

Listening comprehension challenges and facilitating factors among Indonesian EFL students in English-speaking countries: A phenomenological study

*Laksmy Ady Kusumoriny¹, Abdul Aziz²
Universitas Pamulang

ABSTRACT

Listening plays a crucial role in individuals' communication with others and in their efforts to comprehend their surroundings. As one of the fundamental tools for learning, it serves as a foundation for the development of other language skills and is frequently employed both in everyday life and within educational contexts. Consequently, listening emerges as a key component in foreign language instruction. Learners' ability to comprehend what they hear is essential to avoid difficulties in the language learning process. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language, the careful monitoring of learners' listening processes and the identification of the challenges they face are vital for achieving instructional success. This study aims to identify the listening-related difficulties encountered by university students learning English as a foreign language at the Intermediate proficiency level. Grounded in a qualitative research approach, the study adopts a phenomenological design. The participants consisted of eight Indonesian students enrolled in English speaking countries namely US, Canada, Australia and UK. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted with the selected participants. A descriptive analysis technique was employed to analyze the qualitative data. The participants reported several common difficulties during listening activities, including heavily accented speech, frequent use of idioms and proverbs, limited vocabulary knowledge, lack of attention to stress and intonation, and the speaker's rapid speech rate. On the other hand, several facilitating factors were also identified. These included prior knowledge of other languages, , engaging and interesting content, the presence of audiovisual elements, and the effective use of gestures and facial expressions by the speaker – all of which contributed to improved listening comprehension.

Keywords: listening, communication, phenomenology, gesture.

Received 29 May 2025, Final draft 2 Jul 2025, Published 12 Jul 2025

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving world, communication across languages has become essential. With globalization driving economic, technological, political, and cultural interactions, learning a foreign language—especially English—is no longer optional but necessary (Council of Europe, 2020; Graddol, 2006).

Like first language education, foreign language instruction emphasizes four core skills: speaking, writing, listening, and reading. Among these, listening plays a foundational role. It underpins language acquisition, facilitates personal and social interaction, and is central to learning (Graham, 2017; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Especially for beginners, the ability to understand spoken language is critical to academic success (Field, 2008).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, such as Indonesia, identifying and addressing learners' listening difficulties is essential (Renandya & Farrell, 2011). Indonesia's

strategic position, multicultural society, and increasing international exposure have heightened the demand for English proficiency (Lauder, 2008; Renandya, 2013). As a result, institutions like the British Council and America Corner have expanded English instruction, guided by frameworks such as CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020b).

Listening is particularly valued for its cultural and cognitive roles (Byram, 2012; Kramsch, 2009). It's not only an entry point for language learning but also becomes a tool to access broader knowledge. Learners acquire most of their early knowledge through listening, and studies show they spend about half their class time on listening tasks (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Despite its importance, many EFL learners perceive listening as the hardest skill to master. The challenge lies in its cognitive complexity: interpreting real-time input while storing it in short-term memory. Factors such as limited vocabulary, diverse accents, syntactic differences, idioms, fast speech, and weak

*Corresponding author: **Laksmy Ady Kusumoriny**, Address: Pondok Rangka, No 88, RT 03 RW 01, Kelurahan Curug, Kecamatan Bojongsari, Depok, Jawa Barat 16517. email address: dosen00772@unpam.ac.id, DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.30595/lks.v19i3.26744> ©2025 Leksika. All rights reserved.

memory strategies further complicate comprehension (Hamouda, 2013).

Several studies have explored ways to address these challenges. Graham et al. (2011) found that training learners in goal-oriented listening strategies significantly improved comprehension. Goh & Aryadoust (2019) proposed that difficulties stem from both first-language cognitive habits and limited second-language knowledge. Vocabulary was also found to be a key predictor; Kormos & Csizér (2014) showed that vocabulary size accounted for about half of the variance in listening comprehension.

Siegel (2014) investigated Japanese EFL learners and identified persistent problems including anxiety, excessive translation, and limited inferencing. Coskun (2018) reported that listening issues among Turkish pre-service teachers were due to speaker-related factors (55%), listener-related factors (25%), and context (20%). In Saudi Arabia, Hamouda (2013) identified fast speech, poor vocabulary, and fear of asking questions as major obstacles.

These findings point to the multifaceted nature of listening comprehension. Factors influencing success

span linguistic knowledge, cognitive ability, emotional state, and instructional quality (Rost, 2014). Affective, cognitive, and interpersonal components all shape how learners receive and process spoken language.

While a growing number of Indonesian students pursue higher education abroad, limited research exists on their real-world listening experiences. Few studies address how they navigate multicultural conversations or the strategies they employ when encountering unfamiliar accents or rapid speech.

Given this gap, further research is needed—especially focusing on university-level learners in EFL settings. Understanding their challenges can help educators design more effective, learner-centered listening instruction. Developing strong listening comprehension skills is not just a goal in itself, but a gateway to broader language mastery and intercultural competence.

This study thus aims to investigate the listening comprehension challenges and facilitating factors faced by intermediate-level university students studying English as a foreign language.

To recruit participants, the researcher searched Facebook and Instagram for groups such as “*Indonesian Students in US*” and other country-specific student communities. Interested students were contacted via direct messages explaining the study's purpose. From those who responded positively, eight participants were chosen based on diversity of background and willingness to participate. Pseudonyms (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2) were used to ensure anonymity, and basic demographic information was collected to contextualize their responses.

Method

This study employed a phenomenological qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences of Indonesian students studying in English-speaking countries and the listening comprehension challenges they face when learning English as a foreign language. A phenomenological approach was chosen because it focuses on understanding experiences that are commonly recognized but not yet deeply examined (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, using the maximum variation sampling technique to ensure diverse perspectives. Selection criteria included country of study (the US, UK, Canada, or Australia), level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate), and duration of stay abroad. In total, eight students were selected—seven male and one female—representing various universities and programs.

Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted via Zoom. This format allowed for both consistency across interviews and flexibility to explore unexpected themes. Interviews followed a set of six core questions:

1. Could you briefly introduce yourself?
2. What difficulties have you encountered while learning English?
3. What do you find most challenging when listening to English speakers?

4. Does a speaker's change in volume affect your comprehension? If so, how?
5. What helps you pay closer attention when listening to an English speaker?
6. Based on your observations, what general difficulties do foreigners face while learning English?

Before the interviews, participants were informed about the study and gave written consent to be recorded. The total recording time was 128 minutes, which were transcribed verbatim into 140 pages of raw data. Two external experts reviewed the transcripts to ensure accuracy and reliability, correcting minor errors as needed.

Data Analysis

A descriptive analysis approach was used. The transcripts were read carefully, and meaningful segments were coded to identify

Result and Discussion

The perceptions of students learning English as a foreign language regarding listening difficulties were categorized under two main themes. In this section, student views are presented according to these themes. The participants' statements were transcribed verbatim and cited directly. To maintain anonymity, participants were coded as P1, P2, P3, etc., in the order of their interviews. Below are the views related to the themes of difficulties hindering comprehension during listening and factors facilitating comprehension.

Difficulties of Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is a multifaceted skill influenced by various linguistic, cognitive, and contextual factors. In this study, participants were asked to identify and reflect on the specific challenges they encountered while trying to understand spoken English. Their responses reveal a range of difficulties that hinder their ability to comprehend listening texts effectively. These challenges are categorized and presented in the following themes: regional dialects, the impact of speaker's speech rate, an insufficient vocabulary knowledge of words, the use of idioms and proverbs, the length of speech.

Regional Dialects

patterns and emerging themes. Two main categories were developed from the data:

1. Factors hindering listening comprehension
2. Factors facilitating listening comprehension

Coding was conducted by two researchers independently. The level of agreement between them was calculated using the formula: $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}} \times 100$, resulting in 90% inter-rater reliability. Direct quotations were included in the findings to reflect the participants' voices authentically. This method allowed for a rich understanding of individual experiences and supported the identification of both shared and unique challenges faced by Indonesian students learning English abroad.

All participants reported that they experienced challenges in understanding speakers who used regional dialects. The following excerpts illustrate this subtheme:

- P3 : *"For example, when the speaker uses a dialect, especially from the Eastern or Black Sea regions, it becomes problematic."*
- P4 : *"When I came to New York, it was faster, and you know, phrases like 'What did you do?' and such were used, and this caused some problems."*
- P7 : *"Not all international students come only from London; some come from Manchester, Birmingham, or Glasgow. Naturally, they learn English influenced by the region they live in. ...Therefore, when I go to another place, of course, it is challenging. ... We went to Newcastle for something; I asked two questions, got answers, but I did not understand at all."*

As observed, the participants indicated that comprehension was easier when the native speaker did not use a regional accent. However, as they speak in regional dialects, the participants reported difficulties in understanding the spoken language. One of the most significant challenges in understanding regional dialects lies in phonological variation—specifically, the differences in how sounds are pronounced across dialects. As

noted by (Trudgill, 2000), dialects do not only differ in terms of vocabulary but also in their phonetic characteristics, and these variations can substantially hinder intelligibility, particularly for second language (L2) learners or individuals unfamiliar with the specific dialect. For example, a simple sentence in Standard English such as "I didn't do it" may be rendered in Glaswegian Scottish as "Ah didnae dae it." Here, the pronunciation differences are quite stark: the Standard English /dɪdn't/ contrasts with the Glaswegian /dɪdni/, and /du:/ becomes /de/. These unfamiliar sound patterns can confuse listeners who expect the more standard articulation, thereby disrupting comprehension and processing of the spoken message.

However, other participants noted that they eventually overcame these difficulties over time:

P1 : *"Depending on the dialect, for instance, when listening to someone from Liverpool or Newcastle, I might have trouble understanding. There's not much of a problem with the Southern English accent since I've been here for 2-3 years and have gotten used to it. Although I sometimes struggle a little, it's generally not a big issue."*

Considering the characteristics of participants who reported no difficulty in understanding speakers with regional accents,

The Impact of Speaker's Speech Rate

The rapid speech of the speaker was identified as another significant challenge by the students, following the use of regional dialects. Four participants explicitly stated that they experienced difficulties understanding the speaker when the speech rate was fast. Among these, two participants reported that they initially faced this difficulty when they first started learning English but no longer considered it problematic. Selected participant perspectives regarding the speaker's speech rate are presented below:

P1 : *"If the speaker talks fast, it can cause some difficulties because if they quickly move from one word to the next before I understand the connection between sentences or some words within a sentence, it becomes challenging. ... "*

it is notable that P1 had lived in Southern England for three years, while P8 had been residing in Canada for eleven years. Their ability to comprehend various regional accents appears to correlate with the length of immersion in an English-speaking environment. In contrast, P7, despite having lived in London for three years, still reported difficulties when interacting with speakers using strong regional dialects.

Research supports the notion that extended exposure to authentic spoken English plays a critical role in improving listening comprehension, particularly regarding regional variation. According to Derwing and Munro (2013), it often takes at least 5-7 years of consistent, immersive experience for non-native English speakers to become comfortable with a wide range of native speaker accents, especially those involving reduced forms, connected speech, and idiomatic usage. Additionally, Vandergrift and Goh (2012) highlight that successful listening comprehension among EFL learners is highly dependent on the cumulative quantity and quality of exposure, rather than simply the number of years abroad.

This suggests that while a three-year stay may lead to significant improvement in general listening skills, comprehension of regional dialects often requires longer and deeper exposure, possibly beyond the three-year mark, as seen in the contrast between P1/P7 and P8.

P5 : *"I do not understand well when the speech is fast, but when it is slow, I understand better."*

P8 : *"At the beginning, yes, the speaker needed to speak clearly and slowly. When they spoke fast, I could not understand. ..."*

P3 : *"If the speech is fast, it affects me, but now that I speak English more and live among Turks, it is easier for me...."*

As seen above, some participants emphasized the necessity for speakers to speak slowly and clearly. Others noted that although they initially experienced difficulties with fast speech, living in an English-speaking environment helped them overcome this challenge. However, some students reported that the speed of speech—whether fast or

slow—did not affect their comprehension. Their views are represented as follows:

- P2 : "Whether they speak fast or slow, it does not matter; it does not affect me."
 P6 : "No, fast or slow is not a problem. I understand."

An Insufficient Vocabulary Knowledge of Words

Another challenge reported by participants was an insufficient vocabulary knowledge of words whose meanings they did not know. Three participants expressed difficulty in making sense of the listening input due to unfamiliar terms:

- P1 : "I sometimes struggle with technical terms or less frequently used words in daily life. I cannot infer their meanings. ..."
 P4 : "Older people tend to use more old-fashioned or archaic words when they speak. Sometimes, when someone was talking, I didn't understand certain expressions—for example, phrases like 'pass away' instead of 'die', 'forthwith' instead of 'immediately', or 'behold' instead of 'look' can be confusing"
 P5 : "The most challenging words while learning English are those that do not exist in our native language. Therefore, I struggle."

As observed, two participants highlighted that unfamiliarity with

The Use of Idioms and Proverbs

The use of idioms and proverbs during speech was identified by participants as one of the challenges they encountered when trying to comprehend spoken discourse. Two participants explicitly reported difficulties arising from the speaker's incorporation of idiomatic expressions and proverbs. Their perspectives are presented below:

- P3 : "I find it difficult to understand when the speaker uses proverbs and idioms. I listen and wonder what they actually mean."
 P6 : "I don't really understand what is being said, especially these proverbs and certain words."

- P7 : "For example, there are many people who speak very fast in front of me, but I understand, of course I do not know all the words, but I understand most of them. I understand everything in class."

infrequently used words hindered their listening comprehension. Another participant noted that when speakers talk fast, the weakness in vocabulary led to confusion regarding word meanings. Correspondingly, one participant reported that previously learned words tend to be forgotten when living in an environment dominated by their native language rather than English, which further complicates comprehension during listening:

- P4 : "During language courses, some people speak English very quickly, while others still struggle to form proper sentences—mainly because their native language (e.g., Indonesian) dominates their thinking. Honestly, when you use your native language most of the time, you tend to forget some English vocabulary. For example, after frequently speaking Indonesian in daily life, I sometimes find myself struggling to recall certain English words when I return to using English, which affects both my understanding and fluency.."

Analysis of these responses indicates that participants struggled to understand speeches containing idioms and proverbs. This difficulty is consistent with previous research highlighting that figurative language—such as idiomatic expressions and culturally bound phrases—is one of the most challenging aspects of second language comprehension (Boers & Lindstromberg, 2009; Liu, 2008). Notably, both participants had been residing in Australia for approximately 18 months and had received their primary, secondary, and high school education in Arabic. As pointed out by Liantas (2002), learners with limited exposure to the cultural context of the target language often misinterpret or fail to grasp the meaning of idioms, especially when such expressions do not have direct equivalents in their first language. The participants' educational

background in Arabic, with minimal formal exposure to English idiomatic usage, likely contributed to their limited comprehension of

The Length of Speech

Another issue perceived as problematic by participants was the duration of the speech. One participant reported experiencing listening difficulties when the speech duration was prolonged:

P1 : *"For example, I have attended many conferences and listened to many*

Factors Facilitating Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is not solely dependent on linguistic proficiency; it is also shaped by various facilitating factors that either enhance or hinder understanding. In this study, several themes emerged from the participants' reflections that illuminate the positive conditions under which they experienced greater listening success. These include the speaker's delivery, personal interest in the topic, familiarity with other languages, exposure to audiovisual materials, and vocabulary knowledge. These findings are also supported by existing theories on input processing, affective engagement, and multimodal learning.

Effective Delivery

All participants agreed that the speaker's delivery style significantly impacted their attentiveness and comprehension. Factors such as voice modulation, pronunciation clarity, stress, and intonation patterns were mentioned frequently. These findings align with prosodic theory in spoken discourse, which posits that prosodic features such as pitch variation and stress play a key role in parsing and interpreting speech (Cutler et al., 1997).

P2 : *"I understand better that way. For instance, there was a conference recently where the lecturer spoke normally, then suddenly raised his voice and tone, which made me listen more attentively and understand more."*

P4 : *"I listen carefully if the speaker uses a soft tone."*

P7 : *"Of course, speaking slowly and not too loudly is better."*

figurative speech in authentic listening situations.

speakers. To truly enjoy and fully understand, the timing is very important. If it becomes too long, one loses the desire to listen. It becomes boring."

As seen here, the participant emphasized that prolonged speech length led to boredom, reduced willingness to listen, and consequently incomplete comprehension.

P8 : *"At a conference, if the speaker maintains the same voice level all the time, we can't pay full attention. When they raise their voice, I understand better."*

Participants noted that monotone delivery made it harder to sustain attention, whereas varied intonation encouraged active listening. This echoes findings by Vandergrift (2007), who argued that expressive delivery supports chunking and semantic segmentation, which in turn facilitates comprehension. Additionally, participants emphasized the impact of non-verbal cues, including gestures and facial expressions, consistent with multimodal learning theory (Mayer, 2005), which underscores the synergy of verbal and visual channels in aiding processing and retention.

In addition, one participant highlighted the importance of oratory skills, while two others emphasized the speaker's gestures, facial expressions, and physical presence:

P1 : *"It depends on the person. A good orator makes listening pleasurable, like famous speakers. Here, for example, I listened to the governor's speeches; he speaks clearly and simply, which makes me want to listen more. Some speakers speak too heavily."*

P2 : *"Facial and hand gestures also affect listening. When everything is in harmony – the environment, the speaker's appearance, and the topic – I listen more attentively and productively."*

P3 : *"Hand movements help me listen carefully. Facial expressions are very important; it's harder on the phone."*

The Role of Interest

According to participants, beyond the speaker's delivery, the relevance and interest of the topic significantly facilitated comprehension. All participants reported that they listened more attentively when the subject matter was engaging. Representative comments include:

P2 : *"If it is about history or football, I enjoy it more and listen better."*

P4 : *"If the topic concerns things related to me, I pay more attention. For example, if someone talks about Eskişehir, it doesn't*

Familiarity with Other Languages

Interestingly, familiarity with other languages (such as French, Arabic, or Indonesian) was reported to aid comprehension. This finding resonates with cross-linguistic transfer theory, which explains that learners may draw on known linguistic structures or vocabulary from one language to support understanding in another (Odlin, 1989). Participants who recognized cognates or structural similarities between English and their known languages reported a stronger grasp of content. For example, P2's ability to identify French-origin words in English reflects what Ringbom (2007) refers to as positive transfer in second language listening.

The interesting nature of the topic, as well as familiarity with other known languages, emerged as factors that facilitate participants' comprehension during listening tasks. Five participants specifically reported that their knowledge of other languages supported their understanding while listening. Their perspectives on this issue are as follows:

Audiovisual Exposure

Participants emphasized the role of frequent audiovisual exposure (e.g., English TV, music, and news media) in building their listening comprehension. This supports input enhancement theory, which posits that rich, meaningful exposure to authentic input increases learners' sensitivity to language

interest me, but if it's about Kütahya, where I live, it does."

P7 : *"I try to listen as much as possible if the topic interests me."*

P8 : *"If it catches my interest, it positively affects me. I listen carefully, ask questions, and try to learn more."*

These statements reveal that participants' attention and comprehension improve when the topic aligns with their interests and motivations. One participant specifically mentioned enjoying lectures on history and football topics.

P2 : *"For example, I know French. While listening to English, there are some similar words used both there and here. This makes it more engaging. When I notice that a word is also used here, it draws my attention. For instance, many words from French are also found in English. Because of this, when such words appear in the speech text, I pay more attention and understanding becomes more efficient since I already know their meanings. So, knowledge of other languages contributes positively."*

P3 : *"For me, when Indonesian words are used, it becomes easier to listen."*

P6 : *"Since I know Arabic, English feels easier for me because many English words come from Arabic."*

P8 : *"I think my native language and English help me. Some concepts were very similar to each other."*

An examination of participants' responses reveals that students familiar with Arabic and French languages particularly expressed this view. Additionally, the observation by P8, who stated that knowledge of Indonesia and English facilitated comprehension, is notable.

forms (Sharwood Smith, 1993). Television and radio offer contextualized, repetitive, and visually supported input, making them ideal for incidental vocabulary learning and speech pattern acquisition (Webb & Rodgers, 2009).

Five participants reported that their frequent exposure to audiovisual materials

enabled them to understand spoken English more easily. Their views include:

- P4 : *"I love reading newspapers and watching television a lot because, you know, contemporary daily English is used. English has changed over time... When I listen to television and radio, I learn words and understand better."*
- P6 : *"For example, watching English channels taught me vocabulary. As I listened, I did not struggle with other contexts."*
- P7 : *"The more I speak English, watch English TV, and listen to English music, the more benefit I get. That's how I did it, and it*

was helpful. ... I learned the language through TV."

These accounts indicate that participants learn vocabulary through audio-visual exposure, which in turn improves their listening comprehension. The significant role of television and radio as language learning tools was especially emphasized. P4's observation about tracking the changes in the English language over time through television and radio is particularly insightful.

Vocabulary Knowledge

Consistent with Nation's (2001) model of vocabulary and listening, several participants emphasized that a broad vocabulary base significantly enhances comprehension. They noted that the more words they knew, the more likely they were to infer meaning even in fast-paced conversations. This finding aligns with empirical research by Mecarty (2000), who found a significant correlation between vocabulary size and listening test scores among ESL learners.

Parallel to these views, some participants emphasized that having a large vocabulary facilitates comprehension during listening:

- P1 : *"To understand a language, the most important thing is memorizing a large number of words from that language. When the memorization is extensive, understanding becomes easier."*
- P7 : *"Of course, how much English you learn depends on how much effort you put in. It depends on how many words and grammar rules you know. There are many people who speak fast in front of me, but I understand quite a lot. Naturally, I do not understand every word, but I understand most of it, especially in class."*

Immersion in English-speaking Environments

One participant mentioned that living among English speakers facilitated comprehension.

- P3 : *"If someone speaks fast, it affects me, but now, since I speak English more and live with Turks, I understand it more easily."*

Thus, P3 underlines that residing in an English-speaking environment enhances their

ability to comprehend English more effectively. This aligns with the noticing hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990), which argues that authentic exposure allows learners to notice and internalize real language use. Furthermore, social interactionist perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978) support the view that language acquisition is enhanced through meaningful social engagement, which immersion naturally provides.

Discussion

This study identified a range of challenges experienced by university students learning English as a foreign language in their listening comprehension. The participants' perspectives revealed two overarching themes: factors hindering listening comprehension and factors facilitating it. Reported difficulties predominantly involved accented speech,

idiomatic expressions, limited vocabulary, unclear speaker intonation, and rapid speech—all of which complicate understanding. Conversely, participants noted that prior knowledge of other languages, a broad vocabulary, engaging topics, exposure to audiovisual resources, and nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions enhanced their comprehension. These factors neatly categorize into sub-themes representing barriers and supports in the listening process.

The dual origin of these listening challenges—from both listeners and speakers—corroborates findings in previous research across proficiency levels (Goh & Aryadoust, 2019; Graham, 2017; Hamouda, 2013; Siegel, 2014; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). For example, Vandergrift (2012), studying native English-speaking learners of French, concluded that deficits in native language listening skills and limited target language knowledge are principal causes of foreign language listening difficulties. Similarly, our findings confirm that participants' familiarity with their native or previously learned languages positively influences their English listening comprehension.

Vocabulary emerged as a critical cognitive link in foreign language acquisition. As learners expand their lexical knowledge, they create more connections between conceptual thoughts and language forms, facilitating all four key language skills. Insufficient vocabulary, on the other hand, constrains comprehension and impedes effective communication. This aligns with Nation's (2017) assertion that vocabulary size strongly predicts L2 listening and reading proficiency by enabling learners to decode meaning from spoken input. Milton and Treffers-Daller (2013) further demonstrated a significant correlation between receptive vocabulary and listening comprehension in EFL contexts. More recently, Zou et al. (2021) identified lexical knowledge—especially of collocations and idioms—as a strong predictor of listening success in second language learning. Our participants' reported difficulties with idioms, proverbs, and unfamiliar words resonate strongly with these findings, situating the study within an established evidence base.

Attention and motivation also play essential roles in listening comprehension. Engagement with the topic influences listeners' focus and capacity to extract intended meaning. Chang and Read (2006) found that topic familiarity improved listening performance notably for lower proficiency learners, while Li and Renandya (2012) emphasized that motivation—often driven by topic relevance—

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study highlights several strategies to address the key listening difficulties encountered by students

enhances both comprehension and retention. Consistently, participants in this study exhibited higher attentiveness and confidence when listening to interesting topics, supporting the integral role of motivational factors documented in the literature.

Nonverbal communication, particularly gestures and facial expressions, surfaced as another facilitative factor. Huang and Eskey (1999) demonstrated that visible gestures aid learners in comprehending spoken passages, while Gullberg (2006) provided evidence of improved vocabulary recall and sentence comprehension through co-speech gestures. Hostetter's (2011) meta-analysis further affirmed that gestures enhance language processing across native and non-native speakers. Participants in this study similarly reported that such nonverbal cues improved their listening and understanding, reinforcing and extending previous research findings.

Finally, the impact of audiovisual materials in language learning is increasingly recognized in the digital era. Almusharraf & Khahro (2020) showed that audiovisual aids significantly boost EFL university students' listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Wang & Antonenko, (2017) experimentally confirmed that multimodal video input—featuring visual enactments and subtitles—enhanced secondary learners' understanding of spoken English. These findings, echoed in our study, underscore the transformative potential of integrating audiovisual resources into foreign language listening instruction.

In sum, the challenges and facilitators identified in this study align closely with existing literature while providing context-specific insights into Indonesian EFL learners' experiences. This contributes to a nuanced understanding of the complex, multifaceted nature of listening comprehension in multicultural and multilingual settings, offering valuable implications for language teaching and learner support strategies.

learning English as a foreign language. One important recommendation is the integration of audiovisual materials into the learning process. While textbooks provide structural support, audiovisual resources—such as videos, recordings, and multimedia presentations—

can significantly enhance students' comprehension and engagement during listening activities.

Another crucial factor is the selection of topics that are relevant and interesting to learners. When students are exposed to content that captures their curiosity, they are more likely to stay attentive and comprehend better. Instructors also play an essential role in facilitating understanding by using expressive gestures and facial cues to reinforce meaning.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of vocabulary development as a foundation for language learning. A broad and active vocabulary directly supports both listening and reading comprehension. In this

regard, consistent and focused vocabulary instruction should be a key component of English language programs.

Lastly, the study notes the particular challenge students face with idioms and proverbs due to their abstract nature. These elements of language require targeted instruction, ideally supported by audiovisual context, to help learners grasp and retain their meanings effectively. Through the implementation of these approaches, educators can better support students in overcoming listening barriers and achieving greater language proficiency.

References

- Almusharraf, N., & Khahro, S. (2020). Students' satisfaction with online learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (IJET)*, 15(21), 246-267.
- Boers, F., & Lindstromberg, S. (2009). *Cognitive linguistic approaches to teaching vocabulary and phraseology*. Mouton de Gruyter.
- Byram, M. (2012). Language awareness and intercultural communicative competence. In B. Spolsky & F. M. Hult (Eds.), *The handbook of educational linguistics* (pp. 296-309). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Chang, A. C. S., & Read, J. (2006). The effects of listening support on the listening performance of EFL learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(2), 375-397. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264527>
- Coskun, A. (2018). Listening comprehension problems of Turkish EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 14(1), 91-103. <https://www.jlls.org/index.php/jlls/article/view/815>
- Council of Europe. (2020a). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. <https://www.coe.int/lang-cefr>
- Council of Europe. (2020b). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment – Companion volume*. Council of Europe Publishing. <https://www.coe.int/lang-cefr>
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Cutler, A., Dahan, D., & van Donselaar, W. (1997). Prosody in the comprehension of spoken language: A literature review. *Language and Speech*, 40(2), 141-201. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00238309970400201>
- Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2013). *Pronunciation fundamentals: Evidence-based perspectives for L2 teaching and research*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Field, J. (2008). *Listening in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gilakjani, A. P., & Sabouri, N. B. (2016). Learners' listening comprehension difficulties in English language learning: A literature review. *English Language Teaching*, 9(6), 123-133. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n6p123>
- Goh, C. C. M., & Aryadoust, V. (2019). Mapping listening difficulties: Strategies and learning needs from EFL learners' perspective. *System*, 81, 63-78.

- <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2019.01.001>
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next: Why global English may mean the end of "English as a Foreign Language."* British Council.
- Graham, S. (2017). Research into practice: Listening strategies in an instructed classroom setting. *Language Teaching*, 50(1), 107-119. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444816000306>
- Graham, S., Santos, D., & Vanderplank, R. (2011). Exploring the relationship between listening development and strategy use. *Language Teaching Research*, 15(4), 435-456. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168811412026>
- Gullberg, M. (2006). Some reasons for studying gesture and second language acquisition (Homage à Adam Kendon). *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 44(2), 103-124. <https://doi.org/10.1515/IRAL.2006.004>
- Hamouda, A. (2013). An investigation of listening comprehension problems encountered by Saudi students in the EL listening classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2(2), 113-155.
- Hostetter, A. B. (2011). When do gestures communicate? A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(2), 297-315. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022128>
- Huang, H.-H., & Eskey, D. E. (1999). The effects of closed-captioned television on the listening comprehension of intermediate English as a Second Language (ESL) students. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems*, 28(1), 75-96.
- Kormos, J., & Csizér, K. (2014). The interaction of motivation, self-regulatory strategies, and autonomous learning behavior in different learner groups. *TESOL Quarterly*, 48(2), 275-299. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.129>
- Kramersch, C. (2009). *The multilingual subject: What foreign language learners say about their experience and why it matters.* Oxford University Press.
- Lauder, A. (2008). The status and function of English in Indonesia: A review of key factors. *Makara, Sosial Humaniora*, 12(1), 9-20.
- Li, W., & Renandya, W. A. (2012). Effective extensive listening for English learners. *English Language Teaching Journal*, 66(1), 13-21. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccr015>
- Liontas, J. I. (2002). Exploring second language learners' notions of idiomaticity. *System*, 30(3), 289-313.
- Liu, D. (2008). *Idioms: Description, comprehension, acquisition, and pedagogy.* Routledge.
- Mayer, R. E. (2005). *The Cambridge handbook of multimedia learning.* Cambridge University Press.
- Mecartty, F. H. (2000). Lexical and grammatical knowledge in reading and listening comprehension by foreign language learners. *Language Learning*, 50(2), 245-303. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00118>
- Milton, J., & Treffers-Daller, J. (2013). *Vocabulary size revisited: The link between vocabulary size and academic achievement.* British Council.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language.* Cambridge University Press.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2017). *Learning vocabulary in another language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Odlin, T. (1989). *Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning.* Cambridge University Press.
- Renandya, W. A. (2013). The role of input-based practice in English language classrooms. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 1(1), 1-10.
- Renandya, W. A., & Farrell, T. S. C. (2011). 'Teacher, the tape is too fast!': Extensive listening in ELT. *ELT Journal*, 65(1), 52-59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccq015>
- Ringbom, H. (2007). *Cross-linguistic similarity in foreign language learning.* Multilingual Matters.

- Rost, M. (2014). *Listening in language learning* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129–158. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/11.2.129>
- Sharwood Smith, M. (1993). Input enhancement in instructed SLA. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 15(2), 165–179. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0272263100011943>
- Siegel, J. (2014). Exploring L2 listening instruction: Examinations of practice. *ELT Journal*, 68(1), 22–30. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cct058>
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society* (4th ed.). Penguin Books.
- Vandergrift, L. (2007). Recent developments in second and foreign language listening comprehension research. *Language Teaching*, 40(3), 191–210. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444807004338>
- Vandergrift, L. (2012). *Challenges in L2 listening: Proficiency, processes and pedagogy*. In *Cambridge Guide to Pedagogy and Practice in Second Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. C. M. (2012). *Teaching and learning second language listening: Metacognition in action*. Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- Wang, Y., & Antonenko, P. (2017). The effects of signaled captions, nonsignaled captions, and no captions on foreign language listening comprehension. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 179–190.
- Webb, S., & Rodgers, M. P. H. (2009). Vocabulary demands of television programs. *Language Learning*, 59(2), 335–366. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2009.00509.x>
- Zou, D., Wang, D., & Xing, M. (2021). Vocabulary knowledge and listening comprehension in second language acquisition: A structural equation modeling approach. *Language Teaching Research*, 25(3), 338–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820904734>