

# An Analysis of Students' Difficulties in Listening Comprehension at Senior High School

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## Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out the difficulties faced by students in listening. This research used descriptive research method and was conducted at a senior high school in Polewali Mandar, West Sulawesi. Thirty-one students from the eleventh grade were selected as research subjects through a random sampling technique. The data was obtained from a questionnaire and an interview. The results obtained from the data analysis is the difficulties that students face when doing listening comprehension are; lack of vocabulary, students' interest in English, pronunciation, lack of concentration, accent, speaker talks too fast, topic changing, and they don't trust themselves.

*Keywords: Difficulties, Students, Listening Comprehension.*

## 1. Introduction

Listening comprehension is one capability that is necessary to be owned by everyone so that they can understand the words meaning they have heard. Someone who is good in listening comprehension skills can convey what they have heard using their own language according to their understanding. Listening comprehension needs to be emphasized for students to learn and spend more time doing so. "Listening comprehension levels affect the capacity for improvement in other language skills such as speaking, reading, writing and translating" (Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011).

Listening comprehension includes important things, those are receiving, remembering, and repeating and the last one in comprehension where in this case he is required can explain the intent or the meaning of what has been heard. In fact, listening comprehension is quite

difficult for students because of any English language learning at school they encounter very little offensive or carry out activities related to listening. This has become a new challenge for teachers to use a new effective method in listening exercises that can help students develop their listening comprehension ability.

Listening comprehension is a complicated and interdependent process. This is because the challenge in listening comprehension is so difficult, as a listener, he must be ready to catch and understand what the speaker said even though the message conveyed is less familiar (Joseph, 1984). This obstacle will be encountered by students in doing the listening. Based on elucidated above, it can be seen that listening is pivotal in learning a language as well as speaking, writing, and reading.

Although it is seen as a pivotal skill in language, in fact, listening gets a slight attention in teaching and learning language, this is because productive skills are more emphasized in the teaching methods used while listening is more of a passive activity (Cross, 2010). University pays more attention to vocabulary, reading, and grammar. Listening and speaking skills are not important parts of any coursebooks or curriculum, it makes the teacher while making or designing their lesson plan does not pay attention on these skills (Abbas Pourhossein Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011).

However, the researchers revealed that listening can be considered as a basic speaking skill, because learning will not take place if you do not understand the correct input. This is why researchers say that listening is an active skill not a passive skill because in this case meaning is built through the flow of sound. This is supported by (Helgesen & Brown, 2017), listening is an active process that aims to make sense of what we have heard.

Listening has now been agreed to be one of the most important skills that need to be considered as well as speaking, reading, and writing skills in language as well as communication. According to Celce Murcia in Solak & Altay, 2014, listening is the ability that is most often used with a percentage of 45%. Speaking has 30% usage percentage in daily life to communicate. While reading has a percentage of 16% in its use in this case communication. While writing with a percentage of 9% only in use to communicate in every single day.

Understanding the pronunciation of the speaker, vocabulary and grammar, and also understanding the meaning of the speaker is something that must be done with listening, this also makes not easy for the students to

listen, especially if the speaker is a native speaker of a foreign language, which way do they speak very fluently. Individual human differences also one of the obstacles that can interfere the effectiveness of a communication in terms of perception, different ages, emotional states, listening skills, differences in status, information disbursement, and information filtering (Rismayanti., 2018).

Based on the research that has been done by Siti Rahmah who investigate the problems that students faced in listening comprehension on the TOEFL test. Based on the interviews conducted, it resulted in 6 difficulties faced by students when answering questions, listening such as tool problem, content of the listening text, mental condition, physical condition, environmental condition, and also time problem. Faisal (2019) who investigate about students' difficulties in learning listening was found two factors that influence listening comprehension those are students' internal which includes English not being liked by students, not understanding English, unclear pronunciation by the speaker, limited vocabulary, not understanding grammar, not knowing the topic of conversation, language style, speaking speed. The second factor is an external factor including the lack of quality of the equipment used (speakers).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Definition of Students' Difficulty**

In accordance with Oxford dictionary student is a person who is studying at a college or university; person studying at secondary school; any person interested in a particular subject. Cambridge dictionary also says the same thing that student is someone who is studying at a school or university. Subsequently, difficulty on Oxford dictionary

is problem, thing or situation that causes problems. Student's difficulty is something that interferes students in learning or understanding something that can hinder the students from mastering a thing and hinder in order to increase of the student's knowledge. Problems that students have can occupy some cognitive achievements and this can have a bad influence on students' academic activities (Bocar, 2018).

## **2. 2. Difficulties That Learners May Face in Listening Comprehension**

According to Hamouda students may encounter some difficulties in listening comprehension processes. Some of difficulties are as follows:

### **a. Pronunciation**

There are a few words in English that have the same pronunciation but different meanings, it can influence students in listening comprehension.

### **b. Speech of Rate**

When the speaker talk too fast it can make students hear the whole word as a single word.

### **c. Insufficient of Vocabulary**

Students vocabulary also can be a problem in listening. The speaker may use the vocabulary the listener doesn't know and it makes the listener doesn't get the point of the context.

### **d. Different Accent of Speaker**

Some students also have problem with the accent used by the speaker. Students will be confused if the speaker speaks in British English accent because pronunciation and intonation quite different.

### **e. lack of Vocabulary**

Maintaining student's concentration to keep listening the audio and comprehend the context in foreign language learning class is not a piece of cake. Some noises from an environmental and also background of the audio can make the students miss their concentration. The

temperature and lighting of the classroom also affect student concentration. From psychology, if people or listener feels nervous, they may lose their concentration.

### **f. Anxiety**

Students with anxiety in order to their abilities will inhibits students to reach out in comprehending. As "the personal emotions of tension, fear, nervousness, and worry with the waking of the autonomic nervous system," anxiety is one of the fundamental individual distinctions.

### **g. Bad Quality of Recording**

There are some schools not have computer, language laboratory, and others encourage listening process. Sa can affect the students in comprehending the context.

## **2. 3. Definition of Listening Definition**

Listening is a matter where a person accepts, accepting requires thinking, and it requires memory and listening, thinking, and remembering it is impossible to be separated (Abbas Pourhossein Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). According to Rost (2011) listening is receiving, constructive and representing meaning, collaborative, and transformative. According to Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011) listening activities are divided into 3 categories, namely pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening.

a. Pre-listening activities, here students are given some key words and tell the topics that might be discussed in the conversation that will be heard by students. The purpose is to help students activate prior knowledge of students and to provide context for specific listening tasks.

b. While listening activities, students who actively participate in listening activities will find it easier to know the meaning of what the speaker wants to convey because

they already have experience. From this experience, students can check and correct their predictions during listening.

- c. Post-listening activities, with post-listening activities will be more effective. Well-designed these activities help students know what they have heard based on their thoughts and from their experiences, and support translation and critical listening and reflective thinking. Post-listening activities also help teachers to assess and check the understanding of the students.

#### **2. 4. Listening Process**

Based on listening consists of 5 stages, namely hearing, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding

##### **a. Receiving (Hearing)**

Receiving is a response to the sound received by the ear. Listening is simply a physical response to sound waves; to hear you must to listen, but you don't need listen to hear.

##### **b. Understanding (Learning)**

In this step the listener understands the symbols that the listener seen and heard by analyzing the meaning of the stimuli we have received not only words but also sounds such as clapping. For interpersonal communication to be successful, the listener must to understand the meaning and the context assumed by the speaker.

##### **c. Remembering (Recalling)**

In listening process, remembering is an important part because the listener not only receives and interprets the message, but also adds it to the memory in his mind.

##### **d. Evaluation (Judging)**

At this stage only the listeners who participate actively sort out facts from opinions, and determine whether or not there is bias or prejudice in a message.

##### **e. Responding (Answering)**

At this stage the listener needs to complete the process through verbal and/or nonverbal

feedback. This is the only way to know the message sent by the sender was received.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3. 1. Research Design**

In this research, researchers used descriptive design. According to Atmowardoyo (2018), descriptive research is defined as the research method used by researchers to describe the existing phenomena as accurately as possible. The phenomenon to be studied in descriptive research is available. What the authors need to do is collect available data through the use of research instruments. Method used in this research was descriptive research because the researchers in this research focuses on finding the difficulties faced by the students and what the English teacher do to minimize the difficulties faced by the students in the eleventh grade of Senior High School 3 Polewali.

#### **3. 2. Research Site**

This research started in 21st April 2022. The data was obtained using questionnaire and interview. The subject of this research are students and teachers who teach at eleventh grade at SMAN 3 Polewali.

#### **3. 3. Research Instruments**

The instrument was used in this study are questionnaire and interview protocol to answer, "What are the difficulties faced by the students in listening comprehension?"

#### **3. 4. Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, the researchers analyzed the data using the following steps:

a. Data Reduction

The data obtained then reduced to retrieve data related to research. The data then summarized and selected important things and focused on the data that supports the results of the study.

b. Data Display

In this stage the researchers take the data points to be given a code for each answer to the research information.

c. Conclusion/Verification

Conclusion and verification are the drawing conclusions from each of these stages is carried out simultaneously so that the collection and analysis of data always runs at the same time.

#### 4. Findings

#### 4. 1. The Analysis of Data Obtained from Questionnaire

a. Lack of Vocabulary

One of the successes in listening is being able to understand the meaning of what they listen to. Understanding the speaker's intentions can only be obtained if the listener has good vocabulary mastery, on the other hand, if the listener has a poor vocabulary, of course, the meaning conveyed will not arrive or will not be understood by the listener because he does not know the meaning of the word spoken by the speaker. This is one of the difficulties of students in listening exercise. This can be seen through the results of the questionnaire answered by students below:

Table 1. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
2. Do you find it difficult to understand every single word of the spoken text? (Apakah kamu memiliki kesulitan dalam memahami setiap kata pada teks lisan?)	28	3
3. Do you understand listening text on in which there are too many unfamiliar words for you? (Apakah kamu memahami teks pada latihan mendengarkan yang mana terdapat banyak kata-kata yang tidak familiar untukmu?)	14	17

The first question on the questionnaire that was shared was about the difficulty of students understanding every single word in the spoken text that had been filled out by 31 students. There were 28 of 31 students who chose "yes" which means that they had difficulty understanding every word in the spoken text that was presented to them. The second question is about the number of words that

students unfamiliar with while listening. There were 17 of 31 students chose the "no" option, which means that students still find it difficult to understand the text at a listening practice where there are many words that are unfamiliar to them.

b. Students Feel Anxious

Table 2. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you have low motivation or spirit in studying listening? (Apakah kamu memiliki motivasi atau semangat belajar yang rendah dalam belajar mendengarkan?)	14	17

Based on the questionnaire that the student has filled out, the questions asked related to students' motivation or enthusiasm for learning listening. There were 17 respondents chose "no" and 14 respondents chose "yes". It

shows that most students have high motivation when learning listening.

c. They Do Not Trust Themselves

Table 3. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Before doing listening comprehension, do you fear you cannot understand what you will hear? (Sebelum melakukan pemahaman mendengarkan, apakah kamu cemas kamu tidak dapat memahami apa yang kamu dengarkan?)	26	4
2. Do you feel worried if you don't understand spoken text? (Apakah kamu khawatir jika kamu tidak memahami teks lisan?)	26	4

Based on the questionnaire that the students filled out, 26 students felt anxious. This indicates that students feel worried about the activities carried out in English classes, namely listening. Before they do listen exercise, students feel worried that they will not understand what they are listening to. The next question is about students' anxiety that they do not understand spoken language. It can be seen

in the questionnaire results, which showed that 26 respondents were concerned if they did not understand the oral text. The teacher's obligation is to overcome the students' lack of confidence.

d. Unclear Pronunciation

Table 4. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you have low motivation or spirit in studying listening? (Apakah kamu memiliki motivasi atau semangat belajar yang rendah dalam belajar mendengarkan?)	27	5

There were 27 students who choose "yes" which means that they have difficulty listening, especially when recognizing words. Students feel that the word is familiar to them, but

students are unable to recognize what word the speaker mentions.

e. Strange Accent

Table 5. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you have low motivation or spirit in studying listening? (Apakah kamu memiliki motivasi atau semangat belajar yang rendah dalam belajar mendengarkan?)	22	9

Based on the questionnaire that the students filled out, there were 22 students chose "yes". It means the students have difficulty understanding what the speaker is saying when speaking in various accents. Students feel

confused when the accent used is a British accent.

f. The Speaker Talks Too Fast

Table 6. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you find it difficult to understand when the speaker speaks too fast? (Apakah kamu menemukan kesulitan untuk memahami ketika pembicara berbicara terlalu cepat?)	29	2

It can be seen in the results of the questionnaire, 27 students chose "yes" option and 2 students chose the "no" option. Based on the questionnaire results, it was produced that when the speaker speaks too fast, it has almost no pauses, making it difficult for students to understand what the speaker is talking about.

In speaking, the speaker speaks too fast, make students hear the whole spoken word in one whole.

g. Lack of Concentration

Table 7. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you lose concentration when you think the meaning of new words? (Apakah kamu kehilangan konsentrasi ketika kamu berpikir arti dari sebuah kata baru)	29	2
2. Do you lose concentration if the recording poor quality? (Apakah kamu kehilangan konsentrasi jika kualitas rekaman buruk?)	28	3
3. Do you find difficult to concentrate if noises around? (Apakah kamu menemukan kesulitan untuk konsentrasi jika di sekitar berisik?)	30	1

Based on the questionnaire that has been handed out to the student there are several things that can influence students especially in the listening exercise. The first challenge is when listening to students busy to think the meaning of a new word they are listening to; it can be seen from the number of students who select the "yes" option on the questionnaire as many as 25 out of 31 students.

The second difficulty is if the quality of the audio or recordings played to students is poor quality. Poor audio quality can produce unclear sound, so students cannot listen well to the

speaker. It can be seen in the results of the questionnaire that has been distributed, 28 students chose "yes" option. The third difficulty is that students find it difficult to concentrate when their surroundings are noisy. The questionnaire results showed that 30 of 31 students chose "yes" option. When we focus our minds and focus on one thing, a quiet room is needed to support these activities, but if the room is noisy, it can damage your concentration.

h. Topic Changing

Table 8. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do you find it difficult to understand when the speaker speaks too fast? (Apakah kamu menemukan kesulitan untuk memahami ketika pembicara berbicara terlalu cepat?)	29	2

In the audio listened to by students, the speaker does not only talk about one thing, so when students listen, they often do not realize that the speaker has moved from one topic to another. It can be seen that in the results of the questionnaire above, 19 out of 31 students

chose the "yes" option, which showed that students had difficulty recognizing signs or that the speaker had moved from one topic to another.

i. Poor Quality of Audio

Table 9. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. If unclear sounds resulting from poor audio. Does interfere your listening comprehension? (jika suara tidak jelas berasal dari audio yang tidak baik. Apakah hal tersebut mengganggu pemahaman mendengarkanmu)	27	4

Unclear sounds coming from poor audio quality can certainly affect students' hearing and comprehension. It can be seen from the questionnaire distributed and completed by students, 27 students chose the "yes" option, and 4 students chose the "no" option. It

indicates that most students' understanding of what they are listening to is compromised if the audio being played is of poor quality.

j. Inadequate Facility

Table 10. Questionnaire Result

Questions	Yes	No
1. Do the media and tools used during listening often have problems? (Apakah media dan alat yang digunakan selama mendengarkan sering bermasalah?)	27	4

From the questionnaire results above, it can be seen that as many as 12 students chose the "yes" option, and 19 students chose the "no" option. It means that some students think that the media and tools used to listen are in good condition, but others think that the media and tools used are not in good condition. The last question that was also asked in the questionnaire was about the tools and learning resources in schools that were adequate and what were not specifically for listening material. It can be seen in the results of the questionnaire that has been distributed, 25

students chose the "yes" option, and 6 others answered "no".

## 4. 2. Interview Result with Students

From interviewed that was done with students, the researchers got several difficulties faced by students in listening comprehension, such as the following:

a. Students' interest in learning English

The conclusion of the interviews that have been carried out is that students do not really like English lessons, especially in the



material taught at school because for them English lessons are difficult for students to learn.

b. Listening is difficult

The conclusion of the interviews that have been conducted is that for students English is a difficult lesson such as in grammar and pronunciation material that sometimes confuses students.

c. Concentration

The conclusion of the interview that has been carried out is that there are several things that can damage students' concentration in listening such as noisy class situations and speakers who sometimes do not sound clear.

d. Lack of Vocabulary

The conclusion of the interviews that have been conducted is that students still have difficulties, especially in mastering vocabulary in English.

e. Unclear Pronunciation

The conclusion of the interview that has been conducted is that students have difficulty in listening to the vocabulary in English spoken by the speaker in this case the student cannot hear clearly what the speaker is saying.

f. Accent

The conclusion of the interview that has been carried out is that students have difficulties when listening because the accent used by the speaker is not used to being listened to by students.

g. The Speaker Talks Too Fast

The conclusion of the interviews that have been conducted is that students find it difficult to listen because the way the speaker speaks so quickly makes students overwhelmed in listening to what the speaker says.

h. The Facility of School

The conclusion of the interviews that have been conducted is that their school does not

yet have adequate facilities to listening skills.

## 5. Discussions

The difficulties faced by students are divided into two categories: internal and external factors. Internal factors are factors that come from within a person or the individual himself, which is usually this factor in the form of attitudes as well as traits inherent in a person. External factors are factors from the outside of a person or individual. This factor covers the surrounding environment including the closest people.

### a. Internal Factors

#### 1) Lack of Vocabulary

In listening and comprehending what is being listened to, it is very important to know the meaning of what is being conveyed or said by the speaker. However, this is different from what happened to the students of SMAN 3 Polewali. Most students have limited vocabulary which makes it difficult for them to understand the whole context and to get what the speaker say. The audio played by the teacher for students still has so many words that are not familiar to them, which then becomes difficult for students in listening.

According to Goh (1999), vocabulary affects students' comprehension. In understanding what is very important is knowing the meaning of the words in the text.

#### 2) Students' Interest in English

Students' interest in something will lead them to learn more about it. Based on what has been expressed by students, they do not like English very much because they do not know and

consider that English is difficult for them to learn. It is very important for students to feel comfortable. For students, learning English material is not interesting for students because it is difficult to learn, but when they get listening material, be it a song, conversation, and so on, students feel more enthusiastic about such a thing.

Based on questionnaires number 4, 5, and 6, more than half of the students answered that they agreed that they had the motivation to participate in listening learning.

### 3) Unclear Pronunciation

The difficulty also faced by students are related to the pronunciation of native speakers. There are several words that have the same meaning but they are different words and are commonly called homonyms.

### 4) Lack of Concentration

To understand what the speaker means, a listener must certainly have concentration and focus on what is being listened to. Based on a questionnaire and an interview with students, several things were found that could distract students' concentration, including boredom, noise, students' being too busy thinking about the meaning of a word they just listened to, and the audio quality not being good.

### 5) Strange Accent

Accents in this case are various ways of speaking in English. The accent used by the speaker also makes it difficult for students to understand what the speaker are talking about. If the speaker using British accent, which the pronunciation is different from the American accent is quite different.

### 6) The Speaker Talks Too Fast

When listening the audio played by the teacher, not all conversations or those spoken by native speakers can be listened to by students well. Apart from accents and pronunciation, the speed of speaking with native speakers is also one of the students' difficulties. Based on Goh (1999) stated that language differences have different "normal" speaking speeds. Students who their first language is Chinese and listening to audio with a speaker whose first language is English will have difficulty capturing what is spoken from the speaker.

### 7) Topic Changing

The topic of conversation on the audio is not just talking about one thing, there are several topics discussed in the conversation played by the teacher. However, the ability to know when native speakers move from one topic to another is also one of the difficulties for students.

### 8) They do not trust themselves

Students with confidence in their own abilities will be able to overcome the anxiety they face in the learning process. Self-confidence in students is also able to improve student learning outcomes.

## **b. External Factors**

### 1) Inadequate Facility

The results of a questionnaire and interview conducted with students stated that good facilities are very important for listening activities. After asking students further in interviews conducted, students leaned towards school facilities, namely language laboratories, which until now still do not exist in their school environment. The ability to listen depends on

the speaker, situation, and listener and to achieve optimal listening results is also supported by adequate facilities and infrastructure.

## 6. Conclusion

After conducting research at SMAN 3 Polewali, researchers can conclude that there are several things that students have difficulty in listening comprehension. Students' difficulties are divided into two factors, namely internal and external factors. Internal factors are: Lack of vocabulary, students' interest, unclear pronunciation, lack of concentrating, strong accent, the speaker talks too fast, topic changing, the students do not trust themselves. External factor; inadequate facilities.

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