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## EFL students' voices on the use of Discord in a critical listening course

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### ABSTRACT

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#### Keywords:

*critical listening course,  
discord, medium learning*

The increasing popularity of the internet has prompted people to embrace digital platforms for language acquisition. Language learning environments now exist in both physical classrooms and virtual spaces. Therefore, listening skills, which are an important component of language proficiency, especially in higher education can be effectively taught through a medium such as Discord, a new and useful digital learning tool. The primary aim of this study is to explore students' voices regarding the use of Discord to enhance critical listening proficiency. To gather meaningful data, a descriptive qualitative design was employed using instruments such as classroom observation checklists, field notes, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD). The study involved 20 students enrolled in the International Class Program at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University Malang. The findings revealed that Discord facilitates the organization of systematic materials, provides features supporting both offline and online learning, encourages the design of new interactive educational activities, and enables immediate responses that promote dynamic discussions. The implication of this study suggests that Discord can be adopted as an effective supplementary platform for developing students' listening skills and fostering collaborative learning in digital language classrooms.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical listening is an essential skill in higher education, requiring learners not only to understand spoken messages but also to evaluate their credibility, interpret the context, and assess the accuracy and reliability of the information delivered (Thompson et al., 2004). Unlike basic listening, which focuses merely on comprehension, critical listening involves higher-order thinking processes that foster analytical and reflective engagement with spoken texts. Its urgency lies in the fact that university students are constantly exposed to diverse spoken inputs lectures, presentations, and discussions that demand active interpretation and critical judgment. Furthermore, critical listening serves as a foundation for the development of other language skills, such as speaking, reading, and writing, as all these skills are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

However, in the practice, scholars reveal that experts have labeled listening as both "neglected" and "forgotten," the impact of neglecting the listening skills, it may impact the development of others language skill, decrease learning outcomes, and need to reevaluate teaching practices. A viewpoint supported by prior studies of (Ghaderpanahi, 2012; Nowrouzi et al., 2015) This negligence of listening skills at the tertiary level is also found in the research of

(Abedin et al., 2009; Ardhanay & Handini, 2019; Hardiyanto et al., 2021). The practical learning of critical listening skills shows that students are served the social issue related to the learning outcomes and they evaluate the speaker's message, extract key details, and convey their own arguments. Regarding this, most lecturers use extensive listening video and audio to discuss in the classroom since there are no prepared materials by experts in the listening course (Septyanti & Kurniawan, 2019). Nonetheless, this approach raises obstacles. Students may exhibit reluctance to actively participate in a real classroom setting, face poorly organized materials, may shy away from asking critical questions, or may prefer not to be the center of attention. Furthermore, they might become confused by the content of the materials provided. Compounding the issue is the fact that traditional listening textbooks often fall short of providing the necessary support for critical listening materials.

In response to these challenges, the educational field has witnessed a significant rise in the use of digital learning tools. This trend is evident through the growing number of educators and researchers who are exploring the benefits of integrating modern digital learning components into their teaching practices (Kwaske & McLennan, 2015; Prott, 2020). By integrating the power of digital learning tools, educators can design the interactive learning experiences and foster students' motivation and engagement. In a critical listening course, these innovative tools become crucial as educators use them to make the display of listening skills more captivating and enjoyable in a fun setting. The challenges in critical listening course need highly the specific innovative learning tools to address the issues. By incorporating such innovative learning tools, the teaching of Critical Listening aims to become more engaging, effective, and inspiring for students. The recent digital tool which offers complete features and fulfills educators' needs is Discord.

Discord is familiar tool as game fans, already used the application for everyday communication. Discord is a free messenger with support for IP telephony and video conferencing, as well as the possibility to create public and private chats for exchanging text and voice messages. This platform was originally created for gamers to communicate while playing games. Now it has acquired new functionalities and has become a place where people of similar interests can communicate with each other on various topics (Odinokaya et al., 2021). In educational context, Discord emerges as a potential tool for blended learning (Arifianto & Izzudin, 2021), it serves as an asynchronous discussion forum, enabling students to engage in meaningful discussions even when not in real-time contact. Discord is easy to use, provides real-time communication, facilitates audio and video streaming, allows screen sharing, provides multi-platform support, offers easy registration, provides access to various communities, and is free, programmable, and automated (Vladoiu & Constaninescu, 2020). It allows educators and students to create separate servers for different groups of students and multiple channels for different purposes (Squire, 2021; Wahyuningsih & Baidi, 2021). Discord also enables students to keep in touch with peers, discuss assignments, catch up, hold video conferences, and clarify any unclear lesson (Baber, 2021; Squire, 2021). In the context of listening skills, Discord proves to be an indispensable platform. Educators can efficiently share course materials, assignments, and various resources. To ensure systematic arrangement, the educator can create distinct channels for different subjects or topics, maintaining a structured repository for students to access. As the conversation and video conference media are applicable for fulfilling students' needs, Discord also has a completely free application that does not contain hidden payments or premium subscriptions (Gorbatuc & Dudka, 2019). It is very important in the economic situation of the state. In addition, Discord excels in supporting simultaneous communication within large user

groups, a feature that sets it apart from other platforms, which often rely on asynchronous communication and necessitate the creation of numerous interconnected servers to facilitate training within a single course, stream, or educational institution.

Several studies, including those by (Ardiyansah et al., 2021; Odinokaya et al., 2021; Wahyuningsih & Baidi, 2021), have provided evidence supporting the effectiveness of Discord as a digital platform for online teaching and learning. Further research conducted by Zannah et al. (2022) reinforces these findings by demonstrating that Discord can facilitate more efficient and effective connections between teachers and students in an online learning environment. The study highlights how the attractiveness of Discord as a medium for online learning positively influences students' interest and motivation, particularly when teachers adopt a supportive attitude during the learning process. These findings underscore the compatibility and coherence between Discord and educational settings, indicating its potential to enhance the overall teaching and learning experience in the digital realm. The effectiveness of Discord in educational contexts, as highlighted by Wulanjani (2018) research, is further supported by their study. They found that incorporating Discord into listening courses can significantly enhance students' enthusiasm and enjoyment. One key factor contributing to Discord's effectiveness in the listening class is its ability to provide a wide range of multimedia content. Within Discord, teachers can utilize text, voice, and video channels to present audio and visual materials directly to students, thereby enriching the listening exercises and creating a more immersive learning environment. By integrating various forms of media within the same platform, Discord simplifies the process for both teachers and students, eliminating the need to switch between multiple apps or platforms. This seamless integration enhances coherence, promotes a smoother learning experience, and makes Discord a preferable application compared to others. Furthermore, Wiranata et al. (2024) emphasize that technology integration in English language instruction, when supported by interactive platforms such as Discord, contributes to more dynamic and learner-centered environments that align with the evolving needs of digital education.

However, previous studies have revealed a similar pattern in which numerous researchers have examined the effectiveness of Discord in language learning (Anwar & Ekawati, 2022; Beltran et al., 2023; Mashud et al., 2021; Odinokaya et al., 2021; Zannah et al., 2022), focusing primarily on speaking skills (Anwar & Ekawati, 2022; Sartika et al., 2025) and listening comprehension (Wulanjani, 2018). Nevertheless, limited attention has been given to portraying students' voices regarding the implementation of Discord in higher education within Islamic settings. This context is particularly urgent to investigate because Islamic universities integrate religious and ethical values with modern pedagogical approaches, where the adoption of digital learning tools must align with institutional culture, technological readiness, and learners' moral frameworks. Moreover, students in Islamic higher education often operate in bilingual or multilingual learning environments, which further influences their listening engagement and interaction in digital spaces. Despite the growing relevance of digital platforms, no previous study has focused on Discord's implementation in a Critical Listening course within the International Class Program (ICP) at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University Malang. Addressing this gap is essential, as understanding students' perspectives can inform how digital tools like Discord can be effectively and ethically integrated to enhance listening proficiency in Islamic higher education.

## 2. METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. This approach was selected to provide an in-depth description of Discord's implementation and to capture meaningful data

from students' voices regarding how Discord was utilized in the classroom context. The research was conducted among students enrolled in the English Education Department at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University Malang during the 2021/2022 academic year. The specific setting was the International Class Program (ICP), where Discord was implemented as a digital learning tool throughout one semester in a Critical Listening course consisting of 20 students. The ICP represents a relatively new institutional initiative within the English Education Department, designed to foster an English-medium learning environment, integrate technology into instruction, and enhance students' global communication competencies. Within this program, Discord was introduced as the primary digital platform alongside the university's e-Learning system to enhance the learning experience. It is important to note that Discord's implementation in this academic context was novel, as it had previously been used primarily for gaming-related communication. This innovative approach aimed to maximize the use of digital tools for developing critical listening skills, which serves as a distinctive feature of this study.

The data was collected from Focus Group Discussion (FGD), classroom observation and interview. The researchers adapted the indicators from the study of Ardiyansah et al. (2021) instrument. These indicators consist of contents or features, interface, feedback & interaction, students' performance, communication process, and interactivity. To align with the specific research context and objectives, the researcher subsequently refined and developed these indicators into the following seven categories: content, feature, educational experience, feedback and interactions, student's progress and performance, interactivity, and possible drawback. These categories allowed for a comprehensive information of Discord's implementation in critical listening course. The researcher distributed eight questions. The researchers distributed eight questions. Additionally, the instruments used in this study were previously validated and approved by experts in the field, ensuring the research instrument's robustness and reliability.

**Table 1.** The Blueprint of the Focus Group Discussion

The Indicators of Focus Group Discussion		
Indicator	Description	List Questions for Students
Content	This indicator refers to the educational materials, resources, and information that lecturer uses to teach their courses.	What role do you feel <i>Discord</i> plays in helping you access and engage with course content and materials effectively?
Feature	Specific functionalities or capabilities within the <i>Discord</i> platform that have had a positive impact on the courses being discussed. It could be key elements or aspects of <i>Discord</i> that have played a significant role in enhancing the learning experience.	Are there particular <i>Discord</i> features or aspects that you find most helpful for your learning experience?
Educational Experience	A range of aspects and outcomes related to how <i>Discord</i> has influenced or contributed to the learning journey of students and the teaching methods.	Can you describe your experience with using <i>Discord</i> as part of your coursework or educational experience?
Feedback and interactions	Combining both aspects by acknowledging the role of feedback from the educational community (students, colleagues, etc.) and how those interactions have shaped the way <i>Discord</i> is employed in the educational context.	Do you feel that your instructors have made any adaptations or changes to their use of <i>Discord</i> based on student feedback or experiences?

Indicator	Description	List Questions for Students
Student's Progress and Performance	The academic progress and achievements of students in a given course of <i>Discord</i> tool.	What specific improvements or changes have you observed in your learning environment or interactions with peers and instructors since the adoption of <i>Discord</i> ? How do these improvements align with your expectations for using <i>Discord</i> as an educational tool?
Interactivity	It examined the level of interactivity and engagement achieved through <i>Discord</i> in the context of critical listening skill development.	Could you share any illustration of how <i>Discord</i> has influenced your interaction with friends and lecturer?
Drawback	This category allows for the identification and exploration of challenges and drawbacks associated with using <i>Discord</i> .	Have you encountered any challenges or difficulties while using <i>Discord</i> or your studies?

The data collected from classroom observations, field notes, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were analyzed following the six stages of qualitative data analysis proposed by (Creswell, 2013). All raw data, including FGD recordings and field notes, were first organized, transcribed, and compiled into digital documents. The researchers then reviewed and prepared the data by cleaning unnecessary or repetitive information and categorizing it according to its sources. Afterward, the researchers repeatedly read the transcriptions and notes to gain a deep understanding of the content while recording initial impressions and emerging ideas. The next stage involved manual coding, in which key phrases and sentences were highlighted and labeled to capture significant aspects of students' experiences with Discord, such as interaction, engagement, challenges, and feedback. These codes were then grouped into broader categories and refined into major themes that represented collective patterns in the data. Each theme was supported with direct quotations from the participants to ensure authenticity and richness of description. Finally, the researchers interpreted the themes in relation to relevant theories and previous studies to understand how Discord influenced students' development of critical listening skills. To maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation across multiple data sources was conducted, member checking was performed to validate participants' voices, and peer debriefing was used to minimize researcher bias. Through these systematic procedures, the analysis provided a comprehensive and credible portrayal of how Discord was implemented and experienced by students in the Critical Listening course.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) conducted with 20 students from the International Class Program (ICP) at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University Malang. The analysis focuses on seven key dimensions related to the implementation of Discord in the Critical Listening course: content, features, educational experience, feedback and interaction, student progress and performance, interactivity, and potential drawbacks. The excerpts are used to illustrate students' perspectives, and each theme is explained narratively.

#### 3.1. Students' Views on Discord Content

Students highlighted that Discord offers a more structured and organized way to access course materials compared to other platforms. As one participant mentioned, "*Discord is more or less similar to other applications, but I strongly agree that Discord is more structured. There are separate columns for classes and assignments, making it more organized*" (Extract 1, May 5th,

2023). Another student added that the arrangement of learning materials and channels on Discord provided a sense of clarity and convenience: *“Using Discord for our listening class brings a fresh approach. The channels for course materials, private discussions, and video lessons make it more interactive and organized”* (Extract 2, May 5th, 2023). These statements indicate that Discord enables systematic management of instructional content, allowing students to easily navigate between lessons and assignments. This organization supports self-paced learning and minimizes confusion, which is often reported in less structured platforms like WhatsApp or standard e-learning systems.

### 3.2. Students' Views on Discord Features

Students consistently emphasized Discord's variety of features that enhanced their learning experience. One student expressed appreciation for its functionality, stating, *“Discord is excellent because of its numerous features that assist educators. Grouping, assignment distribution, and dedicated channels for materials and videos are very helpful”* (Extract 3, May 5th, 2023). Students valued specific features such as *screen sharing, video-watching together, and channel categorization*, which allowed for collaborative learning similar to in-person activities. Compared to other applications like WhatsApp, Discord was perceived as more organized and flexible. These findings align with (Beltran et al., 2023), who found that Discord's diverse tools enhance learner engagement and provide a sense of community in digital learning environments.

### 3.3. Educational Experience through Discord

Students described their learning experience with Discord as more enjoyable and less monotonous. They contrasted it with previous e-learning activities that were often limited to passive listening or film viewing. One participant stated, *“The use of Discord is very different from e-learning; Discord can provide a unique and enjoyable learning experience”* (Extract 8, May 5th, 2023). Another added, *“With variations such as critical listening classes, it no longer becomes a boring activity limited to watching films or presenting in class”* (Extract 9, May 5th, 2023). This indicates that the integration of Discord fostered creativity and variation in instructional delivery. Students were able to engage in authentic and reflective listening practices, transforming the class into a more student-centered environment.

### 3.4. Feedback and Interaction

In terms of feedback, students observed both challenges and strengths. Some mentioned that feedback was not always provided immediately after tasks: *“Feedback after quizzes or assignment submissions is not provided directly but is given in the form of grades”* (Extract 10, May 5th, 2023). However, others highlighted that real-time discussions and presentations allowed for instant responses: *“During discussion forums and presentations, feedback from the lecturer and audience is given directly and can be responded to. This makes feedback highly dynamic”* (Extract 11, May 5th, 2023). These findings show that Discord facilitated *asynchronous* and *synchronous* modes of communication, enabling both delayed and immediate feedback. This dual mode aligns with digital pedagogy principles that emphasize flexibility in online learning (Odinokaya et al., 2021).

### 3.5. Students' Progress and Performance

Participants also shared that Discord encouraged them to perform better and more creatively in their tasks. One student reflected, *“Performance in presentations is packaged differently, not*

*only presenting in class but also using techniques like chain questions or jigsaw*” (Extract 12, May 5th, 2023). The platform’s interactive structure allowed for diverse presentation formats, making students more responsible for their learning process. This finding implies that Discord supports active learning strategies and helps develop not only listening comprehension but also critical thinking and collaboration.

### 3.6. Interactivity and Student Engagement

Students consistently emphasized how Discord promoted higher levels of interactivity. One participant shared, *“I used to struggle with listening because interaction was limited, but with Discord and a different learning atmosphere, I was able to engage in more extensive and comprehensive interactions with my peers”* (Extract 14, May 5th, 2023). This demonstrates that Discord transformed the traditional listening class—often passive and individual—into a collaborative and communicative learning space. The availability of discussion channels and real-time messaging encouraged students to express ideas freely, enhancing both social presence and engagement.

### 3.7. Drawbacks and Technical Challenges

Despite its advantages, students acknowledged several drawbacks, particularly related to technical limitations. A common concern was poor internet connectivity during class sessions: *“I often have issues with the Wi-Fi connection, especially when it’s used during class hours or active study times”* (Extract 17, May 5th, 2023). This issue reflects a challenge in implementing digital learning tools in developing contexts, where access and infrastructure can hinder online participation. While the problem was not directly caused by Discord, it affected students’ ability to fully utilize its features.

The findings of this study revealed that the Discord platform effectively supports learning experiences in critical listening courses in higher education. The present study investigated students’ perspectives on the use of Discord in a Critical Listening course, guided by the analytical framework of Ardiyansah et al. (2021), which includes seven dimensions: content, features, educational experience, feedback and interaction, student progress and performance, interactivity, and possible drawbacks. The findings indicate that Discord functions as a comprehensive platform that facilitates learning engagement, supports structured delivery of materials, and enhances students’ active participation in critical listening activities.

Content delivery through Discord played a central role in shaping students’ learning experiences. The results revealed that students perceived Discord as an organized and systematic medium for managing course content, consistent with Shavitt & Barnes (2020) claim that the platform fosters effective, synchronous communication between educators and learners. In the context of a Critical Listening course, where the learning materials often involve complex auditory input such as podcasts, video lectures, and authentic speech, Discord’s server-based organization simplified content access and improved learners’ focus. The study supports Little John et al. (2008) concept of message interpretation as a multilayered process, demonstrating that structured digital platforms can help learners better process and evaluate auditory messages. Moreover, the systematic arrangement of materials in distinct channels and categories enhanced students’ ability to engage with diverse content formats, leading to a more meaningful listening experience aligned with Naidu, (2003) & Pinto (2020) observations about the role of technology in sustaining engagement in higher education.

Students also emphasized Discord's features as key elements contributing to their positive learning experience. They found the platform's multifunctional tools—such as voice channels, video sharing, and file storage—particularly valuable for collaborative learning. This aligns with Lacher & Biehl (2018) and Ardiyansah et al. (2021), who noted that Discord's moderation and group management features foster student-centered interaction. The platform's structure, which mirrors the course syllabus through separate channels and roles, also made it easier for students to follow discussions, share resources, and stay informed. The interactive functions, including screen sharing and live voice discussions, encouraged real-time collaboration, a finding also supported by (Raglianti et al., 2022). In this study, these features were instrumental in facilitating authentic listening practice, promoting comprehension and analysis through direct exposure to live discussions.

In terms of educational experience, students described Discord as providing a new and engaging learning atmosphere compared to traditional e-learning systems. The integration of interactive activities such as chain questioning, jigsaw discussions, and small-group projects contributed to a more dynamic and less monotonous classroom environment. This finding resonates with Tiarasari et al. (2018) who highlighted that interactive multimedia significantly boosts student interest and engagement. Similarly, Krusche et al. (2017) & Vercellotti (2017) demonstrated that active, computer-based learning environments enhance participation and achievement. Through Discord, critical listening activities became more than just comprehension exercises, they evolved into collaborative spaces for inquiry, reflection, and creativity. Students transitioned from passive recipients of information to active participants in constructing meaning.

Another strong theme emerging from the data was feedback and interaction. Students appreciated the immediacy of responses during synchronous sessions, as well as the structured feedback provided through channel-based communication. This finding echoes Banson & Hardin (2022) arguments that real-time platforms strengthen responsiveness and engagement. Discord's affordances for instant feedback and clarification fostered an ongoing dialogue between teachers and students, leading to a more reflective and supportive learning environment. Furthermore, as Wiles & Simmons (2022) observed, the integration of multimedia tools in Discord facilitates diverse forms of assessment and feedback, which this study also confirmed. Such interactivity is essential for developing critical listening, as it encourages learners to question, respond, and refine their interpretations based on immediate input.

Regarding students' progress and performance, the findings suggest that Discord fostered greater responsibility and confidence in completing tasks. Students reported improved performance in oral presentations and listening comprehension, attributing this progress to the platform's collaborative environment. Similar to Tri et al. (2022) and Effiyana (2021), who found that Discord increases motivation and task ownership, this study revealed that the sense of community within the platform encouraged accountability and sustained engagement. The asynchronous accessibility of materials also enabled students to revisit lessons at their own pace, supporting autonomous learning and continual improvement in listening proficiency.

The interactivity enabled by Discord was also a significant factor in enhancing students' learning outcomes. Students noted that the platform encouraged them to engage in more extensive communication, both with peers and instructors. This heightened interaction not only strengthened their listening and speaking skills but also promoted critical thinking. The participatory environment built through Discord reflects Lauricella et al. (2024) notion of online communities as spaces that foster belonging and intellectual collaboration. The interactive



features thus helped students move beyond passive listening toward analytical and evaluative listening, key competencies in higher education language learning.

Despite these advantages, several drawbacks were identified. The most common challenge concerned unstable internet connections during synchronous sessions, which occasionally disrupted the flow of learning. This issue is consistent with the findings of Arifianto & Izzudin, 2021 & Effiyana (2021), who reported similar technical constraints in digital learning environments. Additionally, some students expressed difficulty adapting to Discord's interface, especially those unfamiliar with its gaming origins. The informal nature of the platform also introduced the potential for distractions or off-topic interactions. As such, instructors must establish clear guidelines and maintain a balance between fostering a relaxed, engaging environment and ensuring academic focus.

Finally, this study reinforces that Discord serves as an effective tool for supporting critical listening instruction by offering structured content organization, rich interactive features, and real-time feedback opportunities. While technical and behavioral challenges persist, the overall student perceptions highlight Discord's capacity to transform listening instruction into a collaborative, reflective, and community-oriented experience. These findings not only support previous research on Discord's educational value but also extend its application to the context of Islamic higher education, where fostering engagement and technological adaptability remains a pressing priority.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Students at Maulana Malik Ibrahim Islamic State University Malang perceived Discord as an effective tool for supporting critical listening courses. The platform enabled organized content delivery, real-time interaction, and prompt feedback, which helped create an engaging and collaborative learning environment. Its structured features and accessibility supported various learning styles and encouraged active participation. However, challenges such as unstable internet connections and students' unfamiliarity with the platform occasionally disrupted the learning process. Beyond these technical issues, this study was limited by its small sample size, focus on a single institution, and short research duration, which may restrict the generalization of the findings. Therefore, future research should involve a larger number of participants and longer observation periods to provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of Discord on students' critical listening development in higher education settings.

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