



**INVESTIGATING LISTENING AND SPEAKING CHALLENGES
LEARNERS: ANALYZING EFL STUDENTS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE
TEACHING FIELD AT MILLAT UMIDI UNIVERSITY**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the listening and speaking challenges faced by EFL students in the English Language Teaching (ELT) field at Millat Umidi University. Using a mixed-method approach, the research combines performance-based tasks with self-reported survey data to identify both observed and perceived difficulties. For listening, participants completed a comprehension task followed by a Likert-scale questionnaire addressing perception, parsing, and utilization problems. For speaking, students engaged in a role-play activity and subsequently reflected on their performance through an agree–neutral–disagree survey. The findings reveal that while learners demonstrate relatively fewer issues with perception (20%) and parsing (10%), all participants (100%) experience difficulties at the utilization stage, indicating challenges in interpreting and applying meaning. In speaking, the most significant problems include idea generation (90%), vocabulary and grammar (70%), and fluency and interaction (50%). The results suggest that learners struggle more with higher-order language processing, such as generating ideas and responding spontaneously, rather than basic language recognition or sentence formation. Overall, the study highlights the need for instructional approaches that prioritize communicative competence, critical thinking, and real-time language use to effectively address EFL learners’ difficulties.

KEYWORDS

EFL, English, teaching, speaking, listening, challenges, research, difficulties, learning, language.

INTRODUCTION

Despite the importance of listening comprehension in terms of improving listening skills, EFL students still struggle at some points in the process of listening. The purpose of this research is to determine the challenges EFL students experience while listening and comprehension. However, speaking is also one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners, often affected by limited vocabulary, anxiety, and lack of practice. This study investigates these challenges through a performance-based and reflective approach. Students first participate in a short role-play activity to reveal real-time speaking difficulties and common errors. Immediately after, they complete an agree–neutral–disagree survey to reflect on their experience and identify perceived problems. By combining

observed performance with self-reported data, the study aims to highlight key speaking challenges and provide insights for developing more effective strategies to improve learners' oral communication skills.

Literature Review

Listening comprehension is widely regarded as a fundamental skill in second language acquisition, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. It serves as the foundation for developing other language skills, as learners must first understand spoken input before they can respond effectively. Despite its importance, listening remains one of the most difficult skills for EFL learners due to the complex interaction of linguistic, cognitive, and psychological factors.

Saputri (2025) examined listening comprehension challenges among university students in an English Teacher Education Program. Using a quantitative descriptive design, the study collected data through questionnaires to identify the main difficulties faced by learners. The findings revealed that students encounter problems in three key stages of listening: perception, parsing, and utilization. Among these, perception difficulties were the most significant. Learners often struggle to recognize sounds, distinguish word boundaries, and understand pronunciation in continuous speech.

In addition, several external and internal factors contribute to these challenges. External factors include fast speech rate, unfamiliar accents, and poor audio quality, all of which make it harder for learners to process spoken language. Internal factors, such as limited vocabulary and insufficient background knowledge, further hinder comprehension. Moreover, psychological aspects—including anxiety, lack of concentration, and low confidence—play a crucial role in reducing listening performance.

These findings are consistent with previous studies, which suggest that listening difficulties arise from both linguistic limitations and affective barriers. Limited vocabulary and weak phonological awareness often prevent learners from decoding spoken input, while emotional factors such as stress and fear of misunderstanding reduce their ability to focus. Therefore, listening comprehension should be viewed as a multifaceted process requiring both cognitive and emotional support.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the importance of effective instructional strategies in addressing these challenges. Teachers are encouraged to use authentic materials, vary listening activities, and create a supportive classroom environment. Activities that target all three stages of listening can help learners gradually improve their comprehension skills.

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates that listening comprehension difficulties among EFL learners are complex and multidimensional. Saputri (2025) contribute to this field by providing a structured framework for understanding these challenges and highlighting the need for comprehensive teaching approaches to enhance listening proficiency.

Regarding speaking, the research has consistently shown that speaking is one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners. The reviewed study highlights that learners commonly experience difficulties in key areas such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. These linguistic limitations often prevent students from expressing their ideas clearly and confidently, even when they possess adequate theoretical knowledge of the language. Such findings are supported by broader literature, which emphasizes that gaps in vocabulary and grammatical accuracy are major barriers to effective oral communication.

In addition to linguistic challenges, the study also points to psychological factors, including anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. These factors can significantly reduce learners' willingness to speak, especially in classroom settings where they feel evaluated. Role-play activities, as discussed in the literature, provide opportunities for authentic interaction and help reveal learners' real-time speaking problems. Although such tasks may initially increase anxiety, they are widely recognized for improving fluency and confidence over time.

Furthermore, the use of structured surveys, particularly agree–neutral–disagree formats, allows researchers to capture learners' perceptions of their own speaking difficulties. Combining role-play performance with reflective survey responses offers a more comprehensive understanding of both actual and perceived challenges, contributing to more effective teaching strategies.

The data were gathered with the help of Likert scale methodology and comprehension-based questionnaire, by linking learners' self-reported responses with their observed listening and speaking performance. The study seeks to identify recurring patterns and key problem areas in EFL skills. The findings are expected to provide deeper insights into both, listening and speaking difficulties, contributing to more targeted and practical pedagogical interventions.

The survey involved EFL students from Millat Umidi University, majoring in ELT (English Language Teaching) field, with 10 students who participated in listening, whereas the other 10 took part in speaking survey. Research dedicated to listening difficulties was done first by approaching students to complete a listening task, and then answering the questions about challenges in the paper survey, selecting agree-neutral-disagree based on their experience. Similarly, speaking research was conducted by asking every two students perform a small role play on the topic «Roommates», where both live together in one house splitting the bills, one of them being a person who makes a huge mess around all the time and the other one being disruptive to their partners' study by playing musical instruments. After that, both learners were approached to answer a paper survey about speaking challenges they have experienced, selecting agree- neutral-disagree in the same way.

Listening Survey Analysis

The findings of this study show that 20% of participants experienced perceptual problems, 10% faced parsing difficulties, and all participants (100%) reported utilization problems in listening. In contrast, the study by Saputri (2025) found that EFL learners experienced difficulties in all three stages of listening— perception, parsing, and utilization—with perception identified as the most problematic stage. While the previous study highlights perception as the dominant issue, the present study reveals a different pattern, where utilization problems are the most significant and universal among learners. This suggests that although learners in this study are relatively capable of recognizing and processing spoken input, they struggle more with interpreting and applying meaning. Therefore, the difference may indicate variations in learners' proficiency levels or instructional contexts, with this study emphasizing higher-level (meaning-related) listening challenges rather than lower-level (sound recognition) difficulties.

Interesting facts

None of the students recorded issues with comprehension when they saw unfamiliar words in listening text that could give a tip for the coming answer. **Also**, the unfamiliar topic itself and processing new information while listening did not influence students' performance that much. **Hence**, compared to

the previous research, recent one represented the lowest number of students experiencing parsing problems.

Speaking Survey Analysis

The present survey identified idea generation (90%), vocabulary/grammar (70%), and fluency/interaction difficulties (50%) as the most common challenges among learners. These findings resonate with prior EFL research showing that linguistic components such as grammar and vocabulary pose significant obstacles to speaking proficiency. For example, **Normawati (2023)** found nearly half of students identified grammar as the most difficult area, with vocabulary and pronunciation also causing difficulties, though fluency was less frequently noted. However, unlike many traditional studies that focus on discrete language components, the high frequency of problems with idea generation in the present data highlights the importance of cognitive and communicative processes — such as thinking and planning ideas — which may not be sufficiently captured in standard speaking difficulty frameworks.

Interesting facts

Participants of the present survey reported that they did not have any problems while forming correct sentences even though they had grammatical challenges. **Moreover**, they did not have any fillers such as: like or you know; in their speech during role-play activity. **In addition**, 60% of the students had difficulty while delivering their ideas to their partner, which means spontaneous conversations had a huge impact on participants reducing their confidence.

In conclusion, the comparison of listening and speaking performance suggests that the main challenges learners face are not at the level of basic language recognition or grammatical knowledge, but at the stage of meaningful language use. Learners appear to cope relatively well with understanding input and forming sentences; however, they struggle when required to generate ideas, interpret meaning deeply, and respond effectively in real-time communication. This indicates that the **core difficulty** lies in higher-order processing, particularly in transforming knowledge into active use. **From this, it can be learned that** language instruction should place greater emphasis on developing communicative competence, critical thinking, and spontaneous language production, rather than focusing predominantly on accuracy or isolated language skills.

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Survey used in the research on listening challenges

I find it difficult to understand the text when there are many unfamiliar words

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

When thinking about the meaning of a particular word, I miss the next part of the listening

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I can hear the sound but not clear words

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find it difficult to really concentrate on the listening

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

Parsing problems

I find it hard to understand the meaning of the sentences

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find the listening complicated if the topic is unfamiliar

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find it difficult to process a lot of new information in a short time

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find it difficult to remember the word or answer I have just heard before writing it down

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I understand the words but not the whole message

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find it difficult to follow the order of ideas

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find it difficult in getting a detailed information

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I find it difficult to understand the meaning of idioms or phrasal verbs mentioned

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

Survey used in the research on speaking challenges

Fluency and Interaction

I found it difficult to respond to my partner

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I did not know what to say in the role-play

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I paused a lot while speaking

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I had many fillers in my speech: like or you know

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

Idea generation and Psychological factors

I felt nervous while speaking

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I was afraid of making mistakes

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I found it difficult to think of ideas quickly

Agree __ Neutral__ Disagree__

I didn't know how to explain my answers

Agree __ Neutral __ Disagree __ Vocabulary and Grammar

I did not have enough vocabulary to express my ideas

Agree __ Neutral __ Disagree __

I forgot some words while speaking

Agree __ Neutral __ Disagree __

I had difficulty forming correct sentences

Agree __ Neutral __ Disagree __

I made many grammar mistakes while speaking

Agree __ Neutral __ Disagree __