



An Analysis Of Seventh Grade Students' Listening Comprehension At MTs Hubbulwathan Duri

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ABSTRACT

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Listening comprehension is a foundational yet complex skill in English language acquisition. This study analyzed the listening comprehension proficiency of seventh-grade students at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri and investigates the potential factors affecting their performance. Employing a descriptive quantitative approach, data were gathered through a structured listening test and a background questionnaire administered to 26 students. The population and sample of this research consisted of a single intact class of seventh-grade students at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri. The class comprised 26 students ($N = 26$). This specific group was selected using purposive sampling. The empirical results revealed a critical gap in proficiency: only 3.8% of the students (1 out of 26) achieved the passing grade, while the remaining 96.2% struggled significantly. Based on the background questionnaire, limited vocabulary and unfamiliarity with spoken English were frequently reported by students as key challenges in decoding auditory inputs. Furthermore, descriptive patterns suggest that higher proficiency aligns with early language exposure, as the single successful student had a history of attending private English tutoring during elementary school.

This research highlights the need for pedagogical interventions that integrate vocabulary development and early language exposure to improve listening outcomes.

Introduction

Listening comprehension is a foundational yet highly complex cognitive process in second language acquisition. As a receptive skill, listening serves as the primary gateway for language input, providing the essential raw data from which learners construct their understanding of grammatical structures and vocabulary (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). In Indonesian junior high school education, particularly within *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), English transitions into a more structured academic subject. For many seventh-grade students, however, entering a classroom where they are suddenly exposed to spoken English audio tracks often triggers substantial anxiety and cognitive overload (Afriani & Elsanti, 2025).

Prior research consistently indicates that difficulties in listening are deeply rooted in the learners' linguistic limitations and lack of authentic exposure (Alzamil, 2021). Within the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, a major cognitive bottleneck occurs when students possess a limited vocabulary, which severely paralyzes their "bottom-up" decoding process (Alnajjar & Art, 2022). When an unfamiliar word is uttered, the learner's brain pauses to decode its meaning, causing them to immediately lose track of subsequent input. This issue is further amplified in Indonesia, where students lack authentic exposure to spoken English outside school premises, making classroom audio materials feel foreign and detached from reality (Alamri, 2025).

This proficiency gap becomes glaringly evident during the transition to the seventh grade. Students entering MTs come from highly diverse elementary school backgrounds, where English instruction is either inconsistent or entirely absent due to shifting curriculum policies. One critical external factor that creates this academic disparity is early, non-formal language exposure, such as private tutoring during early childhood (Aminulloh et al., 2025). Students who attend private English lessons during elementary school generally accumulate a larger vocabulary size and develop a sharper auditory memory, giving them a significant head start over their peers. The novelty lies in an integrated descriptive approach that juxtaposes student performance test data with data on perceived obstacles (derived from questionnaires). This provides a holistic picture: revealing not only the low skill levels but also the reasons behind the students' difficulties, viewed from the perspective of their own experiences.

While previous studies have extensively documented the general challenges of EFL listening anxiety (Afriani & Elsanti, 2025) and the theoretical importance of vocabulary size (Alnajjar & Art, 2022), there is a distinct research gap regarding how these factors manifest empirically during the critical transition to secondary education in specific Islamic school environments (MTs) in suburban areas. Most existing research focuses on public schools in metropolitan regions with relatively homogenous student

backgrounds. Empirical diagnostic studies that visually trace how a single student's non-formal educational background (such as early private tutoring) creates a drastic performance disparity within a completely underperforming classroom remain scarce.

This exact pedagogical dilemma is currently observable at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri. Preliminary observations in a seventh-grade classroom revealed an alarming trend in listening activities. Out of 26 students in the class, the vast majority showed severe confusion and scored poorly on listening exercises. Remarkably, only a tiny fraction statistically around 3.8% (representing just one proficient student) was able to comprehend the audio input and answer the tasks successfully. Upon closer investigation, this outlier student had a background of intensive private English tutoring during their elementary school years, while the rest relied solely on standard public school exposure.

Driven by these real-world findings, this study aims to conduct a descriptive quantitative analysis of the listening comprehension skills of seventh-grade students at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri through a structured diagnostic test and a background questionnaire. To address the empirical gaps and explicitly state the direction of this inquiry, this study seeks to answer the following questions: What is the level of listening comprehension proficiency among the seventh-grade students at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri? and What potential challenges, particularly regarding vocabulary and early language exposure, are reported by the students as barriers to their listening performance?

The insights gained from this study are expected to provide practical evaluations for English teachers at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri to design more adaptive listening strategies that accommodate learners of all backgrounds.

Method

This study employs a descriptive quantitative research design to evaluate and analyze the listening comprehension proficiency of seventh-grade students. This study presented the first empirical baseline data regarding the listening comprehension profile of beginning-level students (Grade 7) at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri, serving as a direct reference for teachers at the school to develop local listening instructional materials. A descriptive quantitative method is highly appropriate for this research as it allows for the objective measurement, calculation, and systematic description of a specific phenomenon in this case, student test scores and proficiency percentages without manipulating any variables (Pd et al., 2024). The population and sample of this research consisted of a single intact class of seventh-grade students at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri. The class comprised 26 students ($N = 26$). This specific group was selected using purposive sampling, a technique where participants are chosen based on the specific needs of the study, which in this context was the apparent widespread difficulty in listening comprehension observed during preliminary classes (Faizah, n.d.).

The primary instrument used to collect empirical data was a structured listening comprehension test. The test questions used are drawn from the students' English

textbook. The test materials were adapted from standard junior high school curriculum listening tasks to ensure content validity. The test consisted of objective questions (such as multiple-choice and gap-filling tasks) delivered via audio playback. To supplement the quantitative data and understand the underlying reasons behind the scores, a brief background questionnaire was distributed immediately after the test. This questionnaire specifically inquired about the students' previous English learning background, including whether they had attended private English tutoring during elementary school.

The quantitative data obtained from the listening test were analysed using basic descriptive statistics to find the percentage of student proficiency. The formula used to calculate the percentage score for each student and the overall class passing rate is as follows (Sugiono, 2011):

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Where:

P = Percentage of proficient students

F = Frequency of students who achieved the passing grade

N = Total number of students in the class (26)

A student was categorized as “proficient” if their score met or exceeded the school’s Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) for English. Once the quantitative percentages were established, the data from the background questionnaire were cross-referenced qualitatively to contextualize the scores, specifically looking at the correlation between vocabulary limitations, private tutoring history, and the final test outcomes.

Finding and Discussion

The quantitative data obtained from the listening comprehension test administered to the 26 seventh-grade students at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri revealed a critical deficiency in their listening comprehension. Based on the school’s Minimum Mastery Criterion (KKM) score of 70, the vast majority of the class failed to achieve a passing grade.

Table 1: The distribution of student performance

Proficiency	Frequency (F)	Percentage (P)	Primary Background Characteristic
Passed (Proficient)	1	3.8%	Attend private English tutoring in elementary school
Failed (Not Proficient)	25	96.2%	Relied solely on public school curriculum, limited vocabulary
Total	26	100%	

As indicated by the data, only 1 out of 26 students (3.8%) was categorized as proficient in listening comprehension. The remaining 25 students (96.2%) scored significantly below the passing threshold. To gain a deeper, more granular understanding of where the students encountered the most significant barriers, the test scores were analyzed further based on specific listening comprehension indicators. These indicators included identifying main ideas, extracting specific information, and inferring meaning from the audio context. The details of student performance across these specific sub-skills are presented in Table 3. Interpretation standards used by Depdiknas (2006):

Table 2: . Interpretation standards

Rentang Persentase (%)	Academic categories
81% – 100%	Very Good / Excellent
61% – 80%	Good
41% – 60%	Fair / Moderate
21% – 40%	Poor
0% – 20%	Very Poor

Table 3 : Students' performance breakdown by listening sub skills

Listening Comprehension Indicators	Total Items	Mean Score (%)	Interpretation
Identifying Main Ideas	5	28.5%	Poor
Extracting Specific Information	10	42.3%	Fair / Moderate
Inferring Meaning/ Vocabulary in Context	5	12.0%	Very poor

Table 3 clearly that the students struggled severely across all tested dimensions of listening. Their performance plummeted drastically in the third indicator, Inferring Meaning / Vocabulary in Context, yielding a mean score of only 12.0%. While they performed slightly better at extracting specific information (42.3%), their ability to grasp the overall gist or main ideas of the audio tracks remained low at 28.5%. 25 struggling students consistently noted that they could not understand the audio because they did not know the meaning of the words being spoken. The single student who passed the test was revealed to have a unique educational background: they had attended regular, intensive private English tutoring sessions outside of school hours during their elementary school years.

Conclusion

The empirical results of this study paint a clear picture of the listening challenges faced by early junior high school learners in an EFL context. The overwhelming failure rate (96.2%) underscores the fact that listening is not a passive tool but a heavy cognitive burden for students who less linguistic foundations. The primary barrier identified in this research is the students' severely limited vocabulary. In cognitive linguistics, listening comprehension relies on "bottom-up processing", where a listener must first hear a sound, recognize it as a word, and immediately retrieve its meaning from their mental lexicon (Kritis & Literatur, 2024). When students have a limited vocabulary size, this process breaks down instantly. As Ross & Stuckler (2025) argues, a language learner needs to know at least 95% to 98% of the words in a spoken text to comprehend it accurately without outside help. Because the seventh graders at MTs Hubbulwathan Duri did not possess this critical mass of words, the audio tracks sounded like a blur of disconnected noises, leading to immediate frustration and cognitive failure.

Furthermore, the fact that only 3.8% of the class succeeded highlights a deep pedagogical divide stemming from early language exposure. The sole student who passed the test benefited from private English tutoring during elementary school. This finding aligns perfectly with the "Age of Onset" and early exposure theories in foreign language acquisition. (Wijaya, n.d.) notes that while older learners can learn grammar rules quickly, early and consistent exposure such as through private tutoring in childhood fundas Private tutoring provides smaller class sizes, interactive environments, and a tailored vocabulary build-up that standard public primary schools in Indonesia often cannot offer due to curriculum constraints (Linguam, 2021). Consequently, this single student entered the seventh grade with an established "mental dictionary" and an ear already trained to recognize English phonemes (speech sounds). For the other 25 students, entering the seventh-grade English classroom was essentially like starting from zero, leaving them completely unprepared for curriculum-standard listening tasks.

This huge disparity shows that vocabulary mastery and early, out-of-class language exposure are not just minor advantages they are the definitive factors that dictate whether a student survives or fails in standard classroom listening activities. Mentally shapes a learner's auditory memory and phonological awareness. Matriculation or bridging program at the beginning of the seventh grade. This program should specifically target basic vocabulary building and ear training to help the 25 untutored students construct the foundational linguistic tools they missed during primary school.

For Future Researchers: Since this descriptive study has mapped out the specific sub-skill deficiencies (particularly in contextual vocabulary), future researchers are encouraged to conduct Classroom Action Research (CAR). Future studies should design and test specific action cycles using remedial strategies, such as audio visual aids, top-down listening strategies, or Total Physical Response (TPR), to find the most effective and rapid method for lifting young EFL learners out of this severe listening deficit.

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