ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN CRITICAL LISTENING AT IAIN LANGSA

SKRIPSI

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Degree (S1)

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THE MINISTRY OF RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

STATE INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC STUDIES LANGSA

2025

STATEMENT OF APPROVAL

ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN CRITICAL LISTENING AT IAIN LANGSA

Submitted to the Tarbiyah and Teachers Training Faculty

State Institute of Islamic Studies Langsa as Fulfilment of the Requirements For

the Degree of *Sarjana Pendidikan (S.Pd)* of English Education

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Menyatakan dengan sebenarnya bahwa skripsi yang ditulis dengan judul **"ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN CRITICAL LISTENING AT IAIN LANGSA"** merupakan hasil karya sendiri. Apabila di kemudian hari terbukti bahwa skripsi ini adalah hasil jiplakan, maka saya bersedia menerima segala sanksi yang diberikan atas perbuatan saya tersebut.

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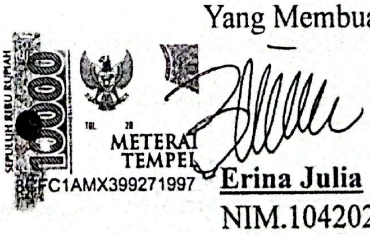

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

Assalammualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh

By offering praise and gratitude to the presence of Allah SWT
who has bestowed His grace, taufik, and guidance so that the writer can complete this thesis with the title "**Analysis Of English Department Students' Difficulties In Critical Listening At Iain Langsa**", which is one of the requirements for completing the Undergraduate Program (S-1) in English Department of Tarbiyah and Teachers Training Faculty, State Institute for Islamic Langsa Studies.

This paper would not have been possible to complete without the support,assistance, guidance and advice from various parties during the preparation activities. Therefore, on this occasion the author expresses his sincere thanks to:

1. Dr. Sabaruddin, M.Si as Chancellor of the State Institute of Islamic Studies Langsa;
2. Dr. Amiruddin Yahya Azzawiy, MA as the Dean of the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at State Institute of Islamic Studies Langsa;
3. Mr. Fachrurrazi,S.Ag, M.Hum as Chair of English Department of Tarbiyah and Teachers Training Faculty at State Institute of Islamic Studies Langsa;
4. Mr. Mhd. Rasid Ritonga, MA, Ph.D and Mrs. Shafrida Wati, MA as supervisors who have provided guidance to the author in completing this paper;
5. The service who have given permission and provided data to the author while conducting research at the institution;
6. Lecturers and educational staff in the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teaching Sciences, Langsa State Islamic Institute who have provided knowledge and services during the author's study;
7. My first love and the most inspiring figures in my life are my beloved father, Asrin, and my gateway to heaven, my mother, Farida Yanti. Thank you for

every drop of sweat shed with each step you took in carrying the heavy responsibility of being the head of the family. Although you never had the opportunity to experience a college education, you have always managed to give your very best. Thank you, Dad your little girl has grown up and is now ready to pursue even greater dreams.

8. To my older sister and younger brother, Kiki Asprianti and M. Alfath Fauzi, thank you for being part of my journey throughout my educational path.
9. To my beloved friends Siti Zahara, Intan Sabrina, Aulia Sinthia Mayang, Siti Raissa, and Ummi Yani Ritonga, thank you for all the motivation, support, shared experiences, time, and knowledge throughout our college years. Praise be to Allah SWT for blessing me with the best friends like you. See you on top, guys!
10. To myself, Erina Julia, a simple girl with big dreams. Congratulations on overthinking, and drama. It's finally done-you've proven that you can earn your S.Pd degree right on time. I'm pround of you, Erina. Thank youfor always encouraging yourself when things weren't going well, for celebrating small victories by doing the things you love, for always saying "i can do it" even when you felt like you couldn't. Let's continue to be strong and happy in the joutneys ahead. May Allah always guide you in reaching your dreams and aspirations. Aamiin.

I also express my gratitude to those who have provided constructive and useful criticims in the completing of this thesis. This thesis is not perfect, but I hope it can help and become a role model for other writes. "Rabbi yassir wa a'in wa laa tu'assir".

Wassalammualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh.

Langsa, 21 Juni 2025

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Abstract

Erina Julia. 2025. Analysis Of English Department Students' Difficulties In Critical Listening At Iain Langsa *Skripsi.* English Department, Tarbiyah And Teachers Training Faculty, State Institute For Islamic Studies (IAIN) Langsa.

Supervisor (1). Mhd. Rasid Ritonga, MA, Ph.D **(2).** Shafrida Wati, MA

This study investigates the challenges encountered by fourth-semester students of the English Education Department at IAIN Langsa in developing critical listening skills, as well as the strategies they use to overcome these obstacles. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study involved 19 students enrolled in the Critical Listening course. Data were gathered through interviews. The results revealed that students face various difficulties in critical listening activities, including unclear messages, delivery style, listener-related factors, and environmental disturbances. Internal factors such as limited vocabulary, lack of concentration, and low motivation, along with external factors like fast speech, unfamiliar accents, and background noise, were also found to affect students' listening performance. To deal with these issues, students reported using strategies such as repetition, note-taking, summarizing, and predicting content. These findings highlight the need for more effective instructional practices to support the development of students' critical listening abilities in academic settings.

Keywords: *Critical listening, student difficulties, listening strategies.*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Listening skill is the least researched language skill. Most of the published studies include theoretical information about this skill. The fact that individuals have acquired some theoretical knowledge does not mean that they will use them effectively in their lives. In very few studies, listening activities were suggested and implemented. Moreover, there are no recommendations and practices of activity in the literature related to critical listening. In our age, which is accepted as the age of persuasion and propaganda, the effective and efficient use of critical listening skills has gained great importance. Developing critical listening skills is possible through the use of different methods / techniques and classroom activities. For this reason, it is thought that this study which is prepared by field experts and which includes activity suggestions that can be used to develop students' critical listening skills will contribute to the field of education.[1]

Listening is the basic initial talent and ability for beginners to learn a new language. This is a receptive ability, which means that language learners receive new words from what they need to hear. Receiver flexibility will affect production flexibility. If they are good at listening, so they will be able to perceive and even have good production skills, especially oral and written.[2] According to Anderson et

[1] Erkek GüLTEN and Batur Zekerya, "Actıvıty Suggestions for Improvıng Crıtıcal Lıstenıng Skılls," *Educational Research and Reviews.* Vol. 14. No. 17 (2019): 639–646.

[2] Michael Rost "Teaching and Researching Listening," (Edinburgh : Pearson education limited , 2011), 146.

al, listening is not simply something that happens because of what a speaker says. The listener has a crucial role to play in the process, by activating various types of knowledge, applying what he knows to what he hears, and attempting to understand what the speaker means. Listening ability is essential for all effective communication. Messages are easily misunderstood when people lack the ability to listen effectively. As a result, communication breaks down, and the message's sender may become frustrated or irritated.[3] According to Herbert J. Walberg the authorities have some definitions. Listening skills are essential for learning because they allow students to gain insights and information while also communicating effectively with others.[4]

One important type of listening that enhances comprehension and communication is critical listening. Critical listening is a listening skill that involves not only understanding the conveyed information but also analyzing, evaluating, and determining the reliability and accuracy of the message. This process requires listeners to be active and discerning, carefully examining the evidence that supports or challenges the presented argument while recognizing potential biases or assumptions. This skill plays a crucial role in academic discussions, debates, and professional settings, where informed decision-making relies on a thorough comprehension of the information received. By practicing critical listening,

[3] Anderson, J., Anderson, A, Lynch, J., & Shapiro, J. "Storybook reading in a multicultural society: Critical perspectives." (Mahwah : Taylor & Francis, 2008), 203.

[4] Herbert J Walberg, “Improving Student Learning: Action Principles for Families, Classrooms, Schools, Districts, and States Innovation & Improvement,” (Philadelvia : Lincoln, 2010), 121.

individuals move beyond passive reception of information, striving to interpret its meaning and credibility to form objective and logical responses.[5]

Listening is one of the most important skills in learning English. When students listen to English, they face many listening difficulties. Listening plays an important role in learning English. Students often face challenges when it comes to listening to English due to the lack of emphasis on this skill in educational institutions that prioritize writing, reading, and vocabulary. Many course materials also ignore the listening aspect, and often ignore its importance in the classroom. However, research shows that paying attention to students' listening difficulties can help them develop effective strategies to improve their critical listening.[6] Many students believe that their challenges stem from their own assumptions, limited skill abilities, and the complexity of the listening tasks and assigned material. Few people realize the impact of ineffective listening strategies or skill implementation. his addresses issues related to students' listening behavior and their attitudes towards comprehension. Over the past twenty years, much research has focused on strategies to improve listening comprehension.[7]

Critical listening remains one of the most challenging aspects for English Education students, as initial observations show that many challenges to analyze and evaluate spoken information effectively. Factors such as limited practice

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[5] Stephane Elmosnino, "A Review of Literature in Critical Listening Education," *AES: Journal of the Audio Engineering Society*. Vol. 70. No. 5 (2022): 328–329.

[6] Musa Nushi and Fereshte Orouji, "Investigating EFL Teachers' Views on Listening Difficulties Among Their Learners: The Case of Iranian Context," *SAGE Open* Vol. 10 . No. 2 (2020): 1-6.

[7] Christine Goh, "Metacognitive Instruction for Second Language Listening Development: Theory, Practice and Research Implications," *RELC Journal*. Vol . 39 . No. 2 (2008), 188-213.

opportunities, insufficient awareness of critical listening techniques, and difficulties in applying theoretical knowledge to real-life situations exacerbate the problem. Additionally, challenges like inadequate vocabulary, cognitive overload, and environmental distractions further hinder students' ability to engage in critical listening. Addressing these issues requires a focus on increasing practice frequency, integrating critical listening strategies into lessons, and fostering a supportive learning environment to help students enhance their critical listening abilities and academic performance.

Based on preliminary research especially at English education department students, it was found that many students struggle with critical listening. Several factors contribute to these difficulties, making it challenging for students to comprehend and analyze spoken English effectively. One of the main challenges is the fast pace of speech in audio materials. Many students find it difficult to keep up with the speed at which native speakers talk, making it hard to grasp key information and understand the overall message. This problem is further compounded by unclear pronunciation, where certain words or sounds are not articulated distinctly, leading to confusion and misinterpretation.

Another significant obstacle is students' limited vocabulary. When encountering unfamiliar words, students often lose focus on the overall message, as they spend more time trying to understand individual words rather than deriving meaning from the surrounding context. Without a sufficient vocabulary base, they

struggle to infer meanings from sentences, making comprehension even more challenging.

Additionally, many students have limited exposure to English listening activities in their daily lives. Unlike speaking skills, which require active participation, listening skills demand consistent practice and familiarity with various accents, speech patterns, and contexts. Due to the lack of exposure to English conversations, students find it difficult to quickly recognize words and phrases. The absence of an environment that encourages spoken English further exacerbates the issue, as students rarely hear English being used naturally in conversations. Another factor contributing to students' struggles is their lack of experience with critical listening strategies. Critical listening goes beyond simply understanding words; it involves analyzing the speaker's intent, identifying key points, and distinguishing between facts and opinions. Without adequate training in these skills, students often find it difficult to deeply comprehend audio materials. As a result, they struggle to filter essential information, evaluate arguments, and respond critically to what they hear.

Based on the discussion above, the researcher is interested in investigating further on challenges and difficulties of English department students in critical listening. Finally, this idea inspired researcher to conduct a research entitled: ***Analysis of English Department Students' Difficulties in Critical Listening at IAIN Langsa.***

B. Research Question

Based on the background of study above, the research questions formulated in this study are as following:

1. What are the difficulties faced by English education department students' difficulties in critical listening?
2. What are the strategies and techniques used by the English department students' in dealing with the critical listening difficulties?

C. Purpose of the Study

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

1) To describe the English department students' difficulties in critical listening.
2) To find out potential strategies for the students in dealing with their difficulties in critical listening.

D. Significances of the Study

Theoretically, this research can contribute to the understanding of students' difficulties in critical listening. The findings of this study can be used to inform critical listening teaching practices.

Practically, this research can provide insight into the difficulties faced by students in critical listening and approaches that can be applied to address these challenges. The findings of this research are expected to offer valuable input for enriching existing teaching methods and provide useful information in designing more effective learning activities tailored to students' needs. Additionally, the

results of this research can be used to develop more accurate ways of assessing students' critical listening abilities.

E. The Scope of Study

The research will specifically focus on identifying and analyzing the difficulties faced English Department students at IAIN Langsa in critical listening.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Findings

This chapter presents the research findings derived from interviews conducted with 19 English Department students at IAIN Langsa who had completed the Critical Listening course. The analysis followed Creswell's six-step qualitative method, including data organization, reading, coding, theme development, representation, and interpretation. To enhance validity and depth, the analysis was supported by Guba and Lincoln's principles, emphasizing credibility, reflexivity, triangulation, and contextual understanding to ensure that the findings reflect the participants' lived experiences.

With reference to the findings outlined in the critical listening section, the interview data revealed several recurring themes that reflect the actual challenges encountered by students in undertaking critical listening tasks. The following presents the key results of the study:

1. The Difficulties Faced By English Learners In Performing Critical Listening Tasks

a) Linguistic Complexity

Linguistic complexity became one of the recurring difficulties expressed by students during the interviews. This challenge was not only related to their limited vocabulary but also their struggle to process spoken English when pronunciation, accent, or sentence structure differed from what they were familiar with. From the participants' stories, it was clear that

these linguistic barriers often made listening feel overwhelming and discouraging. Those were:

Participants P2 expressed that unfamiliar vocabulary often led to confusion during listening tasks. One participant remarked: *"Many words that I don't know, so I get confused when I listen. I often get stuck on one word and end up not understanding the next sentence." [Banyak kata yang belum saya tahu, jadi bingung waktu dengar. Saya sering terpaku ke satu kata dan akhirnya gak ngerti kalimat berikutnya].* and in this statement, the same thing was also expressed by P5, P1, and P6. In this context, the experience of being "stuck" illustrates the significant role that vocabulary mastery plays in enabling real-time understanding during listening tasks.

Participant P8 stated that differing pronunciation often caused misunderstanding during listening tasks. P8 said: *"The pronunciation is different from what I learned, so I don't understand. Sometimes the words I know have different pronunciations." [Pronunciation-nya beda sama yang saya pelajari, jadi gak paham. Kadang kata yang saya tahu ternyata cara bacanya beda].* This statement aligns with the responses of participants P9, P3, P4, and P15, who similarly experienced confusion when encountering words pronounced differently from how they had previously learned them. These findings emphasize the gap between written and spoken English. Even when students recognize a word in its written form, they may struggle to comprehend it when it is spoken naturally, due to unfamiliar pronunciation patterns.

Participant P7 expressed difficulty when encountering unfamiliar English accents, particularly British or Australian. The student said: *"If the accent is different like British, I can't distinguish the words. Usually, I learn American, so when I hear a different one, I get confused rightaway." [Kalau aksennya beda seperti British, saya gak bisa bedain katanya. Biasanya saya belajar American, jadi begitu denger yang beda, saya langsung bingung].* and in this statement, the same thing was also expressed by P10, P12, P16 and P19. This suggests that most listening materials used in their learning were based on American English, which made it hard to adjust when different accents appeared in tests or practice.

Participant P11 shared: *"I hear her words, but it's hard to analyze their meaning. Especially if I have to know the speaker's opinion or conclusion."* [*Saya dengar kata-katanya, tapi susah menganalisis maksudnya. Apalagi kalau harus tahu opini pembicara atau kesimpulannya].* This statement aligns with the responses of participants P13, P14, P17 & P18 This difficulty goes beyond vocabulary or pronunciation it touches on the student's ability to analyze, interpret, and make inferences, which are core components of critical listening.

In summary, the experiences of the participants above highlight how linguistic complexity such as unfamiliar vocabulary, pronunciation, and accent poses a significant challenge in listening critically.

b) Cognitive Load and Memory Limitations

Another significant challenge in critical listening involves the cognitive demands placed on students, particularly in terms of memory and attention. The following excerpts illustrate how mental overload and short-term memory limitations hinder students' listening comprehension:

Participant P1 stated that they had difficulty following long listening passages, especially when required to answer multiple questions: *"When the audio is too long, I forget the beginning. I try to remember, but my mind gets full, especially when there are many questions." [Kalau audionya terlalu panjang, saya lupa bagian awalnya. Saya coba ingat, tapi kepala saya penuh, apalagi kalau ada banyak pertanyaan].* This statement reflects the cognitive overload students may experience when processing extended spoken texts. The challenge mentioned by P1 is consistent with the experiences reported by participants P3, P5, P7, P8, and P9, who also described difficulties in maintaining focus and retaining information throughout longer audio passages. When the listening input is dense and coupled with several comprehension questions, students are more likely to encounter mental fatigue, which hampers their ability to effectively recall and interpret earlier parts of the text.

Participant P4 described a personal struggle in balancing attention during listening tests: *"I cannot focus on listening while also thinking about the questions. I miss the audio while checking the options." [Saya tidak bisa fokus mendengarkan sambil memikirkan pertanyaannya. Saya jadi*

kehilangan isi audio saat sedang lihat pilihan jawabannya]. Similarly, participants P2, P6, P18, and P10 echoed this experience, reporting that their comprehension was disrupted whenever they attempted to engage with task questions while still listening to the audio. Their shared experiences point to a split attention problem, where learners are required to divide cognitive resources between understanding the content and simultaneously completing tasks. This dual demand often results in missed information and decreased performance in listening assessments.

Participant P13 specifically described how lack of background knowledge interfered with memory retention: *"If the topic is something I don't understand, I forget quickly." [Kalau topiknya tidak saya pahami, saya cepat lupa. Dan kalau pembicaranya bicara cepat, otak saya tidak bisa mengikuti].* This statement aligns with the experiences shared by participants P11 & P15 who illustrates that unfamiliar content places an additional cognitive burden on learners, making it harder to retain information during critical listening tasks. Without sufficient context or prior knowledge, students struggle to make meaningful connections with the material.

Participant P12 stated that keeping up with extended spoken texts was particularly challenging, especially when required to retain detailed information: *"I understand the general idea, but when they ask about specific words or numbers, I can't remember*."*[Saya paham ide umumnya, tapi saat ditanya kata atau angka tertentu, saya tidak ingat].* This statement

aligns with the experiences shared by participants P14, P6, P17, and P19, who also reported difficulties in processing and remembering specific information in long listening passages. The response from Participant P12 illustrates the limitations of short-term memory in retaining precise details under time pressure.

In conclusion, the experiences of participant suggest that cognitive load and memory limitations significantly affect students' ability to perform critical listening tasks. High demands on attention, speed of delivery, topic unfamiliarity, and multitasking contribute to reduced comprehension. These insights highlight the need for listening strategies that reduce cognitive pressure—such as note-taking training, segmentation of audio, and pre-listening support.

c. Lack of Background Knowledge

One of the main challenges identified by participants in performing critical listening tasks was the lack of sufficient background knowledge. This deficiency hinders their ability to process, interpret and evaluate spoken texts, especially when the topic is unfamiliar or culturally distant. Background knowledge, often referred to as schematic knowledge, plays a crucial role in comprehension. Without prior knowledge, listeners will find it difficult to make connections between what they hear and what they already know, which limits their ability to grasp the overall meaning of the text.

Participant P5 described a similar challenge, explaining: *"If the topic is new or I don't know much about it, I just listen without really understanding. It's like guessing." [Kalau topiknya baru atau saya tidak tahu banyak, saya hanya dengar tanpa benar-benar mengerti. Rasanya seperti menebak].* This statement aligns with the experience of participants P1, P2 & P8**,** who also illustrated the difficulty of comprehending unfamiliar content during listening tasks. These responses highlight learners' reliance on background knowledge and topic familiarity. When students encounter new or abstract topics, their ability to engage meaningfully with the audio diminishes, often reducing their listening process to passive guessing rather than active comprehension.

Participant P3 shared a similar experience, stating: *"Sometimes they talk about history or culture that I've never learned. I don't know what they mean, so I stop paying attention." [Kadang mereka bicara soal sejarah atau budaya yang belum pernah saya pelajari. Saya tidak tahu maksudnya, jadi saya berhenti memperhatikan].* In line with this, participants P4, P13, and P18 also reported that when the listening material involved unfamiliar topics such as foreign cultural references, historical events, or abstract academic discussions they found it difficult to follow the content. As a result, they tended to lose focus or withdraw mentally from the listening task.

These responses collectively highlight how insufficient background knowledge significantly affects listening comprehension. When

learners are unable to relate the topic to their prior experiences or knowledge, they become passive listeners. This lack of contextual grounding reduces both their motivation and ability to engage meaningfully with the material, often turning the act of listening into a process of mere guessing rather than active understanding.

Participant P10 expressed a shared difficulty in understanding listening materials that involve unfamiliar public figures or political issues. One participant stated: *"I was confused when the speaker talked about political issues or famous people I don't know. I can understand the words, but not the point." [Saya bingung waktu pembicara bicara soal isu politik atau tokoh terkenal yang saya tidak tahu. Saya bisa mengerti katanya, tapi tidak paham maksudnya].* In line with this, participants P9, P14 and P17 also response illustrates the distinction between linguistic decoding the ability to recognize and understand individual words and pragmatic comprehension, which involves interpreting the intended meaning within a broader context. Even when students understand the language used, a lack of relevant background knowledge can prevent them from grasping the speaker's message. This finding suggests that listening comprehension requires more than just vocabulary knowledge; it also depends heavily on the listener's familiarity with the topic being discussed.

Participant P7 expressed the following: *"If I never heard about the topic before, it's hard to imagine what they're talking about. I can't follow the story." [Kalau saya belum pernah dengar topiknya sebelumnya, susah*

membayangkan yang mereka bicarakan. Saya tidak bisa mengikuti ceritanya]. In this line, participants P18, P16 & P15 also reflects the mental processing difficulties that arise when students cannot build a mental representation of the listening text. Listening comprehension involves constructing mental images and frameworks, which becomes challenging without foundational knowledge.

Participant P6 added: *"I remember listening to a recording about business terms, and I didn't understand anything because I don't know the topic." [Saya ingat mendengarkan rekaman tentang istilah bisnis, dan saya tidak mengerti apa-apa karena saya tidak tahu topiknya].* In this line, participants P10, P11 & P12 also indicates a complete breakdown in understanding due to domain-specific terminology and unfamiliar context. Learners often feel overwhelmed when they encounter professional or technical content that lies outside their field of interest or study.

In conclusion, lack of background knowledge emerged as a consistent obstacle in students' critical listening performance. The participants' reflections revealed that unfamiliar topics reduced their confidence, engagement and ability to interpret messages beyond the literal meaning.

d. Affective Factors : Anxiety And Confidence

Affective factors particularly anxiety and self-confidence—play a pivotal role in language learning and listening comprehension. In the context of critical listening, these emotional aspects can either hinder or

support students' ability to concentrate, interpret meaning, and make inferences.

Participant P2 reported experiencing anxiety and confusion when encountering fast-paced speech during listening tasks. For instance, participant P2 shared: *"When the speaker talks fast, I get nervous and cannot focus. I panic and forget everything."* [*Kalau pembicara ngomong cepat, saya jadi gugup dan nggak bisa fokus. Saya panik dan lupa semuanya*]. In this regard, participants P3, P4, P5, and P6 reflects a common challenge among learners: the negative impact of listening anxiety triggered by rapid speech delivery. The stress induced by fast-paced audio can result in cognitive overload, where students struggle to keep up, lose focus, and ultimately fail to retain or process the information effectively. These responses collectively demonstrate that the speed of spoken input not only affects comprehension but also heightens emotional stress, which in turn impairs working memory and overall listening performance.

Participant P9 reflected: *"Even if I understand some parts, I feel unsure. I'm afraid my answer is wrong, so I don't speak up or write it down." [Meskipun saya paham sebagian, saya merasa tidak yakin. Takut salah jawab, jadi saya diam atau nggak tulis jawabannya].* This response illustrates a common emotional barrier among students: a lack of confidence, even when partial comprehension is achieved. Similar concerns were expressed by Participants P1, P7, P8 and P10**,** who also admitted feeling hesitant to respond due to fear of making mistakes, despite having a

general understanding of the material. Such hesitation is not necessarily rooted in linguistic incompetence, but rather in emotional insecurity and fear of failure, which can suppress students' willingness to engage with the listening task. This suggests that affective factors such as anxiety, self-doubt, and lack of confidence play a significant role in shaping students' listening behavior and their overall performance in comprehension-based assessments.

Participant P11 described the intense emotional pressure experienced during listening assessments, stating: *"I always feel anxious during listening tests. I try to listen, but my heart beats fast and I can't think clearly." [Saya selalu cemas waktu ujian listening. Saya berusaha dengar, tapi jantung berdebar dan nggak bisa mikir jernih].* This quote highlights the physiological manifestations of anxiety, such as increased heart rate and mental clouding, which can significantly hinder listening comprehension. In this regard, participants P12, P13, and P14 expressed similar feelings of tension, nervousness, and mental blockage during listening tests. Their experiences suggest that test-related anxiety not only affects emotional well-being but also interferes with cognitive processing, making it difficult for learners to focus, decode, and retain auditory information effectively.

Participant P19 offered a different perspective: *"When I know the topic and I'm confident, I can understand better. It's like I'm more relaxed and focused." [Kalau saya tahu topiknya dan merasa percaya diri, saya bisa lebih paham. Rasanya lebih santai dan fokus].* In this line, participants

P15, P16, P17 & P18 also demonstrates the positive influence of confidence. When students feel familiar with the topic and believe in their ability, their affective filter is lowered, allowing them to engage more meaningfully with the content.

Affective factors, particularly anxiety and confidence, emerge as critical dimensions in students' ability to engage with critical listening. Emotional discomfort can act as a barrier to comprehension, while emotional readiness can facilitate deeper processing of the spoken input.

e. Speaker Related Challenges

One of the most frequently mentioned barriers in critical listening was the way the speaker delivered the information. Elements such as speaking speed, pronunciation clarity, speaking style, and lack of structured delivery greatly affected students' comprehension.

Participant P5 expressed difficulty in keeping up with the audio due to the speaker's speed, stating: *"The speaker talks too fast. Before I understand the first sentence, the second one already comes." [Pembicaranya bicara terlalu cepat. Sebelum saya paham kalimat pertama, kalimat kedua sudah datang].* This participant felt overwhelmed by the rapid pace of the audio, which did not allow sufficient time for processing and comprehension. Similarly, participants P1, P2, P3, and P4 also reported struggling to follow fast speech during listening tasks. They noted that when the speaker spoke too quickly, they were unable to focus, lost track of the message, and experienced a sense of panic or helplessness. These shared

experiences indicate that speech rate is a critical factor affecting listening comprehension. Rapid delivery can exceed learners' cognitive processing limits, leading to incomplete understanding and heightened anxiety. Therefore, adjusting the speed of spoken input especially in academic or testing contexts may be necessary to support learners' ability to process and retain information effectively.

Participant P8 shared that unclear pronunciation hindered their understanding: *"Sometimes I cannot hear clearly, like the speaker is mumbling. I miss some words and it's hard to guess." [Kadang saya nggak dengar dengan jelas, seperti pembicaranya bergumam. Saya kehilangan beberapa kata dan susah menebak].* In this regard, participants P6, P7, P9 & P11 also response illustrates how unclear articulation or mumbling can cause students to lose key parts of the message.

Participant P10 pointed out that the lack of logical pauses made it hard to follow the speaker's ideas: *"The speaker talks without pause, and I don't know when one idea ends and the next begins*." *[Pembicaranya ngomong tanpa jeda, dan saya nggak tahu kapan satu ide selesai dan ide berikutnya dimulai].* In this line, participants P12, P13 & P15 Students rely on natural pauses, emphasis, and discourse markers to help them segment information.

Participant P14, commented on how unfamiliar speaking styles created confusion: *"The speaker's style is too different, like too serious or too casual. I cannot follow the meaning." [Gaya bicaranya beda banget,*

kadang terlalu formal atau terlalu santai. Saya jadi nggak bisa ngikutin maknanya]. This highlights the impact of tone and delivery style on comprehension. Students may become confused when they cannot distinguish between formal and informal expressions, or whether a speaker is being serious, sarcastic, or humorous.

Finally, participant P16 stated : "*The speaker doesn't say the answer directly. I have to guess what they mean, but it's hard." [Pembicara nggak bilang jawabannya langsung. Saya harus menebak maksudnya, tapi itu susah].* This reflects was also with participants P17, P18 and P19 who difficulty students face in making inferences—a key component of critical listening. Instead of clearly stated information, students are sometimes expected to interpret hidden meanings or implied messages. From these five participants' experiences, it is evident that how a speaker delivers information significantly influences students' listening comprehension. Rapid speech, unclear articulation, lack of pauses, unfamiliar speaking styles, and indirect language all contribute to difficulties in processing spoken input.

f. Lack of Instruction in Critical Listening Skills

One significant challenge mentioned by participants was the absence of explicit instruction in how to perform critical listening. Students reported that while listening activities were included in the curriculum, they rarely received guidance on how to understand speakers' opinions, recognize implied meanings, or analyze arguments.

Participant P6 stated: *"In class, we usually just answer questions after listening. The teacher doesn't explain how to understand the speaker's opinion or message." [Di kelas, kami biasanya hanya menjawab pertanyaan setelah mendengarkan. Guru tidak menjelaskan bagaimana cara memahami opini atau pesan dari pembicara].* This indicates that listening activities were mostly focused on surface-level understanding. Similarly, participants P2, P3, and P4 also felt that they lacked guidance in developing deeper listening skills, such as interpreting meaning or identifying the speaker's intent.

Participant P1 shared: *"I never learn how to find the speaker's intention or main argument. We just listen and choose A, B, C, or D." [Saya tidak pernah belajar bagaimana cara menemukan maksud atau argumen utama dari pembicara. Kami hanya mendengarkan lalu memilih A, B, C, atau D].* This highlights how an over-reliance on multiple-choice questions may limit students' development in critical interpretation. A similar concern was expressed by Participants P7, P8, P9, and P11, who felt that classroom listening tasks rarely trained them to analyze the speaker's purpose or argument beyond selecting predetermined answers.

Participant P14 also explained: *"There is no discussion before listening. We don't talk about the topic or what to expect, so I feel unprepared." [Tidak ada diskusi sebelum mendengarkan. Kami tidak membahas topik atau apa yang akan kami dengarkan, jadi saya merasa tidak siap].* This shows that the absence of pre-listening activities left

students unprepared, leading to poor comprehension and reduced confidence. Participants P5, P6, P12, and P13 expressed similar concerns, noting that listening tasks were often done without any contextual introduction, making it harder to follow and engage with the material.

Participant P15 commented: *“Listening feels like a test. We don’t practice how to understand deeply; we just answer questions and get scores.” [Mendengarkan terasa seperti ujian. Kami tidak berlatih untuk memahami secara mendalam; kami hanya menjawab soal dan mendapat nilai].* This suggests that listening was viewed more as an assessment tool than as a skill to be developed through guided practice. A similar perception was shared by Participants P16, P17, P18, and P19, who also felt that classroom listening focused more on grading than on helping students build deeper comprehension strategies.

Participant P10 noted: *"I don't know any techniques for listening. I just try to listen carefully, but it’s not enough." [Saya tidak tahu teknik apapun untuk mendengarkan. Saya hanya berusaha mendengarkan dengan saksama, tapi itu tidak cukup].* This reflects the absence of training in listening strategies such as inference, identifying speaker intent, or summarizing spoken content.

In summary, the lack of explicit instruction in critical listening skills emerged as a significant barrier for many learners. Although students are exposed to listening activities, they often do not receive adequate

guidance on how to interpret, evaluate, or respond critically to what they hear.

g. Environmental and Technological Barriers

In addition to linguistic and instructional challenges, participants also pointed to environmental and technological barriers that hindered their ability to engage in critical listening activities. These external factors often interfered with their focus, comprehension, and overall listening experience.

Participant P7 stated: *"Sometimes the class is too noisy or the speaker's voice in the audio is not clear, so I can't understand anything." [Kadang-kadang kelas terlalu berisik atau suara pembicara di audio tidak jelas, jadi saya tidak bisa mengerti apa-apa].* This issue was also experienced by participants P1, P2, P3, and P4, who reported that noise and unclear audio made it difficult to concentrate and follow the listening material. These responses highlight how background noise and poor audio quality can significantly interfere with students' ability to comprehend spoken English.

Participant P6 explained that the use of outdated speakers or laptops during listening tasks affected sound clarity, especially in crowded classrooms: *"The listening tasks use old speakers or laptops. The sound is not loud or clear, especially when there are many students." [Tugas listening menggunakan speaker atau laptop yang sudah lama. Suaranya tidak keras atau jelas, apalagi kalau banyak siswa].* This concern was similarly expressed by Participants P5, P10, P15, and P19, who also

reported that poor-quality audio devices hindered their ability to hear the material clearly. As a result, they often struggled to follow the speaker, which negatively impacted their overall listening comprehension.

Participant P9 also stated: *"Sometimes we don't have electricity, so we skip listening practice." [Kadang tidak ada listrik, jadi latihan listening dibatalkan].* This issue was similarly experienced by Participants P8, P12, P14, and P16, who reported that power outages and limited infrastructure in their learning environment often disrupted listening activities. These findings show how lack of basic facilities, such as electricity, can hinder the continuity and effectiveness of listening instruction, particularly in rural or under-resourced areas.

Participant P11 said: *"The internet is slow, so when I try to practice listening on YouTube, it keeps buffering. I give up." [Internet-nya lambat, jadi waktu saya latihan listening di YouTube, sering buffering. Akhirnya saya menyerah].* This issue was also experienced by participants P13, P17, and P18, who reported that unstable internet connections often disrupted their access to online listening materials. These challenges discouraged them from regularly engaging with digital resources, which are otherwise valuable for improving listening skills through exposure to authentic spoken English.

Overall, the experiences of the participants above show that environmental barriers such as noise, limited technological equipment, unstable electricity, and slow internet access, are important factors that

affect their ability to listen critically. Without a supportive learning environment and adequate technology, effective listening skills training is difficult to achieve.

2. Strategies and Techniques Used by Students to Overcome Critical Listening Difficulties

a) Environment Preparation

A conducive physical environment is a foundational element in successful critical listening. Many participants described how external distractions, such as noise, crowd, or poor audio quality, negatively influenced their ability to concentrate and process spoken English. To address this, several students developed strategies to prepare their environment before beginning listening tasks.

Participant P4 emphasized the impact of environmental noise on concentration, stating: *"If it's noisy around me, I can't focus on the listening. I usually choose a quiet place and use my headset. If people talk near me or there's noise, I easily lose track and can't follow what the speaker says." [Kalau di sekitar saya berisik, saya nggak bisa fokus mendengarkan. Biasanya saya pilih tempat yang tenang dan pakai headset. Kalau ada orang ngobrol dekat saya atau ada suara-suara, saya mudah kehilangan fokus dan nggak bisa ikuti apa yang dikatakan pembicara].* This difficulty was also reported by participants P1, P2, and P3, who noted that background noise often distracted them and made it hard to concentrate during listening

tasks. These responses highlight that a noisy environment can significantly reduce students' ability to comprehend spoken input effectively.

Participants P5 also mentioned the importance of choosing the right time and place for listening activities: *"I wait until the house is quiet before I start listening. I can't do it if my siblings are playing or the TV is loud. It's too distracting." [Saya tunggu sampai rumah sepi baru mulai mendengarkan. Saya nggak bisa kalau adik-adik saya main atau TV-nya kencang. Terlalu mengganggu].* This difficulty was also indicates by P6, P9, P10, and P18 that students not only consider physical space but also timing, demonstrating intentional planning to optimize comprehension.

Participant P8 shared that using earphones helped improve focus during listening tasks: *"I always use earphones because it helps block other sounds. It makes me feel more focused. Without them, I can hear other people or motorbikes and get distracted easily." [Saya selalu pakai earphone karena itu membantu menutup suara lain. Saya jadi lebih fokus. Tanpa itu, saya bisa dengar orang lain atau suara motor dan gampang terdistraksi].* This strategy was also adopted by participants P7, P11, P13, and P19, who mentioned that minimizing background noise through the use of earphones or finding a quieter space was essential for staying concentrated during listening activities. These shared experiences indicate that environmental control plays a significant role in supporting students' listening performance.

Participant P12 emphasized the importance of physical environment in maintaining focus: *"I sit at my desk, not on the bed, and make sure the room is bright. That way I feel more serious and alert when listening." [Saya duduk di meja, bukan di tempat tidur, dan pastikan ruangan terang. Dengan begitu saya merasa lebih serius dan waspada saat mendengarkan].* This awareness of physical setting was also reflected by Participants P14, P15, P16, and P17, who shared similar habits. They reported that adjusting small environmental details such as lighting, sitting posture, and room setting helped improve their concentration and engagement during listening tasks. These findings suggest that a controlled and comfortable physical space supports cognitive readiness and minimizes distractions.

Collectively, these responses show that environment preparation is not only about removing distractions but also about creating a setting that promotes mental focus and discipline. The students' efforts reflect an understanding of how external factors can influence internal processing, and how managing one's environment is a form of strategic learning behavior.

b) Initial Listening (General Understanding)

In critical listening, the first stage is often gaining a general understanding of the spoken content before diving into details. Several participants shared that they deliberately listened to the audio once or twice just to catch the main idea, without worrying too much about difficult words

or specific information. This strategy helped them reduce anxiety and prepare mentally for deeper analysis in the next steps.

Participant P1 emphasized the importance of not pressuring oneself during the first listening: *"In the first listening, I just try to understand what it's about. I don't pause or repeat. I just listen like I watch a movie. After that, I start to focus on details." [Di pendengaran pertama, saya cuma coba ngerti itu tentang apa. Saya nggak pause atau ulang. Saya dengarkan aja seperti nonton film. Setelah itu baru saya fokus ke detail].* This difficulty was approach by P2, P5, P10, and P15 who reflects the principle of top-down processing**,** where learners activate prior knowledge and expectations to build meaning before analyzing specifics.

Participant P8 echoed a useful strategy, saying: *"Usually, I listen once without taking notes, just to know the topic. If I understand the topic, it's easier to catch the details later." [Biasanya saya dengar sekali tanpa catat, hanya untuk tahu topiknya. Kalau topiknya udah paham, lebih gampang nangkep detailnya nanti].* This approach was also applied by Participants P4, P6, P11, and P12, who reported that identifying the main idea first helped them stay focused and understand specific details more effectively. These responses indicate that recognizing the general theme early on provides a mental framework that supports better comprehension during listening tasks.

Participants P7 described their personal habit of listening through without interruption: *"I don't pause in the beginning. I just try to catch the*

overall meaning. Then I replay and pay attention to the important parts." [Saya nggak pause di awal. Saya coba nangkap makna keseluruhan dulu. Baru setelah itu saya putar ulang dan perhatikan bagian pentingnya]. This approach was also applied by participants P13, P14, P16 & P17, who technique resembles scaffolded listening, where learners build comprehension in stages starting from global understanding to more detailed information.

Participants P9 & P19 added how this strategy helps them avoid feeling overwhelmed: *"If I stop too much in the first listening, I get nervous. So I just listen one time to feel relaxed and catch what I can. Later I go deeper." [Kalau saya terlalu sering berhenti pas pertama dengar, saya jadi gugup. Jadi saya dengerin sekali dulu biar santai dan nangkep yang bisa saya tangkep. Nanti baru saya dengar lagi untuk lebih dalam]*. Their comment illustrates the emotional benefit of initial general listening—by keeping the first round low-pressure, learners can reduce listening anxiety and gain confidence before tackling more cognitively demanding parts.

Overall, these responses demonstrate that initial listening for general understanding serves not only as a comprehension-building step but also as an affective strategy. By starting with the "big picture," students manage both their attention and emotions, paving the way for more effective critical listening in later stages.

c) Focused Listening (Deep Listening)

Content, students move on to a more complex stage: focused or deep listening. At this stage, they aim to catch key information, the speaker's intentions, opinions, and even implied meanings. Many participants reported that this stage required higher concentration, as well as specific strategies like re-listening, pausing, and taking notes.

Participant P8 stated: *"Usually, I listen once without taking notes, just to know the topic. If I understand the topic, it's easier to catch the details later." [Biasanya saya dengar sekali tanpa catat, hanya untuk tahu topiknya. Kalau topiknya udah paham, lebih gampang nangkep detailnya nanti].* This difficulty was also Participants P6, P11, P12 and P14 shared a common strategy to improve their listening comprehension. They reported that listening to the audio once without taking notes helped them identify the general topic first, which made it easier to catch specific details in the next phase of listening .

This strategy illustrates how recognizing the main idea early on provides a mental framework that helps learners stay focused and interpret information more effectively during subsequent listening. It reflects a metacognitive approach, where students actively manage their listening process by first constructing a general understanding before diving into details.

Participant P5 stated: *"Some answers are not direct. I have to listen carefully to guess what the speaker means. I try to write keywords to help*

me." [*Beberapa jawaban nggak langsung. Saya harus dengar baik-baik buat nebak maksud pembicara. Saya coba tulis kata kunci buat bantu saya*]. Participants P1, P7, P9, and P13 reported using a similar strategy to enhance their understanding during listening tasks, particularly when dealing with implied or indirect information. They trained themselves to identify and write down keywords as cues to help interpret the speaker's intended meaning. This strategy highlights the importance of inference-making in critical listening. By focusing on key terms and contextual clues, students are able to go beyond literal understanding and construct meaning even when the information is not explicitly stated. Such approaches reflect higher-order thinking and are particularly useful in academic or test-based listening situations.

Participant P4 said that full concentration was needed to catch specific details: *"In deep listening, I must concentrate more. I close my eyes or stop other things so I can catch small details like contrast or agreement." [Saat listening mendalam, saya harus lebih konsentrasi. Saya tutup mata atau berhenti dari hal lain supaya bisa nangkap detail kecil seperti perbedaan atau persetujuan].* This suggests same like participants P2, P15, P17 & P18 that minimizing distractions helps boost focus and comprehension.

Meanwhile, participant P3 explained that they mentally divided the audio into parts to better process the information: *"I divide the audio into parts in my mind. I listen to one part, then think about it, then go to the next.*

It helps me not to get lost." [Saya bagi audionya dalam pikiran saya. Saya dengarkan satu bagian, lalu saya pikirkan, baru lanjut ke bagian selanjutnya. Ini bantu saya supaya nggak kehilangan arah]. This strategy same like participants P10, P16 & P19 is known as chunking**,** which allows the listener to handle complex input in smaller, manageable segments.

Overall, the participants' techniques during focused listening reveal that deep understanding requires active and reflective processing. Strategies such as re-listening to key parts, note-taking, paying attention to sentence structure and intonation, and making inferences are crucial for comprehending implied messages.

d) Critical Evaluation

The final and most cognitively demanding stage in critical listening is evaluating the speaker's ideas, reasoning, and credibility**.** At this level, students are expected not only to understand what is being said but also to form judgments whether the information is reliable, logical, biased, or well-supported. For many participants, this stage presented a considerable challenge due to limited exposure to argumentative or persuasive speech in English learning environments.

Participant P15 stated: *"Sometimes I agree with the speaker, but I'm not sure why. I don't know if their argument is strong or not. I just feel like its right."* [*Kadang saya setuju sama pembicara, tapi gak tahu kenapa. Saya nggak tahu apakah argumennya kuat atau nggak. Saya cuma merasa itu benar*]. Participants P1, P12, P18, and P19 expressed similar difficulties

in evaluating the strength and logic of the speaker's arguments during listening tasks. They reported feeling unsure about whether the points presented were reasonable or valid, often agreeing without clear justification.

These responses reflect a lack of evaluative listening skills, where learners struggle to assess the credibility, coherence, or persuasiveness of spoken arguments. This limitation suggests that while students may understand the content on a surface level, they often lack the critical framework needed to analyze, question, or reflect upon what they hear—skills essential for academic and critical listening competence.

Participant P17 mentioned difficulty in distinguishing between facts and opinions, particularly in spoken texts: *"In listening, it's hard to know if something is a fact or just opinion, especially if the speaker sounds confident." [Waktu listening, susah tahu itu fakta atau cuma opini, apalagi kalau pembicaranya terdengar yakin].* This statement underscores how tone and delivery can influence perception, and how students must develop critical awareness to separate content from persuasion.

Participant P2 reflected on their hesitation to challenge information due to language barriers: "Even if I feel something is weird or not true, I don't say anything because I'm not confident in my English to explain why." *[Kalau saya merasa ada yang aneh atau nggak benar, saya diam aja karena nggak percaya diri jelasin kenapanya dalam Bahasa Inggris].* This experience was echoed by Participants P4, P5, and P13, who also admitted

that their limited language skills often made them refrain from questioning or evaluating what they heard. These responses highlight how linguistic insecurity can obstruct critical engagement. Even when students notice inconsistencies or questionable arguments, the inability to articulate thoughts in English prevents them from expressing doubt or forming deeper analysis.

Participant P10 shared how unfamiliar cultural references hindered their ability to evaluate content critically: “Sometimes I don’t understand the context, like why something is important in their culture. So, I can’t really judge their point.” *[Kadang saya nggak ngerti konteksnya, kayak kenapa sesuatu penting di budaya mereka. Jadi saya nggak bisa benar-benar menilai pendapatnya].* Similar difficulties were experienced by Participants P7, P8, P9, and P11, who also struggled to grasp the deeper meaning or relevance of ideas rooted in different cultural backgrounds. These findings highlight the importance of cultural competence in critical listening. Without sufficient cultural understanding, students may fail to interpret the speaker’s intention or evaluate arguments effectively, especially when the perspectives presented are shaped by unfamiliar norms or values.

In summary**,** critical evaluation requires learners to go beyond understanding and into analysis, reflection, and judgment. The participants’ responses indicate that this skill is underdeveloped due to limited training

in argument evaluation, unfamiliarity with discourse structures, and low confidence in expressing critiques in English.

e) Comparative Listening (Contextual Analysis)

Comparative listening involves the ability to analyze spoken information in relation to other contexts such as previous knowledge, different perspectives, or contrasting ideas. This skill is essential in critical listening because it encourages students to reflect, compare, and contextualize what they hear, rather than just accept it at face value. However, for many participants in this study, this advanced level of listening remains difficult due to limitations in exposure, experience, and instruction.

Participant P11 admitted: *"I just listen and try to understand the message. But I don't really think, 'Is this the same as what I learned before?' I never compare."* [*Saya cuma dengar dan coba pahami pesannya. Tapi saya nggak pernah mikir, 'Apa ini sama dengan yang pernah saya pelajari?' Saya nggak membandingkan*]. This tendency was also shared by Participants P3, P6, P13, and P17, who rarely compared new information with prior knowledge or reflected on its consistency with their understanding.

This indicates that for many students, comparative thinking is not yet an automatic part of their listening process. They tend to focus solely on surface comprehension rather than actively evaluating or connecting the input to prior knowledge. This may be attributed to a lack of instructional emphasis on metacognitive strategies, such as self-questioning, reflection,

and comparison skills that are essential for critical listening and academic growth.

Participant P14 explained that it was hard to notice contradictions or differences between speakers: *"When two speakers say different things, I get confused. I don't know which one is right, or how to compare their opinions."* [*Kalau dua pembicara ngomong hal berbeda, saya jadi bingung. Saya nggak tahu mana yang benar, atau gimana cara membandingkan pendapat mereka*]. This difficulty was also shared by participants P1, P2, P3, and P8, who admitted that they often struggle to evaluate contrasting viewpoints or determine which argument is stronger. These findings suggest that many students are still developing the cognitive flexibility required to hold multiple perspectives in mind. Without structured support, they may feel lost when faced with differing opinions during listening tasks. This highlights the need for explicit instruction on how to identify, map, and evaluate contrasting ideas, which is a core component of critical listening.

Participant P12 pointed out the challenge of comparing unfamiliar content*: "Sometimes the topic is about something I never learned, so I don't have anything to compare it to." [Kadang topiknya tentang hal yang belum pernah saya pelajari, jadi saya nggak punya apa pun untuk dibandingkan]*. This issue was echoed by Participants P4, P9, and P10, who similarly reported difficulties in drawing comparisons due to limited background knowledge. These responses highlight that effective comparative listening is not solely reliant on listening proficiency but also on content familiarity

and cross-disciplinary awareness. When students lack prior exposure to the subject matter, their ability to make meaningful contextual links or critically evaluate information becomes significantly limited.

Participants P18 & P5 reflected that cultural differences also made comparison challenging: *"In my culture, some ideas are different, but I don't know how to explain that or compare it with what the speaker says."* [*Di budaya saya, beberapa ide berbeda, tapi saya nggak tahu gimana cara menjelaskannya atau membandingkannya dengan yang dikatakan pembicara].* This points to the importance of cultural literacy in developing comparative analysis. Students may recognize differences intuitively but lack the language or training to articulate those contrasts.

In conclusion**,** comparative listening requires a high degree of cognitive flexibility, background knowledge, and cultural awareness. The findings suggest that many students have not yet been trained to listen critically across contexts. Instructional approaches that integrate contextual discussions, comparative tasks, and reflective listening journals may help students strengthen this skill over time.

f) Reflection and Synthesis

Reflection and synthesis are higher-order processes in critical listening. They involve not only understanding the spoken message but also thinking deeply about its meaning, evaluating its relevance, and integrating it with prior knowledge. These skills are central to developing critical thinking through listening. However, participants in this study indicated that

these stages are particularly challenging, largely due to limited training and unfamiliarity with reflective learning practices.

Participant P11 stated: *"After listening, I don't really think much about it again. I just answer the questions or move to the next task." [Setelah mendengarkan, saya nggak terlalu mikirin lagi. Saya langsung jawab soal atau lanjut ke tugas lain].* This pattern was echoed by P1, P2, and P3, who similarly reported treating listening as a task to complete rather than an opportunity for deeper thinking. Such responses indicate that post-listening reflection is often overlooked. Students may miss chances to consolidate their understanding, evaluate ideas critically, or connect listening input to broader contexts. Without structured guidance or habits of reflection, listening remains a surface-level activity with limited long-term impact.

Then, Participant P9 reflected on the difficulty of forming a personal opinion based on what they listened to: *"Sometimes I have an opinion, but I don't know how to connect it with what I just heard. I feel like I can't explain it clearly." [Kadang saya punya pendapat, tapi saya nggak tahu gimana cara menghubungkannya dengan apa yang saya dengar. Saya merasa nggak bisa menjelaskannya dengan jelas].* This pattern was echoed by P5, P6, & P7, who similarly the struggle to synthesize information, especially when students are not confident in expressing their reasoning or drawing connections between ideas.

Participant P14 confessed how easy it was to forget the content shortly after listening: "I usually forget the details after listening. Maybe if

I write a summary, it will help, but we don't usually do that in class." *[Saya biasanya lupa detailnya setelah mendengar. Mungkin kalau saya nulis ringkasan bisa membantu, tapi itu jarang dilakukan di kelas].* This sentiment was echoed by Participants P13, P12, and P11, who similarly admitted that the absence of summarizing or reflective writing habits made it hard for them to retain information. They often listened passively and moved on without reviewing or processing what they had heard. These responses indicate that although reflective strategies such as summarizing, paraphrasing, or note-taking could support long-term comprehension, such approaches were not systematically embedded in their learning experience. This highlights the potential benefit of incorporating structured post-listening activities that encourage retention, synthesis, and critical engagement with the material.

Participant P8 admitted*: "Sometimes I don't really understand the main message until I listen again and think about it more." [Kadang saya belum paham inti pesannya sampai saya dengarkan ulang dan pikirkan lebih jauh].* This response same with participants P9, P10, P15 & P16 suggests that reflection requires both time and support, such as repeated listening or guided discussion. It also reinforces the idea that critical synthesis is a gradual process that may not occur during first exposure.

In conclusion, reflection and synthesis are essential but often underdeveloped aspects of critical listening. Teaching practices that include guided reflection, peer discussion, post-listening journals, or synthesis tasks

can foster students' ability to internalize and critically respond to listening content in more meaningful ways.

g) Practical Application

Critical listening does not end with comprehension or reflection; it culminates in the practical application of ideas. This refers to how students apply what they hear to real-world situations, academic tasks, or decision-making. However, many participants in this study reported difficulty in translating listening input into meaningful actions or applications.

Participant P1 stated: *"I understand what the speaker says, but I don't know how to use it in my writing or speaking."* [*Saya paham apa yang dikatakan pembicara, tapi saya tidak tahu bagaimana menggunakannya dalam menulis atau berbicara*]. This issue was also experienced by Participants P19, P10, P5, and P15, who expressed similar difficulties in bridging their listening comprehension with speaking or writing performance. Although they could grasp the content of the audio, they often found it challenging to apply vocabulary, expressions, or ideas in productive language use. This reflects a common gap between passive understanding and active output, emphasizing the need for more integrative instruction that connects listening input with communicative practice.

Participant P2 pointed out a lack of follow-up or meaningful engagement with listening materials in class: *"In class, we listen to recordings, but we don't really use the information after. It's just for answering questions." [Di kelas, kami dengar rekaman, tapi informasi itu*

tidak benar-benar kami gunakan setelahnya. Hanya untuk menjawab soal saja]. This observation was reinforced by Participants P8, P12, P16, and P18**,** who described similar experiences where listening tasks were treated as isolated assessments rather than opportunities for communication, discussion, or application. These accounts suggest that classroom listening tends to be product-oriented focusing solely on correct answers without encouraging students to process, respond to, or integrate the content into broader language use. As a result, critical thinking and active learning opportunities are lost, limiting the depth of learners' engagement with the material.

Participant P7 reflected on how meaningful input is often lost due to lack of follow-up practice: *"When I hear something useful, like a new opinion or idea, I sometimes forget it quickly because we don't practice using it." [Kalau saya dengar sesuatu yang berguna, seperti opini atau ide baru, saya kadang cepat lupa karena tidak ada latihan untuk menggunakannya].* This sentiment was echoed by participants P3, P9, P14, and P4**,** who similarly described how valuable ideas encountered during listening were not retained because they were rarely discussed, written about, or applied in further tasks. Their experiences highlight that without active engagement such as group discussions, reflective writing, or debates critical input tends to fade. Encouraging students to reuse and reflect on what they've heard helps transform listening from a passive activity into a dynamic process of knowledge construction and critical thinking.

Participant P6 reflected on how meaningful input is often lost due to the absence of follow-up activities: *"When I hear something useful, like a new opinion or idea, I sometimes forget it quickly because we don't practice using it." [Kalau saya dengar sesuatu yang berguna, seperti opini atau ide baru, saya kadang cepat lupa karena tidak ada latihan untuk menggunakannya].*

This perspective was similarly expressed by participants P11, P12 and P17, who noted that ideas or insights gained during listening tasks were rarely retained due to the lack of opportunities to apply them in class. The absence of post-listening engagement such as group discussions, reflective writing, debates, or follow-up projects appears to limit students' ability to internalize and critically engage with the content. These findings indicate that critical listening becomes more effective when learners are encouraged to actively reuse and reflect on the material, thereby transforming it from a passive intake into an active process of meaning-making and knowledge integration.

In summary**,** practical application is the final but often neglected step in critical listening development. It requires learners not only to comprehend and analyze spoken input but also to use it in meaningful, purposeful ways. Instructional strategies that promote active transfer of listening content into real or academic tasks are therefore essential to help students internalize and apply what they hear effectively.

B. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings obtained from interview data and student listening scores related to the difficulties faced by Tadris English students at IAIN Langsa in completing Critical Listening courses. The data is analyzed thematically and supported by theoretical and empirical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. In this section the research findings are conducted by integrating with current studies and scholarly perspectives in the field of critical listening, particularly in the context of Indonesian EFL learners. The analysis reflects students' lived experiences and empirical insights, which support academic rigor. Those were:

1. Difficulty Understanding Diverse English Accents

   Students reported challenges in understanding various native English accents, especially British and Australian, with greater familiarity toward American accents. This aligns with Maharani, who found that 93.9% of Indonesian EFL students were more familiar with American English, making comprehension more difficult when encountering unfamiliar accents.[69] The lack of exposure to diverse accents is a major phonological barrier in listening.

   In many EFL contexts, particularly in Indonesia, listening comprehension tends to rely heavily on standardized American English

[69] Reynita Adlina Maharani, "Indonesian Efl Postgraduate Students' Perception Toward Accent in Listening Comprehension," *Premise: Journal of English Education.* Vol. 12. No. 2 (2023): 559.

materials, such as those found in textbooks, movies, and language learning platforms. As a result, learners develop a phonological schema attuned specifically to American pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation.[70] When exposed to less familiar varieties such as British Received Pronunciation, Australian English, or regional dialects—students struggle to recognize words they would otherwise understand in an American accent. According to Nur Fauzia & Poedjiastutie surveyed EFL students in Malang and reported that learners preferred accents they were familiar with (e.g. American or local), while unfamiliar accents like Thai or Indian were rated as significantly more difficult due to unpredictable stress patterns and pronunciation shifts.[71]

These findings collectively show that accent unfamiliarity significantly increases processing demands: while learners might recognize a word in isolation, differences in vowel length, syllable stress, connected speech, or prosodic rhythm make accurate recognition in streaming audio difficult. Moreover, the dominance of American English in many EFL curricula (the "mononormative bias") limits the development of flexible phonological schemas needed to process global English varieties.

[70] Muhammad Adi, Nasrullah Nasrullah, and Elsa Rosalina, "Investigating Efl Students' Listening Comprehension: Problems and Causes," *ELite Journal : International Journal of Education, Language and Literature.* Vol. 2. No. 1 (2021): 12–25.

[71] Adinda Nur Fauzia and Dwi Poedjiastutie, "Exploring EFL s Tudents ' Preferences for English Accents : A Survey-Based Study in a Listening Class," *A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching, Literature and Linguistics.* Vol. 12. No. 1 (2025): 405–425.

2. Fast Speech Delivery Inducing Cognitive Load

One of the most commonly reported difficulties in critical listening is understanding speech delivered at a rapid pace. Students often struggle to follow messages conveyed by native speakers due to the fast speech rate, which imposes a high cognitive load on the listener.[72] This condition interferes with automatic word recognition and reduces working memory capacity, making it difficult to maintain accurate comprehension.

Supporting this, Chiu and Chen conducted an experimental study involving Taiwanese EFL learners and found that listening comprehension significantly improved when the speech rate was slowed from 116 to 98 words per minute.[73] Their findings indicated that speech exceeding typical processing thresholds led to a decrease in comprehension accuracy, particularly in tasks that required inference and retention of detailed information. Similarly, Hunter used dual-task experiments to examine the impact of cognitive load on listening. His study revealed that under high cognitive demand, response times in word recognition tasks were significantly delayed, even when recognition accuracy remained stable. This implies that while learners may recognize the words correctly, their

[72] Mehrak Rahimi and Mehran Sayyadi, "The Cognitive Load of Listening Activities of a Cognitive-Based Listening Instruction," *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics.* Vol. 9. No. 2 (2019): 382–394.

[73] Chao-Wen Chiu and Tsung-Pin Chen, "Speech Rate and Young EFL Learners' Listening Comprehension," *English Language Teaching*. Vol. 16. No. 7 (2023): 74.

ability to process and comprehend the message in real time is hindered by the fast speech rate.[74]

In conclusion, fast-paced speech in listening activities presents a serious barrier to comprehension by overloading learners' cognitive resources. It limits the efficiency of working memory and delays interpretive processing, especially in academic contexts where inferential understanding is crucial. Slowing down the speech rate or providing pre-listening support may alleviate these challenges and improve learners' processing fluency.

3. Limited Vocabulary Knowledge

Limited vocabulary knowledge emerged as a critical barrier for EFL learners: students often fixated on unfamiliar words during listening activities, which disrupted their ability to grasp the overall message. This phenomenon was clearly observed in this study, where learners tended to stall cognitively when encountering unknown lexical items. Supporting this finding, Rakhman, Tarjana, & Marmanto revealed that Indonesian EFL learners frequently face internal and external challenges in listening comprehension, with vocabulary limitation ranked among the most significant obstacles.[75] They found that even when the main idea was clear,

[74] Cynthia R. Hunter, "Dual-Task Accuracy and Response Time Index Effects of Spoken Sentence Predictability and Cognitive Load on Listening Effort," *Trends in Hearing*. Vol. 25 (2021): 1-15.

[75] Fachriza Amalia Rakhman, Sri Samiati Tarjana, and Sri Marmanto, "Indonesian English Department Students Listening Difficulties and Listening Strategies," *Ijer*. Vol. 4. No. 2 (2019): 60–67.

students often failed to follow the argument due to unknown words that hindered inferential processing.

Further reinforcing this link, Suryanto examined the correlation between vocabulary mastery and listening skills among lower-level EFL learners in Indonesia. The results indicated a modest but meaningful positive relationship: students with stronger lexical knowledge performed better in listening tasks, underscoring how vocabulary breadth supports comprehension.[76] Similarly, Lidiyatul Izzah & Keeya identified vocabulary recognition and phonological awareness as primary listening challenges among Indonesian learners, alongside speech rate and passage complexity. They reported that lexis recognition issues often led to incomplete understanding, even when contextual cues were present.[77]

Collectively, these studies illustrate that limited vocabulary not only impairs word recognition but also diminishes learners' ability to engage in higher-order listening processes, such as inference and summarizing. Consequently, unfamiliar lexical items become cognitive bottlenecks that interrupt the flow of comprehension especially in critical listening settings. To support effective listening comprehension, particularly in advanced or critical contexts, EFL instruction must prioritize systematic vocabulary development. This includes pre-listening vocabulary activation, lexical

[76] Bradhiansyah Tri Suryanto, "Revealing the Relationship Between Vocabulary Mastery and Listening Skills," *International Journal of English Education and Linguistics (IJoEEL)*. Vol. 5. No. 1 (2023): 69–83.

[77] Lidiyatul Izzah and Khodijah Keeya, "Common Listening Challenges: Indonesian EFL Learners' Perception," *English Language in Focus (ELIF)*. Vol. 1. No. 2 (2019): 95-106.

chunk awareness, and explicit training on coping strategies for encountering unknown words thus enabling learners to better maintain macro-sense even when micro-lexical disruptions occur.

4. Difficulty Maintaining Attention and Motivation

Many students reported experiencing difficulty in maintaining attention during listening tasks, particularly when the audio recordings were lengthy or when environmental distractions were present. Such challenges are frequently exacerbated by listening anxiety and low motivation. Chriswiyati and Subekti conducted a survey study involving 74 Indonesian EFL learners and found a negative correlation between the use of socio-affective listening strategies (e.g., peer discussion, positive self-talk) and listening anxiety.[78] Learners who employed these strategies more often tended to report lower anxiety levels, suggesting that emotional support mechanisms can help mediate stress and improve focus.

Supporting the qualitative evidence, Astrid carried out a multiple-case study in three Indonesian universities and identified four primary sources of listening anxiety: lack of listening skills, poor attention control, mood disturbances, and classroom environment conditions. They emphasized that disruptions during listening activities such as background noise or long duration were main triggers for cognitive disengagement.[79]

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[78] Eunike Putri Chriswiyati and Adaninggar Septi Subekti, "Indonesian L2 Learners' Listening Anxiety and Socio-Affective Listening Strategy: A Survey Study," *Englisia: Journal of Language, Education, and Humanities.* Vol. 9. No. 2 (2022): 32.

[79] Annisa Astrid , "Indonesian EFL Students' Anxiety Factors and Solutions for Listening Comprehension: Multiple Case Study," *Studies in English Language and Education.* Vol. 11. No. 1 (2024): 41–58.

The ability to maintain attention and motivation during listening tasks is significantly influenced by both psychological and environmental factors. Socio-affective strategies demonstrate effectiveness in lowering listening anxiety and boosting focus. Therefore, integrating such strategies along with deliberate attention scaffolding and environmental improvements is essential for enhancing sustained attention and learning outcomes in EFL listening classrooms.

5. Concentration and Attention Issues

Many students reported substantial difficulty sustaining concentration during long listening tasks or when exposed to distracting learning environments. This issue echoes the findings of Prastiyowati who conducted research on university students in Malang and determined that moderate levels of listening anxiety were often rooted in an inability to maintain focus compounded by distractions in the surrounding environment and the nature of the materials used.[80] Similarly, Astrid in a multiple case study across universities in Palembang found that lack of attention, poor classroom environment, and students' mood significantly contributed to listening anxiety and reduced engagement during listening activities.[81]

In conclusion, concentration and attention issues present a significant obstacle to critical listening among Indonesian EFL learners.

[80] Santi Prastiyowati, "Anxiety on Students' Listening Comprehension in University Students in Malang," *A Journal of Culture English Language Teaching Literature & Linguistics*. Vol. 6. No. 1(2019): 65-77.

[81] Astrid , "Indonesian EFL Students' Anxiety Factors and Solutions for Listening Comprehension: Multiple Case Study." *Studies in English Language and Education*. Vol. 11. No. 1 (2024): 41-58.

Addressing these barriers requires both environmental support such as quiet, conducive classrooms and quality audio and instructional strategies that enhance students' focus and emotional readiness, ultimately reducing listening anxiety and improving comprehension outcomes.

6. Anxiety During Listening Tests

Students in this study consistently reported that listening anxiety negatively impacted their ability to process spoken English during tests. This finding aligns with Fanandi's mixed-methods study at IAIN Palangka Raya, which identifies internal factors such as tension and low self-confidence as primary contributors to anxiety in critical listening classes.[82] Specifically, Fanandi found that students often felt confused or overwhelmed by spoken input, even when they understood individual words, because psychological pressure disrupted their cognitive control. These internal stressors reduce the efficiency of working memory and impair metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating which are essential for successful listening comprehension.

Further support comes from Astrid , who conducted a multiple case study of 21 undergraduate EFL students across three universities in Palembang. They identified four key anxiety triggers: lack of listening skills, attention difficulties, mood fluctuations, and classroom environment. Among these, listening anxiety emerged as a significant barrier; high-

[82] Fanandi, "The EFL Students Internal Factor Causing Critical Listening Anxiety at IAIN Palangka Raya." *IDEAS: Journal on English Language Teaching and Learning, Linguistics and Literature*. Vol. 10. No. 1 (2022): 489-508.

pressure test environments and internal doubt were reported to erode students' focus and comprehension.[83] These studies suggest that listening anxiety operates not only as a psychological obstacle but also as a cognitive constraint restricting working memory capacity and reducing engagement with metacognitive strategies.

Listening anxiety during assessments poses a significant barrier to comprehension in Critical Listening, particularly in high-stakes test environments. The internal factors of low confidence and elevated stress effectively inhibit working memory and disrupt metacognitive engagement. Thus, addressing affective challenges through strategies such as anxiety-reduction exercises, test simulations, and confidence-building interventions is crucial for enhancing listening performance in EFL contexts.

To address the difficulties students encountered in critical listening, several pedagogical solutions can be proposed. The first issue frequently mentioned was related to phonological challenges, including unfamiliar accents and the speed of native speakers. As noted by participants, many struggled to follow the content when the speaker spoke too fast or used unfamiliar pronunciation patterns. This difficulty can be alleviated by gradually exposing students to authentic audio materials featuring a variety of English accents such as British, American, or Australian English. Another significant solution lies in enhancing vocabulary preparedness and inference

[83] Astrid., "Indonesian EFL Students' Anxiety Factors and Solutions for Listening Comprehension: Multiple Case Study." *Studies in English Language and Education*. Vol. 11. No. 1 (2024): 41-58.

skills. Students often lost meaning when they encountered unfamiliar terms. Therefore, pre-listening vocabulary activities are essential to activate prior knowledge and build expectations about the topic. Research by Evi Karlina indicates that pre-teaching key phrases or keywords helps students feel more prepared and enables them to focus on meaning rather than decoding individual words during listening.[84] Moreover, providing practice in making inferences through note-taking and summarization helps develop the higher-order thinking skills essential for critical listening.

Moreover, the findings showed that students often failed to retain useful ideas because there was no follow-up activity after listening. This lack of retention can be addressed by implementing post-listening tasks, such as reflective writing, group discussions, or short presentations. These activities not only deepen comprehension but also promote critical engagement with the listening material. As expressed by Participant P7 and others, listening becomes more meaningful when students can interact with the content and reflect on its relevance. In line with this, applying peer feedback and collaborative analysis tasks can help students clarify their understanding and reinforce new perspectives.

Lastly, to support critical thinking development, educators can introduce reflective listening strategies**,** such as paraphrasing ideas, asking open-ended questions, and evaluating speaker intentions. These techniques

[84] Evi Karlina Ambarwati and Praditya Putri Utami, "Learners Perspective : The Contribution of Pre- Listening Activities on Learner ' S Listening," *PROJECT (Professional Journal of English Education).* Vol. 5. No. 6 (2022): 1305–1310.

help learners go beyond comprehension and begin to assess, question, and interpret what they hear skills that are essential for academic and real-world contexts.[85] In summary, solutions to students' difficulties in critical listening should not only focus on comprehension but also on creating a pedagogical environment that encourages active engagement, emotional safety, and reflective thinking**.** Through carefully planned pre-, while-, and post-listening stages, as well as attention to affective factors, educators can empower students to become more competent and confident critical listeners.

The discussion highlights that critical listening challenges faced by EFL learners stem from multiple interrelated factors: linguistic (accent, vocabulary), cognitive (speed, concentration), and affective (anxiety). These findings are supported by both student narratives and previous literature, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach in listening instruction. Pedagogical implications include incorporating more exposure to diverse accents, slower-paced input for beginners, vocabulary pre-teaching, and anxiety-reducing strategies during listening tasks.

[85] Sulistyani Sulistyani, "Exploring Critical Thinking Activities in Listening Comprehension Exercises," *Premise: Journal of English Education* Vol. 12. No. 2 (2023): 767.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

A. Conclusion

1. The findings of this research indicate that the fourth-semester students of the English Education Department at IAIN Langsa experienced various difficulties in performing critical listening. These difficulties were influenced by multiple factors, including linguistic aspects such as limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, and the fast pace of speech; cognitive challenges involving memory limitations and insufficient background knowledge; as well as affective barriers like anxiety and low self-confidence. Moreover, external factors such as poor audio quality, environmental noise, and unstable technological conditions further hindered their ability to comprehend, analyze, and evaluate spoken information effectively.
2. In response to these challenges, the students applied several strategies and techniques to support their listening performance. They prepared a conducive environment to minimize distractions, listened to the audio repeatedly to capture the general meaning, took structured notes, and summarized the content to reinforce understanding. Additionally, they used prediction strategies based on context, participated in post-listening discussions, and relied on earphones to reduce external disturbances. While these approaches proved useful in addressing basic comprehension issues, the adoption of more advanced techniques such as critical analysis, evaluation of arguments, and reflective responses remained limited. Therefore, it is necessary to provide

more systematic pedagogical guidance to help students strengthen their critical listening competence in academic contexts.

B. Suggestions

1. For Lecturers/Teachers

Provide explicit instruction on *critical listening strategies*, including how to identify speaker bias, evaluate arguments, and distinguish between facts and opinions.Incorporate a variety of English accents (e.g., British, Australian, Indian) into listening materials to prepare students for real-world communicative diversity.Create low-anxiety classroom environments that encourage active listening and reduce pressure during assessments.

2. For Students

Practice listening to diverse audio materials outside the classroom, such as podcasts, news broadcasts, or interviews with various English accents. Use effective strategies such as note-taking, repeated listening, summarizing, and post-listening reflection to enhance comprehension. Build vocabulary and background knowledge to support inference-making and deeper understanding of spoken texts.

3. For Future Researchers

Expand the scope of research by involving more participants from various institutions to increase generalizability. Combine qualitative and quantitative methods (e.g., pre-tests and post-tests) to measure the impact of specific listening interventions. Explore how technology-assisted tools (e.g., AI-based listening apps) affect students' critical listening performance.