

Students Difficulties in Listening Comprehension at the Junior High School

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis jenis-jenis kesulitan yang dialami siswa SMP dalam pemahaman mendengarkan, faktor penyebabnya, serta strategi yang digunakan guru untuk mengatasinya. Keterampilan mendengarkan memiliki peran penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris karena menjadi dasar dalam memahami informasi lisan secara akurat. Namun, banyak siswa masih menghadapi hambatan dalam kegiatan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif dengan subjek 15 siswa kelas VIII SMP Swasta Asga Mandiri Medan tahun ajaran 2025/2026. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes mendengarkan dan kuesioner yang masing-masing terdiri dari 15 butir. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kemampuan pemahaman mendengarkan siswa tergolong rendah dengan nilai rata-rata 52. Kesulitan utama meliputi keterbatasan kosakata, kesulitan memahami pengucapan dan variasi aksen, rendahnya konsentrasi, kualitas audio yang kurang jelas, serta ketidakmampuan memahami kalimat panjang. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa masalah mendengarkan bersifat kompleks dan saling berkaitan. Oleh karena itu, guru perlu menerapkan strategi yang lebih adaptif seperti penggunaan media audio yang lebih jelas, latihan berbasis konteks, serta penguatan kosakata secara sistematis. Implikasi penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya desain pembelajaran mendengarkan yang terstruktur, interaktif, dan sesuai dengan kebutuhan siswa untuk meningkatkan hasil belajar secara optimal.

Kata Kunci: Pemahaman Mendengarkan, Kesulitan Siswa, Belajar Bahasa Inggris, Kemampuan Mendengarkan, Siswa SMP.

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the types of listening comprehension difficulties experienced by junior high school students, the underlying factors contributing to these difficulties, and the strategies employed by teachers to address them. Listening plays a crucial role in English language learning as it supports learners in understanding spoken information accurately. However, many students still encounter significant challenges in listening activities. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method involving 15 eighth-grade students of SMP Swasta Asga Mandiri Medan in the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through a listening test and a questionnaire, each consisting of 15 items. The findings revealed that students' listening comprehension ability was relatively low, with a mean score of 52. The major difficulties included limited vocabulary, problems in recognizing pronunciation and different accents, lack of concentration, poor audio quality, and difficulty in understanding long sentences. These findings indicate that listening comprehension problems are complex and interrelated. Therefore, teachers need to implement more adaptive strategies, such as providing clearer audio materials, using contextualized listening activities, and strengthening vocabulary instruction systematically. The study implies that listening instruction should be designed in a structured, interactive, and needs-based manner to improve students' learning outcomes effectively.

Keyword: Listening Comprehension, Students' Difficulties, English Learning, Listening Ability, Junior High School Students

INTRODUCTION

English is not a foreign language to everyone in this day and age. due to the fact that English is a universal language that is spoken everywhere (Rao, 2019). English is an important language for students to study at every school since it is an international language and can help students in their future employment. Basic skills must be mastered by students in order to support their English language proficiency. In English, specifically speaking, writing, listening, and reading. One of the English language skills that students need to acquire is listening, since it is a crucial tool for shaping students' character.

Listening is a very important skill to be taught in language classes because it provides input for students and helps them develop their language. Listening is a very important ability to build effective and successful communication (Apgrianto, et. Al., 2018). Based on (Mutia, 2020) Listening skills are important things that must be considered in teaching English because we have to know what other people are saying and students need to understand the words, they hear from each teacher's explanation. Listening is one of the abilities to receive and analyze what someone is saying.

According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), listening can be divided into four main types: intensive listening, responsive listening, selective listening, and extensive listening. These types show different levels of listening activities used in learning English. Intensive listening focuses on understanding small parts of language such as sounds, vocabulary, and grammar. In this type, students usually listen carefully to short recordings so they can recognize words and understand how sentences are formed. Responsive listening happens when students listen and give short responses in communication, such as answering simple questions or responding to greetings. Selective listening means that listeners focus on certain information from what they hear, for example finding specific details like names, dates, or numbers in a conversation or recording. Extensive listening encourages students to listen to longer pieces of spoken language and concentrate on capturing the general meaning rather than every detail. In this type, students do not need to understand every word but try to understand the main idea of what the speaker is saying. These types of listening help students improve their listening skills and understand spoken English more effectively.

In this research, the type of listening used is intensive listening because students are required to listen carefully to short listening materials in order to understand the words, vocabulary, and information presented in the audio. This type is suitable for the research because it helps the researcher identify the students' difficulties in understanding listening comprehension. Teachers play an important role in helping students improve their listening comprehension. One strategy that teachers can use is pre-listening activities, such as explaining the topic and introducing important vocabulary before students listen to the audio. This helps students understand the listening material more easily. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2018), preparing students before listening can improve their comprehension because they become more familiar with the topic. Teachers can also play the audio more than once so students have another chance to understand the information they may have missed. In addition, teachers can use post-listening activities, such as asking questions or discussing the listening material to check students' understanding. Hasan and Hoon (2021) state that using different listening activities can help students become more active and improve their listening skills. Teachers may also use interesting media such as songs or videos to make listening activities more enjoyable and help students stay focused (Amelia, Tasnim, & Fardhani, 2024). These strategies can help students understand listening materials better and reduce their listening difficulties.

However, in the process of learning listening skills, many students at the junior high school level still face various difficulties in understanding spoken English. These difficulties often arise due to several factors, such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, fast speech rate, and lack of concentration during listening activities. In addition, poor audio quality and ineffective teaching strategies also contribute to these difficulties.

According to Hamouda (2018), many students find listening difficult because they cannot recognize words easily when they are spoken quickly or with different accents. In addition, the speed of speech can also cause problems because native speakers often speak faster than students expect. As a result, students may miss important information while listening. Students may also experience lack of concentration, especially if the classroom is noisy or the audio quality is not clear. Hasan and

Hoon (2021) explain that external factors such as noise, poor listening equipment, and unclear recordings can affect students' ability to understand listening materials. Furthermore, students sometimes find it difficult to understand the main idea of a listening text, especially if the topic is unfamiliar or the recording is too long.

Various studies indicate that junior high school students' difficulties in listening comprehension are influenced by interconnected linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Kulsum and Hidayatullah (2023) found that students experienced difficulties in understanding spoken texts due to limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge, ineffective listening strategies, fast speech rates, unfamiliar accents, low concentration, and environmental distractions. Meanwhile, Purba, Abdullah, and Husnaini (2025) revealed that listening comprehension problems were not only caused by students' language ability but also by the characteristics of listening materials, audio quality, speaker factors, low listener focus, and physical classroom conditions such as noise. In addition, classroom action research conducted by Amelia, Tasnim, and Fardhani (2024) showed that before the use of English songs as learning media, most students had difficulties in comprehending listening materials and achieved low learning outcomes, indicating problems related to students' motivation and limited engagement in conventional listening instruction. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that listening comprehension difficulties among junior high school students are complex and require varied, contextual, and engaging instructional approaches.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study will employ qualitative methods. Researchers gather information for this kind of study in a systematic, natural, or direct way. The researchers generate descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words by observing the behaviour and actions of individuals or groups. Qualitative research is also described as research that produces descriptive data from written or spoken words and observed behaviour of individuals or groups. This method allows researchers to describe and interpret phenomena based on real conditions in the research setting (Panjaitan, 2020).

In qualitative research, the data are usually collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, or documentation, and the results are presented descriptively rather than statistically. This approach focuses on understanding the meaning of events and experiences from the participants' perspectives in natural contexts (Jalil & Tanjung, 2020).

Through the use of questionnaires and documentation, the researcher will undertake qualitative research methodologies in order to conclude. The immediate or natural conditions of the object being studied must serve as the foundation for any research. The things that the researcher observes in this study are the kinds of listening comprehension challenges junior high school students encounter, the primary causes of students challenge in understanding listening comprehension, and the methods that educators now employ to assist students who struggle with listening comprehension.

The subject of this study will be grading VIII-A students, SMP Swata Asga Mandiri. The topic will be selected by researchers to determine the kinds of listening comprehension challenges junior high school students face, to identify the primary causes of students challenges in understanding listening comprehension, and to outline the methods teachers employ to assist children in overcoming listening comprehension challenges.

This Research will be conducted at SMP Swata Asga Mandiri, Jl. Karya Jaya No. 196, Komplek Karya Jaya Shafira, Kelurahan Gedung Johor, Kecamatan Medan Johor, Kota Medan, Sumatera Utara, kode pos 20143. from February 26, 2026, until February 27, 2026, and the procedure for gathering data will be completed through a questionnaire and a listening test.

In this study, the techniques used to collect data and make it easier to process are known as research instruments. A tool used by researchers to gather data is called a research instrument, helping them work more effectively and produce clearer, more accurate, and organized results that are easier to understand.

In this study, researchers will collect data using 15 questionnaires and 15 tests. These will be given to 15 junior high school students, and the research tool will be a listening test. Researchers chose the listening test because it makes data collection easier and is suitable for this purpose.

A listening test is an evaluation technique in which students must respond to questions in writing, either on paper or using a computer. In order to evaluate students learning outcomes or as a part of a selection process, these tests might be either subjective (descriptive) or objective (multiple choice, true-false, matching).

In this study, the researcher employs listening tests and questionnaires as the primary data collection methods to obtain comprehensive and complementary data. The questionnaire uses a closed-ended format to gather structured information about students' perceptions of their listening difficulties and learning experiences, allowing for consistent responses and easier analysis across participants. At the same time, the listening test measures students' actual listening comprehension ability by assessing how well they understand spoken English, including their ability to identify main ideas, follow instructions, and recognize specific details such as tone and speaker intention. By combining these two methods, the researcher obtains both perceptual data from students and performance-based evidence, which strengthens the validity of the findings and provides a clearer understanding of the listening challenges faced by the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the researcher presents and discusses the findings of the study conducted at SMP Swasta Asga Mandiri Medan involving the eighth-grade students during the academic year 2025–2026. The data for this research were collected through two research instruments, namely a questionnaire and a listening test. The questionnaire was used to obtain information about students' perceptions and difficulties in listening comprehension, while the listening test was conducted to measure the students' ability to understand spoken English.

The listening test was conducted to measure the students' listening comprehension ability. The test consisted of 15 questions and was administered to 15 students of class VIII at SMP Swasta Asga Mandiri Medan. Each correct answer was given a score of 1, while incorrect answers were scored 0. The final score was calculated using the formula: $\text{Score} = (\text{Correct Answer} / \text{Total Questions}) \times 100$. Listening tests are commonly used in language learning research to evaluate students' ability to understand spoken information, identify main ideas, and recognize specific details from audio materials (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

Tale 1 Students Listening Test Score

No	Student	Correct Answer	Total Questions	Final Score
1.	S1	9	15	60
2.	S2	9	15	60
3.	S3	10	15	67
4.	S4	10	15	67
5.	S5	9	15	60
6.	S6	8	15	53
7.	S7	7	15	47
8.	S8	7	15	47
9.	S9	7	15	47
10.	S10	4	15	27
11.	S11	10	15	67
12.	S12	5	15	33
13.	S13	7	15	47
14.	S14	9	15	60
15.	S15	6	15	40

As presented in the table, three students (S3, S4, and S11) reached the highest score of 67, which reflects their ability to understand the majority of the listening content. Meanwhile, student S10 obtained the lowest score of 27, showing that the student experienced significant difficulty in answering the listening questions. Several students such as S1, S2, S5, and S14 obtained scores of 60, indicating a moderate level of listening comprehension ability.

To determine the overall listening comprehension ability of the students, the researcher calculated the mean score of the listening test results. The mean score was calculated using the formula $\text{Mean} = \Sigma X / N$, where X represents the total score and N represents the number of students (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Based on the calculation, the total score of all students was 780 and the number of students was 15. Therefore, the mean score of the listening test was 52.

The mean score indicates that the students' listening comprehension ability is still relatively low. Many students still experienced difficulties in understanding spoken English, especially when identifying specific information from the listening material. Hasan and Hoon (2021) explain that students often experience listening comprehension difficulties due to factors such as limited vocabulary, fast speech rate, and unfamiliar pronunciation.

Furthermore, these findings are consistent with previous studies which indicate that listening comprehension difficulties are common among junior high school students learning English as a foreign language. Research conducted by Amelia, Tasnim, and Fardhani (2024) found that students often struggle to understand listening materials because they lack sufficient exposure to spoken English and have limited listening practice. Therefore, the results of this study suggest that students need more listening practice and effective instructional strategies to improve their listening comprehension ability.

The questionnaire was distributed to 15 students of class VIII at SMP Swasta Asga Mandiri Medan in order to identify the students' difficulties in listening comprehension. The questionnaire consisted of fifteen statements related to students' experiences in learning listening, the difficulties they encountered during listening activities, and several factors that may influence their listening comprehension ability. Each statement required the students to choose either "Yes" or "No" based on their personal experiences during listening activities in the classroom.

The questionnaire data were analyzed using percentage analysis to identify how frequently students responded to each statement. This analysis was used to identify the most common listening difficulties experienced by the students. The percentage of responses was calculated using the following formula: $P = F/N \times 100$, where P represents the percentage, F refers to the frequency of responses, and N represents the total number of respondents.

Table 2 The Results of Students Questionnaires on Listening Comprehension Difficulties

No	Statement	Yes	No	Percentage Yes	Percentage No
1.	Do you have difficulty understanding English conversations played during listening lessons?	12	3	80%	20%
2.	Do you feel that the speaking speed in listening audio is too fast?	4	11	27%	73%
3.	Do you often not know the meaning of words you hear in listening audio?	13	2	87%	13%
4.	Do you have difficulty understanding the accent or pronunciation of speakers in listening audio?	12	3	80%	20%
5.	Do you have difficulty identifying important information when listening to English texts?	5	10	33%	67%

6.	Do you easily lose concentration during listening activities?	9	6	60%	40%
7.	Do you feel less confident after completing listening tasks?	4	11	27%	73%
8.	Do you need to listen to the audio more than once to understand it?	15	0	100%	0%
9.	Does unclear audio quality make it difficult for you to understand listening materials?	12	3	80%	20%
10.	Does limited vocabulary make it difficult for you to understand listening materials?	5	10	33%	67%
11.	Do you have difficulty understanding long sentences in English audio?	10	5	67%	33%
12.	Do you feel nervous or anxious when taking listening tests?	5	10	33%	67%
13.	Do you have difficulty taking notes on important information while listening to audio?	8	7	53%	47%
14.	Do you rarely practice listening outside of school hours?	11	4	73%	27%
15.	Do you feel that you need more strategies or tips to better understand listening?	14	1	93%	7%

Total Respondens = 15 Students

The questionnaire results indicate that many students faced various difficulties in understanding spoken English during listening activities. Based on the first statement, 12 students (80%) reported that they had difficulty understanding English conversations played in listening lessons, while only 3 students (20%) stated that they did not experience such difficulty. This indicates that listening comprehension remains a challenging skill for most students.

Vocabulary was found to be one of the main factors influencing students' listening comprehension. Based on the responses to statement three, 13 students (87%) reported that they frequently did not understand the meaning of the words they heard in the listening audio, whereas only 2 students (13%) stated that they did not face this difficulty. In addition, students' concentration during listening activities was also identified as an important factor. According to statement six, 9 students (60%) indicated that they often lost their concentration when listening to English audio materials.

One of the most notable findings appears in statement eight, where all 15 students (100%) stated that they needed the audio to be played more than once in order to understand the content. This result indicates that students rely heavily on repetition to comprehend listening materials.

Technical factors were also found to influence students' listening comprehension. In statement nine, 12 students (80%) stated that unclear audio quality made it difficult for them to understand the listening materials. Poor audio quality can reduce students' ability to recognize words and sentences correctly.

The results also indicate that students often face difficulties in understanding long and complex sentences in English audio. Based on statement eleven, 10 students (67%) reported that they had difficulty understanding long sentences.

In terms of students' learning habits, statement fourteen shows that 11 students (73%) admitted that they rarely practiced listening outside the classroom. Limited exposure to English listening materials may contribute to students' listening difficulties.

Finally, statement fifteen shows that 14 students (93%) stated that they needed more strategies or tips to improve their listening comprehension. This result indicates that students expect more guidance from teachers in developing effective listening strategies.

Overall, the questionnaire results reveal that students face several significant challenges in listening comprehension. These include limited vocabulary knowledge, difficulties in understanding pronunciation and different accents, lack of concentration during listening activities, insufficient practice outside the classroom, and the need to listen to the audio repeatedly.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that junior high school students still experience various difficulties in listening comprehension. The results of the listening test show that the mean score of the students was 52, which indicates that the students' listening comprehension ability is still relatively low. Some students were able to understand the listening material well, while others experienced significant difficulties in answering the questions. This finding suggests that listening remains one of the most challenging language skills for students learning English as a foreign language. According to Brown and Abeywickrama (2019), listening comprehension requires learners to understand spoken language by processing sounds, vocabulary, grammar, and meaning simultaneously. Therefore, students often face difficulties when they are not familiar with the vocabulary or pronunciation used in the listening materials.

The results of the questionnaire also support the findings of the listening test. Many students reported that they experienced difficulties in understanding spoken English during listening activities. For example, 80% of the students stated that they had difficulty understanding English conversations played during listening lessons, and 87% of the students admitted that they often did not know the meaning of the words they heard in the listening audio. This indicates that limited vocabulary knowledge is one of the main causes of listening comprehension difficulties. Nation (2019) explains that vocabulary knowledge is essential for understanding spoken language because learners must recognize words quickly in order to interpret the message. Similarly, Kulsum and Hidayatullah (2023) found that students' listening difficulties are often caused by limited vocabulary and lack of familiarity with spoken English expressions.

Another important factor influencing students' listening comprehension is pronunciation and concentration during listening activities. The questionnaire results show that 80% of the students had difficulty understanding the speaker's accent or pronunciation, and 60% of the students stated that they easily lost concentration while listening to English audio. These findings are consistent with Hamouda (2018), who explains that students often fail to recognize spoken words because native speakers speak quickly and use unfamiliar pronunciation patterns. In addition, Graham and Santos (2019) emphasize that listening requires strong concentration because learners must process information immediately while the audio is being played. If students lose focus during listening activities, they may miss important information from the listening text.

Furthermore, technical and environmental factors were also found to affect students' listening comprehension. The results show that 80% of students reported that unclear audio quality made it difficult for them to understand the listening materials, and 100% of the students stated that they needed the audio to be played more than once in order to understand the content. This finding indicates that students rely heavily on repeated listening to comprehend spoken texts. Renandya and Widodo (2020) state that repeated listening can help learners gradually process linguistic information and improve their comprehension. In addition, Cross (2021) explains that external factors such as audio quality, background noise, and classroom environment can influence students' listening performance.

The questionnaire results also show that students rarely practice listening outside the classroom. About 73% of the students admitted that they rarely practice listening outside school hours, and 93% of the students stated that they needed more strategies or tips to improve their listening comprehension. This indicates that students need more exposure to listening activities and more effective learning strategies. According to Siegel (2023), teaching listening strategies such as predicting the topic, identifying key words, and taking notes can help students improve their listening comprehension ability. In addition, Amelia, Tasnim, and Fardhani (2024) found that the use of

interesting learning media such as songs or videos can increase students' motivation and improve their listening comprehension.

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that students' listening comprehension difficulties are influenced by several factors, including limited vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation and accents, lack of concentration, poor audio quality, and limited listening practice outside the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that junior high school students continue to experience substantial difficulties in listening comprehension. These difficulties stem primarily from limited vocabulary knowledge, challenges in recognizing pronunciation and various accents, and low levels of concentration during listening activities. In addition, external and contextual factors such as unclear audio quality, the complexity of long sentences, and limited exposure to listening practice outside the classroom further intensify these challenges. The results confirm that listening remains one of the most demanding skills in English language learning at the junior high school level. Therefore, it is essential for teachers to design more structured, interactive, and context-based listening instruction, supported by clear audio materials, systematic vocabulary development, and regular listening practice. Such efforts are expected to improve students' comprehension ability and reduce the difficulties they encounter in understanding spoken English.

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