

Problematics of English Listening Learning in Procedure Text at Xi Grade SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat

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Abstract

This research aims to identify, describe, and analyze the problematic factors hindering the English listening learning process in the context of procedure texts among the eleventh-grade students of SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through a listening test and interviews with students and the English teacher. The results indicate that the majority of students were categorized at a low level of listening proficiency ("Bad" category), with a percentage of 57.14%. The most dominant difficulties were contextual knowledge (19.42%), followed by speaker's speed (18.70%), vocabulary mastery (18.70%), discourse signals (17.98%), concentration (17.98%), the inability to request repetition, and the tendency to understand every word. These findings indicate that students' listening difficulties are influenced by both linguistic factors, such as vocabulary mastery and discourse signals, and non-linguistic factors, such as the speaker's delivery speed, concentration, and contextual knowledge. This research recommends the need for more effective and varied listening instructional strategies to improve students' listening comprehension, particularly in understanding procedure texts.

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1. INTRODUCTION

English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia and serves as a compulsory subject at the secondary school level. Among the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing listening is considered a fundamental receptive skill that supports the development of the other language abilities. However, listening remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners because it requires students to process spoken language in real time while simultaneously understanding meaning, vocabulary, pronunciation, and context (Agustiana, 2019). In the Indonesian EFL context, students often have limited opportunities to interact with authentic English outside the classroom, which further contributes to difficulties in listening comprehension.

Listening comprehension is influenced by various factors, including limited vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation, rapid speech rate, lack of concentration, insufficient background knowledge, and anxiety during listening activities (Agustiana, 2019). According to Brownell (2017) as cited in (Fatonah et al., 2024), listening is a cognitive process through which individuals interpret and construct meaning from spoken language. Similarly, Saricoban (1999) states that listening involves recognizing and understanding spoken messages by utilizing linguistic knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (as cited in Lestari & Nor, 2024). Therefore, successful listening comprehension requires learners to integrate multiple cognitive and linguistic processes simultaneously.

One of the text types taught in the Indonesian senior high school English curriculum is the procedure text. Procedure texts are designed to provide instructions and guide readers or listeners through a sequence of steps to achieve a particular goal (Widayanti et al., 2019). When presented orally, procedure texts may create additional challenges for students because they must understand instructions, identify key information, and follow the sequence of steps without the opportunity to review the content repeatedly. As a result, listening comprehension becomes crucial for students' successful understanding of procedural information.

To analyze students' listening difficulties, this research adopts Underwood's (1989) framework, which identifies seven major barriers to effective listening comprehension: inability to control the speaker's speed, inability to ask for repetition, limited vocabulary, failure to recognize discourse markers, lack of contextual knowledge, difficulty maintaining concentration, and the tendency to attempt to understand every word (as cited in Al-thiyabi, 2014). This framework provides a comprehensive basis for examining the specific difficulties experienced by EFL learners during listening activities.

Several previous research have investigated students' difficulties in understanding procedure texts. (Martin et al., 2024) found that students experienced difficulties in comprehending spoken sentences, retaining information, and understanding connecting sentences in procedural texts. (Umara Umami, 2018), reported that limited vocabulary, low motivation, and inappropriate teaching strategies negatively affected students' listening comprehension. Furthermore, (Afandi, 2020) revealed that vocational high school students faced difficulties due to limited vocabulary mastery and insufficient understanding of procedure text structures.

Despite these findings, studies focusing specifically on the detailed analysis of listening comprehension difficulties in procedure texts at the senior high school level remain limited. Moreover, no previous research has been conducted at SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat to investigate the listening difficulties encountered by students in learning procedure texts. Therefore, this research aims to identify and analyze the listening comprehension difficulties experienced by the eleventh-grade students of SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat in understanding procedure texts and to determine the dominant factors contributing to those difficulties.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the listening comprehension difficulties encountered by eleventh-grade students in understanding procedure texts. The research was conducted at SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat, North Sumatra, during the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants consisted of 21 students of Grade XI and one English teacher who served as a key informant. The participants were selected because they had learned procedure texts as part of the English curriculum and were directly involved in listening learning activities.

The instruments used in this research were a listening test, interview guidelines, and field notes. The listening test was designed based on a procedure text entitled *How to Make Waffles* and consisted of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The test aimed to identify students' listening comprehension difficulties related to seven listening problem categories: speaker's speed, inability to request repetition, vocabulary limitation, discourse signals, contextual knowledge, concentration, and the tendency to understand every word. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and the English teacher to obtain deeper information regarding the factors affecting students' listening comprehension. Field notes were used to record relevant observations during the data collection process.

The data were collected through two techniques. First, students completed the listening test during regular classroom activities. Second, interviews were conducted after the test administration to explore students' experiences and perceptions of listening difficulties as well as the teacher's perspective on students' performance in listening activities. The data obtained from the listening test were in the form of students' scores and incorrect responses for each listening difficulty category, while the interview data consisted of verbal responses from students and the teacher.

The data were analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis. The listening test results were tabulated and converted into percentages to determine the distribution of listening difficulties across the seven categories. The interview data were transcribed, organized, and classified into themes related to students' listening challenges. The analysis process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Finally, the findings from the listening test and interviews were compared and interpreted to identify the dominant factors contributing to students' listening comprehension difficulties in understanding procedure texts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The listening test was administered to 21 Grade XI students of SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat. The results revealed a considerable range in listening ability, with the highest score recorded at 90 and the lowest at 25. Table 1 presents the distribution of student scores across Arikunto's as cited in, (Inayah et al., 2020), proficiency categories.

Table 1. Distribution of Students' Listening Proficiency (Based on Arikunto's Scoring Rubric)

Number of Students	Score Range	Level of Mastery	Percentage
0	0 – 20	Very Bad	0%
12	21 – 40	Bad	57.14%
6	41 – 60	Sufficient	28.57%
0	61 – 80	Good	0%
3	81 – 100	Very Good	14.28%

The data in Table 1 reveal that the majority of students 12 out of 21 (57.14%) were categorized at the Bad proficiency level, indicating substantial difficulties in comprehending the procedural text delivered via the listening test. Six students (28.57%) were categorized as Sufficient, while only three students (14.28%) achieved the Very Good level. Notably, no student attained the Good category, highlighting a polarized distribution of listening ability. These findings collectively indicate that the listening competence of Grade XI students at SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat remains predominantly at a low proficiency level, underscoring the urgent need for more structured and engaging listening instruction.

A total of 139 difficulties were identified across all test items. Table 2 presents the distribution and frequency of each difficulty category, analyzed according to Underwood's (1989) seven-barrier framework, as cited in Al-thiyabi (2014).

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Listening Difficulties

Difficulty Category	Frequency (F)	Total (N)	Percentage
Speaker's Speed	26	139	18.70%
Request Repetition	21	139	15.10%
Vocabulary	26	139	18.70%
Discourse Signals	25	139	17.98%
Contextual Knowledge	27	139	19.42%
Concentration	25	139	17.98%
Understanding Every Word	13	139	9.35%

The difficulty of managing the speaker's pace accounted for 26 incorrect responses (18.70%), making it one of the most prevalent barriers. Test items targeting this difficulty (questions 2, 3, 4, and 9) revealed that 15 out of 21 students answered item 3 incorrectly ("What is the amount of baking powder used?"), indicating that a substantial proportion of students failed to accurately process quantity-specific information delivered at natural speaking speed. Item 4 ("How many large eggs are needed?") yielded 5 incorrect responses, while item 9 ("How long should the waffle cook in the waffle iron?") produced 6 incorrect responses. Item 2 resulted in no incorrect answers, suggesting that some individual test items aligned more closely with students' processing capacity. These findings are consistent with Underwood's (1989) as cited in Al-thiyabi (2014), identification of speaking rate as the foremost barrier in EFL listening, as learners cannot control the pace of spoken input in real time. (Martin et al., 2024) similarly found that eleventh-grade students struggled to understand oral procedural texts when spoken at natural pace, reinforcing the cross-contextual validity of this difficulty. (Agustiana, 2019), also notes that speaking speed is a primary source of listening anxiety among Indonesian EFL students, which further compounds comprehension difficulties.

The inability to request repetition accounted for 21 instances of difficulty (15.10%). This barrier was primarily identified through interview data rather than test item analysis, as its nature precludes direct measurement through a single-administration listening test. During interview sessions, most students explicitly stated that they had difficulty understanding the listening material because the audio could not be replayed during the test. Students reported needing repetition particularly for numerical data, ingredient quantities, and sequential procedural steps. One student stated (in Indonesian): "Kami perlu pengulangan untuk memahami informasi dengan jelas, terutama angka, bahan-bahan, dan langkah prosedur yang disebutkan oleh penutur." [We need repetition to understand the information clearly, especially for numbers, ingredients, and procedural steps mentioned by the speaker.] This qualitative evidence corroborates Underwood's (1989) second barrier, wherein students in classroom contexts lack the authority to replay audio recordings, a limitation that disproportionately affects learners processing information-dense procedural texts.

Vocabulary difficulties accounted for 26 incorrect responses (18.70%), matching the proportion recorded for speaker's speed. Three test items targeted vocabulary comprehension: item 1 ("How much all-purpose flour is needed?"), item 5 ("How much melted butter is added to the batter?"), and short-answer task 2, item 5 ("How much vanilla extract is used?"). Item 5 yielded 7 incorrect responses, primarily because students failed to recognize the term "melted butter." The most striking finding was task 2, item 5, which produced 18 incorrect responses

the highest single-item failure rate for vocabulary as students were unfamiliar with the term “vanilla extract” in the context of aural delivery. These findings align with Underwood’s (1989) third barrier and are corroborated by both interview data and prior research. The English teacher confirmed that limited vocabulary mastery is the primary obstacle in listening instruction at the school: “Kurangnya pemahaman terhadap kosakata menyebabkan siswa mengalami kesulitan dalam menangkap informasi yang disampaikan melalui audio atau video berbahasa Inggris.” [Limited vocabulary comprehension causes students to experience difficulty in capturing information delivered through English audio or video.] (Umara Ummi, 2018), similarly identified limited vocabulary as a core difficulty in listening to procedural texts at the junior high school level, while . (Martin et al., 2024), corroborated that vocabulary deficits impede overall procedural text comprehension across educational levels.

Difficulty in recognizing discourse signals yielded 25 incorrect responses (17.98%). Two test items specifically targeted this dimension: item 7 (“In which step are the eggs beaten?”) and short-answer task 2, item 2 (“What is added to the beaten eggs in Step 2?”). Item 7 produced 7 incorrect responses, while task 2, item 2 requiring students to identify additive ingredients within a sequential step resulted in 18 incorrect responses. Only 3 students answered the latter correctly, providing the complete response: “milk, melted butter, and vanilla extract.” Underwood’s (1989) fourth barrier identifies the failure to recognize discourse markers as a significant impediment to comprehension. Procedural texts rely heavily on temporal and sequential connectives such as “first,” “next,” “after that,” and “then” to structure the logical progression of instructions. Students who cannot decode these discourse signals are consequently unable to follow the procedural sequence as a coherent whole, resulting in fragmented comprehension.

Contextual knowledge deficiencies produced the highest number of incorrect responses, totaling 27 (19.42%), thereby constituting the most dominant barrier in this research. Three items targeted this dimension: item 6 (“What special tool is required to make waffles?”), item 8 (“What should the batter look like after mixing wet and dry ingredients?”), and short-answer task 2, item 3 (“What should you do to the waffle iron surfaces before pouring the batter?”). Notably, all students answered item 6 correctly, as the term “waffle iron” was inferrable from the audio context. However, item 8 yielded 6 incorrect responses, and task 2, item 3 was answered incorrectly by all 21 students the only test item with a 100% failure rate. The complete failure on task 2, item 3 underscores the pivotal role of background knowledge in listening comprehension. Students who had no prior familiarity with waffle-making procedures a topic largely unfamiliar in the Indonesian cultural context were unable to infer the correct action even from the audio input. Underwood’s (1989) fifth barrier explicitly identifies the absence of shared contextual knowledge between speaker and listener as a critical impediment to comprehension. (Umara Ummi, 2018), similarly noted that a mismatch between teaching materials and students’ real-life conditions contributed to comprehension difficulties.

Concentration difficulties accounted for 25 incorrect responses (17.98%). Two test items specifically measured this dimension: item 10 (“Which of the following is NOT mentioned as a topping?”) and short-answer task 2, item 4 (“When should the waffles be served?”). Item 10 yielded 5 incorrect responses, while task 2, item 4 produced 20 incorrect responses, with only one student correctly providing the answer “while warm.” Interview data further elucidated the nature of this difficulty. Most students acknowledged that they easily lost focus during the listening activity due to environmental disruptions within the classroom, the rapid delivery of the audio, and the emergence of unfamiliar vocabulary that diverted their attentional resources. This pattern corresponds directly to Underwood’s (1989) sixth barrier, wherein the sustained cognitive effort required to process a foreign language over an extended listening period leads to listener fatigue and attentional breakdown. Rost (2016), as cited in (Alfian et al., 2024),

similarly notes that academic listening demands not only comprehension but also the application of critical thinking and attention management across diverse speech patterns.

The tendency to attempt to understand every word produced 13 incorrect responses (9.35%), representing the least prevalent barrier in this research. One test item (short-answer task 2, item 1: “What are the four dry ingredients mixed together in Step 1?”) specifically targeted this difficulty. Of 21 students, 8 answered correctly by identifying all four ingredients (flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt), while 13 answered incorrectly. Analysis revealed that students who focused intensively on decoding each individual lexical item lost the thread of the overall instructional sequence, consequently failing to retain the complete set of ingredients. Underwood (1989) identifies this as a maladaptive listening habit wherein excessive focus on individual words triggers anxiety upon encountering unknown items, disrupting overall comprehension. Although this barrier registered the lowest frequency in the current research, it remains pedagogically significant, as it points to the need to train students in tolerance for ambiguity and holistic meaning construction during listening activities.

The interview data provided convergent qualitative evidence for the quantitative findings derived from the listening test. Across 22 student interviews, the most frequently cited difficulties were speaker’s speed and limited vocabulary mastery, with most students acknowledging that the audio was delivered too rapidly and contained vocabulary beyond their current proficiency. Students also reported systemic challenges in following the sequential structure of the procedural text, particularly when multiple steps were delivered continuously without pause. Several students noted that accents differing from what they typically encountered in classroom instruction caused difficulty in word recognition and consequent failure to comprehend aural input. Background knowledge was also identified as a significant contextual variable: students who possessed prior knowledge about the topic demonstrated notably higher comprehension than those who did not. The English teacher’s interview further confirmed that listening instruction on procedural texts had not been implemented intensively during the current academic year, as students were still engaged in procedural text writing activities. The teacher noted the absence of a dedicated language laboratory, with listening activities dependent on classroom speakers and available video media. This infrastructural limitation compounds the instructional challenges associated with developing students’ listening competence, as noted by Underwood (1989), as cited in Al-thiyabi (2014), and corroborated by (Umara Umami, 2018).

Overall, the findings of this research confirm that the listening difficulties of Grade XI students at SMA Swasta Al Ma’shum Kisaran Barat are multidimensional in nature, arising from the interaction of linguistic factors (vocabulary mastery, discourse signal recognition) and non-linguistic factors (speaker’s speed, concentration, contextual knowledge, and learning facility limitations). This multifactorial profile underscores the need for comprehensive and targeted instructional interventions.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that the listening comprehension difficulties experienced by the eleventh-grade students of SMA Swasta Al Ma’shum Kisaran Barat are influenced by the interaction of linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Contextual knowledge, vocabulary mastery, and speaker’s speed emerged as the most influential factors affecting students’ ability to comprehend procedure texts. The findings indicate that students’ listening problems are not merely caused by limited language knowledge but are also related to inadequate background knowledge, limited exposure to authentic spoken English, and insufficient listening practice. These findings reinforce Underwood’s framework and suggest that successful listening

comprehension requires the integration of linguistic competence, contextual understanding, and effective listening strategies.

SUGGESTIONS

English teachers at SMA Swasta Al Ma'shum Kisaran Barat are recommended to provide more intensive listening instruction by incorporating pre-listening activities that activate students' background knowledge and introduce key vocabulary before listening tasks. In addition, teachers should utilize authentic audio materials and gradually expose students to natural speech rates to improve their listening competence.

Students are encouraged to engage in regular listening practice through English audio and video materials outside the classroom in order to expand their vocabulary, improve familiarity with various accents, and strengthen their listening strategies.

The school is advised to improve facilities that support listening instruction, such as providing better audio equipment or a dedicated language learning space, so that students can experience more effective listening activities.

Future researchers are recommended to investigate listening difficulties using larger participant groups and different educational contexts to obtain broader insights into factors affecting EFL listening comprehension, particularly in understanding procedure texts.

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