

Perception of EFL learners toward the use of Islamic YouTube channel of 'MercifulServant' in improving listening skills

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ABSTRACT

The selection of suitable educational materials will have an impact on students' comprehension. Opting for educational material that aligns with technology advancements enhances students' engagement in the learning process. Among the several English talents, listening proves to be a challenging aptitude for some English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. This research investigates the perspectives of EFL learners in acquiring listening skills via the use of the Islamic YouTube channel "MercifulServant". The objective of this research is to ascertain the perspectives of EFL students about the enhancement of their listening abilities via the utilization of the YouTube platform. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach via the implementation of preparatory research and interviews. The research included five EFL learners who were also viewers of the "MercifulServant" YouTube channel. The findings of this research indicate a positive attitude among EFL learners about their use of the Islamic YouTube Channel. The findings of the first investigation and interviews indicated a rise in the participants' auditory abilities. In addition, certain characteristics were identified that posed challenges for EFL learners in acquiring listening skills. Several reasons contributing to this issue include the native speakers' accent, insufficient vocabulary proficiency, and other related concerns. This study is expected to serve as a valuable resource for acquiring and enhancing listening proficiency. As a result, the acquisition of English listening skills can be rendered more engaging through the utilization of contemporary media.

KEYWORDS:

EFL learners;
Listening skills;
EFL students;
Perception;
MercifulServant
YouTube channel

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of technology-based media in the present day has made the process of learning English more sophisticated and pleasurable. ICT-based learning materials use

technology and are presented in a visually appealing manner, facilitating students' comprehension of the information and learning objectives. Utilizing supplementary learning resources beyond those offered at educational institutions enables English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students to enhance their English proficiency by accessing a broader array of topics. Furthermore, technology serves as a valuable instrument to facilitate the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language (Hashemi et al., 2022).

Additionally, ICT is very important as it can increase student activity in learning (Kew & Tasir, 2022). The availability of ICT-based media attracts EFL students more due to its practical benefits that can be used anytime and anywhere, both in class and at home. Learning media can be visual, audio, or audio-visual in nature. Examples of visual media include PowerPoint (PPT), while examples of audio media include radio and cell phones. However, we will focus on audio-visual media, such as the YouTube platform, for this discussion. Consequently, one way to improve listening skills is to watch informative and educational content in English from native speakers, such as Islamic videos.

The opinions of EFL students regarding the use of Islamic YouTube channels to improve their listening skills are investigated. As stated by Rahmat (2018), attentiveness poses the greatest challenge for EFL learners. Modern media may provide EFL learners with new knowledge. Additionally, it makes listening skill development enjoyable for EFL students. YouTube was utilized in this investigation to enhance listening skills. Due to the fact that learning mediums will evolve in tandem with technology, this research is vital. This facilitates the development of listening skills among EFL learners and enhances their motivation to acquire them. The perspectives of EFL learners regarding YouTube instructional materials could potentially inform the development of novel listening skills materials.

Gracella and Rahman Nur (2020) define perception as a person's opinion of something that influences their behavior. Thus, perception is an opinion, view, or view. According to Hromova (2019), students' impressions of foreign language learning are dependent on their experiences. After experiencing language exposures, students may share their thoughts regarding the language (Al Hakim, 2021). Students who develop listening skills on the "MercifulServant" channel may voice their ideas and observations. They might discuss how YouTube channels improve listening skills based on their experience. Based on some of the ideas discussed, this study examines an EFL learner's impression of learning to listen on YouTube's "MercifulServant" channel. In this research, EFL students describe their media-based learning experiences. Every person has a distinct outlook; thus, researchers investigated each learner's views. From some of the researchers' views, it may be determined whether students like this study.

YouTube offers increasingly popular and entertaining material (Eisenlauer, 2020). There are many YouTube learning videos that may help us improve English, particularly listening. YouTube videos on diverse topics may be used in class or for individual study (Wibowo & Sulistyorini, 2021). Additionally, using YouTube for language learning intrigues kids. Research suggests that developing listening skills on YouTube might improve students' attitudes about boring listening (Saputra & Fatimah, 2018). Showing YouTube videos and then asking students to debate or repeat their meaning is the ideal approach to utilize it (Albahlal, 2019). Some research suggests that YouTube may help teachers and students' study independently.

MercifulServant is a YouTube channel with Islamic material. This channel started in March 2010. This British YouTube channel has numerous followers and publishes a lot of videos. According to videoamigo.com, the "MercifulServant" channel is one of the most popular and has many Islamic and mainstream subscribers. It has 4.31 million users and 1.2

thousand videos in playlists by March 2023. Lifetime views hit 791 million (MercifulServant (Themercifulservant) YouTube Stats: Subscriber Count, Views & Upload Schedule, n.d.).

In order to cover research voids, this study investigates how EFL students perceive the development of their listening abilities via an Islamic English YouTube channel. This research employed the Islamic YouTube channel "MercifulServant" to enhance the religious comprehension and listening abilities of the participants. The impressions that students have of their YouTube channels improve their listening skills, as found in this study. The reasons why EFL students believe this channel enhances their listening skills were also examined in this study as well as the impact that this YouTube channel has on the listening skills of EFL students.

METHOD

This research uses descriptive qualitative methods. Qualitative research uses in-depth interviews, observation, focus group discussions, visual methods, content analysis, and curriculum vitae to examine people's experiences (Hennink et al., 2020). Qualitative research gathers vast data from several sources to better understand participants' views, viewpoints, and attitudes (Nassaji, 2015). In qualitative descriptive research, words, and statistics are used to illustrate a problem or the necessary processes to answer specific questions regarding who, when, where, and how to achieve a goal. The researchers employed a qualitative descriptive technique to write about the study results based on the hypotheses. A descriptive qualitative research approach was utilized to sample five English language education students aged 20–23 from an Islamic institution in Kudus. Five EFL/English students and "MercifulServant" YouTube subscribers were selected. From March to May 2023, an Islamic institution in Kudus will host the study.

In this qualitative study, the researchers collected, analyzed, transcribed, and drew conclusions from research data. Data collection in this study includes preliminary research and interviews. To assess participants' understanding, researchers begin with an initial inquiry. In the first study, the researchers asked participants about their recent TOEFL listening test results, which were valid for less than two years. Researchers assessed TOEFL test scores and participants' listening abilities using the CEFR guide. A listening comprehension test was given in the first study. Participants saw, understood, and listened to a MercifulServant Islamic YouTube video in the first study. The researchers asked about the films participants had viewed using CEFR scale guidelines. This scale evaluates participants' skill based on their initial level or progress.

Additionally, the researchers interviewed other EFL learners. According to Lambert and Loiselle (as cited in Ryan et al., 2009), interviews provide data on participants' research-related experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. More data was collected via interviews. The research employed semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview involves the researchers preparing a list of questions that may be asked in any sequence. This interview lets the subject to reply to and elaborate on the concerns addressed (Alsaawi, 2014). Researchers were able to better comprehend participants' views on the Islamic MercifulServant YouTube channel. In this study, interviews are initiated, executed, and concluded (Fadhallah, 2021). Researchers employed several people or data sources to strengthen this study's findings.

RESULT

The first step involved the researchers' asking participants about their previous TOEFL test results, which were still accurate. The researchers then used the results to determine each participant's level. The participants were given a brief comprehension test as part of the study. They were instructed to watch a video from the "MercifulServant" YouTube channel that they had already seen before. This test aimed to evaluate their understanding of the video content. After watching the video, the participants were then asked several questions based on their CEFR level description. Data was collected by interviewing several participants about their perceptions. The preliminary research findings indicate that the average participant has a listening skill level of A2. The results have been presented in the table below:

Table 1. Preliminary Research Results

Initials of participant's name	(LA)	(AAP)	(IU)	(MY)	(MA)
Score	57	45	41	41	44
Level	B2	A2	A2	A2	A2

After knowing the listening skill level of the participants, the researchers conducted a brief question and answer regarding the participants' understanding of the video that was shown, entitled "5 Things That Will Destroy The Muslims!".

According to the response, a few participants at the A2 level were capable of recalling important information or main topics from the video. The video conveyed five important points from the speaker, and some participants were able to answer all of them, albeit not in order, while some could only answer a few. The researchers also inquired about the video's level of difficulty for them. Some of the participants gave similar answers to IU's response. MA responded, "It was easy because the duration is short, the audio is not too fast, the pronunciation is clear, and the vocabulary is not too difficult" (MA, Personal communication, April 13, 2023).

The participants at level B2 could comprehend the meaning of the video and could explain the information sequentially and in greater detail compared to the participants at level A2. Participant B2 was able to list the five things in sequence and correctly. According to Participant B2, there was no difficulty in understanding the meaning of the video. LA said as follows, "No, for me the pronunciation is very clear, the audio is not too fast, it can still be understood, and there are no difficulties in listening to this video" (MA, Personal communication, April 12, 2023).

Furthermore, in the interview, the participants were asked about their perceptions of the use of the "MercifulServant" YouTube channel. They shared their opinions about how the channel helped them learn English. As stated by LA, "The channel is quite useful for learning English listening. Channels that contain Islamic content will add to our vocabulary about Islam as well." (LA, Personal interview, April 12, 2023). In comparison, IU also shared her opinion as follows:

"MercifulServant is an English-language Islamic channel whose content contains peaceful Islam, unity, and a lot of knowledge about Islam, besides that, there is audio verses of the holy Quran as well. For me, Islamic students are very suitable to learn to listen and add insight into Islam" (IU, Personal interview, April 13, 2023)

In line with the statements of the two participants, AAP said, "I like using this channel because the voice actors have good, clear pronunciation, besides that they can also educate the content". (AAP, Personal interview, April 12, 2023)

Researchers also asked each participant's opinion regarding using this YouTube channel to improve listening skills. Some of them feel that there has been an improvement, but there are also those who have not felt an improvement as far as using the YouTube channel. The following are responses from participants when asked about their perceptions of YouTube in improving listening skills. MY said, "Yes because I've seen a few videos so the more I come here I feel there is an improvement" (MY, Personal interview, April 13, 2023). In addition, MA gave almost the same answer,

"It can improve, because there is a new vocabulary that I got after listening to it from this YouTube channel. While watching it, I also try to figure out the meaning of words I don't know the meaning of. Then there is also in terms of my pronunciation so there are slight changes for the better". (MA, Personal interview, April 13, 2023)

On the contrary, a different answer was given by AAP, "In terms of improving my listening skills, It's lacking, but the content is interesting" (AAP, Personal interview, April 12, 2023).

The participants shared their reasons for claiming that their listening skills have improved since they started using the YouTube channel. They also provided feedback on the benefits they have experienced while using this channel. IU expressed his perception as follows,

"From myself, I really like things related to Islam, by using this YouTube channel I feel happy and interested in learning, as if I get a passion for learning. Because it doesn't hone my listening skills, but it can also add to my Islamic insight. I also got some new vocabulary, because after watching, if there is something I don't know, I immediately look it up on Google Translate or in the dictionary". (IU, Personal interview, April 13, 2023)

Furthermore, IU outlined the benefits that come with using this YouTube channel,

"For the advantages, the visuals are in accordance with each discussion and are also interesting, the speakers are also firm, and the duration is short so it doesn't bore students. As for the drawback, maybe there are some videos where the vocals are difficult for me" (IU, Personal interview, April 13, 2023).

In addition, MA provided the response that is shown below:

"There is a new vocabulary that I got after listening to it from this YouTube channel. While watching it, I also try to figure out the meaning of words I don't know the meaning of. Then there is also in terms of my pronunciation so there are slight changes for the better" (MA, Personal interview, April 13, 2023).

"If the advantage itself is in developing listening skills, namely being able to add new vocabulary, and sometimes there are also many videos that use clear and easy-

to-understand language, then there are also various types of duration provided, that can give listeners the freedom to listen as they want" (MA, Personal interview, April 13, 2023).

DISCUSSION

Based on research that has been conducted, ICT-based learning media is of more interest to participants. This is because it can increase enthusiasm for learning and also broaden insight. One of the most popular types of medical learning and entertainment is YouTube. Learning English using the YouTube application will give an impression of more fun for EFL learners. Internet network-based learning will leave a different impression and change students' perceptions of learning English (Zatulifa, 2018). Learning English via YouTube makes it easier for participants to access and search for the material they want to study. Apart from that, the use of YouTube learning media is more interesting and flexible (Wang & Chen, 2020). In line with what IU said regarding the ease of learning using YouTube as follows,

"Well, I think YouTube is also very, very helpful to improve it. That's because using YouTube is easily accessible anytime, anywhere, and while doing anything, for example, playing English songs before going to sleep so that our brains are fresh and also subconsciously this habit can improve our listening skills." (IU, Personal interview, April 13, 2023)

The YouTube channel used by participants in this research is MercifulServant. Based on the results of the interview, the YouTube channel has several weaknesses and strengths. Some of the participants' answers regarding the advantages and disadvantages they felt while using YouTube MercifulServant are summarized in the following table,

Table 2. Strengths and Weakness of Channel "MercifulServant"

STRENGTH	LA	AAP	IU	MY	MA
Attractive visuals	-	-	✓	✓	✓
Pronunciation is clear	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The delivering content was firm and clear	✓	-	✓	-	✓
The discussion of the content is educative and adds insight	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Short content duration	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
There are helpful transcripts/subtitles	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Many new vocabularies obtained	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
WEAKNESS	LA	AAP	IU	MY	MA
Monotonous content when viewed continuously	✓	✓	-	-	-

Rigid delivery of content	-	✓	-	-	-
The audio is too fast	-	✓	-	-	-
Difficulty due to Native speakers	-	-	-	-	✓

According to the provided table, participants generally evaluate the channel in a good manner. The table displays the quantity of participants who see the benefits of this YouTube channel.

Researchers also asked the participants' perceptions about improving their listening skills while using the YouTube channel. Some of them said there was an increase. However, researchers also compared it with the results of preliminary research which were analyzed using CEFR guidelines.

1. Participants with English proficiency Upper Intermediate (B2)

The description of the CEFR descriptor table at level B2 is "the persons can understand recordings in the standard form of the language and identify speaker viewpoints and attitudes as well as the information content and also can identify the speaker's mood, tone, etc" (Piccardo et al., 2018). The participant at this level is LA. The video watched by LA is relatively slow and clear. With level B2, this video is easy for LA to understand. From the answers given by LA during preliminary research, she was able to mention the five important points in the discussion of the video. When asked about the implicit information in the video, she could not explain it. Apart from that, LA also had no difficulty with the speed and clarity of the audio. As stated in the following interview, "The video is easy to hear, the pronunciation is clear, and adds much vocab" (LA, Personal interview, April 12, 2023).

From the analysis results, LA is still classified as upper intermediate level (B2) because, at an advanced level (C1), it must be able to identify the speaker's implicit attitude, while LA can only answer at level B2. So, there was no increase in listening skills among these participants.

2. Participants with English proficiency Elementary (A2)

The description of the CEFR descriptor table at level A2 is "can understand the most important information, that audio speaks slowly and clearly" (Piccardo et al., 2018). At this level, there are four participants, namely IU, AAP, MY, and MA. The videos used in preliminary research are relatively slow and clear. Firstly, from the answers IU gave during preliminary research, IU was able to answer the important points, she was able to mention all the points in the video briefly but there was one answer that was not quite right. Then, AAP could only mention three of the five things mentioned in the video. AAP considers the audio to be quite fast. Next, MY could answer important points completely, but just like IU, one point was answered incorrectly. Lastly, MA can mention all the important points correctly.

From the answers of the four participants, the three participants were able to answer almost perfectly the important points in the video. If seen from the descriptor table at level B1 "Can understand the information content of the majority of recorded or broadcast audio material delivered in clear standard speech and can

understand the main points of simpler recorded material about familiar subjects delivered relatively slowly and clearly" (Piccardo et al., 2018). From the results of IU's answer, she was able to mention all five points, even though one was not quite right, but she was able to mention them sequentially at a relatively slow audio speed. Based on this, IU is already included in level B1, this is also confirmed by the results of the interview as follows, "For me, this channel can help my listening. At first, I didn't like listening, but this channel can help improve my listening skills" (Interview, April 13, 2023).

For the answer from AAP, he still found it difficult to hear the audio which he thought was fast. Apart from that, AAP was only able to answer some of the main points of the video. So, AAP's abilities have not yet improved and remain at Elementary (A2) level. This is in line with his answer during the interview, "In terms of improving listening, it's lacking, but the content is interesting" (AAP, Personal interview, April 12, 2023).

Meanwhile, MY managed to address all five issues sequentially, although with some inaccuracies. The audio was intelligible and delivered at an appropriate pace, allowing him to articulate the key ideas. MY is classified as an intermediate level (B1) because to its ability to comprehend and respond to the major ideas presented in an audio at a moderate pace with clarity. As he said during the following interview, "So far, there has been quite an increase. Because I've seen a number of videos so the more, I come here I feel there is an increase" (MY, Personal interview, April 13, 2023).

Furthermore, MA demonstrated an improvement in his listening abilities as seen by his ability to accurately answer questions and effectively recall key topics from the film without encountering any difficulties. Therefore, he falls inside the B1 proficiency level, which is considered intermediate. During the interview, MA also reported an upward trend,

"Yeah, can improve. Because there is a new vocab that I got after listening to it from this YouTube channel. Usually, when I watch videos on this channel, I'm looking for the meaning of words that I don't know the meaning of so I can add to my new vocabulary." (MA, Personal interview, April 13, 2023).

Based on the results of this analysis, the three participants experienced improvements both in terms of the perceptions they expressed during interviews and also from the results of preliminary research.

After knowing the perceptions of several participants which were strengthened by the results of the CEFR analysis, the researchers also concluded the reasons why some participants said their listening skills had improved. Several participants said that they felt a positive impact while using the YouTube channel. The positive impacts felt include,

1. Added new vocabulary

Students who master much vocabulary will continue to acquire new vocabulary, such as learning to listen to audio while watching videos (Peters & Webb, 2018). Like the participants who used the MercifulServant YouTube channel to improve their listening skills. The participants acquired much new vocabulary after

listening to and watching content from the YouTube channel. The vocabulary obtained is not only about Islam but also includes some general vocabulary. This is because some of the content on this YouTube channel discusses general things, for example, technology, health, and so on.

2. Getting used to hearing audio from native speakers

The longer they use this YouTube channel as a medium for learning and listening, the more they get used to hearing audio from native speakers. In the MercifulServant channel content, most of them are native speakers. This makes them accustomed to and quite capable of understanding audio from native speakers. This also makes it easier for them to take tests that use native speakers.

3. Increased enthusiasm for learning.

Participants felt more enthusiastic about learning if they used ICT-based learning media because they were considered more interesting and fun. During the interview, several participants said that using the MercifulServant YouTube channel increased their enthusiasm for learning listening skills. Some of them consider listening to be a difficult skill. Having fun with media will make them more enthusiastic about learning to listen.

4. Add new insights

Apart from the positive impact in the context of listening skills, this YouTube channel also provides new insights for participants. As previously explained, this channel is an Islamic channel that discusses several things from an Islamic perspective. So many new insights were discovered, especially in the Islamic sphere, that participants did not know about.

The explanation above is the result of research that has been carried out. Some of the participants gave positive perceptions and some felt there was an improvement. Apart from that, they also mentioned the reasons that made them say there was an increase in listening skills as explained above.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicated that some individuals had positive attitudes. Furthermore, out of the five participants, three individuals had enhanced listening proficiency levels. During the interview, the participants expressed positive perceptions of this YouTube channel. According to the viewpoints of the participants on the YouTube channel, this resource is very valuable for enhancing individual listening abilities and gaining new perspectives, particularly in the field of theological beliefs. Regarding the effects experienced by the participants, one notable result is the acquisition of vocabulary, including Islamic terminology and more broadly. Furthermore, the participants developed a greater familiarity with native speakers' accents, which enhanced their desire and eagerness to enhance their listening abilities. This study has significant implications for the field of education, particularly in the instruction of auditory comprehension abilities. With the advancements in technology, the practice of listening-based learning is also expanding via the use of ICT-based media. Based on the participants' perspectives, this YouTube channel may serve as a reliable source for accessing educational content via Islamic video channels. The findings of this research are anticipated to cultivate students' excitement for acquiring listening abilities via the utilization of this

YouTube channel. The researchers propose incorporating audio-visual learning resources, such as the MercifulServant YouTube channel, into the learning process of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to enhance their listening abilities. In order to enhance the study, future researchers ought to delve into the subject matter more extensively in order to get more comprehensive data.

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