Assessing Listening Comprehension Skills in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education EFL Classrooms: Current Practices, Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract: *The present study aims to examine the current practices, constraints, and potential enablers when assessing students' listening skills in Indonesian Islamic higher education EFL classrooms. This study used a qualitative approach with a case study research design. The selection of the participants used purposive sampling. The study used interviews as a data gathering technique, involving six EFL lecturers in one Indonesian Islamic higher education institution in South Sulawesi. The findings show participants' awareness of the various alternative methods to assess students' listening skills. However, their discussions tend to focus on what is easiest to use as opposed to what matters most for students' listening skills. Furthermore, participants' descriptions of EFL lecturers' constraints in assessing listening skills encompass various educational aspects, which could be classified into resources and practical constraints. The former includes a lack of representative language laboratories and learning resources for conducting quality listening assessment practices. The latter relates to time constraints, auditory surroundings, and designing and developing listening assessment instruments. Therefore, the participants raised several key strategies to enhance quality listening assessment practices, ranging from resources to practical strategies. This includes a high quality and sufficient quantity of educational resources, the use of diverse and authentic assessment tasks, and more collaborative work to share best practices and experience in conducting quality listening assessment practices. These findings imply the need for reformulation of existing practices and policies related to foreign language assessment that could have significant impacts on EFL students, teachers, and classrooms.*

Keywords: *challenges, EFL classrooms, listening comprehension, listening assessment, practices, solutions*

INTRODUCTION

Assessment plays a pivotal role in the teaching of languages as a whole, with a specific emphasis on the enhancement of listening skills. This assertion is supported by three primary reasons. Primarily, assessment furnishes teachers with

the necessary initial and ongoing reference points for the development of teaching plans. Furthermore, the process of assessment provides students with a valuable opportunity to receive feedback regarding their performance, thereby facilitating their progress beyond their initial learning objectives. Furthermore, the inclusion of assessment in the evaluation of the curriculum serves the purpose of identifying specific areas within the instructional framework that require improvement or enhancement (Rost, 2016).

Despite common practitioners' awareness of the importance of listening skills for second or foreign language acquisition, listening comprehension testing continues to be somewhat neglected (Thompson, 1995). It was disregarded and undervalued how important listening is to learning a language and communicating with others (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). Testing listening comprehension has always been a bit of a quiet area in the testing field (Aziz, 2015; Douglas, 1988). This is partly because the hardest language skill to assess is sometimes stated to be listening (Batty, 2021; Green, 2017). Eventually, during the communicative era of language teaching, it attained its proper position. Listening was a key skill in the face-to-face communication that language was taught for (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009).

When it comes to testing students' learning, which is very similar to testing their listening skills, the reality is that when teachers are in charge of creating their own tests, they tend to favor using test forms that have been tried and shown to produce results that are statistically reliable over experimenting with novel tests. This is because when teachers are in charge of creating their own tests, they do not want to waste their time. As a result, they do not develop a new test that is in line with contemporary theory; rather, they continue to use the discrete point test, which is based on speech that has not been contextualized (Lewkowicz, 1992). Indeed, comprehensive listening tests encompass several listening activities that evaluate a broad spectrum of listening subskills. Listening encompasses various sub-skills, including the comprehension of particular lexical units and phonetic elements, the interpretation of conveyed meaning, the appropriate formulation of responses, and the ability to draw inferences, summarize information, and make predictions.

Numerous global studies have been undertaken to investigate teacher practices in the assessment of student listening comprehension, along with the identified obstacles and facilitators associated with this process. One study, done by Podder (2011), examined the barriers and enablers encountered by EFL instructors in Bangladesh while assessing the speaking and listening skills of secondary school students. In a more recent study conducted by Regmi (2022), the focus was on examining the attitudes of English language teachers at the secondary level regarding the assessment of listening skills in thirty schools located in the Gorkha area of Nepal.

In the Indonesian context, there is a lack of research conducted to investigate the identification of practices, difficulties, and prospects associated with the assessment of student listening comprehension in higher education settings. Numerous studies have been conducted pertaining to the overall aspect of

listening skills. Syadiah (2017) conducted a study that specifically examines the challenges encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in the domain of listening comprehension. This research examines the listening challenges experienced by a cohort of senior students with low proficiency levels at a private educational institution located in Kuningan, Indonesia. This investigation bears resemblance to the research conducted by Nadhira and Warni (2021), which aimed to examine the challenges encountered by students in the domain of listening and to delve into the many variables contributing to these difficulties among secondary school students. Another study conducted by Utomo et al. (2019) focused on investigating the obstacles encountered by teachers in the teaching of listening skills within the context of junior high school.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, based on the literature review conducted, few comprehensive studies have been conducted to examine EFL lecturers' current practices, existing challenges, and prospects for the assessment of student listening skills. To date, the existing research on listening assessment in the Indonesian education context has primarily focused on school contexts, either junior high schools (Utomo et al., 2019) or senior high schools (Nadhira & Warni, 2021). This is different from the current study, in which the focus is on the Islamic higher education context. In addition, the previous studies focused primarily on analyzing the obstacles faced by EFL lecturers in teaching students' listening skills (Utomo et al., 2019). Furthermore, other studies (for example, Nadhira & Warni, 2021; Syadiah, 2017) focused on analyzing student difficulties in learning listening skills. Therefore, it is imperative to do this study as a means of elucidating the current practices, existing difficulties, and potential opportunities to assess student listening skills in the context of Indonesian Islamic higher education. This present research aims to address the existing gaps in the literature by providing more insights in this area by formulating the following research questions:

1. How do EFL lecturers currently assess students' listening skills?
2. What are the difficulties faced by EFL lecturers in assessing students' listening skills?
3. What are the possible solutions proposed by EFL lecturers for assessing students' listening skills?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Rost (2016), the act of listening can be characterized as a multifaceted procedure encompassing four interconnected forms of processing: neurological, linguistic, semantic, and pragmatic processing. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of listening, it is important to explore all four forms of processing, elucidating their interplay and mutual reinforcement. In a similar vein, Buck (2001) elucidates that the act of listening is a complicated process where the listener absorbs auditory stimuli, specifically acoustic signals, and subsequently interprets them by drawing upon an extensive range of language and non-linguistic knowledge. From this, it can be seen that listening is an active process that goes beyond absorbing the message content to empathetically understanding the speaker (Guo & Wills, 2005).

In the past, there was a prevailing belief that the act of listening followed a bottom-up trajectory, commencing with the development of fundamental abilities such as phonological and morphological recognition and culminating in the acquisition of more advanced skills such as inferential reasoning, predicting, and summarizing (Guo & Wills, 2005). The notion of listening has undergone a transformation, encompassing a more intricate and sophisticated methodology. Furthermore, Lewkowicz (1992) asserts that individuals utilize their knowledge of the phonological system, vocabulary, and syntax of a language, along with their comprehension of the external environment and its relevance to the current discourse, as well as their familiarity with the cultural aspects of the language, in order to comprehend the intended meaning of spoken messages.

Listening is one of the most important skills to learn in foreign language learning and teaching for several reasons. First, it is an important aspect for individuals to communicate ideas in today's global world (Green, 2017) directly through one-on-one communication or indirectly through the use of media. Second, it plays a crucial role in second language acquisition as a whole and specifically in the development of speaking proficiency. Thirdly, in large part, it is via this medium that individuals acquire their knowledge, their ideas, their sense of values, and their appreciation for the world and its human affairs (Guo & Wills, 2005). Finally, listening comprehension tests are a part of almost all standardized and functional English language tests taken around the world (Aziz, 2015). Therefore, the significance of listening in the context of foreign language acquisition is well acknowledged in contemporary scholarship (Yıldırım & Yıldırım, 2016).

Despite their strategic and important roles in foreign language acquisition, listening skills are considered complex (Buck, 2001), dynamic (Douglas, 1988), and difficult (Wilson, 2008) skills when compared to other language skills, particularly reading comprehension. There are significant differences between listening comprehension and reading comprehension due to the substantial cognitive load involved (Thompson, 1995). This complexity becomes higher in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Individuals who engage in listening activities lack the ability to revisit and reassess the content that has been presented to them, which distinguishes them from reading activities. Individuals are required to get a comprehensive understanding of the material as they engage in listening, retain the information, connect it with subsequent content, and consistently reassess their interpretation of the auditory input in relation to their existing knowledge and recently acquired information.

Scholars and practitioners are all in agreement about the potential difficulties and challenges of assessing students' listening skills (Buck, 2001; Vandergrift & Goh, 2009; Wagner, 2013). In general, Buck (2009) clearly outlined two major constraints on the language test: system constraints and resource constraints. The former relates to how the test should be delivered, which includes platforms, testing time, item format, and facilities. The latter includes things like budget, professional expertise, pilot test-takers, and development time. Rost (2016) argues that assessing listening comprehension is as difficult as describing listening thoroughly. Similarly, Vandergrift and Goh (2009) contend

the skill of listening remains the least comprehended among the four language skills, hence posing challenges in terms of teaching and assessment. Furthermore, Wagner (2013) asserts that assessment of listening skills presents unique challenges for teachers and test developers because it is an internal process. He further describes that these challenges may explain why listening assessment has gotten less attention than other aspects of language assessment. Wagner (2021), in his more recent argument, describes that assessing listening has greater challenges compared to assessing other language competencies, and there exists much ambiguity and divergence on the appropriate methods for assessing listening skills.

Despite the acknowledged complexities and inherent challenges associated with assessing skills, scholars and practitioners have identified a wide range of test items designed to measure different aspects of the listening process. These range from highly targeted, discrete-point items that gauge recognition or comprehension to highly integrated, interactive tasks that gauge everything from listening to speaking and communicative competence (Batty, 2021). Similarly, Brown and Priyanvada (2019) describe designing listening assessment as encompassing several assessment tasks and procedures ranging from intensive listening tasks such as minimal phonemic pair recognition to extensive listening tasks, language in a communicative context, such as listening to a conversation, and lengthy lecturers to find main ideas and to make inferences or summaries. The potential tasks encompass the identification of cognates, analysis of word-order patterns, attentive listening for specific information, anticipation of future content, summarization of key points, making inferences, and discerning the core concept through listening.

Educational experts and practitioners of language testing and assessment propose several key principles and strategies to implement quality and effective assessment in listening. Brown and Priyanvada (2019), one of the leading experts in this field, suggest that the effective assessment of listening skills encompasses a range of test forms that are characterized by cognitive complexity, communicative nature, and authenticity. Moreover, these exam forms exhibit interactivity by virtue of their interaction with other language skills, particularly speaking skills. Furthermore, Wagner (2013) asserts that the incorporation of the listening assessment task might be combined with other language skills to provide a more thorough assessment of interactive conversational language usage. The integration of speaking and listening tasks is a crucial and recommended goal, albeit one that presents difficulties in the context of assessment. Students may also be instructed to engage in listening activities where they are required to listen to a spoken text and then integrate the acquired information into a written response. These are among the key principles in the implementation of listening assessment practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

This present study used a qualitative approach with a case study research design. Yin (2003) defines a case study as a form of empirical research that examines a current phenomenon within its authentic contextual setting. The research is concentrated on a single unit to create comprehensive, rich, and in-depth descriptions (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). This research

design was employed because the goal of the present study is to understand the phenomenon of listening assessment practices in the specific context of the EFL classroom in Indonesian Islamic higher education.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling. They were selected based on several criteria: teaching listening skills, having English language teaching credentials, and being willing to participate voluntarily. Six EFL lecturers from an Islamic high education institution in South Sulawesi met the required criteria and agreed to participate voluntarily. The researchers obtained informed consent from potential participants for ethical reasons. Despite including participant names, the researchers used a unique coding technique to represent each person. For example, the first teacher participant was coded L1. This study used interviews, the most common qualitative data collection approach (Ary et al., 2010). The interview protocol included three key open-ended questions asking EFL lecturers about their assessment practices in listening comprehension, the obstacles and solutions to assessing students' listening skills. Each interview lasted 20–45 minutes. The researchers interviewed participants in Indonesian to guarantee they could express their practices, concerns, and solutions to listening assessment practices. An audio recorder recorded each piece of information, which was meticulously transcribed and translated into English.

The researchers used theme analysis to analyze EFL lecturers' responses. Thematic analyses search datasets for themes (Braun, Clarke, & Gray, 2017). Deductive data analysis yielded empirical themes and categories from the literature as initial coding issues. To learn the data, the interview transcripts were reviewed several times. The researcher then tags texts with possible topics. After reviewing, organizing, and comparing the texts and ideas, a unified set of themes that incorporates teachers' practices, perceived obstacles, and aspired solutions to listening assessment implementation emerges. This thematic analysis helped identify data subjects and patterns of meaning related to the study questions. To ensure the trustworthiness of the present research, the researchers used 'Member checks' (Merriam, 1998). It is considered the most significant way to verify research findings and interpretations in qualitative studies. The researchers in this case asked the participants to verify the transcripts and the researcher's interpretation. After numerous cycles of analysis, participants commonly agreed that the final depiction matched their viewpoints and experiences on the topic.

FINDINGS

In the beginning of the discussion, the participants were asked a general question related to the importance of assessment in developing listening skills. They unequivocally believe that assessment is really essential for the enhancement of students' listening skills. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

> Yes, in my view, doing assessments of listening skills is very important because assessment and learning are like two sides of a coin. Learning will not be effective without assessment, and we can't do assessment without learning. (L1)

> Assessment is very important, not just for listening courses. But assessment is essential for all courses. We have to assess the student's progress; from the

beginning, he's following the listening course, the middle, and the end of the course. (L.4)

The data above indicates the participants' understanding and awareness of how essential listening is to enhancing the quality of student learning. These two could not be separated, as illustrated by the participants as two sides of a coin. Students' learning is stimulated and triggered by the existence of assessment, as noted in the following statements:

When, for example, in one meeting I don't assess it, their reaction is normal. However, when there is assessment, there is appreciation for their efforts, and they also feel enthusiastic to do it. (L.5)

Various themes were raised by participants when discussing techniques they usually apply in assessing student listening skills. The most frequently reported listening assessment formats were the use of multiple-choice questions, true-false questions, filling in the gaps or blanks, matching items, and completion items. Of the reported formats, multiple-choice questions seem to be the most frequently used, along with filling in the blank items. These can be seen in the following exercises:

The test can be in the form of multiple-choice, fill-in-the blank, or completion formats. (L.1)

There are true and false items. So, they have to answer which of the provided sentences is correct. (L.5)

The data above show the participants' use of various formats of listening assessment tasks, such as multiple-choice questions and true-false questions. This indicates that participants tend to use assessment tasks that are easy to use and score, are widely available, and can be easily found in many listening handbooks, including the use of standardized testing such as TOEFL and IELTS. Furthermore, participants also reported the use of other more complicated listening assessment tasks, such as dictation and interviews, as seen in the following excerpts:

The listening tests given can vary. It can be in the form of dialogue, it can be in the form of dictation, or conversation, etc. (L1)

Moreover, the participants also reported their use of other listening assessment techniques in addition to tests. The most frequently used technique is observation. This is followed by other well-known techniques such as self-assessment and interviews, as seen in the following excerpts:

There are observations. In fact, often when they are working and listening to audio, I walk around them. so it can be seen, for example, when spelling a name, for example, Jenny Miller. So I can see who wrote G instead of J and E instead of I. This can be seen by looking directly at the students who are working on the questions. (L.3)

There is also something called an interview. The form of the interview here is that I ask them questions, ask them one by one. (L.5)

The data above indicates participants' awareness of the diverse test formats to assess student listening skills. In addition, the examples above indicate the teachers' well-developed listening assessment literacy with the implementation of observation, interviews, self-assessment, in addition to listening tests to measure students' listening skills.

Upon inquiry into the various aspects of listening skills being assessed through the provided format, several significant themes were brought forth. This encompasses the understanding of basic skills in listening, such as specific vocabulary and phonetic components, the interpretation of imparted meaning, the proper construction of replies, and the ability to retell the stories, as well as the skills of summarizing information and drawing conclusions. These can be seen in the following excerpts:

> On the assessment of listening itself, one of their achievement indicators is when they're able to retell what they've listened to. (L.4)

> I asked them to make a summary based on the stories they heard. (L.6)

Furthermore, when asked about the perceived challenges in assessing their students' listening skills, several key themes were raised by the participants. These encompass limited access to quality language laboratories, learning resources, and media. These can be seen in the following excerpts:

> There's a lab, but it's very unfortunate. It doesn't match our expectations. Maybe the speaker isn't good. Besides, the room's not very conducive. (L.3)

> The language lab is a small room. There are only a few chairs. There are some students who are forced to sit on the floor. So, I said it's less effective. (L.5)

The data above indicates participants' awareness that they could not conduct quality teaching, including assessing listening skills in poor-quality language laboratories characterized by small rooms, poor sound systems, and rather hot rooms without proper air conditioning. These are considered by the participants inconducive and unsupportive for quality teaching and assessment of student learning. This condition is exacerbated by the large class size reported as another theme identified as the key challenge to the assessment of listening, as raised by Participant 4 below:

> The number of students in the class is huge. In fact, if you assess the language skills, it's enough for a maximum of 20 students in one class. But, because this is a big class, it is hard enough for each meeting to assess every student. (L.4)

The data above indicates participants' clear argument that it is hard for EFL lecturers to assess students' listening skills one by one effectively if the class is too big. A big class also means a serious challenge in providing students with appropriate feedback. As indicated in the following excerpt:

> I can usually assess and give feedback to a maximum of ten people in one meeting. I can't evaluate the whole class in one meeting. (L.4)

This issue is related to the reported time available for teaching listening skills, which is also a challenge in assessing student listening. The number of teaching hours for listening skills is usually only 100 minutes, which is of course

very limited when it comes to designing, administering, and giving feedback on students' listening skills. This is noted in the following excerpts:

> We usually run out of time. We usually run out of time in the dictation section. So, usually, I myself sometimes have to be in a real hurry to give feedback. Time is very limited because it's only 1 hour and 40 minutes, or 100 minutes. Then there's a lot to do. The main factor is actually time. (L.5)

Another key theme reported as a challenge in assessing students listening skills is the students' basic abilities and skills in listening. They considered that students' basic skills in listening are still developing, although some students already have good basic skills. As noted in the following excerpts,

> Based on my experience teaching listening, student listening skills in semester 1 and semester 2 are 50-50, the length of which I teach yes. (L.4)

> The challenge is that some of the students I've faced often lack their listening skills, maybe because they rarely listen; sometimes they have trouble. (L.2)

The participants themselves considered that listening skills were the most difficult to acquire. The challenge becomes higher and higher as students who only have average skills are required to understand native speakers with diverse accents. This can be seen in the following excerpts:

> Then comes the challenge from the students themselves, because according to my assessment of all the basic language skills, listening is really the hardest, especially for students whose English basics are low. (L.6)

> Also, the challenge is how students can catch accents from their native speakers. We know there's a British style. There's an American style. (L.1)

When asked about their aspired solutions to the existing challenges, the participants unequivocally urged several themes as the key strategies to assess listening skills. These include improving the quality of language laboratories and providing sufficient learning resources and teaching media for a convenient and conducive classroom atmosphere. These themes can be seen in the following excerpts:

> The second is the facility. The learning facility should be made comfortable. The lab is one of them. The air conditioning, sound system facilities, and others, including LCDs. (L2)

> A quality lab should be provided. This is equipped with devices such as computers, headsets, and speakers. (L.1)

> The lab should be better in the future, equipped with better facilities for quality improvement. (L.3)

In addition, the participants also raised themes related to the design of listening assessment tasks. These encompass using various formats and techniques of learning assessment, using standardized listening tests, developing rubrics as the basis for assessment, gradable listening tasks in terms of difficulty level, and developing integrative listening tasks. As seen in the following excerpts:

> The form of the questions should be varied, and the level of difficulty should also remain the same because if they are different, it will affect the results. (L.1)

> Teachers should provide quality listening questions, for example, according to Cambridge standards and IELTS. The listening test can also be integrated with other language skills, such as through interviews. (L.6)

> We use a rubric. Use a listening assessment rubric. (L.4)

Furthermore, the participants also raised the importance of having a small class size, which consists of only 10–20 students in one class, as this will provide a better opportunity for teachers to manage the listening class, administer quality assessments, provide feedback for students, and report the results for public accountability.

> The room is not overloaded with a large number of students. For example, there are only 20 students instead of 30 in one class. The results will definitely be good. (L.6)

In addition, it is also interesting to note that the participants urged the importance of setting up a policy for student admission in the English background department with certain required TOEFL test scores or other standardized tests. The participants also raised the need to have an English matriculation program for students once they are accepted at the university to provide new students with the required basic skills in English. These proposed strategies are expected to make sure students have the necessary basic English to succeed in EFL classrooms.

> The admission requirements of new students to the English background department should be put in place, such as TOEFL test scores and other English tests. This refers to overseas universities where prospective students cannot be admitted unless they meet a specific TOEFL score. (L.6)

> The best step is to create a special program for new students. It's called a matriculation program, and there's some kind of strengthening and enriching of basic language skills for new students. (L.2)

Another important, unequivocally aspired solution to overcome the existing challenges is the need for more collaborative work among EFL lecturers to share ideas and experience of best practices in teaching and assessing students learning skills. This includes sharing resources and media for assessing listening skills.

> Then there must also be cooperation from all lecturers. In the sense of all teachers. It's not just us who are thinking about how to improve their quality. But there must also be support from other lecturers. (L.5)

It is further claimed that when teachers collaborate with one another, many benefits can be achieved. This could include learning the best practices of other teachers in assessing their students' listening skills.

> I like collaboration like that because usually other lecturers also have different ways and methods of assessing listening. So when we collaborate, there may be new things that can be learned. (L.6)

DISCUSSION

Each participant involved in this study shows a good and sound understanding of the imperative nature of assessing students' listening skills, which is similar to the assessment of other language skills such as reading, writing, and speaking. This finding aligns with other previous studies, such as the study conducted by Podder (2011), where teachers who participated in his research demonstrated their recognition of the importance of assessing students' listening skills. Podder further highlighted that one of the factors facilitating the adoption of listening assessment practices in Bangladesh is the resilient and positive nature of teachers.

Participants in the study also discussed a number of strategies to assess students' listening skills. These spanned from straightforward, isolated assessment tasks to more intricate examinations that assess diverse listening aspects such as comprehending the main idea, generating inferences, and summarizing. EFL lecturers in this study have identified a range of activities to assess students' listening skills, encompassing various formats such as multiple choice questions, true-false items, filling in the gaps, retelling tasks, and matching items. This finding is in line with the findings by Mulyani et al., (2023) in that lecturers in their study admitted their use of various types of assessment. Similarly, the study conducted by Alfian et al., (2022) also revealed EFL lecturers' use of various assessment types to assess three domains of learning, which include language tests, observation, and performance assessment. In addition, the participants of this study are also cognizant of the diverse objectives associated with assessing students' listening skills. These objectives encompass the identification of students' areas of proficiency and for improvement, the enhancement of teaching methodologies employed by teachers, and the provision of progress reports to students' parents, among others. Rasyid (2022) also found in his study conducted in an Isamic higher institution that EFL lecturers are aware of the various purposes of assessment, which can be categorized into two categories: administrative and pedagogic.

Although participants are aware of the various alternative methods they might employ to assess students' listening skills, their discussions on listening assessment activities tend to focus on what is easiest to use as opposed to what matters most for students' listening skills. The most widely used assessment task forms are multiple choice questions, true false questions, and completion tasks focusing on discrete points. This is in line with the description made by Wagner (2013) that discrete-point comprehension questions such as multiple choice questions are commonly used in listening tests because these types of items are relatively easy to create and can be reliably scored. Similarly, Green (2017) argues that empirical evidence has demonstrated that three particular methods exhibit a satisfactory level of effectiveness in assessing an individual's listening skills. The tasks in question encompass matching, multiple choice, and short answer question formats. The latter category includes both closed questions and open questions, specifically those related to sentence completion and table completion. Therefore, future development of listening assessment tasks needs to be more extensive (Brown & Priyanvada, 2019), integrative, and communicative.

The more recently developed theories and practices on listening assessment (for example, Wagner, 2013) indeed highlight the importance of communicative and integrative listening assessment tasks.

Regarding the difficulty encountered by EFL lecturers in assessing students' listening skills, a number of significant concerns arise from the discussions among participants. The majority of the participants raised the issue of unsatisfactory language laboratories with their existing devices and media. They argue that listening assessment tasks cannot be done effectively in the absence of good sound systems and a convenient classroom atmosphere. Another related challenge associated with this is managing the auditory environment. This is one of the practical difficulties identified by participants in the assessment of students' listening skills within the context of EFL classrooms. Specifically, the challenge lies in effectively managing various factors that have the potential to influence students' listening comprehension, including but not limited to ambient noise levels and external distractions. This issue has also been addressed by Green (2017), in which she describes how things like the room's acoustics and other factors like heat, space, light, and so on can affect the test taker and, by extension, how well he or she does on the test. This shows how important it is to make sure the learning setting, especially classrooms, is good for putting effective listening assessment practices into place. This is where the participants of this study really ask for representative language laboratories to support better listening assessment practices.

Several participants also raised poor English and low motivation as key challenges, emphasizing the existence of some students who still have poor basic skills in English and low interest in and motivation for the target language. This issue has been a significant focal point in prior research endeavors. In a study conducted by Mattarima and Hamdan (2011), it was observed that the matter of motivation among students to learn English remains a persistent concern. The prevailing concern pertains to the lack of enthusiasm among Indonesian students towards the acquisition of English language skills. Students attend class with the purpose of fulfilling their attendance requirement. Rasyid (2012) also identified that student motivation to learn English is still a serious concern in the teaching and learning of English in the Indonesian high education context.

Another constraint that arises in the assessment of listening skills, as identified by EFL lecturers, is time constraints. It has been reported that this presents a significant challenge for EFL lecturers in assessing students' listening skills. The available time for teaching listening and conducting quality listening assessments is severely restricted, which further complicates the task of administering and providing feedback on these listening assessments in a large class. This result aligns with the existing body of literature that highlights the time pressures faced by teachers in test development, the extensive nature of the testing process that teachers must navigate (Lewkowicz, 1992), the length of tests, and the demands associated with organizing large-scale marking procedures and marker reliability (Taylor & Geranpayeh, 2011). Furthermore, other educational experts, for instance, Green (2017), also pointed out that the limited amount of time available for EFL teachers and test developers to design and develop

listening assessment instruments in a representative way also poses a serious challenge.

Designing and developing listening instruments that meet the required quality criteria, such as authenticity, is another reported constraint in assessing student listening skills. A large number of studies (for example, Wagner, 2013) describe quality listening assessment instruments that encompass several key criteria, such as validity, reliability, practicality, and washback. The participants of the present study indicated in their discussion that it is really difficult to design and develop an instrument that meets these qualities. Their reasons were the limited time available and the lack of resources available to design and develop such quality instruments. Green (2017) describes how the assessment of listening skills is still not conducted in several countries due to practical constraints related to challenges in accessing, downloading, or creating audio recordings. These limitations may arise from insufficient expertise in these areas. Another potential challenge could be the lack of expertise among EFL lecturers regarding the process of developing a listening activity centered around an audio recording. These findings imply the need to increase EFL lecturers' assessment skills and to allocate time for them to design and develop instruments other than time for the teaching and learning process. These have implications for the need to allocate sufficient funding to support related activities.

Despite the various constraints highlighted in the participants' discussion, there are difficulties that appear to have been overlooked in assessing students' listening skills. These challenges have, in fact, raised significant concerns among English language teachers globally regarding the assessment of listening skills. One primary issue that seems to be neglected pertains to the construct validity of the tests (Vandergrift & Goh, 2009). This aspect should indeed be one of the primary concerns of teachers and test developers when designing listening assessment tasks. Another aspect that has been neglected in the discussion is professional development opportunities tailored exclusively for EFL lecturers, aimed at equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively design and administer listening tests. It is contradictory to other previous studies, such as in Bangladesh, where there exists a lack of training opportunities for EFL teachers pertaining to the development and implementation of listening assessments (Podder, 2011). Likewise, a similar concern arises within Iranian private language institutes, whereby there exists a deficiency in providing formal technological exposure through specialized workshops or training programs aimed at implementing web-based assessment in EFL courses (Alimorad & Saleki, 2022). This might suggest that the participants of this study consider themselves capable of and literate enough to conduct and administer quality listening assessment practices. This might also suggest they consider this a non-significant issue to hinder their listening assessment practices in an Islamic higher education context.

With regard to the potential enablers to enhance the quality of listening assessment skills, the researchers highlight several key themes. The participants express a clear consensus regarding the necessity of both the quality and quantity of resources required for conducting effective listening assessment practices. The

language laboratories, equipped with reliable sound systems and up-to-date information and communication technology systems, are frequently cited and considered desperately needed. The integration of technology in listening assessment has the potential to alleviate teachers' assessment-related responsibilities and foster an interactive and engaging learning and teaching environment. This is consistent with the findings of other studies. According to Wagner (2013), the increasing prevalence of technology in daily life suggests a probable expansion of audiovisual input usage for language learners. The incorporation of visual elements into a spoken discourse might enhance the listening comprehension abilities of individuals. Computer-based testing is another illustration of this trend. It has many advantages over traditional testing methods, including faster test periods, rapid score reporting, continuous availability, and distributed delivery through the internet (Buck, 2001).

It is noteworthy that participants emphasized the need to design and employ diverse assessment tasks, such as multiple-choice questions, true-false questions, cloze tests, and dictation exercises. It is imperative to incorporate these elements in order to ensure that the tests comprehensively encompass all dimensions of listening skills, including word recognition, vocabulary identification, inference-making, and summarization. Brown and Priyanvada (2019) assert that utilizing many measures consistently yields a higher degree of reliability and validity in assessments compared to relying just on a single measure. Similarly, Harmer (2007) argues that students have the potential to enhance their listening skills and acquire significant language input by employing a combination of extensive and intensive listening materials and techniques.

Furthermore, it is imperative to ensure that assessment tasks include authenticity, meaning they are pertinent to the student's requirements and aligned with real-world experiences. When students see a connection between their assessment tasks and their future needs, as well as their real-life experiences, it is more likely that they will exhibit higher levels of motivation and engagement throughout listening activities. Therefore, Green (2017) claims it is imperative for EFL teachers to dedicate considerable time to contemplation regarding the comprehensive listening process prior to embarking on any task preparation pertaining to listening assessment. This is where the participants of this study aspire to the need for more collaborative work among EFL lecturers to design and develop quality listening assessment instruments and to share best practices and experiences in conducting quality assessment practices. Effective communication and collaboration among teachers and educational authorities are key factors that contribute to the enhancement of educational quality (Sativa, Putra, & Kurniawan, 2022).

It is interesting to note that providing quality and sufficient feedback on students' listening skills is also considered a potential enabler of listening assessment in EFL classrooms. A voluminous body of literature highlights the importance of providing feedback for students' listening assessment tasks. The provision of feedback to learners regarding their performance in listening comprehension is essential in order to help them identify areas for improvement and cultivate techniques to enhance their listening skills. This quality feedback for

students' listening skills could be conducted more effectively and efficiently when EFL teachers deal with a small class size. Therefore, the participants of this study strongly emphasize the importance of having a small class size when conducting language skill assessments, including listening assessment practices.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study is to examine comprehensively the practices, constraints, and potential enablers when assessing students' listening skills in Indonesian Islamic higher education EFL classrooms. This study has elucidated some prevalent practices, major challenges, and feasible solutions linked to the assessment of listening skills. First, EFL lecturers employ a combination of discrete and integrative listening tests that encompass several skills, such as phonemic recognition, word completion, dictation, and cloze tests. Second, several identified constraints can be categorized into two general categories: systems/practical constraints and resource constraints. The former category encompasses factors such as the availability of time and facilities, whereas the latter category encompasses factors such as funding and the level of assessment literacy among EFL lecturers. Similarly, the enabling factors to assess students' listening skills effectively could also be seen from two major perspectives. Those related to system enablers, such as the improvement of supporting facilities like sound systems, language laboratories, and information communication technology, and those related to resource enablers, such as the provision of language laboratories, learning resources and professional development in listening assessment-related issues to increase teachers' assessment literacy.

The results of the present study imply the need to conduct significant improvement in several areas for a better quality assessment of students listening skills. Firstly, EFL lecturers ought to incorporate assessment tasks that are diverse, authentic, and integrated with contemporary technology in order to address multiple facets of listening skills. This approach serves to captivate and involve students in the process of acquiring and learning listening skills, while also facilitating the workload of teachers and fostering an engaging learning and teaching environment. Secondly, the present study also implies the need for teachers to design and develop integrated listening assessment tasks to suit the current development in language teaching towards communicative goals. Thirdly, this study implies the need to provide better language laboratories, learning resources, and teaching media in terms of quality and quantity, as these are considered essential to supporting quality listening assessment practices. This is where institutional leadership plays a significant role.

The current investigation is characterized by a number of limitations. This study examines the experiences of six EFL lecturers working at an Islamic higher education institution in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Therefore, it is important to exercise caution when applying the findings of this study to other Indonesian Islamic higher education institutions. Moreover, the primary sources of information consisted solely of EFL instructors, with no inclusion of EFL learners. Hence, it is recommended by the researchers that future investigations use additional primary sources of data, including EFL learners and educational authorities. The use of additional data collection methods, such as focus group

talks, classroom observation, and questionnaires, is also suggested by the researchers for future studies. These recommendations will result in the collection of more detailed data pertaining to the subject matter.

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