

PROBLEM FACTORS IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF CLASS XI-8 STUDENTS SMAN 2 PURWOKERTO

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Abstract

Listening is one of the essential skills in English language learning, yet it remains one of the most challenging for students. This research aimed to investigate the main factors that contribute to students' problem in listening comprehension and to explore the strategies used by the teacher to overcome them. The study was conducted at SMAN 2 Purwokerto with a qualitative descriptive method.

The data were collected through classroom observation, interviews with 33 XI-8 grade students and one English teacher, as well as documentation of students' listening scores. The findings reveal that both literal and inferential level students experience similar problem, primarily caused by three factors: the listening material (such as fast speech, unfamiliar accents, and long audio texts), the listener (limited vocabulary and concentration issues), and the physical setting (classroom noise and technical problems). The most dominant difficulty came from the listening material, especially the speed of speech and recognize main point. Moreover, the teacher employed several strategies to help students improve their comprehension, including audio replay, pre-teaching vocabulary, and group discussions. Among these, audio replay was considered the most effective by students. This study suggests that both the complexity of the listening materials and students' readiness should be considered when designing listening activities.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Students' Listening Problem, Listening Strategies, Qualitative Study.*

A. Introduction

Listening comprehension is a dynamic process in which learners actively interpret and construct meaning from spoken language. It is one of the most frequently used language skills in communication, accounting for a higher percentage of daily use compared to speaking, reading, or writing (Rost, 2011; Celce-Murcia in Sagita, 2023). Mastering this skill is essential in English as a foreign language because it enables students not only to recognize words and sentence structures but also to capture implied meanings and reconstruct them in their own understanding.

However, the challenge of listening lies in its complexity. According to the Cognitive Load Theory, individuals have limitations in processing new or fast input, which can obstruct comprehension (Sweller, 1988 in Asma & Dallel, 2020). Despite its importance, listening is often overlooked in favor of other skills such as grammar, which results in fewer opportunities to develop this crucial ability.

This issue is also evident at SMAN 2 Purwokerto, one of the top schools in Banyumas Regency that consistently produces high-achieving students. Preliminary observations and interviews with an English teacher (January 7, 2025) revealed that students still face difficulties in understanding listening materials. These difficulties are mainly caused by listener-related factors, such as limited vocabulary, as well as physical setting factors, such as inadequate facilities.

Previous studies have widely discussed students' listening difficulties, but most focus on general problems such as limited vocabulary, speech rate, or accent differences. However, there is still limited research that comprehensively investigates the categories of problem factors including material-related, listener-related, and physical setting factors in the context of senior high schools in Indonesia particularly in leading schools such as SMAN 2 Purwokerto.

Therefore, the writers feel interesting to conduct study with the aims to investigate the problem factors in listening comprehension faced by class XI-8 students of SMAN 2 Purwokerto based on their ability levels in listening. The findings are expected to provide deeper insights into the difficulties experienced by students

and to offer recommendations that can help teachers develop more effective strategies for improving listening comprehension in EFL classrooms.

B. Literature Review

This section reviews some theories and previous studies about listening, listening comprehension, listening ability levels, and problem factors. It gives the basic concepts that support this research.

Listening is one of the fundamental skills in language learning because it is essential for both academic purposes and daily communication. As Rost (2011) explains, listening is not merely about hearing sounds, but it is a complex process that requires understanding the speaker's message within its context. In line with this, listening comprehension can be defined as the ability to interpret spoken language by recognizing sounds, vocabulary, and grammatical structures while also linking them with prior knowledge. According to Nhan (2024), this skill is crucial for learners to grasp not only the explicit meaning of utterances but also the implicit information that supports effective communication in EFL contexts.

Furthermore, Al-Musalli (2001), adapting earlier taxonomies of reading skills, classifies listening ability into two levels. At the literal level, learners understand the direct meaning of spoken language through phonological, syntactic, and lexical recognition. At the inferential level, they are expected to go beyond the surface meaning by interpreting implied ideas, identifying the speaker's intentions, and making connections across different parts of the discourse.

However, listening comprehension is not without challenges. Hien (2015) in Mirza et al. (2021) identifies three major factors that influence listening problems: listening material, listener, and physical setting. Problems related to the listening material often include difficulty in identifying main ideas, dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary and colloquial expressions, complex grammatical structures, fast speech rates, authentic materials containing cultural references, varied accents, and long texts. On the other hand, listener-related problems may occur when students find it hard to predict meanings, guess unknown words, handle unfamiliar topics, or connect the content with their background knowledge. Finally, external factors such as background noise, poor audio quality, or inadequate equipment in the physical setting can also distract learners and hinder comprehension.

C. Method of Investigation

This part explains the research design, participants, data collection, and data analysis. It shows how the writers conducted the study to answer the research questions.

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to examine the difficulties students face in listening comprehension. This approach was considered suitable because it helps the writers describe and analyze the problems in depth, especially those connected to the listening materials, the students themselves, and the physical learning environment. The research involved 33 students of class XI-8 at SMAN 2 Purwokerto as the main participants, with additional input from their English teacher, Mrs. Vera Noviana, S.Pd. To strengthen the findings, the writers

also used supporting documents such as listening scripts and students' test scores.

The writers employed three techniques for collecting the data: observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was carried out to see how listening activities took place in the classroom and what challenges students encountered. Interviews with both students and the teacher provided further insights into the difficulties and possible strategies to overcome them. Documentation, including students' test results and worksheets, offered additional evidence that supported the analysis.

For the analysis, the writers applied three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In data reduction, the collected information was summarized and categorized to make it more manageable. Then, in data display, the organized data were presented in themes, tables, and charts for clearer interpretation. Finally, in conclusion drawing, the writers identified recurring patterns and main problem factors in listening comprehension and provided suggestions to help improve students' listening skills in the EFL classroom.

D. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study and discusses them in relation to the research questions: (1) What are the main factors causing students' problems in listening comprehension based on students' ability level? and (2) How does the teacher minimize these problem factors in listening comprehension? The findings presented here are derived from the analysis of the data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation.

1. Students' Problem Factors in Listening Comprehension in General

The data came from observing students while they listened to audio recordings and filled in their worksheets show that students' listening comprehension problems are mainly influenced by three categories: listening material, listeners, and the physical setting (Hien, 2015 in Mirza et al., 2021). Problems related to listening material were the most dominant (85%), including difficulty with colloquial words, long texts, fast speech, unfamiliar accents, authentic materials, and recognizing main points. Listener-related factors contributed 75%, such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, and lack of background knowledge. Physical setting factors accounted for 66%, mostly due to poor equipment and background noise. Interestingly, grammatical complexity was not a major obstacle since students often focus more on vocabulary and overall meaning rather than sentence structures. This finding supports the lexical approach (Lewis, 1993 in Yuxuan, 2022), which emphasizes that language is processed primarily through words and phrases rather than grammar rules.

2. Students' Ability Level in Listening Comprehension

The data for this finding were obtained from the analysis of students' worksheets on the listening comprehension test. The results (10 items: 5 literal and 5 inferential) show that most students perform better at the literal level than at the inferential level. Out of 33 students, 30 are categorized at the literal level, with an average of 3.27 correct answers, while only 3 students reach the inferential level, with a lower average of 1.76. This indicates that students are relatively capable of understanding explicitly

stated information but struggle significantly with implied meanings, making predictions, and connecting ideas. Interviews and teacher observations confirm that limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, and speech speed contribute to these challenges. Overall, inferential comprehension emerges as the dominant difficulty, suggesting that students' listening development is still concentrated on surface-level understanding rather than deeper interpretation.

3. Students' Problem Factors in Listening Comprehension Based on Their Ability Level

The findings from interview with the students show that students at both literal and inferential levels experience similar types of listening problems, though with different intensities. At the literal level (30 students), most difficulties come from the listening material itself, such as focusing too much on individual words, fast speech (90%), unfamiliar accents (63%), colloquial expressions, and long listening texts that reduce concentration (100%). Problems from the listener include lack of prediction skills, difficulty guessing unknown words, and limited background knowledge. Furthermore, environmental factors such as classroom noise and poor equipment disrupt comprehension.

At the inferential level (3 students), similar issues are also observed, especially with fast speech and unfamiliar accents, which hinder their ability to make inferences despite their higher-level skills. Some also struggle with prediction strategies and tend to lose focus when encountering unfamiliar words or topics. Likewise, external factors such as noise and poor audio quality remain significant barriers.

Overall, the data suggest that the listening material is the most dominant factor affecting comprehension across both levels. Limited vocabulary, high speech rate, and accent unfamiliarity consistently prevent students from understanding messages effectively. This condition is explained through Anderson's Cognitive Theory of Listening, which highlights that failure at the perception stage disrupts overall comprehension, and Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which shows that incomprehensible input (too fast, too unfamiliar, or too complex) creates difficulties for learners at any level.

4. The Way Teacher Overcome Students' Problem Factors in Listening Comprehension

The findings from interview with the teacher show that the teacher employs a variety of strategies to help students overcome listening comprehension problems, focusing on three major sources of difficulty: listening material, the listeners, and the physical setting.

For listening materials, the teacher prepares students by pre-teaching key vocabulary, introducing the topic beforehand, and explaining the questions prior to listening. These strategies help students reduce confusion, activate background knowledge, and guide the attention to important points.

For listener-related problems, the teacher uses repetition and clarification, as well as group discussions. Repetition helps students reprocess difficult parts of the audio, while group discussions allow collaborative learning and increase students' confidence.

For physical setting issues, the teacher adjusts the audio volume and speed, frequently replays recordings, and enforces classroom rules to minimize distractions. Among these, replaying the audio is reported as the most effective strategy, with many students stating that it allows them to better catch missed information.

Overall, the findings reveal that audio replay and pre-teaching vocabulary are the two most influential strategies in reducing students' listening barriers. These practices align with Anderson's Cognitive Theory of Listening (1995), which highlights the importance of strengthening the perception stage. By reducing students' cognitive load and giving them multiple chances to process the input, the teacher's strategies enable more effective comprehension at both the literal and inferential levels.

E. Conclusion

The writers concludes that the main source of students' listening comprehension problems comes from the listening material itself. Regardless of whether students are at the literal or inferential level, they face similar barriers such as fast speech, unfamiliar accents, colloquial vocabulary, long listening texts, and difficulty in recognizing the main ideas. These challenges often block comprehension at the perception stage, as explained by Anderson's Cognitive Theory and Buck's Constructivist Model, while Krashen's Input Hypothesis confirms that incomprehensible input hinders understanding across all proficiency levels.

To overcome these difficulties, the teacher implements strategies targeting material, listener, and physical setting factors. Pre-teaching vocabulary,

introducing topic, and pre-listening question prepare students for the material; meanwhile repetition, clarification, and group discussions build their confidence and strategies as listeners. Finally, volume adjustment, audio replay, and classroom rules help address environmental limitations. Universally, audio replay emerges as the most effective method, as it allows students to revisit missed information and strengthen comprehension.

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