

# Brainstorming Implementation on Students' Difficulties in Listening Skills

Irmawaty Hasyim<sup>1</sup>, Salmia Syarifuddin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>English Education, Universitas Muslim Indonesia, Makassar, Indonesia

E-mail: [irmawaty.hasyim@umi.ac.id](mailto:irmawaty.hasyim@umi.ac.id), [salmia.syarifuddin@umi.ac.id](mailto:salmia.syarifuddin@umi.ac.id)

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article History:

Received : Jan 29, 2025

Revised : June 11, 2025

Accepted : Dec 25, 2025

Available online : Dec 31, 2025

### Keywords:

brainstorming, listening skill, students' difficulties

### \*Corresponding Author:

[irmawaty.hasyim@umi.ac.id](mailto:irmawaty.hasyim@umi.ac.id)

## ABSTRACT

*The aim of this research was to describe how the brainstorming technique worked in improving students' difficulties in comprehending listening audio recordings in a listening class. Brainstorming was the process of generating new ideas without criticizing or evaluating those ideas during the class session to encourage students to participate freely and spontaneously in class discussion. As a result, the class atmosphere became relaxed, and students felt free and ready to follow the listening session. Brainstorming techniques involved pre-listening activities as well as while-listening and post-listening activities. In this research, the results of this free discussion were reflected in students' free-writing tasks about their learning experiences in listening skills. This research applied a descriptive qualitative method, in which writing data were obtained from 24 students who attended a listening class in their first year in the 2024–2025 academic year. The research instruments were texts, audio recordings, and written observation sheets.*

*This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.  
Copyright © 2025 by Irmawaty Hasyim & Salmia Syarifuddin. Published by iTELL Association.*



## 1. INTRODUCTION

English as an international language is used not only in countries where English is the main language of everyday life, but also in countries where English is used as a foreign language or English as a Foreign Language (EFL), such as Indonesia. The use of English in the era of globalization increased dramatically by more than 70% in 2000, encompassing the world of science, and as much as 90% of information worldwide uses English (Syarifah, 2022). This situation presents a challenge in the 2020s, namely the importance of having skills to communicate in English, especially for learners and professional workers. To be able to communicate well, four basic skills are expected to be mastered, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among the four skills, listening is the first skill that humans learn from birth; therefore, it is considered the first skill acquired before learning language production.

The biggest challenge in learning listening is the lack of material that can be easily understood by learners, especially those whose English proficiency is still limited. External reasons include noisy surroundings when audio recordings are played, while internal reasons may come from students' limited knowledge and vocabulary related to the listening materials presented.

For example, in learning to listen to short conversations, the speakers are usually only two people discussing simple or common topics in daily life. However, because learners are not proficient in using English, let alone understanding conversations heard through audio recordings, they find it difficult to comprehend the listening material. This situation is different when a listening script is provided by the teacher in class to help students recognize the sounds and meaning of the conversation.

In comprehending listening material, such problems faced by English learners require a learning strategy known as the Top-Down Strategy, which helps learners understand listening comprehension (Syarifah, 2022). Other research applied this strategy in a reading class, where the researcher was concerned about students' understanding of hierarchical procedures; therefore, extensive exposure was needed to improve students' comprehension in English (Albiladi, 2019). However, the top-down strategy applied in this research focused on

the use of brainstorming techniques as the implementation of the strategy, particularly in learning Listening Proficiency for English Language Education students in the 2024/2025 academic year.

In this study, the researcher adapted listening texts and audio materials from Collins' publication entitled *Listening for IELTS*, written by Fiona Aish and Jo Tomlinson in 2011. Considering that listening skills are still not fully mastered by students due to limited access to reference sources and difficulties in adaptation, listening proficiency is still perceived as needing "help," even though learning resources such as e-books and listening packages containing texts and audio can be easily accessed. It was expected that students would be able to master the listening materials well and recognize appropriate learning references for listening proficiency or listening comprehension.

The Top-Down Strategy is basically a technique that focuses on students' global understanding by activating stored schemata, which refers to overall understanding and interpretation of texts. Meanwhile, Nguyen (2018) defined schemata as basic knowledge (background knowledge) and global understanding. According to Brown, nine activities are included as part of the top-down strategy, namely brainstorming, mind mapping, discussion, games, guiding questions, pictures or diagrams, prediction, elimination, and skimming. Students' development of listening skills requires intensive language learning because listening is a crucial and critical skill, not only as a receptive skill but also as a tool needed for the development of spoken language ability (Lestari et al., 2019).

Related research on the impact of brainstorming on students showed that using the brainstorming method in curricula and teachers' guidebooks is recommended and can be applied in further studies to identify its impact on other language skills and learners (Alkhazaleh & Safi, 2024).

This research aimed to describe students' difficulties in learning listening skills, in which the researcher adapted pre-listening materials from Collins and modified them based on students' needs in discussion topic content. The top-down strategy was first introduced by Herbert A. Simon, an expert in computer science and cognitive psychology, in the 1950s in the context of decision-making and problem-solving. In English learning, the top-down strategy is applied by starting from general understanding or the big picture before moving into more specific details. For example, teachers may provide context or background information before students listen to a text so that they can understand the content better. This strategy helps students connect new information with prior knowledge, thereby improving comprehension.

The activities included in the Top-Down Strategy in listening instruction are described in three stages, namely pre-listening, whilst-listening, and post-listening activities. Pre-listening activities include: (1) brainstorming, which involves discussing topics related to the listening text to activate prior knowledge and generate predictions; (2) image or video cues, which involve providing visual aids to help students anticipate content; and (3) titles and questions, which involve presenting key titles and questions to guide listening focus. Whilst-listening activities include: (1) note-taking, which encourages students to write down main ideas and keywords rather than every word; (2) summarizing, which asks students to restate main points in their own words; and (3) predicting, which asks students to anticipate what will happen next based on the audio recording. Post-listening activities include: (1) discussion, which engages students in explaining their understanding and opinions; (2) writing, which asks students to write summaries, retellings, or responses to the listening text; and (3) role play, which encourages students to act out scenes or dialogues based on the listening material.

Brainstorming is a pre-listening or preliminary activity in listening instruction that involves discussing topics related to listening texts. This activity aims to provoke students' general knowledge so that they are encouraged to speak, take notes independently, and practice predicting activities or information related to the listening theme. Related studies have shown that students' difficulties in listening include a lack of vocabulary, speaking ability, concentration, accent familiarity, speed of speech, and motivation (Fadilah et al., 2024). However, in this research, such difficulties were considered to be addressed by applying brainstorming before class began, starting with Collins' directions, followed by listening to adapted audio songs, lyrics, and movies selected by the researcher to meet students' learning needs.

Brainstorming was originally introduced by Alex F. Osborn in 1953 (Besant, n.d.). It can be applied in listening classes through several activities, including: (1) group discussion, in which students discuss main ideas after listening and present them to the class; (2) mind mapping, where students organize ideas and relationships visually; (3) open-ended questions, which encourage critical and creative thinking, such as "What do you think will happen next?"; (4) collaborative notes, where students work together to record ideas using tools such as Google Docs; and (5) role-playing, where students act out characters or situations from the listening text. In this

study, the researcher adapted collaborative note-taking into class activity records and modified group discussions into whole-class discussions. Through the brainstorming technique, this study emphasized that it is not sufficient to merely access and download learning materials; they must also be adapted linguistically, for example into Indonesian, to ensure understanding by both teachers and students.

Table 1 shows the self-directed learning efforts of the 24 participants. Most participants (83%) preferred using songs as a tool to support listening learning, followed by listening to podcasts and audiobooks. Watching Western movies without subtitles was also a popular preference, chosen by 50% of participants. Additionally, reading and writing new books and vocabulary were preferred by 50% of the participants.

**Table 1**

*Participants self-method effort in learning listening*

No	Items	%
1	Listen to songs as well as audiobooks and podcasts	83
2	Watching western movies without subtitles	50
3	Reading and writing new preferences	33

In learning listening, the participants' self-study methods in this research were developed based on their difficulties in learning listening from both external and internal factors. The external factors referred to the availability of capable teachers to teach listening and facilities such as speakers and available audio recordings, whether provided digitally or manually. The internal factors were related to participants' problems with focus and concentration, which made listening learning consistently difficult for them.

## 2. METHODS

In this study, the researcher employed a qualitative research method. Qualitative research refers to an approach in which the researcher exercises a high level of critical engagement throughout all stages of the research process. This study was categorized as descriptive qualitative research and followed several systematic steps: (1) Data Collection, in which all participants' written reflections were collected for analysis, and listening materials were adapted by the researcher for use as brainstorming activity materials; (2) Data Transcription, involving the transcription of participants' handwritten texts into typed text and the coding of the data to facilitate analysis; (3) Data Coding, which involved identifying themes or categories that emerged from the participants' written data; (4) Thematic Analysis, conducted after the data were coded to identify patterns and relationships among emerging themes, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of participants' learning experiences in listening; (5) Data Interpretation, which involved interpreting the findings of the thematic analysis and addressing the research questions; and (6) Reporting Findings, in which a research report was prepared that presented the main findings, interpretations, and research implications in a systematic manner.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study and discusses the results in relation to the research questions. The findings are compared and contrasted with relevant existing literature, and interpretations and explanations are provided to clarify the results.

### 3.1. Results

Brainstorming as a top-down implementation in listening learning is intended so that students can make listening learning "seem easy". The brainstorming methods can be applied in listening classes, including by activating group discussions, making maps, open-ended questions, collaborative notes and role-playing, where in this study, the researcher adapted "collaborative notes" modifying them into class activity notes and adapting "group discussions" into direct discussions with all students in the class.

The following material from Listening for IELTS By Collins Chapter 4 of The Family with the audio recording as the instrument of Brainstorming.

**Table 2***Direction of listening task taken from Listening for IELTS by Collins, 2011*

No	Directions	Items
1	Match the words, discuss with your friends	Picture matching
2	Match, discuss with your friends	Discuss makes perfect
3	Matching words with correct preposition	Correct and incorrect
4	Complete the sentences	Missing words

The listening task above was delivered to students as a pre-listening task. It was arranged to be completed using mobile devices and as a seated activity so that students had to engage with one another. There was no evaluation or scoring involved; instead, the task functioned as a tool to unite students and prepare them to learn more complex topics from the listening material. These activities could be applied in various ways, including listening to songs, watching short movies, and listening to or watching news content.

### 3.2. Discussion

Brainstorming as a top-down implementation in listening learning was intended to help students perceive listening learning as “easy.” The brainstorming methods could be applied in listening classes, including activating group discussions, creating maps, using open-ended questions, collaborative notes, and role-playing. In this study, the researcher adapted collaborative notes by modifying them into class activity notes and adapted group discussions into direct discussions involving all students in the class.

Similarly, the brainstorming methods could be applied in listening classes by activating group discussions, making mind maps, using open-ended questions, collaborative notes, and role-playing. In this study, the researcher adapted collaborative notes by modifying them into class activity notes and adapted group discussions into direct discussions involving all students in the class to ensure full participation during the pre-listening stage.

In carrying out pre-listening tasks or brainstorming activities adapted from Collins’ Listening for IELTS, and considering that technology and online media provided significant contributions to listening practices (Yusra & Hanifa, 2023), this e-book was taken into consideration due to its ease of access and its suitability for students’ level of understanding.

The next activity was a writing session, in which participants were asked to write down their English learning experiences, particularly related to listening skills. The writing focused on how participants learned to listen independently and the difficulties they faced during the listening process.

Based on the information shown in Table 1 regarding the categories of participants in learning listening skills, three items were related to the participants themselves. The category of learning to listen by utilizing the availability of songs and music through audio players, including podcasts, Spotify, and audiobooks, occupied the highest percentage, namely 83% of participants who learned listening through audio materials. This was followed by 50% of participants who used movies as a source of learning listening. Joining English clubs, both in person and within school and campus environments, as well as studying with fellow participants, was also a preferred choice, accounting for 33%. Other notable aspects included students’ encouragement of creativity, consistent efforts to find reading materials, and regular practice in writing in English, including learning new vocabulary.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Regarding listening literacy, the researcher analysed and discussed the data and obtained the following results. Basically, active mentors encouraged participants to be consistently diligent in reading, improving grammar, and practicing pronunciation by watching English television broadcasts.

The term *self-method* referred to the participants’ independent learning. In fact, this was based on the concept of student-centred learning; therefore, there was no reason not to learn listening skills due to a lack of facilities and infrastructure. The listening literacy that participants gained from high school, as well as from junior high school and elementary school through the university level, was part of their development in listening skills driven by the *self-method* attitude that had been developed since they were in high school. It was simply a matter of how listening skills were maintained over time.

The availability of infrastructure facilities, including qualified mentors for listening instruction, was accompanied by the participants' natural ability to learn listening skills. Therefore, it could be concluded that implementing brainstorming activities in listening classes was helpful for participants in preparing themselves for topics related to the learning materials. Furthermore, brainstorming in the form of initial discussions on the topic was conducted in each teaching hour and was very helpful for students in understanding the listening texts and audio materials that they were required to listen to.

## 5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In this section, the researcher acknowledges colleagues and participants engaged in this research as a mutual collaboration in which each party has played each important role contributing the development of knowledge particularly related to learning strategy.

## 6. REFERENCES

- Albiladi, W. S. (2019). *Web-based teaching and learning of English listening: A review of two learning platforms. On CALL*, the Newsletter of the Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section, TESOL International Association. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331701556>
- Alkhazaleh, M., & Safi, M. (2024). The impact of using the brainstorming method on the listening skills of tenth grade students. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 14(6), 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.36941/jesr-2024-0164>
- Besant, H. (2016). The journey of brainstorming. *Journal of Transformative Innovation*, 1(2). <https://www.regent.edu/journal/journal-of-transformative-innovation/the-history-of-brainstorming-alex-osborn/>
- Aish, F., & Tomlinson, J. (2011). *Listening for IELTS*. Collins.
- Fadilah, L., Islam, M. H., & Kholili, A. (2024). Investigating students' difficulties in learning listening comprehension skills at Uswatun Hasanah Senior High School. *EDUSAINTEK: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sains dan Teknologi*, 11(4), 1664–1676. <https://doi.org/10.47668/edusaintek.v11i4.1333>
- Lestari, R., Ikhsanudin, I., Gatot, Y., & Yuliana, S. (2019). An investigation of students' perceptions toward listening comprehension difficulties and top-down listening strategies. *Proceedings of FKIP Universitas Tanjungpura*, 2(2).
- Nguyen, C.-D., & Newton, J. (2018). Schemata in listening comprehension. In A. Burns & J. C. Richards (Eds.), *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.celt0592>
- Syarifah, D. (2022). Improving students' listening comprehension through the top-down technique. *Jurnal Multidisiplin Madani (MUDIMA)*, 2(3), 1181–1198. <https://journal.yp3a.org/index.php/mudima>
- Yusra, S. R., & Hanifa, R. (2023). Using online media for extensive listening practice. *Komposisi: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Seni*, 24(2), 133. <https://doi.org/10.24036/komposisi.v24i2.126565>