

NEED ANALYSIS ON ACTIVE-EMPATHIC LISTENING TRAINING FOR TEACHERS IN THE MERDEKA BELAJAR CURRICULUM

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Abstract: Most teachers have abilities to teach in the classroom. However, they lack knowledge and abilities of emphatic listening skills in teaching and interacting with their students. This study aimed to determine whether teachers require Active-Emphatic Listening (AEL) training as their soft skill to facilitate their teaching in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. The participants of this study were 17 primary school teachers, 6 lecturers of primary education majors and 5 educational trainers. This qualitative study was conducted by distributing an online survey to participants. The results showed that most teachers lack understanding of AEL skills and only limited teachers applied AEL when teaching in the classroom. Meanwhile, educational trainers and primary education lecturers stated that AEL is an important soft skill for teachers to communicate effectively with their students. It aligned with the students-centred approach in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, where effective listening is required to comprehend students' needs in the learning process. Therefore, primary school teachers require AEL training to improve their understanding and practice of teaching in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

Keywords: Active-Empathic; Listening; Merdeka Belajar

Accepted: September 2, 2024

Approved: November 3, 2023

Published: March 20, 2024



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INTRODUCTION

Listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning, and responding to spoken and nonverbal messages (ILA, 2012). It is a crucial and necessary aspect of the communication process and plays an important role in good interpersonal interaction (Maben & Gearhart, 2018). Listening activities refer to an active process of receiving stimulation or stimulus to the ear (DeVito, 2013). Moreover, active listening is a prerequisite for effective interpersonal communication and required for effective teaching and learning (Kourmousi et al., 2018). According to some scholars, active listening consists of at least three components. The first component entails showing interest in the speaker's message by nonverbal interaction in the form of back channelling. The second component is to resist passing judgment by paraphrasing the speaker's message. Third, active listening may include asking questions to elicit further information from the speaker about his or her beliefs or feelings (Weger, Castle Bell, Minei, & Robinson,

2014). Effective listening skill is necessary for learning because it allows listeners to completely understand the speaker's objectives and respond appropriately to cognitive-behavioral (Bond, 2012).

Furthermore, an aspect contributing to students difficulties to get knowledge from their teacher is derived from ineffective communication style. Learning will be lively and meaningful if the teachers' communication style matches the students' learning style (Urea, 2013). Many teachers got difficulties with the responsibility to be a good listener for their students, particularly when they are required to listen to their students stories (Oktavia & Purwanti, 2021). When teachers' communication is aligned with the communication demands of the students, learning will be simple and pleasurable. In contrast, an ineffective communication style will cause students to fail in their study (Sucia, 2017). Teachers should be able to communicate effectively with their students, colleagues, school administrators, parents, and the social community (Juniantari, 2017). Positive interaction patterns during learning with students can improve the classroom climate (Opiola, Alston, & Copeland-Kamp, 2020).

Moreover, the learning approach model promoted by the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is student-centred learning, which impacts on the requirement for teachers' skills in understanding their students. Teachers might have a better understanding of their students by listening carefully. Teachers do not always have to speak in order to comprehend their students; rather, teachers must be skilled at listening in order to get the significance of what the students require. However, teachers do not have the opportunity to enhance their active listening abilities because universities have no course on active-empatic listening skills and school are not providing training for teachers. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum which emphasizes education based on student needs is strongly tied to teachers' ability to listen to students. By listening students' voice, teachers can understand what students' need. Therefore, this study sought to explore: 1) teachers' knowlegde of AEL and their implementation at school; 2). the needs of AEL training for teacher in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

METHOD

The study employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing the survey technique as a tool for data collection. The participants in this study included 17 primary school teachers, 6 lecturers of the primary education department, and 5 educational trainers. The data acquired was divided into two categories: primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected from survey distributed to research participants. While secondary data was obtained from document analysis gathered from teacher education curricula at various universities. The data analysis process includes providing interpretations and meaning to raw data obtained through the survey (Creswell, 2015). The observations from many aspects were carried out using a triangulation technique, which included cross-examination of data from the survey and data from document analysis, with the goal of increasing accuracy and reducing potential bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion of the study based on the data analysis from respondents and documents are presented below, referring to the research questions.

Teachers knowledge and their implementation of AEL in schools

The results of the online survey revealed that teachers participants in this study were mostly unfamiliar with AEL. However, 6 out of 17 respondents (35.29%) admitted that they knowing about the AEL concept. Teachers in this study encounter problems differentiating between AEL as a communication skill and listening as a language proficiency. This condition can be identified from the following statement from two of the respondents (Excerpt 1 and 2).

To be honest, this is the first time I have heard of the term AEL, but if I read the meaning of the term, it is already used in the learning in my classroom. (Excerpt 1)

For me, the term AEL is something new. But, previously what I knew was listening language skills. (Excerpt 2)

Based on the data analysis, only a few teachers comprehensively understand on the significance of AEL. They shared their proficiency in utilizing AEL for communication purposes. Furthermore, they told their experiences in employing AEL to interact with students within the classroom setting during the process of learning. These individuals assert that AEL play significant roles, particularly in comprehending the educational needs of students during their learning journey, as indicated in Excerpt 3.

In my opinion, AEL is necessary for a teacher because a teacher must also be able to listen attentively to other people, particularly their students. (Excerpt 3)

Furthermore, 2 out of 17 teachers stated that they had implemented AEL as a way of communicating with students at school. This was revealed in their statements as in Excerpt 4. However, most of them did not have experiences in implementing AEL because they really did not know the meaning of AEL itself.

When students express their opinions in learning, we listen carefully to conclude and review the students' understanding based on existing theory or experience. Another example is when students express their feelings or express their feelings. As teachers, we pay attention and respond to what the participants conveyed as a form of problem-solving. (Excerpt 4)

The needs of AEL training for teachers in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

According to the data obtained from a survey, all participants of lecturers of primary education (N=6) stated that AEL is an essential skill that teachers must possess in the process of learning. The lecturers argued that AEL can be categorized into two sub-

categories, namely personality and social competencies. These competencies were considered as part of the four essential competencies that teachers must possess, as mandated by the teacher and lecturer laws in Indonesia. These four competencies include personality, pedagogical, social, and professional skills.

Overall, AEL may be found in all essential competencies, but in my opinion, it is most prominently included in teachers' social skills (Excerpt 5)

One of the lecturers emphasized the significant impact of listening skills on students' personalities. Particularly, when teachers were accompanying elementary and middle school students who require mental care, it was crucial for them to possess strong empathy skills. This enables them to provide appropriate treatment to students after attentively listening to their concerns and needs, as stated by respondent in Excerpt 6.

AEL is included in personality competency. Every teachers should have this ability. (Excerpt 6)

Based on the examination of the teacher education curriculum documents conducted by researcher, it showed that no course in primary education department which focused on AEL skills. Consequently, despite being acknowledged as significant by the academic community, integrating AEL skills into the curriculum framework for aspiring teachers at the faculty remains absent. This data revealed that teachers need additional soft skills of AEL, which have not been addressed prior to the commencement of their teaching careers.

Moreover, the survey of educational trainers revealed that they shared their experiences in implementing AEL, including using AEL techniques when engaging with training participants.

As a trainer, AEL is very effective. Such as understanding the questions of training participants, listening to participants' explanations in task presentations, and determining the appropriate response to the person they are talking to. (Excerpt 7)

Additionally, some trainers told their experiences in coaching school principals and teachers that integrating AEL was a valuable and practical educational skill. They stated that teachers who have AEL skills is better equipped to comprehend their students. Furthermore, they elaborated that AEL skills can uncover implicit or unspoken messages. By employing AEL skills, teachers' empathetic capacity is enhanced, allowing for greater attentiveness to students, even with the simple act of listening.

I did this several times to the principal, teachers, and pupils. Typically, during the coaching process or other activities requiring active listening. When using AEL, I will be completely physically, cognitively, and emotionally engaged in order to listen with all of my senses. (Excerpt 8)

AEL is very relevant to the skills needs of teachers in the independent learning curriculum, as stated by one of the trainers or facilitators of Sekolah Penggerak in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, as written in the following statement:

AEL is very relevant and has a good impact on increasing teachers' skills in assisting students in learning. Because AEL is not just an ordinary skill, but can help students feel appreciated by their teachers. This happened because the teacher wanted to listen to his students attentively.
(Excerpt 9)

This experience is in accordance with the student-centered learning approach implemented in Merdeka Belajar, where student-centered learning is the focus of each individual (Capt & Oliver, 2012). When teachers have good listening skills, they can use them to gain an understanding of their students' needs. At the same time, they engaged in a learning process that was set to individual differences.

CONCLUSION

AEL soft skill is valuable in learning, particularly in teaching communication between teachers and students. However, there were still many teachers who did not understand AEL and practice it. This fact was supported by the lecturers of primary education who stated that AEL was not taught in education faculty, even though they agreed that AEL was important for teachers. In addition, trainers of Sekolah Penggerak also recommended that AEL training was highly recommended because it was very relevant to the needs of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. It was used in situations where communication was something needed for student-centered learning strategies. As the Merdeka Belajar curriculum applied a student-centered learning strategy for students, proper application of this technique will take much experience on the part of the learning. AEL is a skill that cannot be taught orally but must be practised through a series of practical tasks to be understood. Training which uses an experience-based learning model will increase teachers' soft skills to communicate with students by AEL skills effectively.

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