

**Exploring Preferences and Strategies of Low Achiever in Listening Comprehension: A
Qualitative Study of 11th Grade Students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang***

Thesis

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ABSTRAK

Mumtazil, Isroul Mufidah, 2025. *Exploring Preferences and Strategies of Low Achiever in Listening Comprehension: A Qualitative Study of 11th Grade Students at SMA An-Nur Bululawang*. Thesis, Program Magister Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Program Pascasarjana, Universitas Islam Malang, Pembimbing: (1) Dr. H. Muhammad Yunus, S.Pd., M.Pd., (2) Prof. Dr. Dwi Fita Heriyawati, M.Pd.

Kata Kunci: kemampuan menyimak, penyebab rendahnya kemampuan menyimak, preferensi keterampilan menyimak, strategi dalam mempelajari keterampilan menyimak, siswa Bahasa Inggris dan Bahasa Asing.

Penelitian ini menyelidiki penyebab rendahnya kemampuan menyimak, preferensi siswa dalam mempelajari keterampilan menyimak, dan strategi yang digunakan oleh siswa berkemampuan rendah untuk mengatasi kesulitan mereka. Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang dengan empat siswa kelas 11 berkemampuan menyimak rendah sebagai partisipan. Desain deskriptif kualitatif diterapkan, dan data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan dokumentasi.

Temuan ini mengungkapkan empat penyebab utama rendahnya kemampuan mendengarkan: bicara cepat, aksen yang berbeda atau audio yang tidak jelas, kosakata yang terbatas, dan kurangnya latihan atau paparan di luar kelas. Dalam hal preferensi belajar, siswa lebih menyukai materi multimedia autentik seperti video, podcast, dan lagu, terutama jika didukung oleh subtitel dan alat bantu visual. Mereka juga menunjukkan preferensi yang berbeda untuk mendengarkan secara individu (agar lebih fokus) dan mendengarkan kelompok (untuk berbagi ide dan memperjelas makna). Praktik kelas seperti pengulangan dan diskusi dianggap efektif untuk memperkuat pemahaman. Mengenai strategi, siswa melaporkan menggunakan kombinasi strategi pribadi (pengulangan, mencatat, menulis kosakata, menggunakan subtitel), strategi yang didukung guru (mendengarkan dengan transkrip, mendengarkan berulang kali, diskusi terbimbing), dan strategi berbasis teknologi (YouTube, Spotify, podcast, Duolingo).

Sebagai kesimpulan, studi ini menyoroti bahwa rendahnya kemampuan mendengarkan disebabkan oleh faktor linguistik dan pengalaman, sementara preferensi dan strategi siswa menunjukkan kemampuan adaptasi mereka dalam mengatasi kesulitan tersebut. Temuan tersebut menunjukkan bahwa instruksi mendengarkan harus memadukan materi autentik dan didukung visual, meningkatkan keseimbangan antara aktivitas individual dan kolaboratif, serta mendorong peserta didik untuk memperluas praktik melalui perangkat digital.

ABSTRACT

Mumtazil, Isroul Mufidah, 2025. *Exploring Preferences and Strategies of Low Achiever in Listening Comprehension: A Qualitative Study of 11th Grade Students at SMA An-Nur Bululawang*. Thesis, Magister English Education Department, Post-Graduate Program, Universitas Islam Malang, Advisor: (1) Dr. H. Muhammad Yunus, S.Pd., M.Pd., (2) Prof. Dr. Dwi Fita Heriyawati, M.Pd.

Keywords: *listening ability, causes of low listening skill, preferences of listening skill, strategies in learning listening skill, English Foreign Language students.*

This study investigates the causes of low listening ability, students' preferences in learning listening, and the strategies employed by low-proficiency learners to overcome their difficulties. The research was conducted at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* with four 11th-grade students of low listening proficiency as participants. A qualitative descriptive design was applied, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation.

The findings reveal four main causes of low listening ability: fast speech, different accents or unclear audio, limited vocabulary, and lack of practice or exposure outside the classroom. In terms of learning preferences, students favoured authentic multimedia materials such as videos, podcasts, and songs, particularly when supported by subtitles and visual aids. They also showed different preferences for individual listening (to focus better) and group listening (to share ideas and clarify meaning). Classroom practices such as repetition and discussion were considered effective to reinforce understanding. Regarding strategies, students reported using a combination of personal strategies (repetition, note-taking, writing vocabulary, using subtitles), teacher-supported strategies (listening with transcripts, repeated listening, guided discussion), and technology-based strategies (YouTube, Spotify, podcasts, Duolingo).

In conclusion, this study highlights that low listening ability results from both linguistic and experiential factors, while students' preferences and strategies demonstrate their adaptability in coping with such difficulties. The findings suggest that listening instruction should integrate authentic and visually supported materials, promote a balance between individual and collaborative activities, and encourage learners to extend practice through digital tools.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, research questions, research objectives, the significance of the study, scope, and limitation, and definition of the key terms.

1.1 Background of Study

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, listening has long been recognized as a cornerstone of communicative competence and authentic language use. Despite its essential role in supporting meaningful interaction and comprehension, listening often remains one of the most challenging skills for learners to master. This complexity stems from the need for real-time processing, integration of multiple linguistic and cognitive processes, and adaptation to diverse forms of spoken input. In Indonesia, where exposure to authentic English outside the classroom is limited, the challenge becomes even greater. Teachers strive to bridge this gap by integrating multimedia resources and adopting various instructional strategies; however, the success of these efforts often hinges on how well they align with students' needs, interests, and preferences. Recognizing this, the present study seeks to explore the specific listening preferences and strategies faced by eleventh-grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang*. Through a qualitative approach, this research aims to provide deeper insights into students' lived experiences in listening activities, thereby contributing to the development of more adaptive and learner-centered instructional practices.

Listening is a central component of language acquisition and one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to master. Unlike reading or writing, listening involves real-time processing of spoken input, which requires not only linguistic knowledge but also cognitive, metacognitive, and affective engagement. Rost (2016) describes listening as “the cognitive process of interpreting and constructing meaning from spoken input

in context,” emphasizing its dynamic and interactive nature. Brown and Lee (2015) further argue that effective listening requires the integration of various competencies such as decoding, interpreting intonation and stress, identifying key information, and making inferences all under time pressure.

In EFL contexts like Indonesia, listening holds a vital position in both curriculum and assessment. It is one of the four macro-skills taught in schools and frequently assessed in national exams, particularly in senior high schools. Modern language teaching approaches advocate for the development of communicative competence, with listening as an essential element that supports meaningful interaction and comprehension (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These approaches emphasize learner engagement, authenticity of materials, and adaptation to learners’ individual differences. Despite the recognized importance of listening, EFL learners in Indonesian schools often struggle to develop this skill. Research has shown that listening is consistently perceived as the most difficult language skill among high school students (Widodo, Purnawarman, & Utami, 2021). These difficulties arise from various factors, including limited exposure to authentic spoken English, fast or accented speech by native speakers, insufficient vocabulary, poor sound quality, and lack of strategies to process meaning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). In addition, psychological barriers such as listening anxiety, low confidence, and cognitive overload further hinder students’ comprehension and motivation (Rahimi & Abedini, 2017).

At *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang*, preliminary observations suggest that students have low score in listening activities, and to deliver listening instruction, teachers at SMA An-Nur commonly use multimedia tools such as videos, audio recordings, and songs, often accompanied by worksheets or comprehension questions. These instructional approaches resonate with Mayer’s (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which highlights that learning is optimized when verbal and visual information are presented together in a

meaningful way. However, the impact of these methods depends on the degree of scaffolding, content familiarity, and the learners' preferences. When students are exposed to materials that are too complex or insufficiently supported, they may fail to comprehend the input, in line with Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which states that language acquisition occurs when learners receive input that is slightly beyond their current level of competence ($i+1$) and is comprehensible.

In response to these challenges, current educational thinking supports differentiated instruction that adapts teaching to students' varying readiness levels, interests, and learning preferences (Tomlinson, 2014). However, in practice, many teachers continue to adopt a one-size-fits-all approach, often constrained by limited resources, large class sizes, and lack of training. Consequently, the mismatch between teaching strategies and students' needs remains a pressing concern in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Understanding students' preferences in listening activities is therefore essential. Research by Teng (2018) suggests that learners perform better when they are aware of and can choose strategies or media that align with their learning styles. Similarly, Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) emphasize that listening instruction becomes more effective when it takes into account learners' attitudes, interests, and preferred media. Yet, while previous studies have identified general listening difficulties, there remains a lack of context-specific, qualitative research focusing on students' lived experiences and voices, particularly at the high school level in Indonesia.

This study addresses that gap by exploring the cause of low listening ability the preferences and the strategies of eleventh-grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in listening comprehension. It adopts a qualitative approach to capture students' perceptions, behaviors, and feelings related to listening instruction. Rather than focusing solely on test scores or performance outcomes, this research emphasizes the importance of understanding how students experience listening in the classroom, how they respond to different types of

input, and what they find engaging or problematic. Insights gained from this study are expected to inform more adaptive, student-centered listening instruction in line with principles of communicative language teaching and differentiated learning.

By highlighting the complexity of listening comprehension and the diverse factors influencing students' success, this study positions itself within the broader effort to create more effective and inclusive English listening instruction. It moves beyond viewing learners as passive recipients of input and instead focuses on understanding their perspectives on the causes of low listening ability of students according to low listening ability students, the preferences, and the strategies faced by 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills. Through this lens, the study aims to reveal how instructional practices can be better tailored to meet students' real needs and support the development of their listening competence. These insights are expected to serve as a foundation for formulating the research questions and guiding the subsequent stages of inquiry.

1.2 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- a) What are the causes of low listening ability of students according to low listening ability students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang*?
- b) What are the preferences of 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills?
- c) What are the strategies employed by 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions above, the objectives of this study are:

- a) To explore the causes of low listening ability of students according to low listening ability students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang*.

- b) To identify the preferences of 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills.
- c) To explore the strategies that employed by 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of English language teaching and learning, particularly in the area of listening skills at the senior high school level.

a) Theoretical Significance

Theoretically, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in the field of English language teaching, particularly in the area of listening instruction. By focusing on students' preferences and strategies, the study provides qualitative insights into how learners experience listening activities in the EFL classroom. These insights are expected to enrich the understanding of learner-centered instruction, especially in contexts where listening is often taught in a uniform and test-oriented manner. In addition, this study supports the development of teaching approaches that are grounded in learners' actual needs and classroom realities, rather than assumptions or generalizations

b) Practical Significance

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to assist English teachers in designing more effective and engaging listening instruction. By understanding what students prefer and what difficulties they face, teachers can adapt materials, media, and teaching techniques that are more suitable for diverse learners. For students, this study may help them become more aware of their own listening habits, strengths, and obstacles, which can encourage them to develop more active and reflective learning strategies. Furthermore, the study may serve as a useful reference for future researchers who are interested in conducting classroom-based

studies related to listening instruction, learner engagement, and differentiated teaching in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

This study is focused on exploring the English listening skills of 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang*. Specifically, it examines students' subjective experiences related to the causes of low listening ability of students according to low listening ability students, the preferences, and the strategies employed by 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills that they encounter in listening comprehension. The research subjects are limited to 11th-grade students which actively participating in English listening activities under the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student-centered learning. The aspects investigated in this study include the types of listening materials and techniques students prefer, as well as the internal and external difficulties they face during listening tasks in the classroom.

The findings of this research are context-specific and cannot be generalized to all senior high school students in Indonesia, as the study only involves a small group of selected participants from one particular school. Additionally, the study focuses solely on students' perceptions and self-reported experiences rather than objective measurements of their listening proficiency or performance.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity and ensure clarity, several key terms used in this study are defined as follows:

Students' Preferences, The choices, including preferred materials, media, strategies, and learning modes that they perceive as more effective and enjoyable.

Student's Strategies, Used by learners to overcome listening difficulties and improve comprehension, including cognitive, metacognitive, socio-affective, and technology-based approaches.

Low Achiever, Student whose listening performance falls below the expected standard, identified through teacher recommendations and assessments, and characterized by greater difficulties in understanding spoken English.

Listening Comprehension, Students' capacity to grasp meaning, including vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and context.



CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter critically discusses the findings of the study by connecting them with the theoretical framework and previous studies reviewed in Chapter II. The discussion explains how the three main themes on the causes of low listening ability of students according to low listening ability students, the preferences, and the strategies employed by 11th grade students at *SMA An-Nur Bululawang Malang* in learning English listening skills about listening comprehension in an EFL context.

5.1 Causes of Low Listening Ability

The first research question sought to identify the causes of students' low listening ability. The findings revealed four primary causes: fast speech, different accents/unclear audio, limited vocabulary, and lack of practice or exposure.

These findings align with previous research that highlights speech rate as one of the most common obstacles in listening comprehension (Nushi & Tahmasebi, 2020; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Students in this study reported that native-like speed made it difficult to catch words or phrases. This supports Field's (2008) view that authentic spoken input often exceeds learners' processing capacity, resulting in comprehension breakdowns.

Different accents and unclear audio were also identified as significant causes. As Vandergrift and Goh (2012) argue, limited exposure to diverse varieties of English restricts learners' ability to adapt to pronunciation differences. In this study, participants admitted that they became confused when listening to unfamiliar accents, which resonates with Maharani (2023), who found that accent variation is a persistent challenge for EFL learners.

Another consistent cause was limited vocabulary knowledge. Students explained that even when they heard words clearly, they often failed to understand the meaning due to

insufficient lexical knowledge. This finding is supported by Graham (2006), who asserts that vocabulary gaps prevent learners from inferring meaning from context.

Finally, lack of practice and exposure emerged as a key factor. The participants reported that they rarely listened to English outside of school, which limited their familiarity with authentic speech. This confirms Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which emphasizes that regular and comprehensible input is crucial for language acquisition. Without sufficient exposure, students are unable to internalize the rhythm, patterns, and natural speed of English speech.

Taken together, these findings indicate that students' low listening ability is not solely due to linguistic barriers but also to environmental and experiential limitations. Hence, addressing listening difficulties requires not only vocabulary building and speech training but also increasing opportunities for authentic exposure.

5.2 Students' Preferences in Learning Listening Skills

The second research question explored students' preferences in learning listening. The results revealed that students favoured authentic multimedia materials (videos, podcasts, songs), especially when supported by visual aids such as subtitles. They also expressed varied preferences for individual versus group learning, and valued classroom activities like repetition and discussion.

These findings resonate with Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016), who argue that students are more engaged when materials are authentic and interesting. Videos and songs provide not only linguistic input but also cultural context, which makes learning more meaningful. This also reflects Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which suggests that comprehension is enhanced when verbal and visual channels are integrated.

The use of subtitles was consistently highlighted as a preference, as students felt that subtitles provided scaffolding to bridge the gap between listening and reading. This finding

aligns with Teng (2018), who argues that visual support reduces anxiety and facilitates meaning-making.

Preferences for learning modes reflected individual learning styles: some preferred learning alone for better concentration, while others benefited from group discussions that provided multiple perspectives. This supports Tomlinson's (2014) concept of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes that students' diverse preferences should be considered in instructional design.

Classroom activities such as repetition and discussion were also emphasized. Students reported that repeated exposure to listening texts allowed them to catch more details, while discussions helped them clarify meaning and reduce anxiety. This finding aligns with Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) view that listening comprehension is strengthened through metacognitive activities such as monitoring and clarifying.

Overall, these preferences indicate that students do not view listening as a passive activity. Instead, they expect engaging, visually supported, and flexible learning environments that balance individual and collaborative practices.

5.3 Strategies to Improve Listening Skills

The third research question focused on the strategies students use to overcome listening difficulties. The findings showed that students employed a combination of personal strategies, teacher-supported strategies, and technology-based strategies.

Personal strategies included repetition, note-taking, writing down difficult vocabulary, and using subtitles. These strategies reflect what Oxford (2017) defines as cognitive strategies, in which learners actively process input through rehearsal, translation, and summarization. They also align with Vandergrift and Goh's (2012) framework of metacognitive strategies, as students reported monitoring their comprehension and reflecting on their understanding.

Teacher-supported strategies included listening with audio + text, repeated listening, and structured discussion. These strategies provided scaffolding and reduced anxiety, in line with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes that lowering anxiety improves comprehension. Discussions also created opportunities for peer learning, confirming Chamot's (2018) view that socio-affective strategies support learners' confidence and comprehension.

Technology-based strategies such as YouTube, Spotify, podcasts, and Duolingo were widely used outside the classroom. Students explained that these platforms allowed them to access authentic English input at their own pace, select topics of interest, and practice repeatedly. This supports Siegel (2025), who emphasizes the growing importance of technology-mediated listening practice in EFL learning. Importantly, students perceived digital media as more engaging than traditional exercises, which enhanced their motivation.

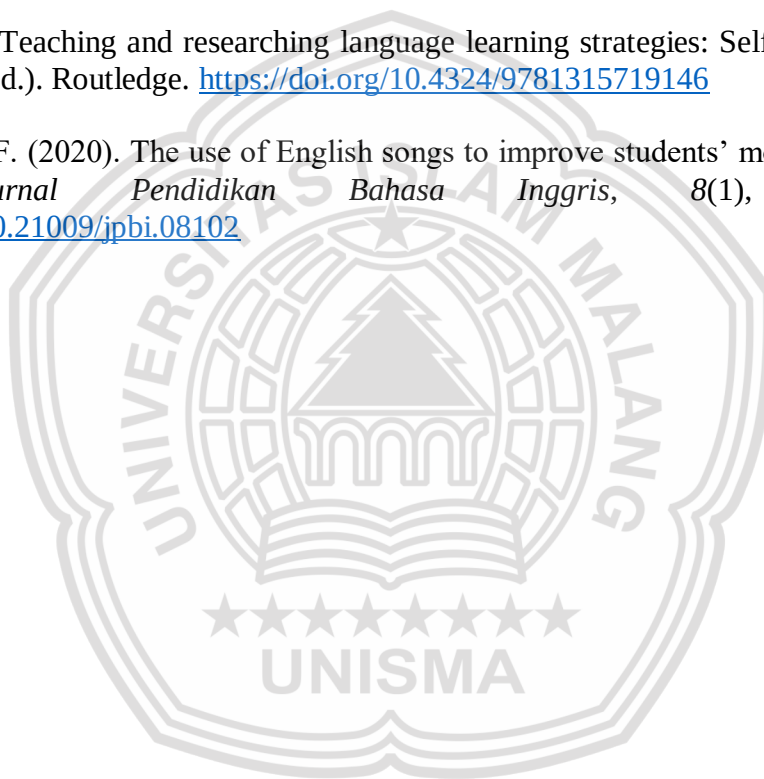
The integration of these strategies reflects an adaptive and learner-centered approach. By combining classroom support with independent practice and digital tools, students demonstrated agency in overcoming listening difficulties. This suggests that effective listening instruction should not only provide explicit strategy training but also encourage students to extend their practice beyond the classroom.

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