AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PROBLEM IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT THIRD SEMESTER OF UIN SJECH M. DJAMIL DJAMBEK BUKITTINGGI

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ABSTRACT

This study aim to analyze students' problems in listening comprehension at the third semester of the English Education Department of UIN Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi. This research employed a qualitative exploratory design. The informants were three lecturers and eight students selected through purposive sampling based on their listening scores. The data were collected through classroom observation and semi-structured interviews, and analyzed using thematic analysis based on Hamouda's framework. The findings showed that students experienced five major problems: listening material, linguistic features, failure to concentrate, psychological characteristics, and listener factors. Among these, listening material became the most dominant factor, particularly related to long audio duration and unfamiliar topics. Students reported losing concentration when the audio exceeded two to three minutes and encountering difficulty understanding unfamiliar topics such as historical and scientific content. In addition, limited vocabulary significantly hindered comprehension, causing students to miss key information. Psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence also reduced students' performance. These findings indicate that students' listening difficulties were influenced by interconnected internal and external factors. Therefore, lecturers are encouraged to provide appropriate materials, improve vocabulary instruction, and create a supportive learning environment to enhance students' listening comprehension.

Keywords : listening comprehension, students' problems, EFL learners

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis masalah yang dihadapi mahasiswa dalam pemahaman mendengarkan pada semester ketiga di Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris UIN Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif eksploratif. Informan terdiri dari tiga dosen dan delapan mahasiswa yang dipilih melalui sampling purposif berdasarkan nilai pemahaman mendengarkan mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan wawancara semi-terstruktur, serta dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik berdasarkan kerangka kerja Hamouda. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami lima masalah utama: materi mendengarkan, fitur linguistik, kesulitan berkonsentrasi, karakteristik psikologis, dan faktor pendengar. Di antara faktor-faktor tersebut, materi mendengarkan menjadi faktor yang paling dominan, terutama terkait durasi audio yang panjang dan topik yang tidak familiar. Mahasiswa

melaporkan kehilangan konsentrasi ketika durasi audio melebihi dua hingga tiga menit dan mengalami kesulitan memahami topik yang tidak familiar seperti konten sejarah dan ilmiah. Selain itu, kosakata yang terbatas secara signifikan menghambat pemahaman, menyebabkan mahasiswa melewatkan informasi penting. Faktor psikologis seperti kecemasan dan kurangnya kepercayaan diri juga menurunkan kinerja mahasiswa. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa kesulitan mendengarkan yang dialami mahasiswa dipengaruhi oleh faktor internal dan eksternal yang saling terkait. Oleh karena itu, dosen didorong untuk menyediakan materi yang sesuai, meningkatkan pengajaran kosakata, dan menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung untuk meningkatkan pemahaman mendengarkan mahasiswa.

Kata Kunci : pemahaman listening, permasalahan mahasiswa, EFL

A. Introduction

In the context of English language learning, listening plays a crucial role as one of the foundational skills that supports the development of other language skills, particularly speaking. Through listening, learners receive linguistic input, recognize pronunciation, and construct meaning from spoken messages. As stated by Renukadevi (2014), listening enables learners to understand the language system and serves as a foundation for developing productive skills. Furthermore, Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) argue that listening accounts for the largest portion of communication activities, highlighting its essential role in both academic and real-life communication.

However, field observations indicate that many EFL students still face significant difficulties in listening comprehension. These difficulties are generally related to limited vocabulary, unfamiliar topics, and an inability to maintain concentration during listening activities due to lengthy audio. Previous research also confirms that listening is often considered the most difficult language skill because it requires a great deal of concentration and deep attention to understand the text being heard (Hardiyanto et al., 2021). Furthermore, listening tasks become more challenging when students encounter unfamiliar topics, lengthy audio texts, and different accents, which can reduce their comprehension and engagement.

Oral comprehension itself is a complex process that involves not only hearing sounds but also interpreting meaning, connecting information to prior knowledge, and maintaining concentration. According to Hamouda (2013), students' difficulties in list-

ening are influenced by several factors, including the material being listened to, linguistic features, lack of concentration, psychological characteristics, the listener, the speaker, and the physical environment. These factors are interrelated and can simultaneously affect students' ability to effectively understand spoken language.

Several previous studies have examined students' listening comprehension issues in different contexts. First, Hamouda (2013) found that students face difficulties related to fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, and lack of concentration. Second, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) identified factors such as accent, speaking speed, and listening material as the main barriers to listening comprehension. A third study, by Shahreza (2019), indicated that the physical environment (32%), lack of concentration (23%), and the content of the text being listened to (20%) were the dominant factors. The fourth study, by Hadis (2022), revealed that sentence length (60%) and unfamiliar words (80%) are the primary content-related difficulties, alongside the listener's attitude and background knowledge gaps. Fifth, Hidayah and Gunawan (2025) found that there are three main problems faced by students: high speaking speed, unfamiliar vocabulary, and diverse speaker accents. However, most of these studies tend to focus on general factors or use quantitative approaches, which limit the exploration of students' real-world experiences and contextual learning conditions.

In the context of this study, initial observations and interviews revealed that third-semester students still experience significant difficulties in listening comprehension despite having completed several listening courses. These issues include limited vocabulary, difficulty understanding native speakers, and an inability to maintain concentration during listening activities. Additionally, students' listening scores indicate that many of them have not yet reached the expected proficiency level. This situation indicates a gap between the expected competencies and the students' actual performance.

Therefore, a more in-depth investigation is needed to explore students' listening comprehension issues based on their real-life experiences and learning contexts. Unlike previous studies, this research

focuses on third-semester students and employs an exploratory qualitative approach to capture students' perspectives more comprehensively. This study aims to analyze the types of listening comprehension problems faced by students and provide deeper insights into the factors that hinder their listening performance.

The benefits of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study can enrich the literature on listening comprehension, particularly regarding the challenges faced by EFL learners. Practically, the results of this study are expected to assist instructors in designing more effective learning strategies and help students in listening.

B. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach with an exploratory research design. This approach was chosen because the study aimed to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the problems experienced by students in listening comprehension. The research was conducted at the English Education Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of Sjech M. Djamil Djambek Bukittinggi. The informants of this study were 3 listening lecturers and 8 third-semester students selected through purposive sampling.

The instruments used in this study were semi-structured interviews and an observation checklist. Classroom observation was conducted to support the interview data by directly exam-ining students' behavior during listening activities. The observation focused on students' concentration, responses to listening tasks, and the learning environment during the listening process.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, source triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from lecturers, students, and classroom observations. Then the data were analyzed using thematic analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke.

C. Research Finding and Discussion

Based on a thematic analysis of the interview and observation data, the findings were categorized into five main themes: auditory material, linguistic characteristics, difficulty concentrating, psychological characteristics, and listener factors.

1. Listening Material

The findings indicate that listening material is the most dominant factor influencing students' listening com-prehension. This theme is reflected in three key aspects: the duration of the audio, the familiarity of the topic, and the range of vocabulary used in the listening texts.

a. Duration of Listening Material

The duration of listening material significantly affects students' ability to maintain concentration and process information effectively. The data show that Most students reported difficulty maintaining concentration when the audio exceeded two to three minutes. As one participant stated:

> *"Ketika audio 2–3 menit mereka kehilang fokus… kalo audionya panjang."* (Interviewee 01)

Similarly, another student explained:

> *"Ketika teks terlalu panjang saya sering ketinggalan teks audionya."* (Interviewee 03)

These findings suggest that excessive audio length increases cognitive load, limiting students' ability to retain and process incoming information in real time. In line with listening comprehension theory, shorter and more manageable audio segments are more effective in supporting learners' understanding, as they reduce the risk of cognitive overload and help maintain attention throughout the listening process.

b. Unfamiliar Topic

Unfamiliar topics also emerged as a significant barrier. Students found it difficult to understand listening materials that were not related to their daily experiences. One participant stated:

> *"Saya kesusahan mendeng-arkan topik yang tidak familiar karena topiknya tidak relate dengan keseharian."* (Interviewee 06)

Another added:

> *"Saya merasa kesusahan deng-an teks yang tidak familiar."* (Interviewee 03)

These results imply that background knowledge plays a crucial role in listening comprehension. When students are familiar with the topic, they can activate prior knowledge, make predictions, and interpret meaning more easily. Conversely, unfamiliar topics hinder these processes, making it difficult for learners to construct meaning from the spoken input.

c. Limited Vocabulary

Limited vocabulary was identified as a major obstacle. Many students emphasized that unfamiliar words hindered their understanding. For example:

> *"Vocabulary saya agak kurang… sangat mengganggu saya dalam mendengarkan audio."* (Interviewee 02)

Another student stated:

> *"Kurangnya kosa kata membuat saya gak paham apa yang di katakan oleh audio tersebut."* (Interviewee 09)

These findings demonstrate that vocabulary knowledge is a fundamental component of listening comprehension. Without adequate vocabulary, students cannot effecttively decode or interpret spoken language. This limitation not only affects word recognition but also disrupts overall understanding, as students may lose track of the message when encountering unfamiliar terms.

2. Linguistic Features

Another problem identified was related to linguistic features, particularly difficulty in recognizing spoken forms of words. Students reported confusion when encountering similar sounds or differences between pronunciation and written forms. One participant stated:

> *"Ada beberapa kata yang suaranya sama tapi memiliki bentuk yang beda sehingga membuat saya kesulitan."* (Interviewee 02)

This indicates that phonological complexity interferes with word recognition during listening.

3. Failure to Concentrate

The findings revealed that failure to concentrate was a significant factor affecting students' listening comprehension. Many students reported difficulty maintaining their focus throughout listening activities, particularly when the audio duration was relatively long. Longer audio inputs appeared to increase cognitive load, making it harder for students to retain previously heard information while simultaneously processing new input. As stated by participants:

> *"Ketika audio lebih dari 2 menit saya sering lupa dengan informasi yang sebelumnya saya dengar."* (Interviewee 06)

Another participant added:

> *"Fokus saya sering terganggu karena teman saya sering mengajak bicara."* (Interviewee 09)

Observation data supported this finding, showing that students became distracted, talked to peers, and lost engagement during listening sessions.

4. Psychological Characteristics

The findings indicated that psychological characteristics played an important role in influencing students' listening comprehension. Emotional and motivational factors, particularly lack of interest and anxiety, were found to significantly affect how students engaged with and processed listening materials. These internal conditions often determined whether students could maintain attention and effectively understand the audio input.

a. Lack of Interest

Lack of interest emerged as one of the prominent psychological barriers in listening activities. Several students reported that they tended to lose motivation when the listening material was too long or perceived as difficult. This decline in interest often resulted in reduced attention and lower engagement during the task. Students reported losing interest when the audio was too long or difficult. As one participant stated:

> *"Audio yang terlalu panjang membuat saya bosan untuk mendengarkannya."*
> (Interviewee 04)

This indicates that lengthy audio materials can lead to boredom, which in turn decreases students' willingness to actively listen. When students are not interested, they are less likely to concentrate on the content, making it more difficult for them to comprehend the information being delivered.

b. Anxiety

Anxiety was also identified as a significant psychological factor that hindered students' listening comprehension. Many students experienced feelings of nervousness and worry during listening activities, particularly when they were unable to catch certain words or missed important information. This emotional response often disrupted their concentration and reduced their ability to follow the rest of the audio. One participant stated:

> *"Saya suka cemas dan gugup ketika mendengarkan audio… menghambat saya untuk fokus."*
> (Interviewee 03)

These findings suggest that emotional pressure can create a

negative cycle in listening comprehension. When students feel anxious, they are more likely to lose concentration, which then leads to further misunderstanding of the material. Observation data also supported this finding, as some students appeared tense, hesitant, and less confident during listening tasks. Overall, psychological factors particularly lack of interest and anxiety were found to significantly reduce students' ability to concentrate and comprehend listening materials effectively.

5. Listener Factors

The final factor relates to students as listeners, including lack of strategy and limited background knowledge.

a. Lack of Strategy

Many students admitted that they did not use effective listening strategies. One participant stated:

> *"Saya tidak punya strategi ketika mendengarkan audio materi listening."* (Interviewee 09)

Another added:

> *"Strategi saya cuman fokus."* (Interviewee 04)

This indicates The lack of these stra-tegies limits students' ability to manage difficulties during listening, especially when they encounter unfamiliar voca-bulary or fast speech. As a result, stu-dents are more likely to miss important information and struggle to construct meaning from the audio.

b. Lack of Background Knowledge

Students also reported limited exposure to English listening.

For Example :

> *"Kemampuan listening saya agak kurang."* (Interviewee 02)

This suggests that the limited experience reduces students' ability to predict and interpret the content of the audio, especially when the topic is unfamiliar. Without sufficient prior knowledge, students may find it difficult to connect new information with what they already know, leading to misunderstandings or incomplete comprehension.

The results of this study are consistent with Hamouda's (2013) theory, which states that listening difficulties are influenced by various factors, such as listening material, linguistic features, concentration, psychological factors, and listener characteristics.

The predominance of issues re-lated to listening material suggests that the length of the audio and unfamiliarity with the topic can

increase students' cognitive load. This aligns with Hamouda's view that material that is too long and complex hinders real-time information processing.

Furthermore, the limited vocabulary identified in this study supports the theory that vocabulary mastery is a critical factor in understanding listening. Without grasping key words, students will struggle to comprehend the overall meaning of the message.

From the perspective of linguistic features, difficulties in recognizing pronunciation and spoken language forms also align with the theory that reduced forms, accents, and pronunciation variations are major obstacles for EFL learners.

Concentration issues and psychological factors such as anxiety further reinforce the view that listening is not merely a cognitive process but also involves affective aspects. Students who feel anxious or lack self-confidence tend to have a harder time understanding the information they hear.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that students' listening difficulties are not caused by a single factor but rather a combination of various interrelated factors. Therefore, appropriate learning strategies are needed, such as the use of suitable materials, vocabulary enhancement, and listening strategy training to help students improve their skills.

D. Conclusion

This study aims to identify the challenges students face in listening comprehension. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that students experience various interrelated difficulties. The main challenges identified include listening material, linguistic features, concentration difficulties, psychological characteristics, and listener factors.

Among these factors, listening material was found to be the most dominant factor, particularly regarding long audio durations and unfamiliar topics, which significantly affect students' ability to maintain concentration and comprehend the content. Additionally, limited vocabulary and difficulties in recognizing spoken forms contribute to students' inability to accurately interpret meaning.

The findings also reveal that students frequently lose concentration during listening activities, particularly when faced with lengthy or complex material. Psychological factors such

as anxiety and a lack of self-confidence further impact their listening performance. Furthermore, a lack of background knowledge and inadequate listening strategies limit students' ability to process and understand spoken input effectively.

Overall, the research results indicate that listening comprehension issues are influenced by a combination of cognitive, linguistic, and affective factors, which collectively hinder students' per-formance in listening activities.

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