

Metacognitive Strategies Used in Listening Comprehension in a Vocational School Context

 <https://doi.org/10.31004/jele.v11i5.3308>

*Aziza Arraiyan Andesa, Eva Devi Sofyawati, Wahid Hasim^{abc} 

¹²³Institut Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: azizaandesa2306@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension remains a major challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, particularly vocational high school students navigating English learning under the Merdeka Curriculum. This study explored the listening comprehension experiences of six vocational high school students, focusing on the difficulties they encountered and the metacognitive strategies they used to address them. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Goh's (2000) taxonomy of listening difficulties and Vandergrift & Goh's (2012) metacognitive framework. Goh's taxonomy provided a basis for identifying listening-related difficulties, while the metacognitive framework guided the analysis of students' approaches to managing these challenges. The findings highlighted students' efforts to manage listening difficulties through planning, directed attention, monitoring comprehension, problem-solving, and evaluating their understanding. These strategies reflected students' attempts to anticipate listening demands, identify misunderstandings, use contextual clues, and assess their comprehension. The findings suggest that metacognitive awareness may help learners respond more strategically to listening challenges. This study highlights the importance of incorporating explicit metacognitive strategy instruction into EFL listening activities to support students' listening development in vocational education.

Keywords: *Listening Comprehension, Metacognitive Strategies, Vocational High School, EFL, Merdeka Curriculum*

Article History:

Received 19th September 2026

Accepted 11th October 2026

Published 17th October 2026



INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension is a fundamental component of English language learning, yet it remains challenging for many learners in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts. Students often have limited opportunities to engage with natural spoken English outside the classroom, making it difficult to recognize unfamiliar words, process connected speech, and construct meaning in real time (Field, 2008). These challenges are particularly relevant to vocational high school students (*Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan*, or SMK) in Indonesia, whose education combines general subjects with vocational training. In this context, English learning needs to support both general communicative competence and, where relevant, future workplace communication, such as understanding spoken instructions, interacting with customers, and responding to professional conversations. The Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for more learner-centered and contextualized instruction, making it important to understand how vocational students experience listening difficulties and manage them within their learning environments.

Previous research has primarily examined the difficulties EFL learners encounter when processing spoken English. Goh (2000) identified three broad sources of listening problems: difficulties with speech perception, difficulties in parsing spoken input into meaningful units, and difficulties in utilizing what has been understood to construct meaning. These difficulties may arise when learners cannot distinguish sounds, recognize familiar words in rapid speech, retain information in working memory, or connect spoken messages with their existing knowledge. Field (2008) further explained that listening requires learners to process transient

speech in real time, often without the opportunity to review the input. [Brown & Yule \(1983\)](#) and [Carter & McCarthy \(2006\)](#) also highlighted characteristics of spoken language, including informal grammatical structures, connected speech, elision, and assimilation, which may complicate comprehension. Although these perspectives explain where listening difficulties occur, identifying such difficulties alone does not fully explain how learners respond when comprehension breaks down.

Learners are not merely passive recipients of spoken input; they may also develop strategies to manage listening difficulties. Metacognitive listening provides a useful perspective for examining these responses. [Vandergrift & Goh \(2012\)](#) conceptualized second-language listening as an active process involving learners' awareness, planning, monitoring, and evaluation of their comprehension. Such processes can help learners prepare for a listening task, direct attention toward relevant information, identify misunderstandings, and evaluate whether they have understood a message. Earlier research by [O'Malley et al. \(1989\)](#) and [Wenden \(1998\)](#) also emphasized the role of learners' awareness of learning strategies in regulating their learning. In addition, [Vandergrift et al. \(2006\)](#) developed the Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire (MALQ), which includes dimensions such as directed attention, problem-solving, planning and evaluation, mental translation, and person knowledge. These perspectives provide a basis for investigating not only the difficulties students experience but also the strategies they use to respond to those difficulties.

The two theoretical perspectives serve complementary purposes in the present study. [Goh's \(2000\)](#) taxonomy provides an analytical basis for identifying the nature and sources of students' listening difficulties, whereas [Vandergrift & Goh's \(2012\)](#) framework guides the examination of how students manage those difficulties through metacognitive processes. For example, difficulty recognizing words in connected speech can be examined as a speech-perception problem, while a student's decision to concentrate on key words, use contextual clues, or replay an audio segment can be analyzed as a strategic response. Similarly, difficulty retaining information may be considered alongside students' attempts to monitor understanding or reconstruct meaning from available information. Combining the frameworks therefore allows the study to connect listening problems with students' reported responses rather than treating difficulties and strategies as separate phenomena. This integrated perspective is particularly relevant for exploring strategy use that develops through classroom experiences and independent learning, including among students who have not received explicit metacognitive strategy instruction.

Research on listening instruction in Indonesian vocational education has also examined the use of learning resources and students' metacognitive awareness. [Fikri & Irawan \(2025\)](#), for example, reported a moderate positive relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening competence among twelfth-grade SMK students in Cimahi. Other studies have investigated instructional resources, including audio materials, audiovisual aids, and English-subtitled videos, as potential supports for listening development ([Efendi & Astutik, 2024](#); [Febriani et al., 2022](#); [Wijaya & Waehayee, 2026](#)). [Asnawi et al. \(2025\)](#) also highlighted the challenges vocational learners face when opportunities to encounter spoken English beyond the classroom are limited. These studies provide relevant evidence concerning listening competence, instructional media, and the learning conditions of vocational students. However, the relationship between students' specific listening difficulties and the strategies they report using to manage those difficulties requires further qualitative exploration, particularly in the Indonesian SMK context.

To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative approach to explore the listening comprehension experiences of six SMK students. The six participants are intended to provide in-depth accounts of the difficulties they encounter and the strategies they use during classroom activities and independent learning, rather than to represent all vocational students statistically. A small, purposively selected sample is appropriate for this exploratory focus when participants can provide information-rich accounts relevant to the research questions. Participant selection should therefore be based on clearly stated criteria, such as current enrollment in an SMK, experience learning English listening, and willingness to describe

listening challenges and coping strategies. The use of semi-structured interviews enables the researcher to explore individual experiences in detail while allowing participants to explain their responses in their own words. The adequacy of the sample should be justified through the richness and relevance of the interview data and the extent to which the data address the research questions, rather than sample size alone.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the listening comprehension difficulties experienced by SMK students and examine the strategic and metacognitive approaches they report using to manage those difficulties. It is guided by two research questions: (1) What challenges do SMK students encounter when listening to spoken English? and (2) How do they use strategic and metacognitive approaches to address these challenges during classroom activities and independent learning? By integrating Goh's (2000) taxonomy of listening difficulties with Vandergrift & Goh's (2012) metacognitive framework, this study seeks to provide a more detailed understanding of the relationship between listening challenges and students' responses to them. The findings are expected to inform listening instruction that helps vocational learners become more aware of their comprehension processes and better prepared to manage spoken English in educational and, where applicable, future workplace contexts.

Furthermore, listening comprehension is influenced not only by the linguistic characteristics of spoken input but also by learners' confidence, concentration, and perceptions of their own listening abilities. Learners who experience repeated comprehension difficulties may become anxious, lose confidence, or focus excessively on unfamiliar words, which can prevent them from following the overall message. Astrid et al. (2024) found that listening anxiety among Indonesian EFL students was associated with factors including limited listening skills, lack of attention, mood, and classroom environment. In contrast, learners who recognize these challenges and adjust their listening behavior may be better able to maintain attention and construct meaning from incomplete information. Supporting this perspective, Vandergrift (2003) found differences in metacognitive strategy use between more-skilled and less-skilled second-language listeners, particularly in comprehension monitoring, elaboration, and translation. This suggests that listening difficulties should be examined in relation to the cognitive and affective responses that accompany them. By exploring students' experiences through semi-structured interviews, the present study can provide insights into how linguistic barriers, individual perceptions, and strategic responses interact during listening activities. Such insights may help teachers identify not only the specific sources of comprehension problems but also the forms of support students need to develop more effective and independent listening practices.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore vocational high school students' experiences of English listening comprehension, the difficulties they encountered, and the strategies they used to address those difficulties. Six vocational high school students were selected purposively to provide diverse accounts of listening experiences and proficiency levels. The participants were identified using codes S1–S6 to maintain confidentiality. Before data collection, participants were informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their responses, and consent was obtained in accordance with the applicable research procedures. The researcher's relationship with the participants was [state whether the researcher was their teacher, another school staff member, or an independent researcher]. To minimize potential influence on participants' responses, the researcher emphasized that there were no right or wrong answers and that participation or responses would not affect students' academic evaluations. The study used semi-structured interviews covering four areas: general experiences of learning listening, difficulties in understanding spoken English, strategies for managing listening difficulties, and perceptions of changes in listening ability over time.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted in Indonesian to enable participants to express their experiences clearly and comfortably. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were checked against the recordings to ensure accuracy, and identifying information was removed before analysis. Relevant excerpts were translated into English for reporting, with attention to preserving participants' original meanings. The interview procedure allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions for clarification and obtain more detailed explanations of participants' listening experiences and strategies. The use of participant codes and the careful handling of recordings, transcripts, and translated excerpts helped protect participants' identities throughout the research process.

The interview data were analyzed thematically through a combination of inductive and deductive coding. First, the researcher read the transcripts repeatedly to become familiar with the data and identify accounts relevant to the research questions. Second, meaningful segments describing listening difficulties, coping strategies, and perceived progress were assigned initial codes. Inductive codes were developed from patterns emerging directly from participants' accounts, while deductive codes were informed by Goh's (2000) taxonomy of listening difficulties and Vandergrift & Goh's (2012) metacognitive framework. Third, related codes were compared and grouped into broader categories, such as difficulties with speech perception, parsing spoken input, and constructing meaning, alongside relevant metacognitive strategies reported by participants. Fourth, the categories were reviewed against the transcripts to identify recurring patterns, differences across participants, and accounts that did not fit the emerging interpretations. Finally, the categories were refined into themes and interpreted in relation to the research questions and theoretical frameworks. Selected interview excerpts were used to support the interpretation and demonstrate how the themes were grounded in participants' accounts.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The participants offered different perspectives when it came to their experience in listening lessons. 3 participants (S1, S3, S4) mentioned that listening was enjoyable, connecting this pleasure to the process of discovering the correct pronunciation on words that were previously seen on written forms. "Pengalaman saya dalam belajar listening itu cukup seru." "Nah, serunya itu paling ketika menambah kosa kata baru dan misalkan ada kosa kata yang kita tahu tapi kita kurang tahu dalam penyebutannya. Ketika ada belajar listening itu kita tahu gitu cara penyebutannya itu bagaimana." (S1, personal interview, 2026. On the opposite end, S2, S5, and S6 explained the difficulty they faced along with disengagement from English as a subject. S5 directly linked her struggle with her lack of interest in the subject, rather than to specific tasks that included listening. The difference in responses indicated that the students' general feeling toward English factors in how they work on listening comprehension tasks, a trend that matches the socio-affective aspect of listening described by (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In line with Goh's (2000) classification, the challenges that participants reported covered all three levels of listening comprehension. At the perceptual level, the most common problem to arise were unfamiliar accents and fast speech rate, which were mentioned by S3 and S5 respectively. S3 explained that after memorizing, the accent remains a challenge in understanding "Kalau yang susah dari listening itu dari Aksen, Jadi Kadang kita suka Salah paham gitu kalau Listening. Selain aksen, sisanya gampang Kalau hafal." (S3, personal interview, 2026). On the parsing level, limited vocabulary and confusion between words with similar sounds arise as the issues. This issue was brought up by S4's confusion of 'Flower' and 'Flour' and S1's mishearing the word 'Perhaps'. One of the learners in utilization level, S1, explained how his own habit of translating speech word by word instead of understanding the overall meaning caused confusion in learning. Additionally, 5 of the 6 participants mentioned that environmental noises made the difficulties worse by taking up limited attention, a point that Field (2008) highlights as essential for processing speech in real time. This pattern is similar to what has been found with Indonesian vocational students, who also

face ongoing challenges in understanding English because they are not exposed to real, everyday spoken English outside of the structured language used in classrooms (Asnawi et al., 2025). Notably, these challenges were seldom mentioned by participants as final points; instead, they were often followed, within the same interview responses, by explanations of how the student had tried to address them, which hinted at the strategic approaches discussed later.

Even so, although the participants referred to a number of difficulties, each of the six of them spoke about employing active strategies to cope with problems in understanding rather than giving up on the task. These strategies fell into patterns that are very similar to the planning, monitoring, and evaluating processes described by (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). O'Malley et al. (1989) and Wenden (1998) had also earlier identified these same processes as essential components of strategic second language listening. The participants demonstrated monitoring by requesting that recordings be repeated or played back to them when they didn't fully understand something (S1, S4, S5, S6). This allowed them to go over the information once again that they had at first not understood. Evaluation and problem-solving were shown by the frequent, mostly self-initiated use of digital and AI-based tools by four of the six participants to deal with specific vocabulary problems. This trend is in line with intervention research, which indicates that podcasts (Efendi & Astutik, 2024), audio-visual materials (Febriani et al., 2022), and subtitled videos (Wijaya & Waehayee, 2026) can effectively support vocational English as a Foreign Language learners' listening skills when used in a structured manner. I sometimes use AI to search. "Terkadang saya search di AI. Jadi tolong analisis gimana penjelasan ini dengan pemahaman pelajar." (S1, personal interview, 2026). Evidence of planning-oriented behaviour can be seen in the participants' informal and self-directed interaction with English outside the classroom, for example by watching movies with subtitles, playing online games with native English speakers, and listening to English songs (S1, S3, S5).

S2 noted that socio-affective barriers can affect the use of these strategies: they hesitated to ask classmates for help for fear of appearing incompetent, showing how listening anxiety can stop students from asking for assistance that might otherwise help them understand better. "Bertanya ke teman aja sih." (S2, personal interview, 2026). Taken together, this set of strategies shows that these SMK students had, even though they had not been given metacognitive strategies directly, acquired at least some degree of independent strategic awareness as a result of repeatedly carrying out listening tasks – something which supports Vandergrift & Goh's (2012) assertion that such awareness can be developed either explicitly or through implicit learning. This explanation is in line with the correlational study carried out by Fikri and Irawan in 2025, in which twelfth-grade students at an SMK in Cimahi were examined. The results of that study showed a significant and moderately strong relationship between metacognitive awareness and listening ability. This quantitative evidence backs up the qualitative trends found in this study and underscores the need to deliberately foster metacognitive awareness in teaching practices rather than letting it develop over time by itself.

All six participants mentioned that they felt their listening skills improved during their studies. They gave different reasons for this improvement, such as developing a greater personal interest in English, being exposed to more listening materials over time, and consistently applying the coping strategies discussed earlier. S6 provided a measurable assessment of her own progress, noting an improvement from about thirty percent understanding to fifty percent over time. "Soalnya dari sebelumnya kayak emang gak ngerti banget ya." (S6, personal interview, 2026) Several participants also connected improved listening skills with greater confidence in communication, indicating that, from the learners' point of view, listening is seen as connected to speaking ability rather than being a separate skill. This pattern of self-reported progress, which is largely achieved through learners' own use of strategies rather than just formal instruction, highlights the importance of making these strategies clear and visible in classroom teaching.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the listening comprehension experiences of six SMK students, focusing on their reported difficulties and the strategies they used to manage them. The findings revealed challenges at the perceptual, parsing, and utilization levels described by Goh (2000), particularly those related to accents, speech rate, vocabulary, and environmental noise. Participants also reported using self-directed strategies consistent with the metacognitive framework of Vandergrift and Goh (2012). These findings suggest that listening instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum could provide more opportunities for students to develop awareness of their listening processes through activities involving planning, monitoring comprehension, addressing difficulties, and evaluating understanding. Teachers may also consider integrating explicit metacognitive strategy instruction into listening lessons to support students' independence and engagement in contextualized English learning relevant to their vocational needs. However, because this study documents students' experiences and reported strategy use rather than experimentally testing an instructional intervention, further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of such instruction in improving listening comprehension.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to express their gratitude to the Almighty God (Tuhan Yang Maha Esa) for His blessings and guidance throughout the course of the college study. The researcher would also like to thank the lecturers who guided the author during the course of this research. Special thanks are also given to the author's friends for being on the author's side and motivating the author during the course of this research, along with the author's family.

REFERENCES

- Asnawi, A., Sikumbang, R., Tamba, S. P., Ritonga, Y. R., & Zega, I. (2025). The listening comprehension problem of vocational students. *Amaliah: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat*, 9(2), 720–726 <https://doi.org/10.64685/jmec.v3i1.36>
- Astrid, A., Khodijah, N., Zuhdiyah, Z., & Yuliyanti, A. Y. (2024). Indonesian EFL students' anxiety factors and solutions for listening comprehension: Multiple case study. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 11(1), 41–58. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v11i1.30976>
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the spoken language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, R., & McCarthy, M. (2006). *Cambridge grammar of English: A comprehensive guide to spoken and written English grammar and usage*. Cambridge University Press <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688206071403>
- Efendi, A. Y., & Astutik, Y. (2024). Podcasts boost listening skills in vocational high school students. *Indonesian Journal of Education Methods Development*, 19(3). <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijemd.v19i3.845>
- Febriani, H., Asvio, N., Rahmadoni, J., & Vivekanantharasa, R. (2022). Improving EFL learners' listening skills by using audio-visual aids. *Linguists: Journal of Linguistics and Language Teaching*, 8(2), 216–230. <https://doi.org/10.29300/ling.v8i2.7662>
- Field, J. (2008). *Listening in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fikri, F., & Irawan, B. (2025). Metacognitive awareness and listening proficiency: A correlational study of vocational school students in Cimahi. *Journal of English Pedagogy and Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 48–63 <https://doi.org/10.2174/0118743501422272251006211402>
- Goh, C. C. M. (2000). A cognitive perspective on language learners' listening comprehension problems. *System*, 28(1), 55–75 [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X\(99\)00060-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(99)00060-3)
- O'Malley, J. M., Chamot, A. U., & Küpper, L. (1989). Listening comprehension strategies in second language acquisition. *Applied Linguistics*, 10(4), 418–437 <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/10.4.418>
- Vandergrift, L. (2003). Orchestrating strategy use: Toward a model of the skilled second language listener. *Language Learning*, 53(3), 463–496. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467->

- Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. C. M. (2012). Teaching and learning *second language listening: Metacognition in action*. Routledge <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2012.10.004>
- Vandergrift, L., Goh, C. C. M., Mareschal, C. J., & Tafaghodtari, M. H. (2006). The metacognitive awareness listening questionnaire: Development and validation. *Language Learning*, 56(3), 431–462 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2006.00373.x>
- Wenden, A. L. (1998). Metacognitive knowledge and language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 19(4), 515–537 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.00033>
- Wijaya, M. R. R., & Waehayee, W. (2026). Using English-subtitled YouTube narrative videos to improve EFL listening comprehension in a vocational high school. *New Language Dimensions*, 7(1), 72–82. <https://doi.org/10.26740/nld.v7n1.p72-8>