

## HARMONIZING SOUND AND SCRIPT: INTEGRATING PHONETIC SYMBOLS WITHIN THE LEXICAL APPROACH TO IMPROVE EFL LISTENING SKILL

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APA Citation: Susanto, S., & Nanda, D. S. (2024). Harmonizing sound and script: Integrating phonetic symbols within the lexical approach to improve EFL listening skill. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, 12(1), 177-192. <https://doi.org/10.25134/erjee.v12i1.9224>

Received: 12-10-2023

Accepted: 11-12-2023

Published: 28-02-2024

**Abstract:** Phonetic symbols play an important role in linguistics, representing the phonological attributes of words in pronunciation and orthography. Its main function is to improve the identification and understanding of words in spoken and written language. This research focuses on the use of phonetic symbols in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to improve students' clarity and understanding, integrated in lexical approach, a pedagogical paradigm that underscores the significance of mastering vocabulary and language components such as collocations, phrases, and idiomatic expressions. The research participants were 46 students from the English Language Education Department, Universitas Bandar Lampung University, Indonesia. With the lexical approach, the research uses a classroom action model to improve students' listening skills through the use of phonetic symbols. The results showed that students' comprehension of spoken texts improved with the introduction of phonetic symbols, and 78% of students achieved a passing score of 75 or higher. These findings highlight the positive impact of incorporating phonetic symbols in a lexical approach on improving students' language skills in an EFL context. The implications show that the use of phonetic symbols in the lexical approach can be a valuable pedagogical strategy for educators aimed at improving students' listening skills and language proficiency.

**Keywords:** *lexical approach; listening skill; phonetic symbols; vocabulary acquisition.*

### INTRODUCTION

Listening constitutes a fundamental and intricate facet of the broader auditory process, encompassing the reception and comprehension of spoken language (Luo et al., 2021; Wolf et al., 2019). It serves as a conduit for effective communication, involving an interactive exchange between the speaker and the listener. Successful communication hinges not solely on the auditory perception of sounds but also on the comprehensive understanding of the conveyed message. In this context, the aptitude of listeners is assessed based on their capacity to fully grasp the intended significance of the speaker's discourse. This illuminates the dynamic and participatory nature of the listening process, wherein listeners actively engage with each individual word, processing them in real-time. Listening is, in essence, an active cognitive endeavor that demands the active involvement of listeners in the reception and interpretation of the speaker's

message (Edwards, 2011; Rost, 2016). The act of communication itself inherently comprises two essential components: the speaker, who endeavors to articulate thoughts and ideas, and the listener, who assumes an active role in extracting the intended meaning from the spoken utterance. This symbiotic relationship underscores the collaborative nature of effective communication, wherein both parties are intricately intertwined in a cooperative effort to convey and apprehend information accurately.

Listeners, as underscored by Goh and Vandergrift (2022), engage in a cognitive process wherein they construct meaning from a myriad of auditory elements, encompassing individual sounds, language intonation, and phonemic units. This intricate process unfolds progressively, commencing with the deciphering of phonemes and culminating in the comprehension of words and more extensive units of semantic content. Therefore, listening is a skill that has many aspects

that are more than just the act of hearing reception; it understands deeply the field of understanding and interpreting the meaning encoded in auditory signals. Given the complexity of this cognitive endeavor, it is not uncommon for some students to encounter challenges in this process. These difficulties may manifest at various stages of the meaning-building continuum, ranging from struggles with deciphering individual phonemic nuances to grappling with the synthesis of coherent semantic content. Such obstacles can arise from a multitude of factors, including differences in linguistic background, exposure to diverse accents, and variations in cognitive processing abilities. Recognizing the intricacies of listening comprehension and the potential hurdles it presents is pivotal for educators and learners alike as they navigate the path towards proficient auditory comprehension and communication skills.

In the Indonesian context, the primary aim of teaching English as a foreign language at the university level is to cultivate students' proficient communication capabilities, encompassing both oral and written modes, in pursuit of functional literacy (Nanda & Susanto, 2020; Susanto and Nanda, 2023). Effective communication in English entails the mastery of linguistic skills, spanning the realms of spoken and written expression. Within this framework, the cultivation of listening skills is of paramount significance. Listening, a fundamental facet of oral communication, necessitates the development and refinement of students' auditory acumen. It is imperative to acknowledge that oral proficiency encompasses not only the capacity to articulate ideas through speech but also the ability to comprehend and interpret spoken language effectively. Communication is inherently a dynamic exchange, where both speakers and listeners actively contribute to the contextual discourse, thereby shaping the communicative process (Rost, 2016; Schoot et al., 2014).

In this educational context, the overarching goal is to empower students with the capacity to engage in meaningful and articulate interactions in English. This proficiency extends beyond mere linguistic competence and involves the aptitude to comprehend the nuances of spoken language, decipher meaning, and respond appropriately. Consequently, listening proficiency is an element of oral communication, demanding students' active engagement in processing spoken information. Moreover, it is essential to underscore the symbiotic relationship between speaking and listening skills within the domain of

oral proficiency. Effective communication hinges on the interplay between speakers, who convey messages, and listeners, who actively receive, interpret, and respond to these messages. This reciprocal exchange between the two parties underscores the dynamic nature of oral communication, emphasizing the importance of honing both speaking and listening skills to facilitate seamless and effective interactions.

Listening skills are undeniably vital in language acquisition. However, certain students may confront formidable obstacles in their quest to master these competencies. A pertinent illustration of this predicament was observed among the students enrolled in the English Education Department at Universitas Bandar Lampung. Within this academic context, a discernible challenge materialized, predominantly manifesting as difficulties in the acquisition of effective listening skills. This issue primarily revolved around the students' struggles in deciphering the nuances of pronunciation associated with vocabulary words. Consequently, this struggle rendered them incapable of not only distinguishing individual words but also comprehending their intended meanings within the broader context of spoken discourse. The root cause of this challenge was traced to their inherent incapacity to distinctly perceive the articulatory intricacies of words as they are enunciated. This perceptual limitation significantly impaired their overall ability to grasp the content and nuances embedded within spoken texts. It is worth noting that such phonetic challenges can serve as substantial barriers to effective language comprehension, impeding students' progress in both receptive and productive language skills. Hence, addressing and ameliorating these listening-related obstacles is paramount to fostering language proficiency and effective communication in the educational context.

To effectively address the challenges posed by language teaching and learning, it is imperative to adopt an instructional approach that is both pragmatic and responsive to the nature of language acquisition. One such approach that holds promise in this regard is the lexical approach, which stems from the fundamental assertion that the core building blocks of language acquisition and effective communication are not primarily rooted in grammar, functions, or abstract linguistic concepts, but rather in lexis, encompassing individual words and, notably, multi-word combinations. The lexical approach is firmly grounded in the belief that the lexicon plays a central and indispensable role in shaping

language structure, facilitating second language acquisition, and guiding language utilization, particularly in the context of multi-word lexical units or chunks that are learned and employed as holistic entities (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Lewis, 1997).

The application of the lexical approach to language instruction is intrinsically linked to the enhancement of listening skills. The fundamental premise of this approach underscores that language proficiency is intricately tied to the acquisition and manipulation of lexical elements, which include not only individual words but also multi-word combinations. Consequently, it becomes imperative for learners to acquire a comprehensive understanding of various linguistic features, including pronunciation, as they endeavor to develop their listening competence. Within the framework of systematic language instruction, particular emphasis is placed on the teaching of pronunciation, often involving intensive oral drills designed to reinforce fundamental sentence patterns (Susanto, Nanda, & Ishak, 2022; Susanto et al., 2023). This attention to pronunciation aligns with the recognition that effective listening comprehension is contingent not only upon recognizing individual words but also on comprehending how they are phonologically articulated in natural speech. Furthermore, the lexical approach recognizes that linguistic competence extends beyond the mere mastery of isolated vocabulary items. It underscores the importance of equipping learners with the skills to employ these lexical elements seamlessly and effectively in both spoken and written communication. This perspective highlights the intricate interplay between lexical (vocabulary and multi-word combinations) and phonological (pronunciation) aspects in the holistic development of language proficiency, with listening skills being a vital component of this multifaceted linguistic competence.

The effectiveness of the lexical approach in enhancing students' listening skills is supported by several related studies. For instance, Hsu and Hsu (2007) conducted a study in which participants found instruction on lexical collocations to be their most preferred type of instruction. They believed that receiving lexical collocation instruction significantly contributed to the improvement of their listening comprehension abilities. This highlights the role of lexically oriented instruction in fostering listening proficiency. Stæhr's findings in 2009 underscored the importance of lexical coverage for successful listening comprehension in English as a foreign

language, aligning with similar observations in reading research (Stæhr, 2009). Cai's study in 2020 further reinforced the importance of both lexical and syntactic knowledge in second language listening. It emphasized the need to employ measures that effectively reflect these constructs in practical research settings. This underscores the significance of a balanced approach that considers various linguistic components for effective listening skill development (Cai, 2020). Bonk's study in 2000 emphasized the role of efficient listening strategies, particularly in comprehending lexically complex texts. While such strategies can aid comprehension, Bonk noted that learners often require a high degree of lexical familiarity to achieve good comprehension (Bonk, 2020). This highlights the interdependence of lexicon and listening comprehension. These collective findings reinforce the suitability of the lexical approach in addressing the challenges faced by students in improving their listening abilities. They emphasize the interconnectedness of lexical knowledge, listening strategies, and overall listening proficiency within the framework of language instruction.

This paper explores the field of English as a foreign language (EFL) education, highlighting the interactions between phonetic symbols, lexical approaches and listening skills. The efficacy of phonetic symbols in language learning has sparked debate, with the question of whether their use can actually improve students' comprehension and pronunciation. Existing studies and discussions show differences of opinion, with proponents advocating for improved pronunciation and comprehension (Chen, 2022; Fouz-González & Mompeán, 2020; Khaghaninejad & Maleki, 2015; Mompeán & Fouz-González, 2020; Por & Fong, 2011) while some doubt its effectiveness (Hu et al., 2010; Kissling, 2013; Umera-Okeke, 2008). At the same time, the lexical approach, which centers on teaching vocabulary and phrases as primary units, is emerging as an attractive alternative in English language teaching. Debate continues around its effectiveness, and some view it as a more contextually relevant approach than traditional methods.

The essence of our research lies in the integration of phonetic symbols in a lexical approach, aiming to harmonize these two elements. In EFL learning, listening skills are of primary concern because of their important role in effective English communication. Although there is much research on the importance of listening skills, there is still a visible gap in the literature

regarding the specific integration of phonetic symbols to improve comprehension. Our paper seeks to fill this void by proposing a framework that aligns sound and script through the integration of phonetic symbols, overcoming the cognitive machinations inherent in listening. The novelty lies in presenting a cohesive integration of voice and script in a lexical approach, which breaks away from conventional methodology. Our emphasis on the different cognitive processes involved in listening, coupled with the integration of phonetic symbols, is expected to contribute to the field of EFL education. Although the existing body of literature tends to ignore the potential contribution of phonetic symbols in assisting EFL learners, our exploration highlights the benefits from combining these symbols with a lexical approach. In doing this, our work can be considered an innovation in language education as it not only offers a solution to the current research gap but also presents a transformative method for developing EFL listening skills. As educators and researchers face the challenge of improving listening skills, our paper introduces a paradigm to pioneer promising avenues for future research and pedagogical development.

The acquisition and development of listening skill occupies a central and indispensable role in the educational progression of students, representing a foundational prerequisite that paves the way for the mastery of other language skills, including reading, writing, and speaking. Proficiency in listening is not a passive undertaking limited to the mere reception of auditory stimuli; rather, it constitutes an intricate cognitive process that demands active engagement. This active engagement extends beyond the auditory domain and encompasses the discernment of the speaker's intentions and the nuanced extraction of contextually relevant information embedded within their spoken message (Field, 2008). Listening, in its essence, transcends the surface-level act of auditory perception. It involves a multifaceted cognitive operation where the listener functions as a decoder, deciphering the layers of meaning intricately interwoven within spoken words. This process is akin to unravelling a complex linguistic tapestry, where each word and phrase contributes to the listener's evolving understanding of the broader context. In effect, listening serves as the gateway through which individuals access and internalize linguistic and contextual knowledge, enabling them to make sense of spoken discourse. As students embark on their educational journey, the cultivation of effective listening skills assumes

paramount importance, laying the foundation upon which the edifice of language proficiency and communication competence is constructed.

Moreover, Peterson (2012) highlights the inherent challenges associated with the skill of listening, noting that it often receives less emphasis and instruction compared to the skills of speaking, reading, and writing. Part of the difficulty in appreciating the complexity of listening lies in the fact that humans are continually exposed to a diverse range of stimuli, often without consciously recognizing their limitations as listeners. As a result, many individuals are unaware of their suboptimal listening abilities and underestimate the inherent difficulty of the listening process. This oversight is particularly significant in educational contexts, where students frequently find themselves in situations where effective listening is pivotal for their success. Paradoxically, despite its critical role in learning, listening often takes a backseat to speaking, which is typically the more privileged and explicitly taught skill.

Further, Bostrom (2011) notes a fundamental issue within the domain of listening research – the historical tendency to conflate listening with general cognitive abilities. Traditional approaches to studying listening have often intertwined it with broader cognitive functions, inadvertently diluting the specificity required to comprehend the intricacies of listening itself. One notable challenge in the study of listening has been the inclination to equate it primarily with memory. This association stems from the fact that listening often involves the retention and recall of information. However, Bostrom offers a cautionary perspective, suggesting that reducing listening to a memory-based process oversimplifies its nature and disregards the unique complexities and challenges inherent to listening as a distinct cognitive endeavour. Then, it is advocated for a broader perspective on the study of listening, one that considers it as a comprehensive and distinct field of inquiry. This approach seeks to disentangle listening from its historical entanglement with general cognitive abilities. Such an all-encompassing view embraces several critical dimensions of listening research.

Firstly, there is the dimension of listening and schemas. Understanding how individuals construct mental frameworks, known as schemas, to interpret and make sense of auditory information is central to listening research. These schemas play a role in shaping how listeners process and comprehend what they hear. Consequently, the study of schemas is vital in unravelling the

intricacies of listening, shedding light on how cognitive processes influence auditory perception and comprehension. Secondly, there's the recognition of the relationship between listening and reading. This perspective underscores the interconnection between listening and reading skills. Proficiency in one domain can significantly impact the development and performance in the other, highlighting the transferability of language skills across modalities. Investigating this relationship provides insights into how individuals acquire and utilize language skills in various communicative contexts.

Finally, we have the dimension of behaviours associated with listening. Beyond cognitive processes, understanding the behavioural aspects related to listening is crucial. This dimension encompasses the examination of how individuals engage with auditory content, adapt their listening strategies, and respond to diverse auditory stimuli in different contexts. By delving into these behavioural aspects, researchers gain a comprehensive understanding of how listening manifests in real-world situations. Bostrom's proposal encourages a holistic and multifaceted exploration of listening. By considering it as a distinct field of study, researchers can disentangle it from broader cognitive functions and explore its intricate components, including the role of schemas, the relationship with reading skills, and the behavioural aspects associated with listening. This perspective promotes a nuanced comprehension of listening as a complex cognitive and communicative skill, essential for both research and educational contexts.

In addition, Bommelje, Houston, and Smither (2003) shed light on the nature of effective listening, emphasizing that its effectiveness is more closely linked to performance aspects within social interactions rather than broader personality traits often associated with interpersonal skills, such as Sociability and Likeability. This perspective underscores the idea that effective listening is largely shaped by the dynamics and demands of specific social situations, with a particular focus on academic environments. Traditionally, discussions about interpersonal skills and effective communication have often centred on personality characteristics like sociability and likability. These traits are important but can be overly general in characterizing one's ability to listen effectively. They argue that the effectiveness of listening should be viewed through a more situational lens. In other words, the way one listens and the

outcomes achieved are influenced by the unique context of a given social interaction.

This insight is particularly pertinent in academic settings, where effective listening is paramount. Academic environments involve diverse and context-specific communication demands, ranging from classroom discussions to research collaborations. Effective listening in such settings may require specific skills, such as active engagement with course content or the ability to comprehend complex academic discourse. As a result, effective listening is not solely a product of one's overall sociability or likability but is instead shaped by the situational intricacies and performance expectations present in academic interactions. The perspective challenges the notion that effective listening can be solely attributed to broad personality traits. It highlights the nuanced relationship between effective listening and the demands of specific social contexts, particularly emphasizing the heightened relevance of effective listening skills within academic environments.

The lexical approach is founded on the fundamental belief that the foundational elements of language learning and effective communication are not rooted primarily in grammar, functions, notions, or other conventional units of language planning and teaching. Instead, the approach places central importance on lexis, which encompasses individual words and, more notably, multi-word combinations (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Lewis, 1997). The essence of the approach lies in its conviction regarding the role of the lexicon in shaping language structure, facilitating second language acquisition, and guiding language utilization. Within this framework, particular emphasis is directed toward multi-word lexical units, often referred to as chunks, which are learned and employed as holistic entities. While earlier discussions of the lexical approach emphasized the general significance of vocabulary in language learning, subsequent discourse on this approach has predominantly centred on the role of these multi-word chunks.

In the current discourse on the lexical approach, the emphasis primarily revolves around the significance of these lexical chunks. These chunks represent clusters of words that are learned and processed as cohesive units, aiding in fluency and comprehension in real-life communication. The approach underscores that language learners should not solely focus on isolated words but also on acquiring these multi-word chunks, which are prevalent in natural spoken and written language. It is important to note that the approach has

evolved, and current formulations prioritize the role of multi-word units rather than general vocabulary acquisition. The role of vocabulary in language teaching, while not central to the lexical approach itself, remains a substantial subject of discussion in the broader literature on language acquisition and pedagogy.

The role of lexis in language teaching has undergone significant transformation. However, it's essential to recognize that lexis represents just one facet of communicative competence within language education. The initial proposition of a lexical approach and a lexically oriented syllabus provided an alternative to conventional syllabus models. However, it did not evolve further to delineate how linguistic competence could exclusively develop through the grammaticalization of lexicon. Instead, the lexical approach was presented as a valid but singular component within a broader language syllabus. According to Richard and Rogers (2014), although a focus on multi-word units is undoubtedly crucial in second language acquisition and communicative performance, there has been limited exploration of how such an emphasis can be harnessed to cultivate linguistic and communicative competence. Consequently, the practical application of a lexically based theory of language and language learning in the design and implementation of language teaching remains to be persuasively demonstrated. This suggests that the concept of a lexical approach is still in search of a comprehensive approach and methodology.

Phonetic symbols can play a significant role within the framework of the lexical approach to language teaching. The lexical approach emphasizes the central importance of lexis, which encompasses not only individual words but also multi-word units or chunks, in language learning and communication. Within the lexical approach to language teaching, the relationship between phonetic symbols and lexis is multifaceted and integral to the development of language proficiency. Firstly, pronunciation and lexical competence are closely intertwined. The lexical approach recognizes that proficiency in a language extends beyond mere vocabulary acquisition; it encompasses the accurate pronunciation of words and phrases. Phonetic symbols provide learners with a precise and standardized means of representing the sounds of words, thereby enabling them to develop a heightened sense of pronunciation accuracy (Fouz-González & Mompeán, 2020; Mompeán, 2015). This becomes particularly valuable when learners grapple with

the irregularities inherent in English spelling and pronunciation, as phonetic symbols bridge the gap between the written and spoken forms of words, facilitating a more authentic and articulate oral expression.

Secondly, the lexical approach places significant emphasis on the acquisition of multi-word units or chunks as essential components of language. These chunks encompass collocations, idiomatic expressions, and fixed phrases that are commonly used in real-life communication. Phonetic symbols serve as valuable tools in aiding learners to recognize and produce the correct pronunciation of these multi-word units. By associating specific phonetic symbols with chunks of language, learners enhance their oral fluency and the naturalness of their spoken communication. This integration of phonetic symbols within the learning process contributes to the development of a more native-like and effective spoken language ability.

Moreover, the lexical approach can incorporate contextual listening and pronunciation practice as integral components of the learning process. Learners are encouraged to engage with authentic spoken language, identify specific words or phrases, and then practice pronouncing them accurately. Phonetic symbols play a guiding role in these activities, enabling learners to comprehend the subtleties of spoken language. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of how words and phrases are used in real-life communicative contexts, thus strengthening both listening skills and pronunciation accuracy. Lastly, phonetic symbols are seamlessly integrated into various lexical activities and exercises designed to reinforce the acquisition of lexis. These activities aim to support learners in recognizing and producing correct pronunciation as they engage with new vocabulary and multi-word expressions. This integration serves to enhance learners' overall lexical competence, empowering them with the ability to comprehend and produce authentic spoken language effectively.

Within the lexical approach to language teaching, phonetic symbols serve as invaluable tools for learners, facilitating the development of accurate pronunciation skills, particularly in the context of multi-word units. These symbols bridge the divide between written and spoken language, enriching learners' ability to understand and articulate authentic spoken language. The integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach contributes significantly to a comprehensive and effective language learning

experience, empowering learners to engage with the intricacies of language proficiency.

## METHOD

In the pursuit of advancing student' listening skills, the research methodology employed a classroom action research design (MacIntyre, 2000). This choice of research design was driven by its inherent purpose, which is to address specific and practical issues within an educational setting while actively seeking viable solutions to identified problems (Creswell, 2012). The integration of phonetic symbols into the research framework was undertaken within the broader context of the lexical approach to language pedagogy (Laver, 1994; Carley & Mees, 2021). The focus was on strengthening students' listening skills through the application of English phonetic symbols (Figure 1). These symbols were designed to enable students to identify and recognize spoken words. By incorporating phonetic symbols into the learning process, students not only gained the capacity to discern the correct pronunciation of words but also experienced a deepened understanding of spoken discourse. This approach to language instruction aimed to bridge the gap between written and spoken language, enhancing students' overall linguistic competence. The integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach framework served as a pedagogical strategy to facilitate clearer and more comprehensible engagement with the English language. This methodological choice aimed to empower students not only with the ability to accurately pronounce words but also with a deeper grasp of spoken language, contributing to their overall language proficiency.

### Consonants

/p/	pie, spot, tip	/s/	sit, circle, miss
/b/	buy, rob	/z/	zoo, cousin, rose
/t/	tie, stop, bat	/ʃ/	ship, mission, nation
/d/	dim, said	/ʒ/	treasure, vision
/k/	cat, skip, pick	/h/	hat, behind
/g/	go, pig	/m/	man, summer, hum
/tʃ/	chin, nature, fetch	/n/	not, run
/dʒ/	gin, judge	/ŋ/	finger, singer, rang
/f/	fan, rough, photo	/j/	yes, unit, yard
/v/	van, river, give	/w/	wet, one, queen
/θ/	thing, bath	/r/	red, rare
/ð/	that, father, clothe	/l/	lost, silly, bill

### Vowels

/ɪ/	busy, build, pretty, myth	/eɪ/	faint, they, day, break
/ɔ/	put, wolf, could	/aɪ/	die, cry, high, buy
/e/	bed, hair, carry	/ɔɪ/	toy, noise, oyster
/æ/	gas, bath		
/ə/	hut, sir, ago, never	/aʊ/	now, mouse, brown
		/oʊ/	go, toe, flow, loaf, roll
/i/	tea, be, leer, police		
/u/	do, lure, lose, new		
/ɑ/	hot, father, car		
/ɔ/	law, all, cloth		
[o]	course, more		

### Diphthongs

Figure 1. *Phonetic symbols of english consonants, vowels, and diphthongs (from Carley & Mees, 2021)*

The research cohort comprised 46 students (27 female; 19 male) taking the course of phonetics and phonology at the English Education Department, Universitas Bandar Lampung, Indonesia. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 21 years (mean = 18.41 years, SD = 0.74). Initial pre-observation findings indicated a reluctance among these students to engage in listening practices, primarily due to their difficulties in accurately apprehending spoken words and comprehending their meanings. Furthermore, the observation reports consistently highlighted their underperformance in comparison to their peers in other classes.

Data collection in this research was conducted through the utilization of two primary instruments: the students' listening test and observational data. These instruments were integral to assessing the impact of the phonetic symbols integrated into the lexical approach on students' listening skills. The listening test was structured to achieve several objectives. First, the main objective is to evaluate the level of students' listening proficiency after they experience learning phonetic symbols (Taylor & Geranpayeh, 2011). This provides an idea of the extent to which students are able to apply acquired phonetic knowledge in the context of language listening. This instrument also functions as a quantitative measuring tool that can provide objective numerical data regarding the improvement of students' listening skills after lexical approach intervention. At the implementation stage of the listening test, students were faced with listening situations that reflect the use of phonetic symbols. Additionally, the observational component of the data collection process was crucial (Scott & Usher, 2011). It involved systematic monitoring of several key aspects of students' engagement with the phonetic symbols. Observations were made regarding their ability to distinguish between spoken words and their corresponding phonetic symbols, demonstrating their capacity to differentiate between various phonetic symbols within a single word, and assessing their aptitude to identify and comprehend specific words within spoken text. These observations provided valuable qualitative insights into the students' development of listening skills within the context of the study.

The research adopted a cyclic model as outlined by Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2014) as its guiding framework. This cyclic approach encompassed distinct phases that

revolved around the process of planning, acting, observing the outcomes of the change, reflecting on these processes and consequences, and subsequently reiterating the cycle. This iterative approach was crucial in facilitating a systematic and dynamic examination of the impact of integrating phonetic symbols within the lexical approach on students' listening skills. The success of the research was contingent upon specific predetermined criteria, serving as benchmarks to gauge the effectiveness of the intervention. In this context, success was defined as the achievement of a significant outcome, namely, when 75% or more of the participating students attained a minimum score of 75 in the listening achievement test. This quantitative criterion provided a clear measure of the tangible improvement in students' listening skills resulting from the research intervention. In addition to the quantitative criterion, the research also considered seven qualitative indicators: listening to the explanations of phonetic symbols and examples; responding and following instructions; identifying phonetic symbols; differentiating one symbol from another symbol; identifying words from the text; completing the tasks in the instructions; and answering questions. Observational data played a role in this aspect, with the indicators needed to exhibit a positive alignment with the application of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach. These qualitative indicators served as a complementary means of assessing the impact of the intervention on students' comprehension and engagement with spoken language.

The research employed two distinct types of research instruments, each necessitating its own analytical methodology to derive meaningful insights from the collected data. Firstly, the students' scores obtained from the listening test were subjected to a percentage-based analysis. This analytical approach aimed to provide a quantitative assessment of the research's primary criterion for success. It sought to determine the proportion of students who successfully met the predetermined passing grade threshold. Specifically, the research target stipulated that at least 75% of the students should achieve a score of 75 or higher in the listening achievement test. The percentage-based analysis allowed for a clear evaluation of the extent to which this target was met. In contrast, the observational data collected during the research was structured in the form of an observation checklist. This observational dataset underwent a descriptive analysis. Descriptive analysis, in this context, focused on delineating and elucidating the activities and

behaviors observed among both students and the teacher throughout the research process. It aimed to provide a qualitative understanding of the nuances of their engagement with phonetic symbols within the framework of the lexical approach. This form of analysis facilitated an exploration of the qualitative aspects of the research, shedding light on the dynamics of how the intervention was implemented and how it influenced participants' practices and interactions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The observation conducted during the first three meetings of the research revealed several noteworthy insights into the students' engagement with the learning process. At this stage, the students actively participated in the learning activities and demonstrated their ability to elaborate on the examples provided in the classroom, which illustrated the use of phonetic symbols. This active engagement indicated that one of the instructional approaches, specifically repetition, was particularly effective in helping students grasp the pronunciation of words and establish associations with the phonetic symbols provided. The application of this instructional phase involved a combination of both individual and group exercises, allowing for varied modes of practice and interaction. During these activities, the students exhibited a commendable level of participation and responsiveness.

However, a significant observation was made when the students were presented with words that had similar sounds. In such instances, they encountered challenges in accurately differentiating between these words. This particular challenge suggested that while the students were able to manage individual word practices effectively, the complexity introduced by similar-sounding words or texts posed greater difficulties in terms of phonetic discrimination and comprehension. To provide a representation of these observations, the results have been summarized in Table 1, allowing for a clear and concise presentation of the findings related to the students' engagement and performance during the three initial meetings in the early phases of the research. These observations serve as a foundation for further analysis and adaptation of the instructional approach to address the identified challenges.

Table 1 reveals the performance of students across three different meetings, each assessed based on seven key indicators. The table presents the number of students (N) and the corresponding percentage (%) of students who met specific



criteria in each meeting. In the first indicator, “Students listen to the explanations of phonetic symbols and examples attentively”, the majority of students exhibited strong engagement, with over 89% in Meeting 1, increasing to 95.7% in Meeting 2 and 97.8% in Meeting 3. The second indicator, “Students respond and follow

instructions precisely”, also demonstrated positive results, with 84.8% compliance in Meeting 1, 87% in Meeting 2, and an even higher 93.5% in Meeting 3. The third indicator, “Students identify phonetic symbols correctly”, shows improvement over the meetings, starting at 54.3% in Meeting 1 and gradually rising to 95.7% in Meeting 3.

Table 1. *The result of observation*

Indicators	Meeting 1		Meeting 2		Meeting 3	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Students listen to the explanations of phonetic symbols and examples attentively.	41	89.1	44	95.7	45	97.8
2. Students respond and follow instructions precisely.	39	84.8	40	87.0	43	93.5
3. Students identify phonetic symbols correctly.	25	54.3	35	76.1	44	95.7
4. Students differentiate one symbol from another symbol correctly.	30	65.2	34	73.9	40	87.0
5. Students identify words from the text they hear correctly.	35	76.1	38	82.6	42	91.3
6. Students complete the tasks in the instructions successfully.	40	87.0	43	93.5	45	97.8
7. Students answer questions correctly.	30	65.2	36	78.3	40	87.0

*Note: N means number of students; % means the percentage of students from the total.*

In the fourth indicator, “Students differentiate one symbol from another symbol correctly”, similar progress can be observed, with percentages increasing from 65.2% in Meeting 1 to 87% in Meeting 3. The fifth indicator, “Students identify words from the text they hear correctly”, also demonstrates positive development, with percentages climbing from 76.1% in Meeting 1 to 91.3% in Meeting 3. For the sixth indicator, “Students complete the tasks in the instructions”, the results are consistently high across all three meetings, ranging from 87% to 97.8%, indicating students’ strong ability to follow instructions. Lastly, in the seventh indicator, “Students answer questions correctly”, percentages range from 65.2% in Meeting 1 to 87% in Meeting 3, indicating an improvement in students’ ability to provide accurate responses. Overall, the data suggests that students’ performance improved over the course of the meetings across various indicators, reflecting their increasing proficiency in phonetic symbols, comprehension, and task completion as the meetings progressed.

students were better able to identify and comprehend spoken words. The observation indicators were successfully met, indicating that the teaching and learning process was executed effectively.

In order to gauge the efficacy of the educational intervention involving phonetic symbols within the lexical approach, a listening test was administered to assess the students’ progress and achievement. The test format employed was that of multiple-choice questions. Students were presented with a series of questions, requiring them to select the correct answers based on the spoken text. This assessment aimed to quantify the impact of phonetic symbol integration on students’ listening skills. Subsequently, the data analysis conducted on the test results unveiled a noteworthy outcome. Specifically, the analysis shows that the majority of students, 78% to be precise, or the equivalent of 36 students, achieved a minimum score of 75 on the listening test as shown in Figure 2.

The process of teaching and learning focused on pronunciation and the literal meaning of words through the use of phonetic symbols. However, it is worth noting that the researcher guided the students towards comprehending entire spoken phrases. This involved the presentation of spoken text along with guided questions that students needed to answer. As a result, revisions and improved activities were incorporated to enhance for reinforcing students’ listening skills using phonetic symbols within the lexical approach. The second and third meetings demonstrated the effectiveness of these revisions in implementing phonetic symbols through the lexical approach, as

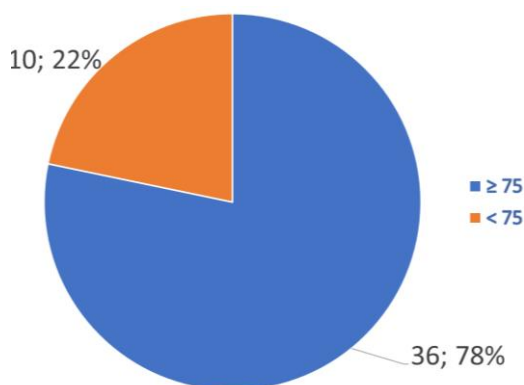


Figure 2. *The percentage of listening test scores (≥ 75 and < 75)*

From Figure 2, it is evident that 36 students, constituting 78% of the total participants, achieved scores that met or exceeded the predefined passing grade (75). This outcome signifies the unequivocal success of the research endeavor. The research can be unequivocally classified as successful, as it met the predetermined success criteria, specifically, the attainment of a score of 75 or higher by 78% of the students on their achievement test. The compelling performance of the students in the test underscores the role played by the integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach. The test score mapping for each student is shown in Figure 3. Throughout the implementation of the research, students rigorously adhered to the prescribed procedures and instructions related to the use of phonetic symbols. This methodology effectively trained them to acclimatize themselves to the intricacies of English consonant and vowel sounds, which ultimately contributed to their success in the listening test.

The driving force behind this research stemmed from a pressing need to elevate students' listening skills to a higher echelon. The crafted teaching and learning process adhered to the designed planning phase, with a deliberate focus on harnessing the power of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach. This strategic approach aimed to imbue students with a crystal-clear comprehension of the intricate nuances of word pronunciation, utilizing phonetic symbols as the guiding beacon. At its core, the primary objective of this endeavor was to endow students with a profound insight into the intricate world of pronunciation. Phonetic symbols, integrated into the instructional framework, played a role in this educational journey. They served as precise markers, illuminating the correct pronunciation of words with unparalleled clarity. This descriptive approach transcended traditional boundaries, providing students with the tools to not just hear but truly understand the acoustic tapestry of spoken words.

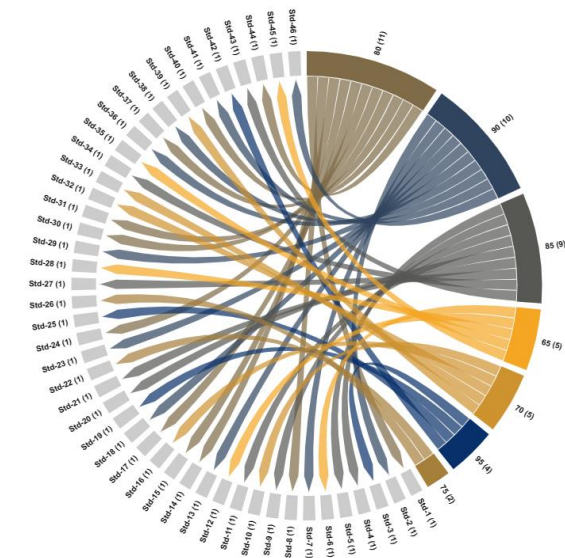


Figure 3. *The listening test score mapping for each student (Mean: 81.5; SD: 9.1)*

A quintessential illustration of the power of phonetic symbols lies in their dissection of seemingly similar words like ‘table’ /teɪbl/ and ‘battle’ /bætl/. While these words might appear interchangeable on the surface, the distinct phonetic representations revealed their unique auditory identities especially for [eɪ] in /teɪbl/ and [æ] in /bætl/. This granular level of analysis became a cornerstone for enhancing auditory discrimination skills among students. By unveiling these subtle disparities, the study reinforced the students’ ability to differentiate even the most closely related sounds, thereby elevating their auditory acumen. This research was not merely an academic endeavor; it was a strategic initiative designed to empower students. Through the integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach, students were not only equipped with the knowledge of correct pronunciation but were also nurtured in their ability to discern the finest auditory nuances. This transformational journey cultivated a generation of learners who could not only hear but truly listen, marking a significant milestone in their linguistic development.

In the examination of instructional activities, this research strategically utilized the strengths inherent in the lexical approach, leveraging its effectiveness in facilitating intensive practice and drilling sessions. These activities were designed to enhance students’ grasp of phonetic symbols and their integration with spoken words. A range of diverse exercises was implemented, each crafted to challenge students’ listening abilities. Through these exercises, students were not merely passive listeners; instead, they were actively engaged in decoding spoken words and linking them to their

respective phonetic symbols. This active involvement not only honed their auditory skills but also reinforced their understanding of the intricate relationship between pronunciation and phonetic representation as discussed by Fouz-González and Mompeán (2020) and Mompeán (2015).

One significant aspect of the instructional approach involved exposing students to spoken words through a variety of exercises. These exercises were designed to compel students to not only hear the words but also identify them accurately. This process demanded a keen ear and a discerning mind, encouraging students to actively participate in the auditory decoding of words. Moreover, these exercises required students to associate the heard words with their corresponding phonetic symbols, emphasizing the importance of this association in their learning process.

In addition to isolated word exercises, the research incorporated the use of texts to evaluate students' listening abilities within a broader contextual framework. By employing texts, students were challenged to identify specific words within the context of a larger narrative. This task necessitated a deeper level of comprehension, as students not only had to recognize individual words but also understand their significance within the overall message of the text. This multifaceted approach provided a comprehensive evaluation of students' listening skills, encompassing both isolated word recognition and contextual comprehension. The instructional activities crafted within the framework of the lexical approach enabled students to actively engage with spoken words, enhancing their ability to identify, associate, and comprehend words in both isolated and contextual settings. This active participation not only bolstered their listening skills but also solidified their understanding of phonetic symbols, illustrating the effectiveness of the chosen instructional methodology.

The observation component played a role throughout the research process, serving as a crucial control mechanism to assess the students' active engagement and the advancement of their listening skills. These carefully designed indicators served as benchmarks, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of teaching and learning methods employing phonetic symbols within the lexical approach. By systematically observing and evaluating specific indicators, the research team gained valuable insights into the students' progress. Active student engagement, a key focus of the observation,

provided tangible evidence of the effectiveness of the instructional strategies. Observing how students interacted with phonetic symbols and identified spoken words demonstrated their ability to apply learned concepts in real-time situations.

The observation component of this research served as a multifaceted lens, offering profound insights into the implementation of teaching techniques. Through astute analysis of students' responses and behaviors during the exercises, researchers gained a nuanced understanding of the effectiveness of the combined lexical approach and phonetic symbols, echoing the insights emphasized by Bostrom (2011). Beyond the realm of cognitive processes, this research analyzed the intricate behavioral aspects related to listening, a dimension critical for comprehension. This examination encompassed not only how individuals engaged with auditory content but also how they adapted their listening strategies and responded to a diverse array of auditory stimuli in varied contexts.

This qualitative exploration served as a validating force, reinforcing the quantitative results garnered from tests with a rich tapestry of contextual understanding. It offered more than mere numbers; it provided a profound narrative of the students' learning experiences, shedding light on the challenges they encountered and the triumphs they achieved throughout the process. By tapping into these qualitative insights, researchers gained a deeper comprehension of the multifaceted landscape of student learning, enriching their understanding beyond the boundaries of standardized assessments.

Furthermore, the observation component functioned as a dynamic and adaptive tool, identifying specific areas demanding further refinement. Through observation, researchers pinpointed precise challenges faced by students, such as the complexities in differentiating similar-sounding words (Hahn & Bailey, 2005; Hendrickson et al., 2015; Pajak, Creel, & Levy, 2016). Armed with this detailed knowledge, instructional methods were not static but fluid, adapting and tailoring themselves to directly address these specific challenges. This iterative process of observation, thoughtful analysis, and strategic adjustment epitomized a responsive and student-centered approach, ensuring the teaching methodology remained agile and finely tuned.

In the application of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach, students were actively involved in a dynamic process of engaging with spoken words, discerning their sounds, and deducing their meanings. This active engagement

was fundamental to the development of their language proficiency and listening skills. Repetition emerged as a key strategy in this pedagogical approach. Through repeated exposure to spoken words and their corresponding phonetic symbols, students were able to reinforce their understanding and internalize the pronunciation patterns. Repetition not only enhanced their recognition of phonetic symbols but also contributed significantly to their oral proficiency in the target language (Curl, Local, & Walker, 2006; Samuel & Frost, 2015). By hearing and practicing these words multiple times, students were able to refine their pronunciation and develop a natural fluency in speaking.

Crucially, the students exhibited a high level of responsiveness and adherence to instructions during the implementation phase of the research. Their ability to follow instructions was indicative of their active participation and engagement with the learning process. This responsiveness highlighted their willingness to learn and their openness to the methods employed, ultimately contributing to the success of the instructional activities. The active engagement of students with spoken words, coupled with the strategic use of repetition and their consistent adherence to instructions, created a robust learning environment. This environment facilitated the effective integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach, empowering students to enhance their listening skills, oral proficiency, and overall language competence. The students' proactive involvement underscored the effectiveness of the pedagogical approach, affirming the significance of their active participation in the language learning process (Ito, 2017; Kim, 2011; Pomphrey & Burley, 2009).

The utilization of the lexical approach in this context provided students with a transformative learning experience, acting as a conduit for them to immerse themselves deeply in the intricacies of the language they are learning. This pedagogical paradigm emphasized the critical importance of vocabulary acquisition and the mastery of language chunks, encompassing collocations, phrases, and idiomatic expressions. Through this approach, students were not merely learning words in isolation but were engaging with the rich tapestry of their language. Central to this immersive learning experience was the exposure to authentic spoken language. By encountering real-life examples of spoken English, students received input that was not only highly effective but also exceptionally adequate. This exposure to genuine spoken English provided students with a

nuanced understanding of pronunciation, intonation, and natural language use (Chan, 2014; Shresta, 1998; Sung, 2016).

One of the significant outcomes of this exposure was the students' ability to engage in authentic language use opportunities. Indeed, the exposure to authentic English pronunciation within context served as a transformative experience for the learners. Through this exposure, they not only heard correct English pronunciation but also internalized the intricate patterns inherent in spoken language. This immersive encounter facilitated a profound understanding of pronunciation nuances, ultimately catalyzing the enhancement of their language production skills. This phenomenon finds resonance in the study conducted by Buz, Tanenhaus, and Jaeger (2016), who scrutinized into the adaptive nature of speakers in response to their perceived communicative success. The research revealed that speakers dynamically adjusted their pronunciations based on the effectiveness of their previous communication attempts within the current context. This adaptive process demonstrated the plasticity of language production, highlighting the continuous interplay between perception and articulation.

In the context of the current research, the exposure to correct English pronunciation became a catalyst for a similar adaptive process among learners. By internalizing the authentic patterns of spoken language, learners subconsciously fine-tuned their own pronunciations, aligning them with the models they encountered. This process was not merely passive reception but an active engagement, where learners, dynamically adjusted their pronunciations based on the effectiveness of their communication attempts. This adaptive learning process underscored the malleability of language skills. By immersing themselves in the nuances of correct English pronunciation within context, learners honed their abilities to articulate words and phrases effectively. This dynamic interaction between perception, comprehension, and production exemplified the intricate dance of language acquisition, illuminating the profound impact of context-driven learning experiences on language proficiency.

Consequently, students actively participated in a variety of enhanced activities, such as identifying and pronouncing words using phonetic symbols while simultaneously listening to the corresponding spoken words. This integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach not only honed their listening skills but also enhanced their ability to articulate words accurately,

marking a significant stride in their language proficiency journey. The lexical approach served as a gateway for students to explore deeply into English lexicon, providing them with authentic language exposure and enabling them to refine their listening and speaking skills. Through this approach, students were not just learning words; they were actively engaging with the living essence of the language, fostering a profound and comprehensive understanding of the linguistic heritage.

The research illuminated the students' remarkable ability to harness the inherent benefits of the lexical approach when synergized with phonetic symbols for deciphering the intricacies of word sounds. Through a blend of diverse activities and rigorous drills, students showcased an impressive proficiency in grasping the nuances of spoken words. This heightened competence, encompassing both the accurate identification of word sounds and the nuanced comprehension of meanings, marked a substantial advancement in their listening skills. The synergy between the lexical approach and phonetic symbols proved to be transformative. The amalgamation of these pedagogical tools enabled students to navigate the complexities of spoken language with finesse. Engaging in a myriad of activities designed to reinforce their understanding, students not only grasped the phonetic intricacies of words but also examined the contextual meanings encapsulated within them.

This heightened competency found tangible validation in their performance, particularly evident in their adeptness at correctly answering test questions. The precision with which they responded underscored their newfound proficiency in not only deciphering word sounds but also comprehending the underlying meanings. This successful integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach not only affirmed the effectiveness of the methodology but also highlighted the students' remarkable capacity to leverage these techniques for significant advancements in their listening skills.

The lexical approach, rooted in a comprehensive understanding of language proficiency, acknowledges that true mastery of a language surpasses the boundaries of vocabulary acquisition alone. It embraces a holistic perspective, emphasizing not only the acquisition of words but also the nuanced pronunciation of both individual words and phrases. In this intricate journey of language learning, phonetic symbols emerge as invaluable tools, offering learners a precise and standardized method of representing

the intricate sounds encapsulated within words. By learning the intricacies of phonetics of spoken language, learners are provided with a structured framework, outlined by the likes of Fouz-González and Mompeán (2020) and Mompeán (2015). This framework allows learners to navigate the complexities of pronunciation with unparalleled accuracy and finesse. Phonetic symbols act as beacons, guiding learners through the labyrinth of sounds inherent in a language, ensuring that each phoneme and intonation is captured and replicated.

This integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach not only empowers learners with a heightened sense of pronunciation accuracy but also instills in them a profound appreciation for the subtleties of spoken language. Through this attention to phonetic detail, learners are not only equipped with the ability to articulate words flawlessly but also develop a deep understanding of the intricate harmony that underpins linguistic communication. Thus, phonetic symbols stand as indispensable allies in the journey toward linguistic mastery, shaping learners into eloquent speakers who can navigate the diverse tapestry of language with precision and confidence.

The results recognize that the lexicon plays a central role in shaping language structure and facilitating language learning. Previous research findings, as acknowledged by Hsu and Hsu (2007), Stæhr (2009), Cai (2020), and Bonk (2000), highlight the effectiveness of the lexical approach in improving students' listening abilities. This study went further by integrating phonetic symbols in a lexical approach, observing a positive impact on students' listening skills. This is consistent with previous discussions about the effectiveness of phonetic symbols as an aid in improving pronunciation and comprehension skills (Chen, 2022; Fouz-González & Mompeán, 2020; Khaghaninejad & Maleki, 2015; Mompeán & Fouz-González, 2020; Por & Fong, 2011). The results of this study provide strong empirical support for the implementation of phonetic symbols in a lexical approach as a potential strategy for obtaining better listening skills. Therefore, this research makes an important contribution in supporting the integration of lexical and phonetic symbol approaches as a pedagogical model for English language teaching, strengthening students' understanding of spoken words adequately.

Although this research can make a contribution in broadening the understanding of the integration of phonetic symbols in a lexical approach to improving EFL listening skills, it needs to be

acknowledged that this research has limitations. First of all, including participants in research were limited to certain age groups or proficiency levels, which limit the generalizability of findings. In addition, the duration of the study and the data collection methods used did not cover real-life situations which may affect the external validity of the results. These limitations may affect the applicability of this research findings in the broader context of English language teaching. Therefore, future research should broaden the range of participants and use more data collection methods to ensure better representation of the diversity of learning conditions. Further research linking additional variables and involving a more diverse population could further contribute to understanding the complexity of phonetic symbol integration in the context of lexical approaches to improving EFL listening skills.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research has explored the integration of phonetic symbols within the lexical approach to enhance English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students' listening skills. The study demonstrated that incorporating phonetic symbols in the lexical approach positively impacted students' comprehension of spoken texts, with 78% of participants achieving a passing score of 75 or higher in the listening test. The findings suggest that the combination of phonetic symbols and the lexical approach can be a valuable pedagogical strategy for EFL educators aiming to improve students' listening skills and overall language proficiency. Moreover, the results underscored the potential of instructional activities that focused on pronunciation and word meanings through the use of phonetic symbols. Students exhibited improvement in various indicators, such as attentiveness to explanations, precise following of instructions, and accurate identification of phonetic symbols. The strategic use of repetition and diverse exercises within the lexical approach contributed to students' increased proficiency in phonetic symbols, comprehension, and task completion over the course of the study. In addition, observations revealed that while students excelled in individual word practices, challenges arose when differentiating between similar-sounding words. This insight emphasizes the need for further refinement in instructional approaches to address specific difficulties encountered by students.

Further, the findings also imply broader applicability in diverse EFL contexts, encouraging educators to consider phonetic symbols as a tool

for enhancing assessment outcomes and promoting professional development opportunities focused on their effective integration into EFL classrooms. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the limitations of the research, including the restricted age groups and proficiency levels of participants. Future research should aim to broaden the scope by including diverse participants and employing varied data collection methods to enhance the generalizability and external validity of findings. It could also explore optimal strategies for using phonetic symbols in the context of lexical teaching and assess the long-term impact on students' listening skills. By examining these areas more deeply, additional insights and empirical support can be provided to strengthen the positive findings of this study. The integration of phonetic symbols in a lexical approach is emerging as a valuable strategy for improving the quality of EFL teaching and learning. This research opens avenues for further exploration and development of instructional methods that cater to the diverse needs of EFL learners, ultimately contributing to the ongoing improvement of language teaching and learning practices.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

We acknowledge the support by the Center for Research and Community Service, the Department of English Education, and the Center for Studies in Linguistics, Universitas Bandar Lampung.

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