

## **BARRIERS TO LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN EFL CONTEXTS: EVIDENCE FROM ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY IN PALEMBANG**

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### **Abstract**

This research aimed to investigate the problems faced by third-semester EFL students in the English Education study program at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang in learning listening comprehension during the 2023/2024 academic year. Using a qualitative case study approach, 8 students were selected through purposeful sampling technique, specifically homogenous sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore students' experiences and perceptions in depth. The findings revealed several factors contributing to students' problems in listening comprehension, including (1) different accent of speakers; (2) unclear pronunciation; (3) the length and speed of the listening; (4) the poor recording quality; and (5) background noise or distractions. This research highlights the importance of providing diverse and clear listening materials, using high quality audio devices, and ensuring a conducive classroom environment. As it focuses solely on students' perspectives, further studies are recommended to investigate solutions and instructional strategies to address these listening comprehension problems effectively.

**Keywords:** Barriers to Listening Comprehension, EFL Students' Problems, Islamic University of Palembang Listening Comprehension

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Listening skills hold a pivotal role in language learning. Given its close connection to persuasion and overall learning productivity, the development of listening skills is crucial for language learners (Arjulayana, 2018). According to Sabrila and Apoko (2022), listening is the most frequently employed skill in classroom settings. In fact, when compared with other language skills, listening occupies the largest proportion of use—approximately 45% of learning time—followed by speaking (30%), reading (16%), and writing (9%).

Despite its importance, listening comprehension remains one of the most complicated skills for EFL students to master. Afriyuninda and Oktaviani (2021) note that when students attempt to understand unfamiliar words or expressions within a given context, repeatedly listening to the same passage or conversation can become tedious. Similarly, Sarem et al. (2018) observe that in formal education, speaking, reading, and writing are often prioritized as key communication skills—commonly taught in that order—while listening receives comparatively minimal attention and emphasis.

Several factors influence students' proficiency in listening comprehension. Bingol and Celik (2014) note that the quality of the sound system affects understanding, while Saraswaty (2018) points out that some teachers use low-quality recordings in their classes. Cultural differences can also pose challenges when the listening topics contain unfamiliar cultural content, making it difficult for students to visualize the message (Bingol & Celik, 2014). Accent is another factor, as frequent exposure to accented speech may hinder comprehension (Saraswaty, 2018). Unfamiliar vocabulary further complicates understanding, whereas the use of common words can facilitate comprehension and enhance students' interest and motivation. The length and speed of the listening material also demand a certain level of proficiency to recall longer passages (Bingol & Celik, 2014). Improving listening comprehension is therefore essential for strengthening overall language proficiency and speaking skills. According to Yilmas and Yavuz (2015), mastering listening comprehension enables students to acquire language input, enhance their speaking skills, and overcome learning challenges. Therefore, students should be exposed to a variety of listening techniques and strategies, with lecturers playing a vital role in guiding them to select and apply the most effective techniques in listening tasks (Saraswaty, 2018).

Concerning this, the researcher conducted a preliminary study on October 6, 2024, with Ma'am HA, a listening lecturer at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The researcher found that the lecturer taught listening comprehension that was aligned with the subject and curriculum standards. However, the lecturer also identified several students' problems in listening comprehension during class, including low concentration, limited vocabulary knowledge, an unsupportive learning environment, and other factors. These findings prompted the researcher to further investigate the listening comprehension problems experienced by students in this course.

Several previous studies have highlighted students' problems in listening comprehension. Diara and Rosa (2020) found problems such as complex grammar, interpreting long spoken texts, unfamiliar vocabulary and phrases, poor concentration, unclear pronunciation, loss of attention, sleepiness, low recording quality, background noise, and varied accents. Syaputri and Jaya (2023) reported issues including poor recording quality, diverse accents, fast speech, lack of repetition, unfamiliar words, and listening without the transcript. Harianja et al. (2022) identified problems with speaking speed, limited vocabulary, concentration, and established language habits. Maulida (2018) revealed that listening was often neglected in schools, facilities were inadequate, and paralinguistic factors such as accent, noise, pronunciation, and intonation further hindered comprehension. Collectively, these studies confirm the persistent problems students face in listening comprehension.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative approach. Creswell & Creswell, (2017) define qualitative research as an approach aimed at exploring and understanding the meanings attributed by individuals or groups to social or human problems, typically by engaging directly with participants, listening to their perspectives, and interpreting the meanings they convey. As noted by Nassaji (2015), qualitative research seeks to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. Within this framework, a case study design was applied, which, according to Lestari et al., (2021), involves an in-depth investigation of a program, activity, event, process, or one or more individuals. This study aimed to identify the precise details of students' problems in listening comprehension at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.

This research investigates the problems encountered by undergraduate EFL students in learning English listening comprehension at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The university was selected as the research site due to the listening-related problems reported by students, as identified by the English listening lecturer during a preliminary study conducted on October 6, 2024. Furthermore, no prior research on this specific topic has been undertaken at the university, making this study both relevant and timely.

The participants in this research were third-semester undergraduate EFL students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, all of whom were taught by the same lecturer, used the same materials, and had access to the same facilities in their listening comprehension classes. A purposeful sampling method was employed, specifically the homogeneous sampling technique. As noted by Shaheen et al. (2019), purposeful sampling enables researchers to select data sources that best serve the objectives of the study. Similarly, Friday and Leah (2024) describe homogeneous sampling as a technique in which participants are grouped based on shared characteristics and then selected as independent samples within the main sample. In this research, 2 students with the lowest scores from each class were chosen, yielding a total of 8 participants. Bekele and Ago (2022) recommend that, considering sample homogeneity and research aims, between 6-8 interviews are sufficient for homogeneous samples, whereas a range of 12-20 is preferable for studies seeking maximum variation.

This research collected data through student interviews. As described by Adhabi and Anozie (2017), an interview serves as a sort of consultation in which the researcher seeks to gain deeper insights into a topic based on the participant's responses. Schröder (2016) notes that face-to-face interviews involve direct interaction between interviewer and respondent, during which the interviewer reads the questions aloud and records the participant's answers. A semi-structured format was adopted in this research, offering a balance between consistency and flexibility that allows for the collection of rich, in-depth information (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). The 24 questions that constituted the interview were adapted from Hamouda (2013), focused on students' problems in learning English listening comprehension at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. These questions were reviewed and validated by two English lecturers with TOEFL scores of over 500. The structure of the interview was as follows: the first two questions addressed general information, questions 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> examined problems related to speaker accents, questions 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> focused on unclear pronunciation, questions 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> explored issues concerning the length and speed of listening materials, questions 17<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> investigated poor recording quality, and questions 21<sup>st</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> dealt with background noise.

The researcher used thematic to analyse the data. Thematic analysis helped the researcher to perceive and understand collective or shared meanings and experiences.

Lestari et al., (2021) mentioned that the six stages are taken while processing qualitative data, as follows: the researcher must be knowledgeable about the complete body of data, generate codes, look for themes, themes should be reviewed, themes should be defined and named, then create the report. The researcher saved the data in files and transcribed the raw data into text. After that, the researcher started coding the data by reviewing all the transcriptions and coding the information relevant to the study's research topic.

In order to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings, the researcher employed the member-checking technique recommended by Creswell & Creswell, (2017) during the interview process. This approach enabled the researcher to assess the veracity of the information provided by participants. It is typically given back to the participant after the event or session and is also used to verify the accuracy of the data (Zairul, 2021).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The results of this research indicate that undergraduate EFL students encountered various problems in learning English listening comprehension. Data were obtained through interviews conducted in Indonesian to facilitate more comfortable and effective communication between the researcher and participants. For confidentiality, the interviewees were identified by their initials: SPK, YN, ENI, WW, K, DR, AC, and FN. The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed several categories of listening comprehension problems experienced by the undergraduate EFL students at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, which are detailed as follows:

Table 1. Theme and codes of the undergraduate EFL students' problems in learning listening comprehension.

No	Theme	Codes
1	Different Accent of Speakers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All students claimed that different accents became a problem because they were more familiar with the American one.</li> <li>2. Most students claimed that they tended to understand American more than British.</li> <li>3. Others found listening to various accents interesting but challenging, as they were less exposed to them outside the classroom.</li> <li>4. Few students mentioned that the British and Australian accents were easier to understand.</li> </ol>
2	Unclear Pronunciation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All students claimed that unclear pronunciation became a problem in listening comprehension, particularly when speakers talked too fast and used unfamiliar vocabulary.</li> <li>2. Most students said that unclear pronunciation affected their performance in class requiring them to replay audio or ask friends for clarification.</li> <li>3. Some students claimed that they struggled to understand speakers with unclear pronunciation.</li> </ol>

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3	Length and Speed of the Listening	All students claimed that shorter duration and slower speaking made it easier to understand listening materials. Fast speech often led to confusion, difficulty in grasping details, and miscommunication, while long durations could overwhelm them and reduce focus.
4	The Poor Quality of the Recording	All students stated that the poor audio quality of the recording interfered with their listening comprehension, as it made the material difficult to understand. Issues such as low volume, sound glitches, or audio crashes were common problems, especially when using videos or equipment in the classroom.
5	Background Noise and Distractions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Most students stated that noise negatively affected their listening comprehension, especially when sitting at the back.</li> <li>2. Some students highlighted that their comfort in the learning process was not determined by the size of the classroom, but rather by the quality of the audio equipment.</li> <li>3. Two students stated that sitting by the window had a negative impact on their focus.</li> </ol>

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### 1. Problems in Listening Comprehension

There are 5 main problems in learning listening comprehension at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, and they are as follows:

#### 1.1 Different Accent of Speakers

Based on the data obtained from the interviews, the researchers found the factors that caused students' problems in learning English listening comprehension. All students felt that the different accents of the speakers were a problem in learning English listening comprehension. Students YN, WW, SPK and ENI stated "*Listening to the speaker with a different accent was an interesting challenge for me. When I hear a different accent, I find it harder to understand. I haven't heard accents other than American. So, I can't really say, but I imagine it might be a bit challenging. I've usually heard British accents on social media, and they're a bit hard to understand. The pronunciation is a little difficult.*" (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students DR, K, AC and FN also stated "*I wouldn't understand what they're saying because I'm not accustomed to that accent. There are also some vocabulary differences between American and British English. So, it feels a bit odd. Sometimes, there's miscommunication. It's harder to understand. I still need extra help, like using Google Translate or other tools.*" (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Most EFL students are more likely to understand American accents. They find it difficult to understand when the speaker has a strong British accent because they feel like they are listening to a different language, especially if they are not familiar with that particular accent. Students YN, SPK and K claimed "*I find the American accent is easier to understand compared to British accent. I think I understand the American accent better, maybe because I often hear it in movies, music, or from*

*speakers who use that accent. Maybe if it's an American accent, I'm more familiar with it, like when watching movies, most of them are in American accent, so it's less foreign to me. That's why I feel more comfortable with the American accent because I hear it often in daily life.*" (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students AC and FN also claimed *"I'd prefer American to British. It feels more exciting. British is a bit difficult, and Australian is also quite challenging, so I prefer American."* (Personal Communication, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Besides learning listening comprehension in the classroom, EFL students have also experienced listening to English media or content with different accents outside the classroom. Students FN and SPK stated *"Mostly on TikTok. On TikTok, there are a lot of international content creators, and their way of speaking varies, some have British accents, some Australian, and others American. The accents are mixed. I would still listen to it, but I probably wouldn't understand much."* (Personal Communication, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Student YN also stated *"Listening to different accents outside the classroom can influence my learning patterns by broadening my knowledge and providing new insights into learning various accents beyond the classroom. It turns out there are many accents that are very helpful in the learning process, and some of them sound very elegant."* (Personal Communication, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

While most EFL students mentioned that American accents were easier to understand, there were a few students who mentioned that British and Australian accents were easier to understand. Students WW and AC *"But the one I understand the most is the British accent and Australian accent."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). From the above statements, it can be concluded that the different accents of speakers in English cause problems for EFL students in learning listening comprehension skills. Most students found the American accent easier to understand due to its frequent appearance in movies, music, and social media, making it more familiar. The students also noted that exposure to mixed accents through platforms like TikTok and other media can enhance their understanding but still causes problems to their comprehension. On the other hand, British and Australian accents are considered easier to understand than American accents. To improve their listening proficiency, EFL students need greater exposure to diverse accents and practice using varied listening materials inside and outside the classroom.

## 1.2 Unclear Pronunciation

The second factor that caused students' problems in learning English listening comprehension was unclear pronunciation. All students claimed that unclear pronunciation became a problem in listening comprehension, particularly when speakers talked too fast and used unfamiliar vocabulary. Students SPK, WW, YN, and ENI stated *"In my opinion, if the speaker has a heavy accent and unclear pronunciation, it might be hard to understand. It's harder to understand when listening to something that's unclear. I have experienced unclear pronunciation in listening materials. It slowed down my ability to grasp the content. In listening, the pronunciation needs to be clear."* (Personal Communication, November, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students FN, K, DR and AC also stated *"Unclear pronunciation happens quite often. It could come from the speaker, the way it's pronounced by classmates, or how the explanation is given, it's often too fast. If we're listening to a video from a*

*friend and their pronunciation is unclear, it affects our understanding. I wouldn't understand because I don't know the vocabulary, let alone unclear pronunciation. I just don't understand, Kak.*" (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Unclear pronunciation can disrupt EFL students' listening comprehension, leading to misinterpretation of meaning and negatively affecting their performance in class. The students often have to replay the audio and make guesses to understand the spoken content. Students ENI, WW, K and YN claimed *"Oh yes, it does affect me. It's very disruptive. Since the pronunciation is unclear, it also affects performance. Unclear pronunciation affects my performance because when someone is listening, they might interpret the meaning incorrectly."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students SPK and FN also claimed *"If the pronunciation is unclear, it definitely makes it harder to catch the words being spoken. I often have to replay the audio and guess the meaning, which obviously affects my performance in class. Also, if the speaker's volume drops or becomes low suddenly, that's very distracting."* (Personal Communication, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

The problem EFL students faced in listening comprehension is that they struggled to understand speakers with unclear pronunciation and caused them to have to listen repeatedly to fully understand the material. Students DR, K and SPK stated *"Often, because I'm not focused. In class, it's usually noisy with friends talking, so there are too many sounds, and I don't know which one to focus on. When the speaker's pronunciation is unclear, and I ask a friend, and they also don't understand it clearly, we don't know what the material is about. I need to listen more than once to fully grasp the meaning."* (Personal Communication, 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). From the above statements, it can be concluded that unclear pronunciation is a factor that disrupts EFL students' listening comprehension. All students stated that they had problems understanding the lesson content when the speaker's pronunciation was unclear, especially when speaking too fast or using unfamiliar vocabulary. As a result, they had to replay the material several times and guess the meaning, which negatively impacted their ability to comprehend the content. To improve comprehension, EFL students should focus on listening to materials with clear pronunciation.

### **1.3 Length and Speed of the Listening**

The third factor that caused students' problems in learning English listening comprehension was the length and speed of the listening. All students claimed that shorter duration to understand listening materials. Students ENI, WW, K and YN stated *"Yes, shorter durations are more comfortable. It's easier to understand. Because if it's too long, it's often harder to grasp. Yes, if the material is in shorter duration, my thoughts are all over the place. If the material is long, my mind is wandering. Because it reduces cognitive load and allows for better focus."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students FN and AC *"I prefer shorter durations. Shorter materials are easier to understand. When the material is longer, it can get overwhelming, and my brain feels overloaded. It's a bit more difficult, and I might need to ask again about the main concepts."* (Personal Communication, November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Meanwhile, students also stated that a slower speaking speed made it easier to understand the material they were listening to. Students SPK and WW stated *"Yes, I think slower speech makes it easier to understand."* (Personal Communication,

November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Student YN and ENI stated *“Yes, it's easier to understand the material when listening at a slower speed. I find it easier to understand the material when it is explained slowly because it enhances comprehension of the content.”* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students DR, AC, K, and FN also stated *“Yes, because if the speaker talks slower, I can understand each word better, so I'll fully grasp what they're saying. If there are new vocabulary words, I can look them up first. When it's slower, I can understand the material better, especially the vocabulary, word by word, and the meaning of the listening material. I prefer slower speech because it's more pleasant to listen to, easier to understand, and the concepts are clearer.”* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Fast speech often led to confusion, difficulty in grasping details, and miscommunication. Additionally, longer durations of listening materials tended to overwhelm students and reduce their focus. Students ENI, SPK, YN and WW stated *“Yes, it really has an effect. If the text is long and the speaker talks too fast, it becomes difficult to follow. Sometimes, I feel confused and can't focus on the important parts of the material. Fast speech can confuse and make it harder to grasp details. So, it's better if it's short but clear in its meaning.”* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Student K, DR, AC and FN also stated *“If the text is too long, it often makes the listener confused, with their mind wandering, and suddenly the speaker is done, even though we haven't fully grasped the main point of the text. If the speaker speaks quickly, I'd fall behind in translating and understanding what they're saying. I sometimes lose track or it leads to miscommunication. It disrupts my focus on what they're saying because the speech feels rushed.”* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

From the above statements, it can be concluded that the length and speed of listening materials significantly impact EFL students' comprehension in learning listening. All students felt that the shorter listening materials and slower speaking speed were easy to understand, as it allowed them to catch words, understand vocabulary, and comprehend the materials more clearly. In contrast, longer durations and faster speech often lead to confusion, difficulty in processing details, and miscommunication. To improve their listening proficiency, EFL students need exposure to appropriate listening materials, as well as practice with varying duration and speed to improve their skills.

#### **1.4 The Poor Quality of the Recording**

The fourth factor that caused students' problems in learning English listening comprehension was the poor quality of the recording. All students stated that poor audio quality of the recording affected their listening comprehension, making the subject difficult to understand. Students SPK, YN, ENI stated *“I've experienced situations where the audio recording quality was poor, and it was very distracting. It significantly disrupts the learning process during class. In listening lessons, it's essential to hear clearly. If there are errors in hearing, it may lead to mistakes in writing vocabulary. The sound system would glitch, like the sound would cut out. That made it hard for us to concentrate on listening.”* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students K, AC, FN and DR stated *“I feel disturbed when the audio quality is poor, stops suddenly, or there are interruptions in the listening material provided. If the audio keeps crashing, it's hard to understand.”*

*Sometimes the audio makes crackling noises. It's hard to hear, and the material becomes difficult to follow. The explanations from the speaker also become unclear. We won't understand what the presenter is saying.*" (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Clear audio materials and high-quality audio devices are considered crucial for EFL students' success in listening classes. Common issues include low volume, sound glitches, and audio crashes. Students SPK, ENI, K stated *"If the audio equipment is good, the sound is clearer, and it's easier to follow the material. Clear audio helps us focus and understand better, so we don't end up getting distracted. If the audio quality is good, it's easier for students to understand the material."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students YN, DR, and FN also stated *"In my opinion, it is very important because it helps students understand and grasp the material more effectively. High-quality audio ensures that the lessons are not disrupted. With clear audio and a good volume, students will understand better and really pay attention to what the presenter is saying. It's crucial to have something like earphones to help clarify the material."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

While some students benefited from replays or responsive lecturers, others struggled because they couldn't always ask for repeats or relied on discussions with classmates. Students ENI and WW claimed *"Often, the lecturer is also responsive, sometimes the material is repeated. If we ask for a repeat, the lecturer is willing to do so."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024)). Students AC, DR, and FN *"Sometimes they're responsive, Kak. So, we often ask for a replay, and the lecturer is usually responsive and will play it again. The lecturer is willing to replay the audio, usually allowing up to two repetitions, which is enough."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). From the above statements, it can be concluded that poor audio quality is a significant factor causing problems for EFL students in learning listening comprehension. Issues such as low-quality recordings, low volume, sound glitches, and audio crashes disrupt students' ability to concentrate and understand the material effectively. Clear and high-quality audio materials, along with reliable sound systems, are crucial for facilitating comprehension, as they help students focus and follow the content more easily. While some students benefit from lecturers replaying the audio or clarifying the material, reliance on such measures may not fully address the challenges caused by poor recording quality. Therefore, to improve listening comprehension, EFL students require access to clear and high-quality audio materials supported by reliable sound systems.

### **1.5 Background Noise and Distractions**

The fifth factor that caused students' problems in learning English listening comprehension was background noises and distraction. Most students stated that background noises negatively impacted their listening comprehension. Students SPK, YN, and ENI stated *"There's often noises from outside the classroom. It's pretty disturbing. It happens quite often due to distractions or noises from classmates who are not focused during the learning process. Sometimes friends are talking to each other. But it's just the noises from friends."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students DR and K stated *"We can't really force people around us to stay quiet. Even if we ask them to stop talking, they'll probably start chatting again."*

*It's really distracting. The sound of chairs moving or items falling, it disrupts concentration while focusing on listening, causing the mind to become scattered.*" (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024).

Most students expressed that the seating position in class negatively affected EFL students' listening comprehension, particularly for those sitting at the back. Students SPK, YN, and WW claimed *"Yes, it really affects my listening ability. Sitting at the back it might be harder to hear due to classmates' noise. When sitting in the back, it's sometimes hard to understand or hear the lecturer because many students in the back are still talking. The back seats can be noisy."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Students AC, K, ENI and FN also claimed *"In my opinion, sitting in the front makes it easier to hear. If you're in the back, it can be harder to see the text or PowerPoint slides. If you're at the back, it's hard to even hear properly. Sometimes, even looking ahead isn't that clear. Sitting in the back makes it harder, especially when there's writing on the board, it's sometimes hard to see. I once sat in the back, and my vision from that distance was a bit limited."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024).

Some students highlighted that classroom size also affects comfort and audio clarity. They stated that larger class sizes are more comfortable. Students WW, YN, and SPK stated *"In my opinion, larger classrooms make it easier to listen to the lecturer's explanation. In larger classrooms, the material can be heard and explained more thoroughly. If the classroom is large, it's more comfortable, Kak. If it's small, it feels a bit cramped, which can be uncomfortable."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). However, one student stated that smaller class sizes are more comfortable. Student ENI stated *"For listening classes, it's better to have a small classroom. In larger classrooms, the sound sometimes spreads out. So, in smaller classrooms, the sound is much clearer."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024).

On the other hand, some EFL students also commented that classroom size is not as important as the quality of the speakers and audio devices in ensuring effective listening comprehension. Students DR, FN and AC stated *"As for the classroom size, it doesn't really matter. What actually affects it is the speaker. Even if the classroom is large, as long as the speaker is good, it'll still be clear. On the other hand, if the classroom is small but the audio is poor, it's the same, it'll still be hard to understand the material being explained. If I don't understand something, I can always ask for it to be discussed again. So, the classroom size doesn't matter. It depends on the equipment, Kak. Just adjust accordingly."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024). Student K also stated *"If the classroom is large, we tend to move around more and be more active. On the other hand, if the classroom is small, we might be more focused, but it can also feel stuffy. So, each has its own pros and cons."* (Personal Communication, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2024).

Two students stated that sitting near a window had a negative impact on their focus. Students ENI and WW claimed *"Sitting near the window has a negative impact. Sometimes people pass by, and my concentration shifts to them. Sitting near an open window with outside noise can be distracting."* (Personal Communication, November 21<sup>st</sup>, 2024). From the above statements, it can be concluded that background noise and distractions are significant factors causing problems for EFL students in learning listening comprehension. Noise from outside the classroom, classmates talking, and other distractions such as moving chairs or falling objects disrupt

students' focus during the learning process. Seating positions also play a crucial role, as students sitting at the back often face problems hearing the lecturer and reading visual materials, leading to reduced comprehension. Classroom size was noted to influence comfort and clarity, but the quality of audio equipment is deemed more critical in ensuring effective listening. Additionally, sitting near windows can lead to distractions from outside activities, further affecting students' concentration. To improve listening comprehension, EFL students should be in a quiet learning environment, minimize distractions, and optimize the classroom setting.

## **Discussion**

This discussion is intended to encourage reflection on the previous research findings and inquiries. Through thematic analysis of the collected data, the researcher identified several problems faced by undergraduate EFL students in learning English listening comprehension at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. These problems include: (a) different accent of speakers; (b) unclear pronunciation; (c) length and speed of the listening; (d) the poor quality of the recording and; (e) background noises and distraction.

Firstly, EFL students encountered problems in understanding speakers with different accents. They struggled to follow speakers with strong British accents, as it felt like listening to a different language, particularly when they were not familiar with that specific accent. This aligns with Jaya et al., (2021), who note that both native and non-native unfamiliar accents can hinder listening comprehension, while familiarity with an accent facilitates understanding. Erzad (2020) similarly observes that the British accent is often perceived as more difficult to comprehend than the American accent. Supratiningsih et al., (2020) further highlight students' limited exposure to the British accent, especially when it differs from the standard forms they have encountered. Likewise, Yunira (2019) reports that EFL students struggle to grasp listening content when faced with varied speech patterns and unfamiliar accents. In conclusion, EFL students experienced major difficulties in comprehending speakers who had different accents, especially those with strong British accents.

Secondly, EFL students encountered problems in unclear pronunciation during listening comprehension. They struggled to follow the material, particularly when speakers talked too fast or used unfamiliar vocabulary, often requiring them to replay the audio or seek clarification from other students. This finding aligns with the research of Diora and Rosa (2020), the primary barrier to students' listening comprehension was struggling in understanding unclear pronunciation. Similarly, Erzad (2020) found that students often struggled to recognize words spoken by native speakers, while Hamouda (2013) noted that many students perceived unclear pronunciation as a major obstacle in comprehending English listening materials. In line with this, Darti and Asmawati (2017) revealed that numerous students attributed their lack of success to an inability to discern the speaker's utterances, stemming from limited pronunciation skills. In conclusion, EFL students encountered problems in listening comprehension because of unclear pronunciation and their limited pronunciation abilities, which hindered them from recognizing and comprehending spoken English.

Thirdly, EFL students encountered problems in length and speed of the listening. They found it difficult to understand details and miscommunication occurred when the speaker spoke quickly, as it often caused confusion. In contrast, shorter duration and slower speaking speed made comprehension easier, as longer materials tended to overwhelm them and reduce their focus. This statement was supported by the findings

by Diora and Rosa (2020), who reported that most students struggle to interpret the meaning of extended spoken texts, leading to reduced motivation to engage in active listening. Similarly, Supraptiningsih et al. (2020) identified the length of spoken texts as a significant obstacle to effective listening comprehension, with students noting that lengthy material often caused confusion. Another problem is the speaker's speed rate of delivery. Students mentioned having problems understanding speakers who talked too fast. Hardiyanto et al. (2021) further observed that long spoken texts, particularly those containing unfamiliar vocabulary and rapid speech, often caused students to miss portions of the content, resulting in partial understanding. Purwanto et al. (2021) also confirmed that fast speech can hinder comprehension, as it may prevent learners from processing L2 vocabulary effectively. In conclusion, EFL students encountered problems in listening comprehension because of the length and speech speed. Longer texts and fast speech often caused confusion, loss of information, and decreased concentration, whereas shorter and slower recordings were easier for them to grasp.

Fourthly, EFL students encountered problems due to the poor audio quality of recordings, which significantly disrupted their listening comprehension. They found it difficult to understand the material when faced with issues such as low volume, sound glitches, or audio crashes, particularly with classroom equipment. This statement was supported by the findings by Ramadhianti and Somba (2021), highlight that the clarity of the speaker's voice is a common problem for students, as it can impede their ability to recognize spoken words and, consequently, hinder comprehension of the talk's content, leading to the loss of essential information. Similarly, Sa'diyah (2016) found that many students encounter problems in listening comprehension due to poor-quality audio recordings. Sari and Fithriyana (2019) further note that inadequate audio equipment, which produces unclear sounds, also negatively impacts students' listening performance. In line with these findings, Diora and Rosa (2020) report that the quality of audio recordings plays a crucial role in determining students' understanding of listening materials, with low-quality recordings often producing indistinct sounds that make it difficult for learners to grasp the content. In conclusion, the poor-quality audio greatly interferes with EFL students' listening comprehension. Problems like unclear sound, low volume, and malfunctioning equipment make it difficult for them to grasp spoken content, leading to missed details. This emphasizes the need for reliable audio devices in listening sessions.

Lastly, EFL students encountered problems in background noise and distractions. They stated that noise significantly hindered their listening comprehension, particularly for those seated at the back of the classroom. They found it challenging to concentrate and process audio effectively due to the disruptive background sounds. This statement was supported by the findings by Wahab and Tanasy (2022), background noise around students can harm their performance, leading to poor listening results. Hardiyanto et al., (2021) found that noise can interfere with students' concentration during listening activities, making it unable for them to grasp the audio content. Jaya et al., (2021) reported that students seated at the back often struggle more to hear the recording than those at the front. Additionally, two students pointed out that sitting near the window negatively affected their focus, as distractions from outside diverted their attention. Jaya et al. (2021) also noted that students who choose seats near the window are affected by external noises.

## CONCLUSION

The researcher found several factors that contributed to the problems in learning English listening comprehension at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, based on the perspectives of EFL students, which were categorized into: (a) different accent of speakers; (b) unclear pronunciation; (c) length and speed of the listening; (d) the poor quality of the recording and; (e) background noise and distractions.

The findings reveal problems faced by EFL students in learning English listening comprehension. Overcoming these require strategies such as increasing exposure to diverse accents, using varied and clearly pronounced materials, practicing with different durations and speeds, providing high-quality audio with reliable sound systems, ensuring low-noise classrooms, minimizing distractions, and optimizing the classroom setting. Systematic implementation of these strategies can enhance support for EFL students in improving their listening skills.

The researcher concludes that understanding EFL students' perspectives on listening comprehension problems can guide effective solutions. Students are advised to increase exposure to various English accents, practice pronunciation, engage with longer and faster speech, and listen in distraction-free settings. Lecturers should provide varied-speed, high-quality audio, ensure good equipment, reduce noise, and arrange optimal seating. This research only focuses on finding problems; future research should explore solutions and involve more varied contexts to enrich the findings.

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