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## **English Listening Errors of University Students in Bangka Belitung, Indonesia**

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**Abstract:**

Many individuals possess the ability to hear spoken English, yet actively listening and comprehending it presents significant challenges, particularly for international students like those from Indonesia. This research investigates the listening proficiency levels and specific errors encountered by students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bangka Belitung. Employing a mixed-methods approach with an embedded design, the study analysed 21 students' grades. Besides, the in depth interview was conducted to gather comprehensive data. The findings reveal that the students' listening scores remain comparatively low. Several factors contribute to these lower scores, including confusion arising from words that sound alike, either through rhyming endings or being complete homophones. Furthermore, a limited English vocabulary, difficulties in processing diverse accents and the rapid speech of native speakers in audio recordings also impede comprehension. Recognizing these underlying causes is crucial, as it empowers educators to implement targeted teaching methodologies and strategies designed to address these specific listening challenges effectively.

**Keywords:** *listening skills, errors, rhyming words, accent..***Received:** 14/06/2025**Accepted:** 22/10/2025**Proofreading:** 05/11/2025**Available online:** 31/12/2025**Introduction:**

Improving English listening skills is crucial for Indonesian university students for several important reasons. Academic purposes become the first main importance for students worldwide. Many university courses, especially those related to international studies, science, and technology, are often conducted in English. Good listening skills help students understand lectures, discussions, and seminars better. A significant amount of academic resources such as research papers, journals, and books are in English. Listening skills can help in comprehending audio-visual materials like documentaries and online courses.

Besides, English holds the prominent roles as it belongs to a global lingua franca in this era (1,2). Proficiency in listening helps in job interviews, understanding instructions, and effectively communicating in multinational companies. It is also essential for networking at international conferences, seminars, and professional gatherings, enabling students to build connections with peers and professionals globally. It enhances cultural understanding and appreciation, which is valuable in today's interconnected world.

Many educational platforms and courses are conducted in English. Thus, listening skills are necessary to fully benefit from these resources. On the other hands, staying updated with the latest technological advancements and research often requires understanding

English content, which is predominantly available in audio and video formats. It is also related to standardized tests like TOEFL, IELTS, and others include listening components. Good listening skills are essential to score well in these exams, which are often required for further studies and professional certifications. By honing their English listening skills, Indonesian university students can greatly enhance their academic performance, career prospects, and personal development, positioning themselves more favourably in a globalized world.

Unfortunately, in the midst of this urgency, students' English language skills still experience several obstacles, especially in listening (3–5). Most students still experience errors in the process of listening to English. This was also revealed by several previous studies, but the identification of the problem has not been discussed too much. For students who learn English as a foreign language, the listening process is one of the challenges that is never finished considering that daily habits do not use English.

Errors in listening to English for Indonesian students who are foreign learners can be caused by some common problems, such as not being familiar with English words. However, of course, the problems experienced by students are very varied and different. Therefore, in this study, researchers identified the problems experienced by students with the aim of finding

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alternative problem solving through appropriate techniques.

## METHODOLOGY

This research is a mixed-method research. This means that this research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative research. According to Greene, one of the purposes of this mixed research is to find out and confirm the data taken from one side to the other (6). In this study, quantitative data will be the premier data taken from the average score of students. While qualitative data will be as supporting data. The qualitative data is drawn from open interviews conducted after the value of each individual is carried out. The design used uses an embedded design as below.

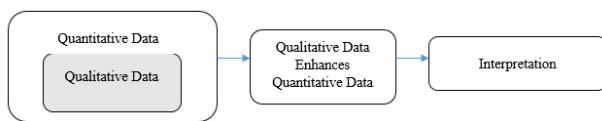


Figure 1. Research Design using Embedded Design.

The respondents of this study were 21 students of the second semester of English Education at Muhammadiyah University of Bangka Belitung. This research was conducted in the even semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. Quantitative data collection was done by giving quizzes and assignments throughout the semester. The quiz consists of guessing words and completing sentences. Furthermore, students' scores were analysed by calculating the average score. Furthermore, students' work results were analysed for errors on their work sheets supported by open interviews conducted to all students. Meanwhile, qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews involving five representatives. The sample was selected based on considerations of listening ability differences.

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In this research, ethical considerations are carefully managed to ensure that no ethical problems arise during the study. All information collected from respondents is kept strictly confidential, and personal identities are never disclosed in any reports or publications. Participants provide informed consent, understanding their rights and the purpose of the research. Data is securely stored and only used for academic purposes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

From the research conducted, there are four elements that are the main obstacles in the process of learning English listening by students. Based on the analysis of the results of student work consisting of 21 students, with the types of overlapping and complementary tests, the following results were obtained.

The tests were conducted in three stages with the aim of observing progress in each stage. The tests were conducted in different formats, ranging from completing sentences to guessing vocabulary. From the three cycles, the results were analysed using the average percentage values displayed side by side to see the comparison between each cycle. The detailed results can be seen in the table below.

Table 1. Student Listening Score through Worksheet

No	Students	Sex	Max	Cycle 1		Cycle 2		Cycle 3		Σ	
				Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%
1	A	M	20	10	50	12	60	11	55	11	55
2	B	F	20	14	70	14	70	13	65	13.67	68.35
3	C	F	20	15	75	13	65	15	75	14.33	71.65
4	D	M	20	12	60	11	55	11	55	11.33	56.65
5	E	F	20	14	70	14	70	12	60	13.33	66.65
6	F	F	20	13	65	13	65	13	65	13	65
7	G	F	20	13	65	14	70	12	60	13	65
8	H	F	20	13	65	13	65	12	60	12.67	63.35
10	I	F	20	13	65	14	70	12	60	13	65
11	J	M	20	12	60	11	55	12	60	11.67	58.35
12	K	F	20	14	70	11	55	11	55	12	60
13	L	F	20	12	60	12	60	11	55	11.67	58.35
14	M	F	20	11	55	12	60	12	60	11.67	58.35
15	N	F	20	10	50	12	60	12	60	11.33	56.65
16	O	M	20	9	45	10	50	8	40	9	45
17	P	F	20	10	50	9	45	11	55	10	50
18	Q	F	20	12	60	11	55	12	60	11.67	58.35
19	R	F	20	12	60	12	60	12	60	12	60
20	S	F	20	11	55	11	55	11	55	11	55

From the table above, it can be found that the average value of listening to students in three rounds is in the lower middle category. To find out the causes and support these learning outcomes, researchers conducted brief interviews with several students related to the obstacles experienced in the process of listening to English. The students were asked to do flashbacks and self-reflection on the unsatisfactory listening learning outcomes. The interview was conducted by involving students with the lowest to highest scores.

From the results of the interviews conducted, the researcher concluded that there were several obstacles that became obstacles in the process of listening to English as follows.

No	Students	Sex	Opinion
1	Student A	M	"The most difficult language skill. One of the problems that causes such difficulty is that it is too fast and difficult to identify the spoken word in the audio"
2	Student B	F	"There are too many similar sounds. Especially when spoken quickly by a native speaker"
3	Student C	F	"Maybe because I don't have a good English vocabulary. So the words heard are often confused"
4	Student D	M	"It's like hearing someone gargling. When spoken by Indonesian speakers, I still find it easy to listen. But the accent used by native speakers makes it difficult for me to identify word by word"
5	Student E	F	"The most noticeable problem is that the speaking is too fast and blends one word with another"

There are several other students who give their opinions regarding the obstacles experienced in the process of listening to English, but researchers only take samples that are considered to have accommodated

### Discussion

The four problems experienced by students in the process of listening to English can be illustrated as figure 2 below which is part of the barrier or barrier to the communication process.

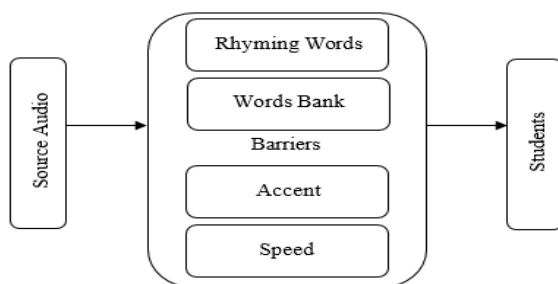


Figure 2. Errors and Barriers of Listening Activities of University Students.

For further explanation, the explanation of each aspect of communication barriers in this case is listening experienced by students can be seen from the explanation per item below. In addition, researchers also present a comparison of student work in each aspect to strengthen what is produced from the interview as above.

#### Rhyming words

As in previous studies, it can be concluded that several factors hinder students' listening skills, one of which is Rhyming Words or similarities in the sounds conveyed by the original speaker located at the end of the word.

Based on the theory above, if you look at the students' work, there are several examples of errors in the student worksheets. The error that occurs is due to the similarity of the words Grown and Gown. The answer is obtained because students do not actually understand the context of the sentence as a whole. This error can be seen through the results of students' work in the exercise of completing the overlapping sentences based on the words they hear through audio as in Figure 3 below.

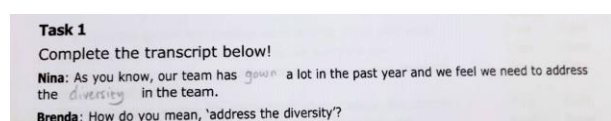


Figure 3. Example of Error in Rhyming Words

In addition, there are several similar forms of errors in different sentences made by most early learners not only in Indonesia, but in several other countries (9–11)

#### Words Bank

Other problem is the vocabulary limitation that is an obstacle in completing answers, especially in exams with overlapping models. An overall understanding of the context of the sentence is needed. Therefore, vocabulary is needed in every language skill, especially in listening. Previous research conducted by the author found the fact that linguistic barriers are one of the challenges in two-way communication (12)

In some interviews, some students explained that the problem they faced was limited vocabulary so that they could not complete the overlapping questions given.

"Maybe it's because I don't have a good English vocabulary. So the words heard are often confused"

Limited vocabulary mastery poses a substantial barrier to effective English listening comprehension. When learners encounter unfamiliar words, their ability to follow the flow of speech and grasp the overall meaning significantly diminishes. This is particularly evident in academic settings and standardized tests where nuanced language and specific terminology are often employed (13,14). Even if students can discern individual sounds, a lack of vocabulary prevents them from piecing these sounds together into meaningful units.

This deficiency becomes even more critical in situations with overlapping or paraphrased information, requiring a deep understanding of word meanings and their subtle variations to distinguish between correct and incorrect options. Relying solely on phonetic recognition without sufficient vocabulary knowledge often leads to misinterpretations and incorrect answers. Furthermore, a limited lexicon hinders the ability to infer meaning from context, a crucial skill when encountering unknown words in spoken discourse.

Therefore, addressing vocabulary gaps is paramount in enhancing listening proficiency. Instruction should move beyond rote memorization and focus on contextual learning, word families, and strategies for deducing meaning from surrounding words

(15–17). Exposure to a wide range of vocabulary through diverse listening materials, coupled with explicit vocabulary instruction, is essential to equip learners with the necessary linguistic resources to navigate and comprehend spoken English effectively. Without a robust vocabulary base, even strong phonetic awareness will fall short in achieving true listening comprehension

In addition, if you look at the example above in Figure 3, the limited vocabulary that students have is very clear. If you look at the context of the sentence in the picture, the sentence does not have a clear meaning. An error in the use of one word will result in a change in the meaning and context of the sentence. However, this vocabulary deficit can be mitigated by understanding the context of the sentence as a whole. By understanding the whole sentence, guessing techniques can be used (18–20).

### Accent

Accents in the use of English have a very wide variety. For example, the accent used by Australians and Americans will be different from the accent used by British people. This diversity is an obstacle for Indonesian students in learning English. Based on the review of several previous studies, accents in English tests tend to be different from English accents found in everyday life. The same thing also happens in some countries when listening to native English speakers, the test results will tend to be low (21–23)

From the perspective of the students of the English Education Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Bangka Belitung, similar problems occur very clearly. They listen to native speakers uttering unclear pronunciation. It is because they are used to the accent used by non-native speakers, especially Indonesians with a slower pronunciation frequency.

“It's like listening to someone gargling. When spoken by Indonesian speakers, I still find it easy to listen. But the accent used by native speakers makes it difficult for me to identify word by word.”

The discrepancy between accents in English tests and real-world English presents a significant challenge for students, as highlighted by previous research and the experiences of English Education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Bangka Belitung (24,25). The tendency for tests to feature standardized accents, often differing from the diverse range encountered daily, can lead to

lower scores even when comprehension of more familiar accents is present. The students' description of listening to native speakers as the unclear voice of the speakers vividly illustrates the difficulty arising from unfamiliar pronunciation patterns and faster speech rhythms compared to the slower, Indonesian-influenced English they are accustomed to. This disconnect underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that expose students to a wider variety of accents and pronunciation speeds. Relying solely on standardized test accents can create a false sense of proficiency and hinder students' ability to understand and interact effectively in authentic English-speaking environments (26).

Therefore, accent is an important subject for non-native users to learn because language is used not only in daily life but also in tests that use native speakers as a source of information (23,27,28) (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Gass & Varonis, 1984; Kang et al., 2019).

### Speed

The last problem experienced by students in listening to English is the speed of pronunciation of the audio they listen to. Pronunciation speed by native speakers is a very frequent problem with an average of over 150 words per minute (29,30). This is difficult to overcome for learners with English as a foreign language such as Indonesian students. Differences in pronunciation make it difficult for students to identify spoken words. This problem often occurs in everyday life such as repeating audio or TV shows to see subtitles and re-listen to the speech they hear. Meanwhile, in the listening test, students are required to listen only once.

In a normal conversation, learners may be able to understand a spoken sentence easily, but when spoken by a native speaker, several words are often spoken together very quickly. In addition, it is also possible that there will be slang in English which adds to the learner's level of difficulty in identifying words.

In theory, the problem with the speed at which words are pronounced is that there are some sound similarities known as homophones or homonyms (31). For example, there is a relation with Rhyming Words but homophones have similarities in the whole word such as Their - There - They're. These words have similarities in pronunciation so that for unfamiliar listeners, these words seem the same. This is in line with what Student E



said, who said that the speed of pronunciation is a problem in listening to English.

“The problem that feels the most is because the speakers speak too fast and blends one word with another”

“words that come out like gargling. That's very hard to identify”

Therefore, the problem of speed in listening to English is a challenge for students for whom English is a foreign language. The best way to improve listening skills is to practice a lot of listening with various platforms such as television, watching movies, etc (32). The speed of spoken English in listening materials is a significant factor impacting student comprehension, particularly for non-native speakers. While exposure to natural, faster speech is crucial for developing real-world listening skills, overwhelming students with overly rapid delivery can hinder understanding and lead to frustration (33,34).

A balanced approach is necessary. Initially, slower, clearer speech can build confidence and foundational comprehension. Gradually introducing materials with varying speeds, coupled with strategies like pre-teaching vocabulary and providing transcripts, can help students adapt. Teachers should also explicitly address the challenges of fast speech, offering techniques for identifying key information and not getting bogged down by every word (35). Ultimately, the goal is to equip students with the ability to process natural speech rates effectively, but scaffolding this development is essential for successful listening acquisition.

Therefore, this issue must be evaluated in terms of the learning curriculum. For example, learning outcomes must be determined in accordance with the circumstances of students at that level. Furthermore, teachers must have teaching methods and techniques that can accommodate the needs of students, especially those who have difficulty understanding English. For example, the imitation method, where students say certain words and then listen to them one by one, will be very useful for beginners or those at a basic level.

## CONCLUSION

This research has identified four major challenges that contribute to the low English listening performance of university students in Indonesia: confusion due to rhyming words, insufficient vocabulary

knowledge, difficulties understanding various English accents, and the rapid pace of spoken English. These findings underscore the need for targeted pedagogical strategies to improve students' listening comprehension. As a response, this study recommends the implementation of a systematic instructional approach, namely the Listening Diagnostic and Remediation Program (LDRP). This program should consist of a series of structured learning activities designed to address the specific issues uncovered in the study. Additionally, explicit vocabulary teaching within meaningful contexts can equip students with the lexical resources needed to process spoken language more effectively. The integration of diverse audio materials representing a range of English accents will further help learners become familiar with various pronunciation styles. Moreover, scaffolded listening exercises with adjustable speech rates can assist students in gradually adapting to the natural pace of native speakers.

Regarding that, the experimental studies are recommended to evaluate the impact of the proposed LDRP intervention on learners' listening proficiency over time. It would also be beneficial to conduct comparative studies across different demographic or academic contexts to examine whether these listening difficulties are consistent across student populations. Longitudinal studies may provide deeper insights into the developmental patterns of listening skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, especially when linked to sustained pedagogical support. Overall, addressing the four core listening challenges through carefully designed interventions is essential for enhancing EFL students' auditory comprehension and academic success in English-medium environments.

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