the classroom”.

### ***Teaching Method***

The methods she chose were students' active learning and the techniques were pair work or group work. She asserted:

“It's all the material supposed to be- they have, you know, they have to respond to all the things that we have in the classroom. Students must be more active than teachers. They have to do it”.

This lecturer used a variety of techniques and activities so that her students did not get bored in learning. The lecturer implied that the teaching methods that she most often used were communicative learning. Most of the time, she encouraged the students to work in groups or in pairs. Moreover, the students with low competency would benefit a lot from working with others. In the listening class, the students participated actively while the lecturer led and controlled them during the listening activities.

### ***Assessment***

Meanwhile, concerning evaluation, the lecturer assessed the students starting at the beginning of the semester. She talked, for example she conversed quite fast, so she could see whether the students could respond to her or not. She also avoided questions with yes-no answers to make sure that the students had to answer the questions comprehensively. She said, “I like to have short conversations and then they have to answer the question and it's all about comprehension, about the details. I avoid questions with yes-no answers”. The students of course need to listen carefully to the short conversation by the lecturer first and to respond to it to show their comprehension of it. If the students had problems answering the questions, the lecturer would put them in the front seats. So, next time they would be involved in many things. However, she did not use a scoring guide for listening assignments to evaluate the listening tests. She used standard percentages for scoring, viz: quiz (10%), assignments (25%), midterm exam (25%) and final exam (40%).

### ***Discussion***

#### ***Reviewing The Preparations Made by The Lecturers***

The researchers found that these two English lecturers who taught listening made preparations by looking at the syllabus and their lesson plan, but they did not have the same preparations. Each of the lecturers believed that the ability of the students was different for each class.

They wrote and created their own lesson plans and connected them to the syllabus.

The lesson plan is really needed for effective teaching and to give good impact for students' learning achievements. Woodward (2001, p. 180) clarifies that planning does not only just happen before classes, but also you can do it during and after lessons too. A plan will help to remind teachers what they intended to do and allow them to think about where they are going and provide the time to have ideas for the next day and for days to come.

It was found that the English lecturers at the English Language Education Department of UIN Ar-Raniry who taught listening had made good preparations before they came into the class. They had set their goals and objectives for the lesson, had determined the materials and equipment needed, had decided on the procedures and they knew what and how they wanted to evaluate and they had even prepared extra class work. They were aware that lesson plans help them to control the teaching materials and the time needed to reach their goals for the lesson, but they still had the freedom to create their own ways and to use their own techniques for teaching listening.

This finding is also supported by Machackova (2009) who noted the importance of lesson plans for teaching listening lessons and of being careful and paying attention to each step in order to help students to develop good listening skills and strategies which are necessary in today's multicultural world.

On the other hand, good lecturers are certainly flexible and respond creatively to what happens in their classroom, but they need to have a destination to allow them to think about where they are going and to provide the time to have ideas for the next meeting.

### ***The Use of Teaching Materials***

Selecting appropriate teaching materials is a crucial aspect to reach the goals when teaching listening so lecturers have to realize the importance of good materials for communicative activities. McDonough and Shaw (2003, p. 143) have stated that recently, a lot of attention has been paid to teaching materials designed for activities that focus on tasks mediated through language or that involve the negotiation and sharing of information by the participants.

The researchers observed that both of these lecturers used teaching materials taken from authentic sources. Tamo (2009, p. 76) says that authentic materials are materials applied for teaching learning in the

classroom without modifying any single part of it for the purposes of teaching-learning.

According to Machackova (2009), listening materials should reflect the features of real-life spoken language which is used for L2 listening comprehension instruction. It is important, therefore, to take the opportunity wherever possible to expose students to examples of real language usage to help them become more competent communicatively.

Before coming to their listening classes, these lecturers prepared and selected their materials in order to be ready to teach and able to provide useful and meaningful activities for listening. In the teaching processes, the materials presented were in line with the themes or the topics stated in the syllabus. Oftentimes the lecturers adapted and created the teaching materials by themselves.

### ***Teaching Methods Used by the Lecturers***

From the observations and interviews, the researchers found that these lecturers used communicative methods and combined various techniques when teaching listening in the classroom. The lecturers used a variety of techniques and activities so that the students would not feel bored in learning. These lecturers implied that the teaching methods that they most often used were predominantly communicative teaching-learning methods.

As Larsen and Freeman (1986, p. 133) have stated, classroom activities in CLT are often carried out using group work or small groups. Most of the time, the lecturers encouraged the students to work in groups or in pairs. Moreover, the students with low competency benefited a lot from working with others.

By contrast, Tokeshi (2003) states that the Japanese EFL education system has not proven successful in improving the communicative ability in English of their students. Students and teachers are likely to place a higher value on English for entrance examinations than for communicative English.

Finally, it can be summed up that the listening techniques used by the English lecturers were in accordance with the theories for teaching listening and the lecturers varied the techniques when teaching their listening classes. The methods used were communicative language teaching and the techniques used were group work, sister groups, pair-work and information gap. Furthermore, this concurred with Yukselci,

(2003) who said that group work may also involve other strategies such as taking notes, paying attention, or semantic mapping.

### ***Assessment of Achievements by Students***

The quality of teaching-learning can be investigated from the assessments done by the lecturers. By assessing students (Lázaro, 1996, p. 12), we check their progress at different stages of the course; we reinforce the students' learning by giving them regular feedback and we evaluate the teaching-learning processes as well as the approaches, the aims, the materials and even the assessments themselves.

There are generally two types of assessment, namely formal and informal assessments that are used to measure the progress of the students in learning. Formal assessments are planned and the students are informed about them before they are conducted, such as tasks, quizzes, mid-term tests, assignments and final exams. Yukselci (2003) says that listening tasks, which require students to draw or mark a picture, diagram, map, or even a written text, are examples of tasks.

Brown (2004, p. 5) has asserted that informal assessment can take a number of forms, starting with incidental, unplanned comments and responses, along with coaching and other impromptu feedback to the students. The improvement of students is more important than the scores they get from the exercises.

Based on how the procedures of the assessment are done, assessments can be classified into two types, namely formative and summative assessments. Brown (2004, p. 6) has stated that formative assessments evaluate students in an on-going process of teaching-learning to form their competencies and skills with the goal of helping them to continue that growth process. He adds that summative assessment, as its name suggests, summarizes what the students have learnt during a course and it is usually done at the end of the semester. The examples are final exams and general proficiency exams.

The two English listening lecturers who were observed assessed the listening ability of their students appropriately. They assessed them at every meeting session. Based on the observations and interviews, the assessments conducted were incidental. One of the lecturers used a scoring guide for listening assessment to evaluate the listening tests. Meanwhile, the other one used percentages for scoring, viz: quiz (10%), assignment (25%), midterm (25%) and final (40%) to evaluate the listening. Both of them used formal and informal assessments to see and measure their students' progress. They also used formative and

summative assessments to find out whether the goals of their course had been achieved. The activities chosen included retelling a story, collaborative tasks, discussions, questions and answers and recordings of speeches.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings and discussions above, the researchers came to the conclusions. Both of the English lecturers prepared lesson plans well before coming to the class: They were organized and well prepared in class and taught based on the syllabus and the lesson plans that they had prepared. Nevertheless, their preparations were not the same. Each of them believed that their students had different abilities. In short, these two English listening lecturers in the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry prepared and designed lesson plans before they started their listening classes.

The teaching materials presented were in line with the themes or topics stated in the syllabus and lesson plans. The teaching materials were taken from authentic resources such as live recordings and the Internet such as YouTube. Sometimes the lecturers adapted and created their own teaching materials.

The teaching methods used by these two English lecturers were various and in accordance with the theories for the teaching of listening and the lecturers varied the techniques in teaching their listening classes. The methods they used were communicative language teaching and the techniques used were pair work, group work, sister groups and information gap.

The English lecturers assessed their students' listening abilities appropriately with both informal and formal assessments. One of the lecturers used a scoring guide for assessment of listening. Meanwhile, the other one used percentages for the scoring, viz: quiz (10%), assignment (25%), mid-term (25%) and final exam (40%) for evaluation. The lecturers also conducted formative and summative assessments. They evaluated the students' progress by having the goal of assisting the students to improve their listening skills and gave appropriate feedback. They also conducted quizzes, mid-term tests, and final exams and gave home work assignments for their listening classes.

## **Suggestions**

### ***For English Lecturers***

English lecturers should be aware of their teaching strategies to fulfill their targets. They should encourage students to become aware of their listening abilities, monitor their efforts and provide feedback on the' performances of their students in the listening classroom.

The lecturers not only have to master the basic knowledge of designing lesson plans and managing the methods, techniques and strategies for teaching listening, they also have to master the knowledge of conducting assessments rather than just testing them. Therefore they must keep improving themselves by reading books, attending seminars or workshops that discuss how to teach listening including the preparation, activities, methods and techniques, feedback and assessments of listening ability. This will make the results of their students' learning more valid and reliable.

### ***For Future Researchers***

The researchers suggest that other researchers who intend to conduct further research study a larger number of lecturers in their listening classes and observe higher levels of listening classes. Additionally, future research can also be conducted by observing and investigating students who are studying in these listening classes.

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