

**A SURVEY ON THE TENTH GRADERS' ENGLISH LISTENING
COMPREHENSION DIFFICULTIES AT SMK MUHAMMADIYAH 3
PALEMBANG**

A Thesis by:

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STATEMENT LETTER

Saya menyatakan dengan sebenar-benarnya seluruh data, informasi, interpretasi serta pernyataan dalam pembahasan dan kesimpulan yang di sajikan dalam karya ilmiah ini, kecuali yang disebutkan sumbernya merupakan hasil pengamatan, penelitian, pengelolaan serta pemikiran saya dengan pengarahan dari pembimbing yang ditetapkan.

Apabila ternyata naskah ini dapat dibuktikan terdapat unsur-unsur jiplakan, saya bersedia skripsi ini digugurkan dan gelar akademik yang saya peroleh (s-1) dibatalkan, serta di proses sesuai dengan peraturan perundang-undangan yang berlaku (uu) no. 20, tahun 2003, pasal 25 ayat 2 dan pasal 70

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ABSTRACT

Listening is one of the skills students find hardest in learning English, but in many classrooms it does not get as much attention as reading or writing. This study looked at the listening comprehension difficulties faced by tenth graders at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang and tried to find which factor caused the most trouble. A survey method with a quantitative approach was used. The respondents were all 113 tenth-grade students from five classes in the 2025/2026 academic year, and since the population was small, total sampling was used so every student took part. The data were collected using a 40-item questionnaire adopted from Nadhira and Warni (2021), based on the Q-BELLP model by Lotfi (2012). The questionnaire covered six factors: process, input, listener, task, affect, and context. A reliability test on the data showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.927, meaning the questionnaire was very reliable for this group. The students were found to have a moderate level of listening difficulty overall, with a mean score of 3.39. Context had the highest score (3.77) and was the dominant factor, followed by Input (3.54). The other four factors, Process (3.40), Listener (3.34), Task (3.18), and Affect (3.14), were in the moderate range. This showed that poor audio equipment and noisy classrooms made it harder for students than their own thinking or emotional struggles did. Schools and teachers were encouraged to improve audio quality and classroom conditions, while also giving students more exposure to different accents and natural English speech.

Keywords: *listening comprehension, listening difficulties, EFL learners, vocational high school, survey research*

TABLE OF CONTENT

COVER.....	
APPROVAL SHEET	i
RATIFICATION SHEET	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
STATEMENT LETTER	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
ABSTRACT	vi
TABLE OF CONTENT	vii
CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 The Background of Study.....	1
1.2 The Problems of Study.....	8
1.2.1 The Limitation of Problem	9
1.2.2 The Formulation of Problem	9
1.3 The Objective of Study	9
1.4 The Significance of Study.....	10
CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 The Concept of Listening Comprehension.....	12
2.2 The Importance of Listening Comprehension.....	13
2.3 The Type of Listening	14
2.4 The Listening Difficulties in English as a Foreign Language	17
2.4.1 The Factors of Listening Difficulties	18
2.5 The Previous Related Studies	20
CHAPTER III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	23
3.1 The Research Design	24
3.2 The Research Procedures of a Survey	24
3.3 Operational Definition	26

3.4 Population and Sample	27
3.4.1 Population	27
3.4.2 Sample	27
3.5. Technique for Collecting Data	28
3.5.1 Instrument.....	29
3.5.2 Validity	30
3.5.3 Reliability.....	31
3.6 Technique for Analyzing the Data	32
3.6.1 The Students' Listening Comprehension Difficulties	32
3.6.2 The Dominant Aspect of Listening Comprehension Difficulties.....	33
CHAPTER IV FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION	34
4.1 Findings.....	35
4.1.1 The Result of Descriptive Data Analysis.....	35
4.1.2 The Listening Comprehension Difficulties Across Six Factors	35
4.1.3 Process Factor	37
4.1.4 Input Factor	41
4.1.5 Listener Factor	43
4.1.6 Task Factor.....	46
4.1.7 Affect Factor	48
4.1.8 Context Factor	49
4.1.9 The Dominant Factor of Listening Comprehension Difficulties	51
4.2 Interpretation.....	51
CHAPTER V CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION	56
5.1 Conclusion.....	56
5.2 Suggestion.....	57
REFERENCES	59

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents five main parts: the background of the study, the limitation of the problem, the formulation of the problem, the objectives of the study, and the significance of the study.

1.1 The Background of Study

In today's interconnected world, English functions as a global lingua franca, serving as the main channel of communication in business, academia, technology, and cross-cultural interaction. Mastery of English has therefore become essential for anyone seeking to take part meaningfully in international affairs, since it opens doors to broader learning resources, career prospects, and opportunities for intercultural engagement. Within Indonesia, English continues to be treated as a strategic foreign language, one that equips learners with the communicative competence needed to keep pace with global demands and remain competitive on the international stage.

Even so, listening tends to be the skill that receives the least attention in language classrooms. According to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016, pp. 123–133), teachers commonly devote more effort to writing, reading, and vocabulary building, leaving listening instruction on the sidelines. Consequently, students often enter listening activities without adequate preparation to handle the difficulties involved. Such difficulties are not caused by a single element but emerge from an interplay of

factors related to the spoken input itself, individual learner traits, the demands of the task, emotional reactions, and the surrounding learning environment.

Alzamil (2021, pp. 366–374) makes a comparable point, noting that although listening plays a vital role in language development, it continues to be among the most demanding yet least emphasized skills taught formally. Instructors, he argues, tend to invest more instructional time in productive skills like speaking and writing, or in isolated linguistic knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary, while explicit listening instruction is often overlooked. This imbalance denies learners the strategies and practice they need to build solid listening ability, leaving EFL learners especially ill-prepared to handle genuine spoken English.

As a cognitive activity, listening comprehension is far from simple; it is an active, multilayered process that draws on both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge (Buck, 2001). Vandergrift and Goh (2012) stress that listeners do not merely receive sound passively but actively build meaning by combining phonological cues, grammar, vocabulary, situational context, and background knowledge all at once. Because EFL learners must carry out this process in a language other than their own, the cognitive load involved is substantially heavier for them.

In addition, listening occupies a foundational place in language learning, functioning as the channel through which learners first receive input in the target language. Rost (2011) points out that listening is not only the earliest language skill developed but also the foundation upon which speaking, reading, and writing are subsequently built. Yet, despite this importance, listening remains one of the hardest skills for EFL learners to master. Learners commonly struggle with restricted

vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, weak grammatical command, rapid delivery, differing accents, indistinct pronunciation, limited chances to practice, and disruptive background noise (Ali, 2020; Apriyanti et al., 2024; Nushi & Orouji, 2020; Pratama & Anwar, 2024; Zhang, 2023).

Ali (2020) adds that university-level EFL learners often describe feeling overwhelmed during listening tasks, especially when they encounter unfamiliar accents, informal expressions, and speech delivered faster than they can process. In a related study, Nushi and Orouji (2020) examined teachers' views on students' listening problems and found that educators consistently pointed to gaps in vocabulary knowledge, minimal exposure to authentic listening input, and weak metacognitive strategy use as recurring sources of difficulty across various EFL settings.

Listening comprehension difficulties can be understood as the obstacles EFL learners face when trying to make sense of spoken English. These are distinct from general hearing problems, since they specifically concern a breakdown in constructing meaning from what is heard rather than an inability to detect sound. Such difficulties may stem from several sources at once, including the characteristics of the spoken text, the learner's own cognitive and emotional state, the nature of the listening task, and the surrounding learning conditions (Lotfi, 2012, pp. 508–515).

Within EFL learning specifically, listening comprehension difficulties are considered a major barrier to progress. Vandergrift and Goh (2012) explain that learners must decode sounds, process grammar, retrieve word meanings, and draw on context simultaneously and in real time, without the option to pause or replay natural speech. A breakdown in any one of these processes disrupts overall comprehension, and for

EFL learners with limited exposure to authentic spoken English, particularly those in vocational school settings, such breakdowns tend to occur often and persist.

A number of scholars have put forward theoretical frameworks to explain and organize the difficulties EFL learners encounter while listening. Among the most influential is Goh's (2000, pp. 55–75) framework, which situates learners' difficulties at different stages of cognitive processing: perception (recognizing sounds and words), parsing (making sense of phrases and sentences), and utilization (linking meaning to prior knowledge). This staged view demonstrates that listening comprehension can fail at more than one point in the process and is seldom the result of a single cause.

Extending this idea, Lotfi (2012, pp. 508–515) constructed a six-factor model of listening comprehension difficulties consisting of: (1) process difficulties, tied to the cognitive and metacognitive strategies learners apply while listening; (2) input difficulties, arising from features of the spoken text such as pace, accent, and vocabulary demands; (3) listener difficulties, rooted in the learner's own attributes such as concentration and memory; (4) task difficulties, reflecting a gap between learner ability and what the task requires; (5) affect difficulties, covering emotional reactions like anxiety and frustration; and (6) context difficulties, connected to unfavorable physical conditions in the learning setting. This model suits EFL research well because it captures both linguistic and non-linguistic sources of listening breakdown.

Vandergrift and Goh (2012) likewise offer a metacognitive perspective on listening difficulties, contending that many learners struggle not purely because of limited language knowledge but because they lack the metacognitive skills required to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own comprehension. Without deliberate strategy

instruction, they argue, even learners whose linguistic ability is sufficient remain prone to comprehension breakdown. This view reinforces the idea that listening difficulties reflect deeper cognitive and affective challenges rather than simple gaps in language knowledge, and that they call for targeted pedagogical support.

A number of earlier studies have examined listening comprehension difficulties within EFL contexts. Nadhira and Warni (2021, pp. 186–193), for instance, surveyed 100 eleventh-grade students at a senior high school in West Java, Indonesia, using a combination of questionnaires and interviews to identify students' listening difficulties and the factors behind them. Their results pointed to unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech, unfamiliar accents, unclear pronunciation, poor recording quality, and inadequate facilities as the main difficulties, driven by limited background knowledge, insufficient practice, and environmental noise.

In a Saudi Arabian university context, Hamouda (2013, pp. 113–155) collected questionnaire and interview data from first-year EFL students and found that accent variation, fast speech, unclear pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and anxiety were the most commonly reported obstacles. The study concluded that listening difficulties rarely stem from one cause alone, but instead result from a mix of linguistic and emotional challenges, particularly for learners with little exposure to authentic English outside class.

Focusing on a vocational high school (SMK) context in Indonesia, Supratningsih et al. (2020, pp. 1–11) surveyed 30 first-grade students, selected purposively, through a 26-item questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Their findings highlighted unfamiliar accents and topics as the most prominent difficulties,

alongside environmental noise, low-quality audio equipment, lengthy spoken texts, and fast delivery, which they grouped into seven domains covering listening materials, linguistic features, concentration, psychological characteristics, listener, speaker, and physical setting.

Collectively, these studies indicate that EFL learners' listening comprehension difficulties typically arise from an interaction of input-related, affective, contextual, listener-related, task-related, and process-related factors, and that learners in different countries, whether Iran, Saudi Arabia, or Indonesia, tend to share many of the same underlying challenges. What remains unexplored, however, is the situation of vocational high school students in Palembang, South Sumatra; their listening difficulties have not yet been examined in existing research.

For SMK students in particular, strong English listening comprehension carries added weight because they will soon enter a workforce that is both competitive and multilingual. Among the four core language skills, listening is regarded as especially fundamental, exerting considerable influence on overall language acquisition and communicative competence (Apriyanti et al., 2024; Dewi, 2025; Pratama & Anwar, 2024; Zhang, 2023).

Prior to the main study, the researcher conducted a preliminary investigation to gain an initial picture of the English listening comprehension difficulties faced by tenth-grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang. Carried out in October 2025, this preliminary study involved classroom observation during an English lesson together with informal interviews with the English teacher and five students drawn from different tenth-grade classes.

During the observation, the researcher found that classes at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang were relatively small, with some enrolling fewer than fifteen students. Yet even in these small classes, students often had trouble following spoken English during listening tasks. Many looked confused and could not answer questions based on the audio they had heard; when the recording played, several glanced at classmates for cues, and some simply stopped writing. The English teacher confirmed that listening was, in her view, the skill students found most difficult, adding that formal listening instruction was infrequent because of tight scheduling and, in some rooms, inadequate audio equipment.

Interviews with five students from different tenth-grade classes surfaced several recurring complaints. Students said that speakers in the recordings talked too quickly for them to keep up, and that unfamiliar vocabulary frequently appeared in the audio. They also reported having little exposure to English audio or video outside school, which left them unaccustomed to the natural rhythm and variety of spoken English. One student noted that even replaying a recording did not help much, since the words still blended together and sounded unlike the written form. Students further mentioned that outside noise and low-quality speakers made it even harder to listen effectively in class.

Taken together, these observations confirmed that listening comprehension was a genuine concern for tenth-grade students at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang. Limited vocabulary, fast speech, minimal exposure to English, and unfavorable classroom conditions all combined to make listening tasks more difficult. These early

indications convinced the researcher of the need for a more systematic study to better capture the specific difficulties students were experiencing.

As far as the researcher could determine, no prior study has examined English listening comprehension difficulties specifically among students at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang. Although research on listening difficulties within Indonesian EFL settings exists, covering schools in West Java and elsewhere, none has focused on this particular institution, meaning the listening problems faced by its students remain undocumented in published research.

SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang also has features of its own, including small class sizes in certain programs, restricted audio equipment, and a vocational curriculum whose demands differ from those of general high schools. These factors likely shape how students experience listening difficulties in ways that have not yet been captured. Without school-specific data, teachers there lack a clear sense of where students struggle most, making it difficult to refine how listening is taught.

Given the considerations outlined above, the researcher chose to conduct a survey study titled “A Survey on the Tenth Graders’ English Listening Comprehension Difficulties at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang,” aimed at identifying the specific listening comprehension difficulties tenth-grade students experienced and determining which factor most strongly influenced those difficulties.

1.2 The Problems of Study

As outlined in the background above, listening poses considerable challenges for EFL learners because of its cognitive complexity and the many possible sources of

difficulty involved. The preliminary observation conducted at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang showed that tenth-grade students regularly struggled during English listening activities, suggesting that listening comprehension problems may have noticeably slowed their progress in learning the language.

1.2.1 The Limitation of Problem

This study was limited to a survey on the tenth graders' English listening difficulties at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang.

1.2.2 The Formulation of Problem

Based on the background elaborated above, this study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What were the factors of English listening comprehension difficulties encountered by the tenth graders of SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang?
2. What was the dominant factor that influenced English listening comprehension difficulties among the tenth graders of SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang?

1.3 The Objective of Study

Based on the formulation problems, the objectives of the study were as follows:

1. To describe the factors of English listening comprehension difficulties encountered by the tenth graders of SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang.
2. To identify the dominant factor that influenced the listening comprehension difficulties experienced by the tenth graders of SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang.

1.4 The Significance of Study

The study was expected to provide benefits to:

1. For English Teachers

This study equipped English teachers at SMK Muhammadiyah 3 Palembang with a clearer picture of the listening comprehension difficulties their students faced. Armed with knowledge of which factors were most problematic, teachers could refine their teaching approaches, design more targeted listening activities, and shape classroom conditions to better meet students' needs.

2. For the Students

This study was also intended to raise students' awareness of the specific factors underlying their own listening comprehension difficulties. Recognizing these sources could help students build more effective self-monitoring habits and seek out opportunities to strengthen their English listening skills.

3. For the Researcher

For the researcher, this study offered valuable hands-on experience in conducting educational research within the field of language learning, deepening understanding of EFL listening pedagogy and the factors that shape listening comprehension in vocational school settings.

4. For Other Researchers

The findings of this study were also intended to serve as a reference point and empirical basis for other researchers interested in pursuing further work on English listening comprehension difficulties, particularly within Indonesian vocational high schools (SMK). Future researchers could build on these findings by exploring

related questions in different school settings, applying alternative research methods, or examining additional variables that might affect students' listening comprehension outcomes.

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