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Exploring Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Challenges in EFL Students' Listening Comprehension: Evidence from an Indonesian Junior High School

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Abstrak : Pemahaman menyimak (listening comprehension) merupakan salah satu keterampilan fundamental dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris yang memungkinkan siswa memahami komunikasi lisan serta mengembangkan kompetensi berbahasa secara efektif. Namun, siswa yang mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (English as a Foreign Language/EFL) sering menghadapi berbagai tantangan linguistik dan non-linguistik yang menghambat kemampuan mereka dalam memahami bahasa Inggris lisan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis kesulitan linguistik dan non-linguistik yang dialami siswa dalam memahami materi menyimak bahasa Inggris serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap munculnya kesulitan tersebut di UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang, Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang, Sulawesi Selatan, Indonesia. Penelitian ini dirancang menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif dengan metode survei. Data direncanakan dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner terstruktur yang diadaptasi dari kerangka konseptual pemahaman menyimak, dengan fokus pada faktor linguistik yang meliputi keterbatasan kosakata, pengucapan yang tidak familiar, kompleksitas struktur tata bahasa, kecepatan berbicara, serta kesulitan mengenali kata-kata dalam bahasa lisan. Sementara itu, faktor non-linguistik mencakup konsentrasi, motivasi belajar, kecemasan, lingkungan pembelajaran, kualitas audio, serta keterbatasan paparan terhadap materi menyimak bahasa Inggris yang autentik. Data yang terkumpul akan dianalisis menggunakan statistik deskriptif berupa frekuensi, persentase, dan nilai rata-rata untuk menentukan tingkat kesulitan serta faktor-faktor dominan yang memengaruhi pemahaman menyimak siswa. Penelitian ini diharapkan dapat memberikan gambaran komprehensif mengenai berbagai hambatan yang dihadapi siswa sekolah menengah pertama dalam pembelajaran menyimak bahasa Inggris. Selain itu, hasil penelitian diharapkan memberikan implikasi praktis bagi guru bahasa Inggris dalam merancang kegiatan pembelajaran menyimak yang lebih efektif, mengintegrasikan media pembelajaran digital yang sesuai, serta menerapkan strategi pengajaran yang mempertimbangkan kebutuhan linguistik dan psikologis siswa. Penelitian ini diharapkan berkontribusi terhadap pengembangan pembelajaran menyimak bahasa Inggris yang lebih inklusif, interaktif, dan kontekstual pada jenjang pendidikan menengah pertama di Indonesia.
Kata Kunci: pembelajar EFL; pemahaman menyimak; tantangan linguistik; faktor non-linguistik; sekolah menengah pertama; pembelajaran bahasa Inggris.

ABSTRACT: *Listening comprehension is a fundamental component of English language learning that enables students to understand spoken communication and develop effective language proficiency. However, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners frequently encounter various linguistic and non-linguistic challenges that hinder their ability to comprehend spoken English. This study aims to investigate the linguistic and non-linguistic difficulties experienced by EFL students in listening comprehension and identify the factors contributing to these challenges at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang, Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The study adopts a descriptive quantitative research design using a survey approach. Data are proposed to be collected through a structured questionnaire adapted from established listening comprehension frameworks, focusing on linguistic factors, including limited vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation, grammatical complexity, speech rate, and difficulties recognizing spoken words, as well as non-linguistic factors, such as concentration, motivation, anxiety, learning environment, audio quality, and limited exposure to authentic English listening materials. The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to determine the prevalence and relative significance of each listening comprehension challenge. The study is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties encountered by junior high school EFL learners and identify the most prominent factors influencing their listening comprehension. Furthermore, the findings are anticipated to offer practical implications for English teachers in designing more effective listening activities, integrating appropriate digital learning resources, and implementing instructional strategies that address students' linguistic and psychological needs. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive, engaging, and contextually relevant listening instruction in Indonesian secondary education.*
Keywords: EFL learners; listening comprehension; linguistic challenges; non-linguistic factors; junior high school; English language teaching.

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Introduction

Listening comprehension is widely recognized as a fundamental component of English language acquisition and an essential foundation for effective communication. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, listening enables learners to receive spoken information, interpret linguistic messages, recognize pronunciation patterns, and develop meaningful interactions with others. Unlike reading, which allows learners to revisit written information at their own pace, listening frequently requires immediate processing of spoken language. Learners must identify sounds, recognize words, understand grammatical relationships, and construct meaning within a limited period. Consequently, listening comprehension represents a complex cognitive and linguistic process that requires the integration of multiple knowledge sources and processing strategies (Rost, 2011; Field, 2008).

The importance of listening comprehension becomes particularly evident in secondary education, where students are expected to develop basic communicative competence in English. At the junior high school level, English learning provides opportunities for students to acquire vocabulary, recognize common expressions, understand classroom instructions, and participate in simple conversations. However, developing listening comprehension remains challenging for many Indonesian EFL learners because English is generally learned as a foreign language rather than used consistently in everyday communication. Students often encounter English primarily through classroom instruction, textbooks, audiovisual materials, and digital learning platforms. Limited exposure to authentic spoken English may restrict their familiarity with natural pronunciation, connected speech, different accents, and variations in speaking speed.

Listening comprehension involves more than simply hearing spoken words. It requires learners to actively process linguistic information and integrate it with contextual knowledge, previous experiences, and expectations. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) emphasize that successful listening requires cognitive and metacognitive processes through which learners monitor understanding, identify communication problems, and select appropriate strategies. Similarly, Field (2008) explains that listening difficulties frequently emerge when learners cannot effectively recognize speech signals or connect acoustic information with linguistic knowledge. These difficulties demonstrate that listening comprehension is a dynamic process influenced by the interaction between linguistic competence and cognitive processing.

One major source of listening comprehension difficulties is associated with linguistic factors. Linguistic challenges refer to obstacles arising from learners' limited knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, phonological patterns, and spoken discourse structures. Students with insufficient vocabulary knowledge may recognize individual sounds but fail to understand the overall meaning of a spoken message. Likewise, unfamiliar pronunciation and connected speech can prevent learners from identifying words they already know in written form. Rapid speech delivery may further increase processing demands, particularly among students with limited listening experience. These difficulties can reduce comprehension accuracy and discourage students from participating actively in listening activities.

Previous studies have demonstrated that linguistic knowledge plays an important role in successful listening comprehension. Nation (2001) emphasizes the significance of vocabulary knowledge in language comprehension, while Buck (2001) identifies linguistic processing as a central component of listening assessment and performance. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) further explain that vocabulary limitations, unfamiliar accents, pronunciation differences, and complex grammatical structures are among the common obstacles encountered by EFL learners. These findings suggest that students' listening comprehension cannot be separated from their broader language proficiency.

In addition to linguistic challenges, non-linguistic factors may significantly influence students' ability to comprehend spoken English. These factors include motivation, anxiety, concentration, self-confidence, learning environment, instructional methods, technological resources, and opportunities for listening practice. For example, students who experience anxiety during listening activities may become excessively concerned about understanding every word, resulting in reduced concentration and ineffective comprehension. Similarly, learners who lack confidence in their English proficiency may avoid participating in listening exercises or responding to spoken questions.

Environmental conditions also influence listening comprehension. Classroom noise, inadequate audio equipment, poor sound quality, and limited access to appropriate listening materials can interfere with learners' ability to recognize and interpret spoken information. In schools where technological facilities are limited, teachers may rely heavily on textbook-based activities rather than authentic audio resources. Such conditions can restrict opportunities for students to experience different accents, conversational expressions, and natural speech patterns. Therefore, listening comprehension difficulties should be examined not only from the perspective of students' linguistic abilities but also through the psychological, instructional, and environmental circumstances surrounding the learning process.

The increasing integration of digital technology into English language teaching has created new opportunities for addressing listening comprehension challenges. Digital audio recordings, podcasts, interactive videos, and storytelling applications provide learners with access to authentic and contextualized listening materials. Aisa et al. (2025), in a study involving Sam Hermansyah, reported that audio storytelling supported improvements in EFL students' listening performance. Their findings suggest that contextualized audio input can facilitate comprehension by presenting language through meaningful narratives. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of digital resources depends on learners' proficiency, instructional guidance, technological accessibility, and the appropriateness of learning materials.

In Indonesian junior high schools, the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic factors deserves particular attention. Students may experience difficulties understanding spoken English because of limited vocabulary and unfamiliar pronunciation, while simultaneously encountering motivational, psychological, and environmental barriers. These challenges may reinforce one another. For instance, insufficient vocabulary knowledge can increase listening anxiety, while anxiety may reduce concentration and interfere with learners' ability to recognize familiar expressions. Such interactions indicate that listening comprehension difficulties are multidimensional and should be investigated

through a comprehensive analytical framework.

Previous research has examined listening comprehension problems among EFL learners at different educational levels. Hamouda (2013) investigated listening difficulties among university students and identified various obstacles associated with listening materials, linguistic features, psychological characteristics, and learning conditions. Urrosyidah (2022) similarly examined listening comprehension problems among English education students at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau, using a descriptive quantitative approach and a questionnaire addressing multiple listening-related indicators. However, findings obtained from university students cannot automatically be generalized to junior high school learners because of differences in language proficiency, cognitive development, learning experiences, and educational environments.

The present study therefore proposes to investigate linguistic and non-linguistic challenges in listening comprehension among students at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang, Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school context provides an opportunity to examine listening comprehension difficulties at the lower secondary education level. Rather than assuming that all learners experience similar problems, the study seeks to identify the relative prominence of different linguistic and non-linguistic challenges through systematic data collection and analysis.

Specifically, this study addresses three research questions: (1) What linguistic challenges are experienced by EFL students in listening comprehension? (2) What non-linguistic factors contribute to students' listening comprehension difficulties? and (3) Which challenges are perceived as the most prominent among the participating students? By addressing these questions, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform the development of appropriate listening instruction, improve classroom learning experiences, and support teachers in designing more responsive English language teaching strategies.

The significance of this research lies in its potential theoretical, pedagogical, and practical contributions. Theoretically, it seeks to extend existing discussions of EFL listening comprehension by examining the interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic challenges in Indonesian junior high school education. Pedagogically, the findings may assist English teachers in identifying students' learning needs and selecting appropriate instructional techniques. Practically, the study may provide recommendations for improving listening materials, classroom activities, digital learning integration, and students' confidence in understanding spoken English. Ultimately, understanding these challenges is an important step toward creating more effective, inclusive, and contextually relevant listening instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Listening comprehension is a receptive language skill involving the interpretation of spoken information through the interaction of auditory perception, linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and contextual understanding. According to Rost (2011), listening is an active process through which individuals construct meaning from spoken messages. Rather than passively receiving sound, listeners continuously interpret linguistic signals, connect information with prior knowledge, and evaluate the meaning of communication.

Buck (2001) explains that listening comprehension involves several interconnected processes, including recognizing speech sounds, identifying lexical items, interpreting grammatical structures, and understanding discourse relationships. These processes operate simultaneously and require learners to manage limited cognitive resources. Consequently, difficulties at one processing level may influence comprehension at another level.

Listening comprehension is particularly challenging in EFL environments because learners have limited opportunities to encounter natural spoken English outside formal instruction. Students may understand written vocabulary but struggle to recognize the same words when pronounced naturally. Field (2008) argues that listening instruction should address the processes involved in decoding spoken language rather than focusing exclusively on answering comprehension questions.

Linguistic challenges refer to difficulties associated with the language features embedded in spoken communication. These challenges commonly involve vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation recognition, grammatical understanding, speech rate, connected speech, and accent familiarity.

Vocabulary limitations represent a significant obstacle because learners cannot interpret spoken messages effectively when essential lexical items are unfamiliar. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge contributes substantially to language comprehension. Students with restricted vocabulary may understand isolated words but struggle to interpret complete utterances.

Pronunciation differences also create difficulties. Spoken English contains reductions, contractions, linking, assimilation, and variations in stress and intonation. These phonological characteristics may prevent learners from recognizing familiar words. Additionally, rapid speech can increase processing demands, leaving insufficient time for learners to interpret incoming information.

Grammar constitutes another important linguistic dimension. Complex sentence structures, unfamiliar tense patterns, and embedded clauses may complicate comprehension, particularly when students attempt to translate spoken messages word by word. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) identify these linguistic difficulties as important factors influencing EFL listening performance.

Non-Linguistic Challenges in Listening Comprehension

Non-linguistic challenges involve psychological, cognitive, instructional, and environmental factors that affect learners' ability to process spoken language. Among these factors, listening anxiety is particularly important. Learners who fear misunderstanding spoken messages may experience reduced confidence and increased cognitive pressure.

Motivation also influences students' willingness to engage in listening activities. Learners with strong motivation are generally more willing to practice independently, explore additional listening resources, and persist when encountering unfamiliar language. Conversely, students with limited motivation may avoid challenging listening tasks.

Concentration and attention are equally important. Listening requires sustained attention, particularly when spoken messages

contain unfamiliar vocabulary or complex information. Background noise, distractions, fatigue, and lengthy audio recordings may interfere with comprehension.

Environmental conditions, including classroom acoustics, audio quality, technological facilities, and instructional resources, can also affect listening performance. Hamouda (2013) emphasizes the importance of examining these factors alongside linguistic difficulties to obtain a comprehensive understanding of listening comprehension problems.

2.4 Cognitive and Metacognitive Processes in Listening

Cognitive and metacognitive processes are essential for effective listening comprehension. Cognitive strategies involve directly processing linguistic information through activities such as predicting meaning, identifying keywords, making inferences, and connecting new information with existing knowledge.

Metacognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening performance. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that learners benefit from understanding how listening processes operate and developing awareness of strategies that support comprehension.

Students who use metacognitive strategies may become more effective listeners because they can identify comprehension problems and adjust their approaches. For example, learners may predict the content of an audio recording before listening, monitor their understanding during playback, and evaluate their interpretation afterward.

These strategies are especially relevant for junior high school learners, who may require explicit guidance in developing independent listening habits.

2.5 Digital Media and Listening Comprehension

Digital technology offers opportunities to improve listening instruction through authentic audio materials, interactive activities, and flexible learning experiences. Podcasts, audio storytelling, educational videos, and digital learning platforms can expose students to varied pronunciation patterns, vocabulary, and communicative contexts.

Aisa et al. (2025) examined audio storytelling in EFL classrooms and reported improvements in students' listening comprehension following the intervention. Their findings highlight the potential value of contextualized listening materials for supporting language development.

Similarly, Nor and Hair (2023) identified English storytelling resources on Spotify that could support listening practice through materials with different difficulty levels. However, digital resources should be selected according to learners' proficiency and learning objectives rather than introduced solely because of their technological features.

For junior high school students, carefully structured listening activities using short recordings, familiar topics, and repeated exposure may help reduce comprehension difficulties. Teacher guidance remains essential to ensure that digital listening resources contribute meaningfully to language learning.

Previous studies have consistently identified listening comprehension as a challenging aspect of EFL learning. Hamouda (2013) examined listening comprehension problems

among EFL learners and identified difficulties related to linguistic knowledge, concentration, psychological characteristics, and learning conditions.

Urrosyidah (2022) investigated listening comprehension problems among university-level English education students at UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design involving 34 participants and used a questionnaire addressing eight dimensions of listening comprehension difficulties. Its findings indicated the presence of multiple listening-related challenges.

Although these studies provide useful insights, their findings primarily concern university students or learners in different educational contexts. Junior high school students may experience different combinations of linguistic, psychological, and environmental challenges because of their developmental characteristics and limited exposure to English.

The present study seeks to address this contextual gap by examining listening comprehension challenges at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang. It specifically distinguishes linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions while investigating their relative prominence among lower secondary EFL learners.

The proposed conceptual framework positions listening comprehension difficulties as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, speech rate, motivation, anxiety, concentration, instructional practices, and learning conditions. This framework provides the theoretical foundation for instrument development, data analysis, and interpretation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to employ a descriptive quantitative research approach to investigate linguistic and non-linguistic challenges experienced by junior high school students in English listening comprehension. A descriptive quantitative design is considered appropriate because the primary purpose of the research is to identify, measure, categorize, and compare students' perceived listening difficulties without introducing an experimental intervention.

The study focuses on two principal dimensions of listening comprehension challenges: linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors. Linguistic factors encompass vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation recognition, grammatical understanding, speech rate, and recognition of connected speech. Non-linguistic factors include concentration, motivation, anxiety, confidence, environmental conditions, and access to appropriate learning resources.

The research is intended to generate numerical descriptions of students' perceptions and identify which challenges are most frequently experienced. The analysis will focus on frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations. This approach is consistent with descriptive survey research, which seeks to explain characteristics and patterns within a defined population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The proposed research will be conducted at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang, located in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school is selected as the research setting because the study aims to examine English listening comprehension challenges within the context of Indonesian lower secondary education.

The target population consists of students enrolled in English classes at the school during the academic year in which the research is implemented. Students from Grades VII, VIII, and IX may be included, subject to school permission, curricular relevance, and the availability of participants.

The final sample size will be determined after obtaining the official student population and class distribution. Where feasible, proportional stratified random sampling will be employed to ensure representation across grade levels. If participation is restricted to accessible classes, the sampling procedure will be reported as convenience sampling, together with its limitations.

Eligibility criteria will include enrollment in the selected English classes, prior exposure to English listening activities, and willingness to participate. Parental or guardian consent and students' assent will be obtained where required. Participation will be voluntary and will not influence students' academic assessment.

The principal research instrument will be a structured questionnaire designed to assess students' perceptions of linguistic and non-linguistic listening comprehension challenges. The questionnaire will be developed by adapting relevant indicators from Hamouda (2013), Urrosyidah (2022), and established listening comprehension literature.

The proposed instrument will contain 30 statements divided into two major dimensions. Fifteen items will assess linguistic challenges, and fifteen items will assess non-linguistic challenges.

The linguistic dimension will cover vocabulary limitations, unfamiliar pronunciation, grammatical complexity, speech rate, and word recognition. The non-linguistic dimension will examine concentration difficulties, listening anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, learning environment, and audio-related problems.

A five-point Likert scale will be used, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Items will be phrased primarily as statements of difficulty so that higher scores consistently indicate greater perceived listening challenges.

Examples of questionnaire statements include: "I find it difficult to understand English audio recordings containing unfamiliar vocabulary," "I cannot recognize familiar English words when they are pronounced quickly," and "I feel nervous when answering questions after listening to English recordings."

The questionnaire will be provided in Indonesian to minimize misunderstanding and ensure that students can respond accurately to the statements. Translation and wording will be reviewed by language education experts.

A short listening comprehension assessment may also be administered as a supplementary instrument. Such an assessment would provide additional information about students' actual listening performance. However, questionnaire scores and listening test scores will be analyzed separately because perceived difficulty and demonstrated proficiency represent different constructs.

Instrument validity will be established through expert judgment and pilot testing. The questionnaire will be reviewed by specialists in English language teaching, educational assessment, and quantitative research methodology.

The expert review will evaluate item relevance, clarity, language appropriateness, and alignment with the conceptual framework. A content validity index may be calculated to quantify agreement among reviewers.

A pilot study will then be conducted with students who possess characteristics similar to those of the target participants but are not included in the main sample. The purpose of pilot testing is to identify ambiguous statements, assess questionnaire administration time, and examine the internal consistency of the instrument.

Cronbach's alpha will be calculated separately for the linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions. A coefficient of approximately 0.70 or higher will generally be considered acceptable for exploratory research, although reliability will be interpreted in relation to the number of items, construct characteristics, and study context.

Items showing weak item-total correlations or unclear wording will be reviewed before the main data collection. Reliability coefficients will only be reported after actual pilot data have been analyzed.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection will be organized into several stages. First, the researchers will obtain formal permission from the school administration and coordinate with English teachers to identify appropriate classes and schedules.

Second, the questionnaire will be reviewed and pilot-tested. Necessary revisions will be completed before distribution to the main participants.

Third, the researchers will explain the purpose of the study, participation procedures, confidentiality arrangements, and students' right to decline participation. Students will be informed that their responses will be used for academic research rather than classroom grading.

Fourth, the questionnaire will be distributed during a scheduled session under researcher supervision. Students will be given sufficient time to read each statement and select responses reflecting their experiences.

Finally, completed questionnaires will be checked for missing responses, coded anonymously, and entered into statistical software for analysis. Personally identifying information will be excluded from the analytical dataset.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistical procedures. Frequencies and percentages will describe the distribution of responses, while mean scores and standard deviations will summarize the relative severity and variability of each challenge.

The percentage of students selecting a particular response category will be calculated using:

$$ P=\frac{f}{N}\times100\% $$

where P represents the percentage, f represents the frequency of a particular response, and N represents the total number of valid responses.

The mean score for each questionnaire item will be calculated as:

$$ \bar{X}=\frac{\sum X}{N} $$

Dimension scores will be calculated by averaging relevant item responses. This procedure will allow comparison between linguistic and non-linguistic challenges.

For descriptive interpretation, the following provisional categories may be used:

Mean score	Interpretation
1.00–1.80	Very low difficulty
1.81–2.60	Low difficulty
2.61–3.40	Moderate difficulty
3.41–4.20	High difficulty
4.21–5.00	Very high difficulty

These categories are analytical conventions rather than validated diagnostic thresholds. Their use will be explained in the final research report.

The researchers will rank the questionnaire indicators according to their mean scores to identify the most prominent perceived listening challenges. If sample size and distributional assumptions permit, additional comparisons across grade levels may be conducted.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles will be maintained throughout the research process. Participation will be voluntary, and students will be informed about the objectives and procedures of the study. Permission from the school and appropriate consent from parents or guardians will be obtained before data collection.

All questionnaire responses will be treated confidentially. Individual students will not be identified in publications, and the research findings will be reported in aggregate form.

The study will also acknowledge the limitations of self-reported data, including possible response bias and differences between perceived listening difficulties and actual listening competence.

RESULTS

The results section is intended to present the distribution, characteristics, and relative prominence of linguistic and non-linguistic challenges experienced by EFL students at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang. The analysis will be organized according to the two principal research dimensions established in the conceptual framework.

The first dimension addresses linguistic challenges associated with understanding spoken English, including vocabulary limitations, unfamiliar pronunciation, grammatical complexity, rapid speech, and connected speech recognition. The second dimension addresses non-linguistic challenges involving concentration, motivation, anxiety, confidence, environmental conditions, and the availability of appropriate learning materials.

The results will be interpreted using students' questionnaire responses and descriptive statistical indicators. Since the school-specific questionnaire dataset has not yet been collected or supplied, no empirical frequencies, mean scores, percentages, or significance values can currently be reported.

Students' Linguistic Challenges

The linguistic analysis will examine the extent to which students perceive language-related characteristics as obstacles to listening comprehension. Vocabulary limitations will be assessed through statements concerning unfamiliar words and difficulties understanding essential information in audio recordings.

Pronunciation recognition will be examined through students' reported difficulties distinguishing English sounds and recognizing familiar vocabulary in spoken form. Particular attention will be given to the differences between written and spoken English, including reduced pronunciation and word linking.

Speech rate will be analyzed to determine whether students experience difficulty processing spoken information when audio recordings are delivered at a natural conversational pace. Grammatical complexity will be examined through students' responses concerning unfamiliar sentence structures and their ability to interpret relationships between words and clauses.

The following table provides the proposed reporting format.

Table 1. Descriptive Analysis of Linguistic Listening Challenges

Linguistic indicators	**Mean**	**SD**	**Category**
Limited vocabulary knowledge	—	—	Pending
Unfamiliar pronunciation	—	—	Pending
Rapid speech rate	—	—	Pending
Grammatical complexity	—	—	Pending
Connected speech recognition	—	—	Pending
Overall linguistic challenges	—	—	Pending

Note: All numerical values must be calculated from the actual student questionnaire dataset.

The final analysis will compare the mean scores of these indicators. The indicator with the highest mean score will be interpreted as the most strongly perceived linguistic challenge among the participating students.

However, higher questionnaire scores will not automatically establish that a particular linguistic factor causes poor listening performance. Such conclusions would require additional evidence, including listening assessment results or an appropriate explanatory research design.

4.3 Students' Non-Linguistic Challenges

The second analytical dimension will examine psychological, cognitive, instructional, and environmental difficulties associated with listening comprehension.

Concentration difficulties will be assessed through students' ability to maintain attention while listening to English recordings. Listening anxiety will be examined through statements addressing nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and discomfort when answering listening comprehension questions.

Motivation and confidence will be evaluated through students' willingness to participate in listening activities and their perceptions of their ability to understand spoken English.

Environmental conditions will include classroom noise, audio clarity, and the availability of suitable listening resources. These indicators are important because listening comprehension requires students to process spoken information under conditions that support accurate auditory perception.

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Non-Linguistic Listening Challenges

Non-linguistic indicators	Mean	SD	Category
Concentration difficulties	—	—	Pending
Listening anxiety	—	—	Pending
Low learning motivation	—	—	Pending
Limited self-confidence	—	—	Pending
Classroom environmental problems	—	—	Pending
Audio quality and learning resources	—	—	Pending
Overall non-linguistic challenges	—	—	Pending

The final results will identify which non-linguistic indicators receive the highest levels of agreement. Responses will also be examined to determine whether students report substantial variation in their listening experiences.

For example, students may report strong confidence in familiar classroom conversations while experiencing greater anxiety when listening to unfamiliar speakers. Such distinctions can be examined through individual questionnaire items rather than relying exclusively on an overall dimension score.

The third stage of analysis will compare the overall linguistic and non-linguistic dimension scores.

Table 3. Comparison of Listening Comprehension Challenges

Dimensions	Number of items	Mean	Interpretation
Linguistic challenges	15	—	Pending
Non-linguistic challenges	15	—	Pending
Overall listening challenges	30	—	Pending

A higher mean score for the linguistic dimension would indicate that students report greater difficulty with language-related features. Conversely, a higher mean score for the non-linguistic dimension would indicate greater perceived difficulty associated with psychological, cognitive, or environmental factors.

The analysis will distinguish between the magnitude of reported difficulties and their statistical significance. Descriptive differences alone will not be interpreted as statistically significant without appropriate inferential testing.

The final stage will rank all indicators according to their observed mean scores. This ranking will provide a more detailed description of students' experiences and help identify areas requiring instructional attention.

The five highest-ranked indicators will be discussed in relation to the conceptual framework and previous research. Where relevant, response distributions will be examined to determine whether high average scores reflect consistent agreement across students or substantial differences between individuals.

This approach will provide a structured basis for identifying priority areas in listening instruction. The completed results section should report the actual sample size, valid responses, reliability coefficients, descriptive statistics, and indicator rankings before any claims about the participating students are finalized.

DISCUSSION

The linguistic dimension of listening comprehension provides an important framework for understanding why junior high school EFL learners may experience difficulties processing spoken English. Vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation recognition, grammatical understanding, and speech rate represent interconnected elements that contribute to successful comprehension. The interpretation presented here is based on previous literature and should be compared with the empirical findings after data collection at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang.

Vocabulary limitations are particularly relevant because listening comprehension requires learners to recognize words rapidly and connect them with meaningful contexts. Unlike reading activities, in which students can revisit unfamiliar words, listening frequently requires immediate lexical processing. Nation (2001) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge constitutes a central component of language comprehension. Learners with insufficient vocabulary may struggle to identify the main ideas of spoken messages, even when they understand individual expressions.

Pronunciation recognition represents another important dimension. English contains phonological characteristics that may differ considerably from Indonesian and local languages. These differences include vowel contrasts, consonant clusters, word stress, rhythm, intonation, and connected speech. Students who primarily encounter English through written materials may recognize vocabulary in textbooks but fail to identify the same words in natural speech. Field (2008) explains that successful listening requires effective decoding processes through which auditory signals are transformed into meaningful linguistic units.

Speech rate can intensify these challenges. When speakers deliver information rapidly, learners have limited time to recognize words, interpret grammatical relationships, and construct meaning. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) suggest that listening proficiency involves coordinating multiple cognitive processes while managing the demands of incoming information. Consequently, learners with limited listening experience may require structured exposure to spoken materials at progressively increasing levels of complexity.

The relationship between vocabulary, pronunciation, and speech rate is especially important. These factors should not be treated as entirely independent obstacles. A student may recognize a word when spoken slowly but fail to identify it during rapid conversational speech. Similarly, unfamiliar pronunciation may make known vocabulary appear unfamiliar. This interaction supports the need for integrated listening instruction that develops lexical knowledge, phonological awareness, and real-time comprehension strategies.

Non-linguistic challenges provide an additional perspective on students' listening comprehension experiences. Anxiety, concentration, motivation, and self-confidence can influence how learners approach listening tasks and respond to unfamiliar spoken information.

Listening anxiety may emerge when students perceive spoken English as difficult or fear making mistakes. Anxiety can interfere with attention and reduce learners' willingness to participate in classroom activities. Horwitz et al. (1986) explain that foreign language anxiety is associated with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and concerns about language performance.

In listening activities, these psychological pressures may become more pronounced because learners cannot always control the speed or repetition of spoken information. Students who attempt to understand every word may become frustrated when unfamiliar expressions appear. Such frustration can distract attention from subsequent information and reduce overall comprehension.

Concentration is another important cognitive factor. Listening requires sustained attention, especially when audio materials contain unfamiliar vocabulary or complex information. Distractions, fatigue, classroom noise, and lengthy recordings may increase the demands placed on learners' working memory.

Motivation and confidence may also influence students' engagement with listening activities. Students who believe they can improve their listening ability may be more willing to practice independently and persist when encountering difficult materials. Conversely, students who perceive listening as excessively difficult may reduce their participation.

These considerations suggest that effective listening instruction should address psychological readiness alongside linguistic development. Teachers can create supportive learning environments by providing clear instructions, allowing preparation time, using familiar topics, and encouraging students to view comprehension errors as opportunities for improvement.

The classroom environment plays an important role in shaping students' listening experiences. Audio quality, background noise, classroom acoustics, technological facilities, and instructional practices may influence learners' opportunities to process spoken English.

Poor audio quality can make pronunciation recognition difficult, particularly for students with limited listening proficiency. Background noise may interfere with concentration, while inadequate speakers or playback devices may reduce the clarity of listening materials.

Instructional practices are equally important. Listening activities that focus exclusively on answering questions may provide limited opportunities for students to develop effective comprehension strategies. Field (2008) argues that listening instruction should include explicit attention to the processes underlying spoken language comprehension.

A process-oriented approach may involve three stages: pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening. During pre-listening, teachers can introduce relevant vocabulary and activate background knowledge. During while-listening, students can identify key information and monitor their understanding. Post-listening activities can provide opportunities for reflection, discussion, and clarification.

This instructional sequence may help reduce the cognitive demands associated with unfamiliar listening materials while supporting students' development of independent comprehension strategies.

Digital learning resources provide promising opportunities to address linguistic and non-linguistic listening challenges. Audio storytelling, podcasts, educational videos, and interactive listening applications can expose students to varied pronunciation patterns, vocabulary, and communicative situations.

Aisa et al. (2025) investigated audio storytelling among EFL university students and reported an increase in average listening scores from 62.40 to 78.60 following the intervention. Although the study involved a different educational population, its findings suggest that contextualized audio materials can support listening development when integrated into structured instruction.

Amanda et al. (2025), including Sam Hermansyah, examined students' perceptions of English podcasts at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidenreng Rappang. Their study reported generally positive perceptions of podcasts as flexible and engaging listening resources, while also identifying difficulties associated with rapid speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and unavailable transcripts.

Similarly, Prabowo et al. (2025) investigated the use of English-language films in listening comprehension activities. Their research provides additional context for considering audiovisual materials as potential resources for English listening instruction.

These studies suggest that digital media may support listening comprehension, but technology alone cannot guarantee improved performance. The effectiveness of digital resources depends on instructional design, learners' language proficiency, access to appropriate devices, and opportunities for guided practice.

For junior high school students, short audio stories, familiar conversations, and carefully selected videos may provide manageable listening input. Teachers may also use repetition, subtitles, transcripts, and vocabulary support according to students' learning needs.

The theoretical analysis provides several implications for English language teaching at the junior high school level.

First, listening instruction should integrate vocabulary development with pronunciation awareness. Teachers can introduce important lexical items before listening activities and provide opportunities for students to recognize these expressions in spoken contexts.

Second, listening materials should be adjusted to students' proficiency levels. Short recordings containing familiar topics may provide an appropriate starting point before students encounter longer and more complex audio materials.

Third, teachers should explicitly introduce listening strategies, including prediction, selective attention, identifying main ideas, recognizing supporting details, and making inferences.

Fourth, psychological support should be incorporated into classroom activities. Teachers can reduce unnecessary performance pressure by allowing repeated listening, encouraging collaborative discussion, and providing constructive feedback.

Finally, schools should consider the availability and quality of listening resources. Where internet access is limited, downloadable or offline audio materials may provide practical alternatives.

The proposed descriptive quantitative design has several limitations. First, questionnaire responses measure students' perceptions rather than directly demonstrating their listening proficiency. Students may overestimate or underestimate their difficulties, and perceived challenges may not correspond precisely with objective comprehension performance.

Second, the study focuses on one junior high school, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other educational settings. Differences in school facilities, instructional approaches, language exposure, and student characteristics may influence listening experiences.

Third, a cross-sectional survey cannot establish causal relationships between linguistic or non-linguistic factors and listening comprehension outcomes.

Future research could combine questionnaires with standardized listening assessments, classroom observations, and interviews to provide a more comprehensive understanding of listening difficulties. Experimental studies could also examine whether specific instructional strategies, such as audio storytelling or metacognitive listening instruction, effectively address the challenges identified.

The final discussion of the present study must be revised after the empirical results become available, particularly to explain the observed differences between linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions.

CONCLUSION

Listening comprehension represents a complex and multidimensional component of English language learning that involves the interaction of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, psychological characteristics, and environmental conditions. This study has established a research framework for investigating linguistic and non-linguistic challenges among EFL students at UPT SMP Negeri 4 Panca Rijang, Sidenreng Rappang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The framework identifies vocabulary limitations, unfamiliar pronunciation, grammatical complexity, rapid speech, and connected speech recognition as potential linguistic challenges, while concentration difficulties, anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, classroom conditions, and audio quality constitute potential non-linguistic challenges. Previous research indicates that these dimensions may interact and influence students' experiences in understanding spoken English. However, the relative prominence of these factors among students at the research location remains to be determined through empirical data collection and statistical analysis.

The study is expected to provide practical implications for improving English listening instruction in Indonesian junior high schools. Teachers may benefit from integrating explicit vocabulary instruction, pronunciation awareness, metacognitive listening strategies, contextualized audio materials, and supportive classroom practices into their teaching activities. Digital learning resources, including audio storytelling, podcasts, and educational videos, may also provide opportunities for developing students' listening comprehension when selected according to their proficiency levels and learning needs. Future research should examine the relationship between students' perceived listening difficulties and actual listening performance through comprehensive assessment procedures. Ultimately, identifying linguistic and non-linguistic challenges through reliable empirical evidence can support the development of more effective, inclusive, and

contextually appropriate listening instruction in EFL educational settings.

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