

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explains the research that contains the research background, research questions, research purposes, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous studies.

A. Background

English has established itself as the global lingua franca, functioning as the primary medium of communication in international education, business, and cross-cultural interaction. Within the four fundamental language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—listening holds a particularly crucial position as it provides the primary input for language acquisition. Rost (2001) argues that listening is the first skill learners acquire and it underpins the development of subsequent language abilities. Similarly, Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis highlights that most comprehensible input necessary for language acquisition is obtained through listening. Without sufficient listening proficiency, learners will struggle to develop communicative competence, as weaknesses in this receptive skill may hinder both productive skills and overall language development (Harmer, 2007; Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Although listening is essential, it remains one of the most difficult skills for learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Vandergrift (2007) notes that listening comprehension requires both bottom-up decoding and top-down use of prior knowledge, which makes it cognitively demanding. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) also observe that learners often struggle with factors such as speech rate, limited vocabulary, and unfamiliar accents. These persistent challenges inevitably place greater responsibility on lecturers, who are expected not only to facilitate the teaching of listening but also to evaluate students' progress effectively. As a result, lecturers need appropriate assessment practices

that can accurately capture students' listening competence and support their overall language development.

Assessment constitutes an integral component of the teaching and learning process because it provides information about students' progress and guides instructional decisions. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) highlight that assessment is not merely a tool for measuring outcomes but also a continuous process that informs teaching and supports learning. Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) describe assessment as the systematic collection of information about learners' performance to evaluate their proficiency and development. Effective assessment, therefore, ensures that instruction is aligned with learners' needs and that learning objectives are met. In the context of listening, accurate assessment is particularly crucial, as it allows lecturers to identify students' comprehension abilities and address specific difficulties in processing spoken input.

In order to be effective, assessment is generally understood to consist of several key components. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) point out that assessment involves not only the purpose for which it is conducted but also the methods and techniques employed, the criteria used for judging performance, the type of feedback provided, and the scoring procedures applied. These components ensure that assessment is systematic, transparent, and aligned with instructional goals. In practice, the purpose defines whether the assessment is diagnostic, formative, or summative; the method provides the overarching framework; the technique specifies the concrete classroom activity; the criteria and rubrics determine the standards of performance; feedback supports learner improvement; and scoring translates performance into measurable outcomes. Understanding assessment in this comprehensive way highlights its complexity and reinforces the need for lecturers to choose approaches that best capture learners' abilities in specific skills, such as listening.

Within language education, assessment is commonly divided into traditional and alternative forms. Traditional assessment, such as multiple-choice tests or paper-and-pencil examinations, often focuses on discrete

linguistic items and emphasizes summative measurement of outcomes. While such assessments can provide standardized and objective scores, they are frequently criticized for failing to capture learners' communicative abilities in authentic contexts (Brown, 2004). In contrast, alternative assessment emphasizes performance-based tasks that reflect real-life language use and provide a more holistic picture of learners' competence. According to O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996), alternative assessment techniques—such as portfolios, journals, projects, peer assessment, and self-assessment—are designed to evaluate what learners can actually do with language in meaningful contexts. This distinction underscores the potential of alternative assessment to offer more comprehensive insights into students' listening skills than traditional approaches alone.

Alternative assessment offers several advantages, particularly in assessing listening skills. It encourages active engagement, promotes critical thinking, and provides opportunities for learners to demonstrate their abilities in authentic communicative situations (Cheng & Fox, 2017). Moreover, it supports learner autonomy and reflective practice, which are essential for long-term language development. However, the implementation of alternative assessment is not without challenges. O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) caution that issues such as time constraints, the subjectivity of evaluation, and the need for clear rubrics often complicate its application. Similarly, Shohamy (2001) notes that teachers may struggle with balancing alternative approaches alongside institutional requirements for more standardized forms of testing. These realities highlight the dual nature of alternative assessment: while it promises a more holistic evaluation of learners' listening competence, it also demands careful planning and adaptability from lecturers.

In this study, the researcher explores the challenges faced by university-level EFL instructors in assessing listening using alternative assessment methods. According to Abeywickrama (2018), assessing a learner's listening capacity is important in teaching because it provides insight into their overall language competency and can be used to infer their speaking ability when oral

skills are absent. Listening gives language input for acquisition, which increases learning. Instead of oral assessments, instructors can assign written projects or collaborative tasks that encourage students to engage with spoken language in meaningful ways. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of research on innovative assessment strategies in higher education EFL settings.

B. Research Questions

Exploring alternative techniques in assessing students' listening skills is essential for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strategies involved in promoting effective listening practices, particularly in academic contexts. According to the washback effect, assessment is central to the learning experience. Therefore, if student learning is to be enhanced, methods of assessment should evolve as well (Nasab, 2015:168). Based on this assumption, the research questions for this study are:

1. What alternative assessment techniques are employed by EFL lecturers in listening classes at the State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung?
2. What challenges do lecturers face in implementing these alternative assessment techniques in listening classes?

C. Research Purposes

1. To identify the alternative assessment techniques used by EFL lecturers in listening classes at the State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung.
2. To explore the challenges encountered by lecturers in implementing these alternative assessment techniques.

D. Research Significances

1. Other Researchers

This study can serve as a reference for future researchers who aim to explore alternative assessment techniques, particularly in higher education contexts.

2. Lecturers

The findings of this research are intended to assist EFL lecturers in identifying effective strategies for implementing alternative assessments, as well as addressing the challenges of assessing listening skills in university-level classrooms.

E. Research Scope

The scope of this research covers two English lecturers at the State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung who teaches listening using alternative assessment techniques in EFL classrooms.

F. Conceptual Framework

Listening is a fundamental skill in second language acquisition because it provides the primary input for language learning. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis emphasizes that comprehensible input is the basis of language acquisition, and much of this input is received through listening. Rost (2001) further highlights that listening is often the first skill learners develop, serving as the foundation for the growth of other language abilities such as speaking, reading, and writing. Without sufficient listening competence, students may struggle to achieve communicative proficiency, as weaknesses in this receptive skill can hinder both productive skills and overall language development (Harmer, 2007).

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), listening is considered one of the most challenging skills for learners to master. Vandergrift (2007) notes that listening comprehension requires the coordination of both bottom-up processes, such as decoding sounds, and top-down processes, such

as activating background knowledge, which makes it cognitively demanding. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) add that factors such as speech rate, unfamiliar vocabulary, and varied accents further complicate comprehension for EFL learners. These challenges underscore the importance of effective classroom instruction and assessment practices, as lecturers must be able to evaluate students' listening performance accurately in order to provide appropriate pedagogical support.

Assessment plays a vital role in the teaching and learning process as it enables lecturers to monitor students' progress and inform instructional decisions. Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) explain that assessment consists of multiple components, including purpose, method, technique, criteria, feedback, and scoring. Within this framework, alternative assessment is conceptualized as a method that emphasizes authentic and performance-based evaluation rather than relying solely on traditional paper-and-pencil tests. Richards and Schmidt (2010) similarly note that assessment should be viewed as a systematic process of gathering information about learners' performance in ways that reflect real communication. This perspective highlights the importance of alternative assessment as a means of capturing learners' listening competence in more meaningful contexts.

Alternative assessment is operationalized through a range of techniques that directly engage learners in demonstrating their language ability. According to O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) and Shohamy (2001), techniques such as peer assessment, self-assessment, portfolios, project-based tasks, reflective journals, listening logs, oral presentations, and in-class observations offer more holistic insights into learners' skills compared to traditional formats. These techniques not only evaluate students' comprehension but also foster learner autonomy and reflective practice, making them highly relevant in the development of listening proficiency. In this study, these nine techniques are collectively identified as Variable X, representing the specific practices employed by lecturers to assess students' listening skills.

Although alternative assessment techniques provide richer and more authentic insights into students' listening abilities, their implementation often presents considerable challenges for lecturers. O'Malley and Valdez Pierce (1996) point out that issues such as time constraints, the need for detailed rubrics, and the subjectivity of scoring can complicate classroom practice. Shohamy (2001) further emphasizes that institutional pressures, large class sizes, and limited resources may restrict the extent to which lecturers can fully adopt alternative techniques. These challenges suggest that while alternative assessment offers strong pedagogical benefits, it also demands additional planning, training, and adaptability from lecturers to be applied effectively. Thus, Variable Y in this study refers to the challenges faced by lecturers in implementing alternative assessment techniques in listening classes.

Drawing on these perspectives, the conceptual framework of this study integrates three key variables: listening as the core language skill under evaluation, alternative assessment techniques as the pedagogical means of assessment, and the challenges that lecturers encounter in their implementation. Together, these variables provide the foundation for understanding how lecturers assess listening in EFL contexts and what practical difficulties influence their choices. Specifically, this framework underpins the exploration of which alternative assessment techniques are employed by EFL lecturers in listening classes at the State Islamic University Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung and the challenges they face in applying them. By combining theoretical insights with practical realities, this study aims to bridge the gap between the conceptualization of assessment in the literature and its implementation in the classroom.

G. Previous Studies

According to the study "EFL Teachers' Alternative Assessment Methods in Online Speaking Class" conducted by Zahrotushsholikhah (2021), all four teachers observed and interviewed used alternative assessment methods such as Performance Assessment, Observation, Classroom Presentation, Video/Audio

Taping, Short Plays / Drama, and Open-Ended Question. The findings also revealed that performance assessment and video/audio taping are the most commonly used alternative assessment methods, while open-ended questions are the least frequently used. This study falls under the university level.

According to the study conducted by Primary (2015) titled “Reinforcing Alternative Assessment to Promote Authentic Assessment in English Young Learners’ Classroom”, teachers must be concerned with more than just the score as a result of traditional assessment; they must also use alternative assessment to supplement and reinforce the authentic assessment, which provides numerous benefits for the improvement of the instructional process for young learners. This study falls under the primary or elementary school level.

According to Afrianto (2017)'s study titled "Challenges of Using Portfolio Assessment as an Alternative Assessment Method for Teaching English in Indonesian Schools," one of the alternative assessment methods used to teach English, portfolio assessment, has its own set of challenges when it comes to implementation, including lower reliability, high cost, a high demand for welltrained professional teachers, and an unsupported learning environment. This study falls under junior or senior high school level.

According to the study "The Impact of Formative Assessment on EFL Students' Listening Efficacy and Anxiety" conducted by Bayat, Jamshidipour, and Hashemi (2017), the focus was on university-level students. The study found that continuous formative assessment improved students’ listening comprehension, reduced anxiety, and enhanced listening efficacy, demonstrating how alternative assessment methods can foster both academic success and emotional well-being in learners.

Similarly, Zarei and Yasami (2016), in their study "The Effect of Formative Assessment and Remedial Instruction on EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension," examined university-level EFL students. They found that combining formative assessment with remedial instruction significantly enhanced listening comprehension, highlighting the importance of integrated assessment approaches in higher education.

In the study "Using Alternative Assessment to Improve EFL Learners' Learning Achievement: From Theory to Practice," Hoang and Nguyen (2019) explored the use of self-assessment and portfolio assessment in university-level EFL classes. The findings indicated that these alternative assessment methods fostered critical thinking, self-regulation, and improved listening comprehension, emphasizing the value of real-world and reflective learning strategies.

According to Monib, Karimi, and Nijat (2020), in their systematic review titled "Effects of Alternative Assessment in EFL Classroom," various studies across multiple educational levels demonstrated the positive impact of alternative assessments, including portfolios and self-assessment, on developing listening skills and other language competencies.

The study by Swaie and Algazo (2023), titled "Assessment Purposes and Methods Used by EFL Teachers in Secondary Schools in Jordan," was conducted at the secondary school level. It examined how alternative assessment methods were applied in listening instruction and addressed the challenges teachers faced, including student engagement and comprehension.

In the study "Online English Language Learners' Perceptions of Portfolio Assessment" by Baturay (2015), university-level EFL learners expressed positive perceptions of portfolio assessment. The study found that portfolios promoted learner autonomy, enhanced motivation, and encouraged reflective learning, especially in listening tasks.

This study differs from prior studies in a number of ways, including the use of alternative evaluation for listening skill, whereas earlier studies defined alternative assessment in the speaking class. Furthermore, this study addresses the challenges associated with assessing students' listening skills using alternative assessment methodologies.

According to the study conducted by Wang and Chen (2020) titled "Exploring EFL University Students' Perceptions of Alternative Assessment in Listening and Speaking Courses," the researchers found that students preferred alternative assessments such as portfolios, presentations, and self-assessment

activities over traditional exams. The findings also revealed that these methods enhanced students' motivation and provided a more comprehensive evaluation of their listening and speaking abilities.

According to the study by Shrestha (2017) titled "Alternative Assessment Techniques for University Level Students: A Case Study in EFL Listening and Speaking Classes," the implementation of techniques such as peer assessment, group projects, and oral summaries was effective in promoting active listening and comprehension. The study highlighted that alternative assessments encouraged deeper engagement with listening materials and improved students' critical thinking skills.

According to the study conducted by Azizi and Nemati (2022) titled "The Effectiveness of Alternative Assessment on Iranian University EFL Students' Listening Comprehension," it was discovered that alternative assessment methods, particularly project-based assessment and reflective journals, significantly improved students' listening comprehension performance compared to those assessed by traditional tests.

According to the study by Nurhayati (2019) titled "Project-Based Alternative Assessment for EFL University Students' Listening Skill," using project-based learning combined with alternative assessments such as podcasts, video projects, and reflective portfolios helped students develop better listening strategies. The study concluded that such alternative methods made students more autonomous and actively involved in their learning processes.

Most previous studies have primarily concentrated on investigating the effectiveness of one or two alternative assessment methods, such as portfolio (Afrianto, 2017; Baturay, 2015), self-assessment (Hoang & Nguyen, 2019), or project-based assessment (Nurhayati, 2019) in improving EFL students' performance. While several studies have explored alternative assessments in the context of speaking classes (Zahrotushsholikhah, 2021), or mixed listening-speaking contexts (Shrestha, 2017; Wang & Chen, 2020), few have focused solely on listening skill within the EFL context at Islamic higher education institutions.

The present study provides a more comprehensive exploration by examining a wide range of alternative assessment methods—nine in total—applied in listening instruction. In addition to identifying the methods used, this research places emphasis on the challenges lecturers face during the implementation process.

