

EXPLORING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH LISTENING AT GRADE X OF SMA N 1 SEI BALAI

Putri Lidiana Permata Sari, Meilinda Syahpitri, Khairun Nisa Pjt

Faculty of Teacher Training and Education

University of Asahan

meilindasyahpitri@gmail.com , nisavivo235@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Listening is a vital component of language proficiency, yet often remains the most difficult skill for EFL learners. This study explores the difficulties faced by Grade X students at SMA N 1 Sei Balai in comprehending an English speech titled The Speech. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected via classroom observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Results indicated that students encountered difficulties in decoding vocabulary, understanding speaker accents, processing fast-paced speech, and grasping complex sentence structures. Furthermore, concentration issues and environmental distractions also contributed to comprehension failures. The study recommends integrating listening strategies and metacognitive awareness training to improve student outcomes.

Keywords: *English listening, speech comprehension, student difficulties, EFL students, listening strategies, senior high school*

ABSTRAK

Mendengarkan merupakan komponen penting dalam kemahiran berbahasa, namun seringkali tetap menjadi keterampilan yang paling sulit bagi pelajar EFL. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi kesulitan yang dihadapi siswa Kelas X di SMA N 1 Sei Balai dalam memahami pidato bahasa Inggris berjudul The Speech. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara, dan kuesioner. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam mengartikan kosakata, memahami aksen pembicara, memproses ucapan cepat, dan memahami struktur kalimat yang kompleks. Lebih lanjut, masalah konsentrasi dan gangguan lingkungan juga berkontribusi terhadap kegagalan pemahaman. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan integrasi strategi mendengarkan dan pelatihan kesadaran metakognitif untuk meningkatkan hasil belajar siswa.

Kata kunci: *mendengarkan bahasa Inggris, pemahaman ucapan, kesulitan siswa, siswa EFL, strategi mendengarkan, sekolah menengah atas.*

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INTRODUCTION

Listening is a key element in acquiring a second language and is essential for meaningful communication. Despite its importance, listening remains underemphasized in many language learning environments, including in Indonesia. Students are often exposed to written and grammatical tasks but receive limited training in auditory comprehension, particularly in formal speech contexts.

In senior high school, one specific listening material, titled *The Speech*, presents unique challenges due to its rhetorical structure, fast delivery, and use of formal language. Students must process content rapidly, interpret meaning beyond literal words, and identify rhetorical elements. This study focuses on identifying the specific obstacles that hinder students' ability to comprehend this type of material.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening comprehension involves both bottom-up (sound-to-meaning) and topdown (context-to-meaning) processes (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Learners often struggle with decoding words, interpreting accents, and maintaining focus, especially under time constraints (Field, 2008). Vocabulary limitations, anxiety, and unfamiliar pronunciation patterns are key contributors to listening difficulties (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Moreover, effective listening requires metacognitive awareness students need to plan, monitor, and evaluate their understanding while listening (Goh, 2000). When learners lack these strategies, they may rely solely on recognizing individual words, which limits their ability to extract meaning from entire spoken texts.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study was conducted at SMA N 1 Sei Balai in North Sumatra, involving 30 Grade X students who had experience with the listening material *The Speech*. Data were collected over two months through:

- Observation: during listening sessions
- Questionnaires: assessing specific difficulties
- Interviews: to explore in-depth experiences

Thematic analysis was applied to interpret recurring issues across data sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Observation

Students often showed confusion and disengagement during listening tasks. Some appeared distracted due to unclear audio and unfamiliar vocabulary.

Questionnaire Results

Difficulty Aspect	% of Students
Difficult Vocabulary	53.33%
Lack of Concentration	56.67%
Rapid Speech Delivery	30.00%

Accent Related Issues	13.33%
Complex grammar/sentence structure	13.33%

Interviews

Common themes include lack of vocabulary, difficulty following the speech speed, and challenges due to distractions or poor sound quality. Many students also reported low confidence and poor listening strategies.

Discussion

Difficulties are categorized into:

- Linguistic: limited vocabulary, idioms, sentence complexity
- Non-linguistic: unfamiliar accents, rapid delivery, poor audio
- Affective: anxiety, boredom, low motivation
- Environmental: noisy classrooms, inadequate technology

These findings align with Anderson's cognitive model (1995), which identifies failures in perception, parsing, and utilization during listening. Students' lack of metacognitive strategies further hampers their comprehension.

DISCUSSION

The results reinforce previous findings that listening challenges are multifactorial. Students showed breakdowns in the stages of perception (hearing sounds), parsing (understanding grammar), and utilization (connecting to prior knowledge), as proposed in Anderson's cognitive model (1995). The absence of metacognitive strategies such as prediction, monitoring, and clarification further limited their success in comprehension.

Additionally, external factors such as classroom noise and technical limitations impaired students' concentration. Without systematic exposure to various accents or formal listening practice, students lacked confidence and became passive during listening tasks.

CONCLUSION

Grade X students at SMA N 1 Sei Balai face substantial difficulties in understanding formal English speeches due to linguistic limitations, environmental distractions, and lack of listening strategies. The problem is not simply a matter of vocabulary, but a combination of cognitive, affective, and instructional shortcomings.

RECOMMENDATION

- For Students: Engage in varied listening practices, focus on vocabulary growth, and apply note-taking strategies.
- For Teachers: Provide scaffolding through pre-listening tasks and expose students to diverse audio materials.
- For Schools: Improve audio facilities and promote teacher training in teaching listening comprehension.
- For Future Researchers: Conduct longitudinal studies to assess the impact of strategy-based instruction.

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