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VALIDATING A LISTENING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONNAIRE: EXPLORING THE CINDERELLA SKILL IN ESL THROUGH AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract:

Listening comprehension has long been the Cinderella skill of language learning though it is fundamental yet often undervalued in second language acquisition (SLA). This is particularly evident among Islamic Studies students, who must navigate both Arabic and English language in their educational journey. Despite its pivotal role in academic success and cognitive engagement, research on listening strategies and metacognitive awareness within this learner population remains limited. Addressing this gap, this study developed and validated a comprehensive research instrument to assess listening self-efficacy, emotional engagement, metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension among ESL learners in Islamic Studies programs. A systematic expert validation process was conducted with the experts in SLA, Islamic education and assessment methodology, ensuring the instrument's content validity and reliability. Then, the final version comprised 45 validated items across five constructs. The Content Validity Index (CVI) exceeded the 0.7 threshold, confirming its robustness, while Cronbach's Alpha analysis ($\alpha >$ 0.7) demonstrated strong internal consistency. The refined instrument effectively captures both cognitive and affective dimensions of listening comprehension, making it a valuable tool for assessing listening challenges in ESL especially among the Islamic study students. This study makes significant theoretical and pedagogical contributions. It highlights the overlooked

importance of listening among Islamic Studies students, reinforcing the need for explicit listening strategy instruction to enhance their linguistic proficiency. The findings align with contemporary SLA theories and Islamic traditions that emphasize active and mindful listening as a means of intellectual and spiritual growth. Future research should explore the instrument's applicability across diverse educational contexts, particularly where multilingual learners engage with both religious and academic discourse. By bridging SLA research, listening skill and Islamic perspective, this study advances understanding of listening comprehension in ESL settings and from the Islamic lens, offering insights for curriculum design, pedagogical strategies and professional development.

Keywords:

Listening Comprehension, Islamic Studies, Cinderella Skill, Metacognitive Awareness, Listening Strategies, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Self-efficacy

Introduction

Listening has long been regarded as the *"Cinderella skill"* in second language acquisition (SLA) for being overlooked in research, undervalued in classroom instruction and often taken for granted compared to the other stepsisters which are speaking, reading and writing skills (Rost, 2016; Ur, 2004). However, among the four language skills, listening plays a foundational role in ESL learning, serving as the primary channel for linguistic input and the development of communicative competence (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Graham, 2018). Despite its significance, many English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, particularly those in non-native English-speaking environments, struggle with listening comprehension due to limited exposure to authentic input, insufficient strategic awareness and affective factors that hinder their engagement with spoken discourse (Latip et al., 2020; Wang & MacIntyre, 2021). These challenges are further enlarged for Islamic studies students, who are not only learning English as a second language but also navigating the linguistic demands of Arabic in their academic and religious education (Umam, 2021; Ismail & Lim, 2023).

Listening is particularly crucial for students of Islamic Studies, as their academic and spiritual practices heavily rely on oral transmission, including Quranic recitations, Hadith narrations and scholarly discourses (Graham, 2016; Umam, 2021). In Islam, sama' (attentive listening) is regarded as an essential means of acquiring knowledge and wisdom, with the Quran itself emphasizing the significance of listening in multiple verses (Quran, 16:78; 50:37). However, despite the integral role of listening in both linguistic and religious contexts, Islamic studies students often lack the necessary strategic awareness to process complex spoken texts effectively, leading to difficulties in both academic and religious comprehension (O'Hair et al., 1988; Taufiq & Sidhu, 2013).

To address these challenges, researchers have emphasized the importance of metacognitive awareness in listening comprehension (Goh, 2010; Vandergrift, 1997). Metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring and evaluating one's listening processes, enable learners to regulate their listening approaches, identify comprehension difficulties and adjust their strategies accordingly (Macaro et al., 2019). Studies have shown that learners with higher metacognitive awareness are better able to manage listening tasks, leading to improved comprehension and overall language proficiency (Selamat & Sidhu, 2013; Umam, 2021).

Additionally, listening self-efficacy which is related to the belief in one's ability to succeed in listening tasks has been identified as a key factor influencing students' confidence, motivation and persistence in tackling listening challenges (Faidhurrahmat et al., 2020; Zhu et al., 2020).

Emotional factors also play a crucial role in listening comprehension. Positive emotions, such as confidence and engagement, have been found to facilitate active listening and deeper cognitive processing, while negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration, can create psychological barriers that impede comprehension (Pekrun, 2020; Fredrickson, 2022). Islamic Studies students, in particular, may experience heightened levels of anxiety due to the dual linguistic demands of English and Arabic, as well as the cognitive load required to process complex theological and academic materials in a second language (Ismail & Lim, 2023; Umam, 2021). Understanding the interplay between self-efficacy, emotions and metacognitive awareness is essential in developing targeted interventions that support ESL learners in enhancing their listening proficiency.

Despite the growing recognition of listening comprehension as a critical component of language learning, there remains a significant gap in research focusing on the validation of listening comprehension assessment tools, particularly within the context of Islamic studies students in Malaysia. Existing listening comprehension assessments often fail to account for the unique cognitive, affective and linguistic challenges faced by this demographic, leading to inconsistencies in evaluating their listening abilities (Latip et al., 2020; Too, 2018). To address this gap, this paper aims to validate a listening comprehension questionnaire designed to measure listening self-efficacy, academic emotions and metacognitive awareness specifically catered for Islamic studies students. By employing a rigorous validation process through structural equation modelling (SEM), this paper seeks to ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, providing a robust framework for assessing listening comprehension in ESL contexts.

The findings of this study will contribute to both theoretical and practical advancements in SLA research. Theoretically, it will provide new insights into the role of metacognitive awareness, self-efficacy and emotions in shaping listening comprehension, particularly among students with religious academic backgrounds. Practically, the validated questionnaire will serve as a valuable tool for educators and researchers seeking to assess and enhance listening comprehension skills in ESL learners. Additionally, by integrating the Islamic perspective on listening, this study highlights the broader educational and spiritual significance of listening, reinforcing its role as an essential skill that extends beyond academic achievement to encompass cognitive and moral development.

The Cinderella Skill of ESL

Despite being a fundamental component of second language acquisition (SLA), listening has traditionally received less emphasis than speaking, reading and writing in ESL instruction (Rost, 2016; Ur, 2004). Research highlights that listening serves as the primary channel for acquiring linguistic input and plays a critical role in communication (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). However, inadequate training and limited exposure to authentic spoken discourse continue to hinder ESL learners' listening comprehension skills (Latip et al., 2020). These challenges underscore the need for effective listening strategies and the validation of assessment tools tailored to measuring listening proficiency.

Theoretical Foundations of Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension in ESL has been explored through various theoretical frameworks, primarily bottom-up, top-down and interactive models (Field, 2008). Bottom-up processing suggests that learners decode spoken language by segmenting sounds into words, phrases and syntactic structures (Anderson & Lynch, 1988). In contrast, top-down processing relies on prior knowledge, expectations and contextual cues to interpret meaning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The interactive model integrates both approaches, emphasizing that effective listening requires simultaneous decoding and contextual interpretation (Goh, 2010). Moreover, schema theory posits that comprehension is facilitated by activating background knowledge to process incoming auditory input (Anderson, 1985). These theoretical perspectives underscore the cognitive complexity of listening and reinforce the need for validated assessment tools that capture the multifaceted nature of listening comprehension.

Metacognitive Awareness and Listening Comprehension

Metacognitive awareness plays a crucial role in listening comprehension, enabling learners to regulate their listening strategies effectively (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Flavell (1979) defined metacognition as "thinking about thinking," emphasizing the role of self-regulation in learning. Research has demonstrated that learners with high metacognitive awareness perform better in listening tasks due to their ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate their comprehension (Cross, 2011). Vandergrift's (2003) Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ) has been widely used to assess metacognitive strategies in ESL listening. However, existing instruments often lack contextual specificity, particularly for learners in Islamic education settings. This study seeks to validate a listening comprehension questionnaire that integrates metacognitive dimensions within the ESL framework for Islamic Studies students.

The Role of Listening Self-Efficacy in ESL Learning

Listening self-efficacy, derived from Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory, refers to learners' confidence in their ability to succeed in listening tasks. Studies have shown that learners with high self-efficacy are more likely to persist through listening challenges, employ effective strategies, and achieve better comprehension outcomes (Mills et al., 2006; Graham, 2018). Conversely, learners with low self-efficacy tend to experience anxiety, disengagement and reduced motivation in listening tasks (Faidhurrahmat et al., 2020). Assessing self-efficacy in listening comprehension is critical, particularly among Islamic Studies students, who may encounter additional linguistic challenges due to their engagement with Arabic and English in academic settings (Ismail & Lim, 2023).

The Influence of Emotions on Listening Comprehension

Emotional factors significantly impact listening comprehension, with positive emotions facilitating learning and negative emotions hindering it (Pekrun, 2006). Pekrun's Control-Value Theory explains how learners' emotional responses to academic tasks influence their engagement and performance. Positive emotions such as confidence and enjoyment promote motivation and cognitive flexibility, enhancing listening comprehension (Fredrickson, 2022). In contrast, negative emotions such as anxiety and frustration can impair working memory and reduce attentional capacity, leading to comprehension difficulties (Wang & MacIntyre, 2021). Validating a listening comprehension questionnaire that incorporates emotional dimensions will provide deeper insights into the affective factors influencing ESL learners' listening abilities.

Listening from the Perspective of Islam

Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of listening as a means of acquiring knowledge and wisdom. The Quran states:

> *"And Allah brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, but He gave you hearing, sight and intellect so that you may be grateful"*
>
> *(Qur'an 16:78)*

Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was renowned for the "active listening", encouraging believers to engage attentively in discussions (Ibn Qayyim, 2000). Studies have highlighted the role of reflective listening in Islamic pedagogy, where students engage in critical thinking and interpretation of spoken discourse (Umam, 2021). However, despite the significance of listening in Islamic traditions, there remains a gap in research on listening comprehension among Islamic Studies students learning ESL. This study integrates Islamic perspectives into the validation of a listening comprehension questionnaire tailored for this demographic.

Developing and Validating Listening Comprehension Questionnaires

The validation of listening comprehension assessment tools is essential for ensuring reliability, validity and contextual applicability (Messick, 1995). Existing standardized tests such as TOEFL, IELTS and MUET primarily assess listening comprehension in general ESL contexts but do not account for metacognitive, emotional and self-efficacy factors specific to Islamic Studies students (Hair et al., 2018). This study seeks to fill this gap by validating a listening comprehension questionnaire that incorporates these dimensions while ensuring psychometric robustness through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) techniques (Memon et al., 2020).
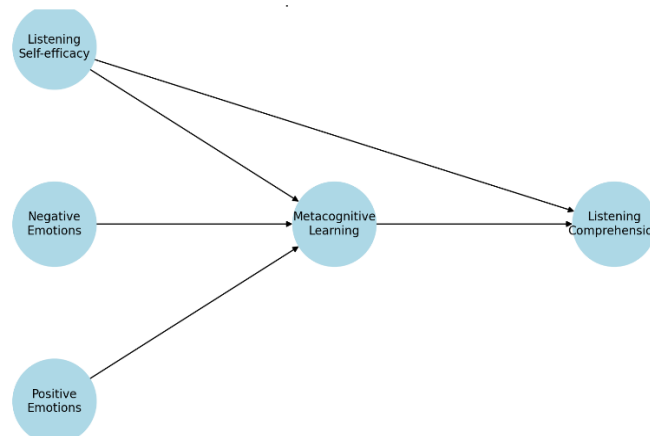
Research Gaps and Rationale for the Present Study

Despite the extensive research on listening comprehension in ESL, few studies have focused on Islamic Studies students and their unique linguistic and cognitive challenges. Additionally, while existing listening comprehension assessments evaluate general listening skills, they often overlook the role of metacognitive awareness, self-efficacy and emotions in listening comprehension. This study addresses these gaps by developing and validating a listening comprehension questionnaire that integrates these dimensions, providing a culturally and linguistically relevant assessment tool for Islamic Studies students.

Research Framework

Based on the research reviewed, this study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates metacognitive learning theory (Flavell, 1979) and self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) to examine the factors influencing listening comprehension among Islamic studies students. This framework builds upon previous research by incorporating emotional regulation as a key factor influencing metacognitive awareness and listening comprehension.

Figure 1: Research Framework

Metacognitive learning theory underscores the importance of self-awareness and self-regulation in the learning process. It posits that learners who actively monitor and control their cognitive strategies are better equipped to enhance their comprehension (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). Given its relevance to listening comprehension, this study incorporates metacognitive awareness as a pivotal mediating factor that links listening self-efficacy and emotions to listening comprehension. However, previous research has often overlooked the impact of emotional engagement in metacognitive processing, an area that this study seeks to address.

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1997) further supports this framework by explaining how learners' beliefs in their ability to succeed influence their motivation and learning behaviours. Higher listening self-efficacy has been associated with greater perseverance and engagement in strategic listening tasks, leading to improved comprehension outcomes (Graham, 2011; Zheng et al., 2018). Despite its well-documented impact, self-efficacy has rarely been examined in relation to metacognitive awareness and emotions within an Islamic studies context, making this study a valuable contribution to existing research.

The role of emotions in listening comprehension is well-documented in second language acquisition research. Positive emotions, such as confidence and motivation, have been found to enhance cognitive engagement and facilitate deeper processing of auditory input, whereas negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration, can hinder comprehension by disrupting cognitive resources (Pekrun, 2006; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). This study refines prior models by positioning emotions as integral to the development of metacognitive awareness, ultimately impacting listening comprehension.

Given the study's focus on Islamic studies students, this framework also incorporates an Islamic perspective on listening. Islamic teachings emphasize the virtue of attentive and reflective listening, which aligns with the principles of metacognitive awareness (Asad, 2003). Previous studies on listening in Islamic education have largely remained theoretical; this study seeks to empirically validate how Islamic listening principles can be integrated into ESL learning. By incorporating both cognitive and Islamic perspectives, this study provides a culturally relevant framework for listening comprehension.

To validate the proposed framework, structural equation modeling (SEM) will be employed to examine the direct and indirect relationships among these constructs. Path analysis will

measure the magnitude of these effects, while bootstrapping techniques will be utilized to assess mediation. Additionally, multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will be conducted to assess moderating variables such as students' academic background and language proficiency, ensuring a comprehensive examination of the model.
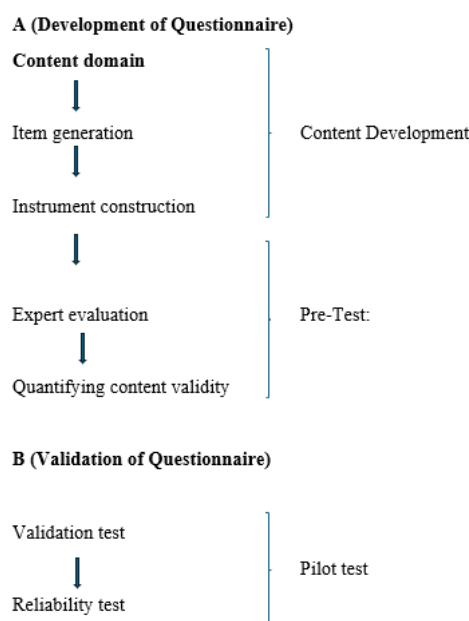
Methodology

This study employed a rigorous and systematic expert validation process to establish the content validity and reliability of the research instrument. A structured approach was adopted, adhering to best practices in instrument validation, including expert evaluation and reliability analysis, to ensure methodological rigor and academic credibility.

Development and Validation of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire development and validation process were carried out systematically in two main phases:

(1) Development of the Questionnaire
(2) Validation of the Questionnaire.

The structured process is visually represented below:

Figure 2: Development and Validation of Questionnaire

A panel of ten experts specializing in language learning, applied linguistics, metacognitive awareness and second language acquisition was engaged to evaluate the questionnaire. Their expertise provided critical insights into the adequacy, clarity and appropriateness of the instrument for measuring the intended constructs.

Table 1: List of Experts

No.	Designation of experts	Area expertise	Organisation	Years of experience
1.	Associate Professor	TEFL, meaning-focused input, vocabulary acquisition	Tamagawa University	20
2.	Senior Lecturer	Applied Linguistic	UNISZA	5
3.	Professor Emeritus	Developmental Psychology	University of Nebraska--Lincoln	51
4.	Professor of Language and Education	Second Language Education	University of Reading Institute of Education	30
5.	Associate Professor	Metacognition	Georgia Southern University	12
6.	Deputy Director (Academic and Internationalisation)	Listening comprehension, metacognitive strategies, second language acquisition	IIUM	15
7.	Lecturer	Education; curriculum and pedagogy	Universiti Malaysia Kelantan	10
8.	Senior Lecturer	English Language Studies; Language And Technology	UPM	8
9.	Senior Lecturer	Applied Linguistics & ESL	UMK	25
10.	Full Professor	Second language learning (listening and speaking; teacher cognition)	National Institute of Education NTU	> 30

Each expert rated individual items based on relevance and clarity using a four-point ordinal scale. The CVI was calculated for each item and for the overall instrument to ensure that it met acceptable validity thresholds. Items with low CVI scores were refined or removed to enhance the questionnaire's quality and precision. The internal consistency of the instrument was examined using Cronbach's Alpha to assess the reliability and coherence of each construct.

Findings
The initial iteration of the questionnaire was meticulously crafted to assess five pivotal constructs pertinent to this study: Listening Self-Efficacy (LSE), Positive Emotion (PE), Negative Emotion (NE), Metacognitive Awareness (MA) and Listening Comprehension (LC). This version encompassed 60 items, each designed to capture the multifaceted nature of listening comprehension and its associated cognitive and affective dimensions. To ensure the instrument's content validity and theoretical coherence, a panel of experts specializing in second language acquisition, psychometrics, and educational psychology was convened. Their comprehensive evaluation led to the elimination of 15 items deemed redundant or ambiguous, resulting in a refined instrument comprising 45 validated items. The expert assessments were systematically compiled and subjected to content validity analysis, confirming the questionnaire's adherence to established academic and methodological standards. To evaluate the internal consistency and reliability of each construct, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated. The results are detailed in the table below.

Table 2: Reliability Results

Constructs	Domains	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Listening strategies	LSE, PE, & NE	23	0.769
Metacognitive awareness	MA	14	0.944
Listening comprehension	LC	8	0.931
	Total items	**45**	

The reliability analysis confirmed that all constructs exhibit high internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values exceeding the generally accepted threshold of 0.7, thereby indicating a robust and reliable research instrument. Based on expert feedback, necessary modifications were made to improve the questionnaire's clarity, content validity, and structure. This iterative refinement process ensured that the final instrument adhered to academic standards and methodological rigor. Since this study focused exclusively on expert validation, university students were not involved in this phase. The final validated instrument is ready for implementation in further research, having undergone extensive content validation and reliability testing to ensure its methodological robustness.

Conclusion

Through a comprehensive expert validation process, this study has successfully established the research instrument's reliability and validity, ensuring its methodological rigor and suitability for broader academic implementation. The validation process facilitated key refinements that enhanced the clarity, coherence and psychometric soundness of the questionnaire, thereby strengthening its credibility as a research tool. The findings confirmed that the Content Validity Index (CVI) exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, affirming the instrument's robustness and alignment with established validation standards (Polit & Beck, 2021). Despite the growing emphasis on instrument validation in social sciences, the literature offers limited practical guidance on the systematic execution of expert validation in questionnaire development. This study contributes to bridging this gap by providing a structured and replicable framework for expert-driven refinement, underscoring its significance in ensuring construct validity and internal reliability (Hair et al., 2022). By empirically demonstrating a rigorous validation process, this research offers methodological insights that can inform future studies seeking to develop psychometrically sound instruments. The validated questionnaire is now primed for empirical application, facilitating investigations into listening strategies, metacognitive awareness, and listening comprehension within the domain of second language acquisition (SLA). Future research may explore its applicability across diverse populations, linguistic backgrounds, and educational settings, thereby enhancing its generalizability and efficacy. Additionally, cross-cultural validations and longitudinal studies could further refine its adaptability and predictive utility in different pedagogical contexts. This study, therefore, serves as a benchmark for future research on listening comprehension within faith-based ESL education, reinforcing its significance in academic and professional language development.

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