



# An Analysis of Listening Difficulties Faced by Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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## Abstract

This study explores the difficulties in English listening comprehension faced by children of Indonesian migrant workers in a non-formal education center located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Data were collected through questionnaire and interviews conducted over a period of one month. The findings reveal five major challenges: (1) multilingual environment, which hinders English language comprehension due to the influence of other languages; (2) limited access to education, resulting in difficulties in English language comprehension due to inadequate facilities and resources; (3) social and economic factors, which impede English language comprehension due to limited access to technology and internet; (4) lack of authentic English exposure, leading to difficulties in English language comprehension due to insufficient exposure to authentic English language; and (5) psychological factors, including motivation and self-confidence, which affect English language comprehension due to anxiety and low self-esteem. These elements are interconnected and based in the students' language setting, educational system, and social-emotional background. The research utilizes a sociocultural framework to examine these challenges and highlights the necessity for inclusive, context-sensitive teaching methods and better educational support systems to bolster the English listening abilities of marginalized students. The results enhance the comprehension of language learning in diverse environments and emphasize the significance of personalized educational strategies for at-risk groups.

**Keywords:** *Children, Difficulties, Educational access, Multilingual Environment, Psychological barrier*

## **Introduction**

In the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and global communication, listening comprehension is a critical ability in second language acquisition. Effective communication, comprehension, and general language proficiency all depend on this receptive ability. According to Zhang & Chen (2023), listening is a sophisticated cognitive process that includes processing auditory information, deciphering contextual clues, and coming up with pertinent answers. Even while listening is sometimes seen as a passive activity, it really requires learners to comprehend language quickly and actively.

According to Nguyen & Pham (2023), two major difficulties encountered in the setting of EFL learning are a restricted vocabulary and high levels of listening anxiety. According to Horwitz (2023), psychological elements like fear of misunderstandings or a lack of comprehension of assignments can have a detrimental effect on students' motivation and self-worth. Unfamiliar accents, rapid speaking, ambiguous pronunciation, and low audio quality all make these challenges worse. For children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, who frequently have particular socioeconomic and language obstacles, the issue gets more complicated.

These migrant workers' capacity to develop is hampered by a number of issues, including limited access to native resources, difficult learning environments, and issues with their English language proficiency. The KKN program has observed that the strongest communities are home to a large number of migrant groups, which implies that their children have less access to technical and educational resources. Children's difficulties in formal education and their often-nonexistent legal status are the root causes of this disorder. It should be noted that the availability of daily courses and regulated curriculum reflects Malaysia's often informal or community-based educational system for migrant children. Furthermore, the Malay language is frequently given priority in Malaysian language and education regulations, which makes it harder for these disadvantaged populations to acquire and receive high-quality English language instruction.

Children's language learning paths are also influenced by the cultural and linguistic backgrounds brought by immigrant families. Despite its numerous benefits, bilingualism can present difficulties while learning a language. Antoniou et al. (2015) show how students' ability to understand and produce English phonemes might be hampered by cross-linguistic interference from a dominant mother tongue, such as Indonesian or Malay. The development of English hearing comprehension may be hampered by early and significant exposure to the local language, according to research by Lee & Huang (2018) and Chen et al. (2021).

Nonetheless, Dewaele & Li (2018) stress that the impact of exposure to other languages might be influenced by individual characteristics including motivation, educational background, and classroom atmosphere. This demonstrates that even if bilingualism helps people become more linguistically aware, cross-language interference is still a major obstacle that has to be overcome, particularly when it comes to pronunciation and sound distinction.

Furthermore, the Malay language is frequently given priority in Malaysian language and education regulations, which makes it harder for these disadvantaged populations to acquire and receive high-quality English language instruction.

Additionally, listening comprehension is influenced by educational and psycholinguistic characteristics. According to Field (2018) and Vandergrift & Baker (2015), students frequently have trouble understanding genuine discussions since they aren't exposed to spoken communication and have weak listening skills. Misunderstandings can also lead to confusion, such as the orthographic illusion, which is the belief that spoken language will mirror written text (Matsuda & Gobel, 2020). Students' listening skills are also hampered by emotional factors including anxiety, insecurity, and failure-related dread. However, it has been demonstrated that a positive teaching environment lowers anxiety and boosts motivation. Additionally, Norton & Toohey (2011) stress that real linguistic engagement and a supportive social setting are essential for language acquisition success, particularly for underprivileged kids like immigrant children.

Despite the fact that listening issues in the setting of EFL have been extensively studied, little is known about the particular difficulties experienced by the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. These learners' interconnected linguistic, social, economic, and legal issues necessitate a more thorough and accurate knowledge of the ways in which different elements impact their English listening abilities. Thus, what factors affect the listening comprehension of children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia is the study topic.

The purpose of this study is to look into the challenges that Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia experience while trying to improve their hearing comprehension of English. The significance of determining and examining the linguistic, psychological, technical, and socioenvironmental elements that influence their listening comprehension is emphasized by this study. The findings of this research are expected to provide guidance for more inclusive and effective teaching techniques, while also influencing educational policies and practices for underrepresented student group

## **Method**

To gather information, the researcher provided Indonesian migrant workers' children the opportunity to share their experiences related to developing English listening skills. The researcher employed a survey comprised of ten statements regarding students' perspectives on challenges in learning to listen. The survey was created using existing research and conversations with specialists in language education, and its validity was assessed through an initial pilot test involving a small cohort of students. Responses from students were gathered using a Likert scale to evaluate the difficulty they experienced.

Moreover, five students were purposively chosen for comprehensive interviews to obtain more specific insights into their personal experiences with difficulties in developing listening skills. The interviews were carried out with a series of prepared structured questions and lasted between 30 to 45 minutes, conducted in Indonesian for improved comprehension. As Kothari (2004) indicates that personal interviews are carried out with a specific set of questions established in advance, the interviewer's ability was essential to reveal significant information about the difficulty's students encountered while enhancing their listening skills. Data analysis methods were carried out utilizing a thematic analysis approach, where responses from questionnaires and interviews were examined to uncover emerging themes and patterns. Data saturation was achieved during the interviews when further interviews yielded no new information.

Ethical aspects were a significant emphasis in this research. All participants received explicit details about the study's purpose and were required to give written consent before taking part. The researcher made certain that the gathered data would remain private and solely utilized for research objectives. This research offers important insights, but certain methodological constraints must be acknowledged, such as the small participant count (N=21 for questionnaire, N=5 for interviews) and potential sampling biases that could influence the generalizability of the results.

## **Results**

The researcher used a questionnaire to collect data regarding students' perceptions of difficulties in learning English listening. The questionnaire consisted of ten statements given to students, and the sample size in this study was N=20. The table below shows the results of the questionnaire regarding the difficulties students face in developing listening skills.

Table 1. Questionnaire on students' difficulties in learning listening skill among children of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia (N=21)

No	Statements	Strongly Agree		Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	1. I find it difficult to understand the English audio because my environment rarely uses English and the vocabulary in the audio I don't understand.	14,3%	33,3%	33,3%	14,3%	4,8%
2.	2. I am confused about English pronunciation because I am used to hearing various languages such as Malay and Indonesian.	9,5%	38,1%	33,3%	14,3%	4,8%
3.	3. I have difficulty understanding speakers with foreign accents or unclear pronunciation when listening to English audio.	9,5%	38,1%	47,6%	4,8%	0%
4.	4. I can't follow the English audio if the speaker speaks too fast.	38,1%	38,1%	19%	4,8%	0%
5.	5. I feel anxious or scared when taking a listening test in English.	14,3%	23,8%	38,1%	23,8%	0%

6.	The sound quality of the audio used in learning is often unclear or not loud enough. That suit me needs.	0%	33,3%	47,6%	14,3%	0%
7.	The learning facilities (such as audio equipment, special rooms) available at my school are not adequate for English listening lessons.	4,8%	47,6%	42,9%	4,8%	0%
8.	I don't have enough access to quality listening materials because my education is not formal.	4,8%	42,9%	33,3%	14,3%	4,8%
9.	I am not motivated to learn listening in English because I find it difficult to understand.	0%	35%	35%	20%	10%
10.	Learning facilities such as cell phones and internet are not always available.	28,6%	28,6%	28,6%	9,5%	0%

### 1. Multilingual Environment

A multilingual environment indicates that students encounter various languages every day, potentially hindering their capacity to differentiate English sounds and pronunciation. The questionnaire results indicated that 14,3% of students strongly agreed and 33,3% agreed that they faced challenges in comprehending English audio because of the minimal exposure to English in their surroundings and the presence of unfamiliar words. In total, 47.6 students experienced this challenge. Moreover, 9.5% of students strongly concurred and 38.1% agreed that their knowledge of languages like Malay and Indonesian resulted in confusion with English pronunciation. This indicates that roughly 47.6% of the students experienced phonological interference from different languages.

Interview quotes that back this conclusion are:

*"I am accustomed to Indonesian and Malay, so English pronunciation can occasionally sound odd and perplexing to me" (P4) and "My issue lies more with the accent of the speaker." "If the accent is British or Australian, I truly cannot understand" (P5).*

These results indicate that encountering multilingualism and unfamiliar accents cause significant difficulties in understanding spoken English.

## **2. Limited Access to Education**

Limited educational access refers to the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources for effective listening practices. The questionnaire results revealed that 4.8% of students strongly agreed and 47.6% agreed that their school lacked adequate listening facilities, such as audio equipment and dedicated rooms. In addition, 0% strongly agreed and 33.3% agreed that the quality of audio materials used in class was often poor or inaudible, highlighting a significant technical barrier to learning.

Interview quotes that support these findings include:

*"As I learn from a non-formal community, there is no supportive learning atmosphere for listening practice." (P4) and "At home and school hardly anyone speaks English, so I am not used to hearing the language every day." (P1).*

Overall, these findings suggest that institutional and environmental deficiencies critically limit students' opportunities for effective listening practice.

## **3. Social and Economic Factors**

Social and economic challenges play an important role in the development of students' listening skills. According to the questionnaire, 28,6% strongly agreed and 28,6% agreed that access to learning devices, such as smartphones and reliable internet, is inconsistent. This means that over 57% of the respondents face technological barriers that hinder learning. When asked about motivation, 35% agreed that difficulties in listening reduced their motivation, but 35% were neutral and 30% disagreed, indicating a varied motivational response.

Interview quotes that support this finding include:

*"My friends are not interested in learning English either, so I don't have anyone to practice listening or speaking with." (P2).*

There isn't always time for serious studies because my parents work and I have to look after my younger siblings at home. (P5)

This social isolation can reduce practice opportunities and confidence, making sustained language acquisition more difficult. In addition, students' unstable living conditions can further disrupt a consistent study routine.

#### **4. Lack of Authentic Exposure**

The lack of authentic exposure relates to students' insufficient interaction with natural and authentic English speech, which impairs their ability to process audio in real life. The questionnaire showed that 38.1% strongly agreed and 38.1% agreed that they could not follow when the speaker spoke too fast, indicating that more than 76% of students had difficulty understanding fast speech. In addition, 9.5% strongly agreed and 38.1% agreed that unfamiliar accents or pronunciation caused difficulties, while 47.6% were neutral.

Interview quotes that support this finding include:

*"I can understand if the speaker is clear and slow. But if they use terms that I don't often hear, I lose my bearings immediately." (P3) and "Usually I get confused because the pronunciation of English is different from the writing. So even if I know the word, I still can't recognize it when I hear it." (P2). I rarely watch English-language movies or TV shows, so I'm not used to the way people speak in everyday life. I rarely watch English-language movies or TV shows, so I'm not used to the way people speak in everyday life (P1)*

These comments illustrate the gap between written and spoken comprehension in English, which is largely due to the lack of contextualized and real listening practices.

#### **5. Psychological Factors: Motivation and Self-Confidence**

Psychological barriers such as anxiety and low self-confidence significantly affect students' listening performance. The questionnaire results showed that 14,3% strongly agreed and 23,8% agreed that they felt anxious or fearful when taking a listening test in English, this reveals widespread test anxiety related to the listening task. However, regarding loss of motivation due to listening difficulties, 35% strongly agreed and 35% agreed, while 30% disagreed, indicating that not all anxious students lose motivation.



The above data is supported by interviews that have been conducted by students; the interview results include:

*"I often struggle because there are many words that I don't know the meaning of. Sometimes I have to stop and repeat several times to understand." (P1).*

These challenges increase cognitive load and stress, which can slow down progress. Without adequate instructional support and emotional encouragement, students risk becoming unmotivated, which hinders the development of their listening skills of their listening skills.

## **Discussion**

Enhancing the English listening abilities of children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia is a difficult task driven by a number of interrelated reasons. Key themes identified in this study include emotional hurdles, technology gaps, inadequate educational resources, and exposure to many languages. These results highlight the need for focused and context-sensitive help and offer insightful information on the particular challenges encountered by this marginalized group. The multilingual environment where this student lives is one of the biggest obstacles. Although beneficial for multilingual development, daily exposure to Indonesian and Malay often causes phonological interference that makes understanding spoken English difficult.

According to Antoniou et al. (2015), early exposure to the dominant local language can alter the way students perceive English phonemes. Students also reported difficulties adapting to different accents and confusion with unusual English sounds. This language overlap makes it difficult for students to achieve accurate and confident spoken English comprehension.

Beyond linguistic difficulties, this study highlights the consequences of a lack of proper educational infrastructure. Students enrolled in community programs or informal learning centers sometimes lack essential resources, such as specialized learning spaces, top-notch audio technology, and structured listening curriculum. Their exposure to authentic English listening materials is restricted due to this lack of access, which confirms Anderson & Williams's (2024) conclusion that subpar educational environments greatly worsen learning challenges for underprivileged pupils. Furthermore, many youngsters do not always have continual access to dependable digital devices and the internet required for independent listening practice, which is made worse by the technological divide (Putri et al., 2022). This restricted access impedes motivation and opportunity for skill development.

The psychological and emotional components of children's listening abilities are equally important. Anxiety, fear of failing, and low self-esteem frequently surfaces during high-pressure listening tasks, forming cognitive barriers that impede the processing of information (MacIntyre et al., 2017). Social isolation exacerbates these emotions, with limited possibilities for interaction that diminish helpful feedback and practical practice, in keeping with Norton and Toohey's (2011) emphasis on the value of social involvement in language learning. Without a lot of social interaction, students find it difficult to develop their abilities and confidence.

Some kids shown remarkable perseverance and a strong willingness to study in spite of these obstacles. For instance, participants in the lively and captivating English listening activities shown increased desire and persistence, suggesting that teaching strategies based on students' interests might promote learning. These findings are in line with the experiences of other immigrant populations, such as European refugee children, who show impressive adaptability in the face of similar emotional and linguistic challenges (Khamis, 2020). This resiliency validates the potential advantages of a customized support system.

The research's conclusions have important ramifications for educators and decision-makers. This study suggests that funding should be set aside to build digital access initiatives, improve informal learning environments, establish emotional support programs, and encourage community involvement in order to increase possibilities for language practice. These findings also call on Malaysia to establish language policies that promote context-appropriate and adaptive programs that take into account the socioeconomic circumstances and linguistic origins of migrant children.

However, the limited sample size and dependence on self-reported data are two flaws in this study that might restrict generalization. The fact that some students see multilingualism as a means of improving their language awareness rather than as a barrier is a startling discovery that highlights intricate dynamics deserving of more investigation. The ability to generalize these findings to other immigrant populations suggests wider relevance and offers suggestions for developing effective language training in other ethnic contexts.

Overall, the numerous challenges that Indonesian migrant workers' children have when learning to listen to English require all-encompassing and collaborative solutions. With systematic assistance that incorporates emotional coaching, resource access, and a socially rich learning environment, these kids might potentially increase their confidence, involvement, and language understanding in both academic and social domains.

## Conclusion

This research highlights the multifaceted challenges faced by Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia. The five main interconnected factors are the primary obstacles: a multilingual environment, limited access to education, social and economic factors, lack of exposure to authentic English, and psychological factors such as motivation and self-confidence. The use of various languages in daily life often disrupts the understanding of English pronunciation and meaning. Limited educational facilities and lack of access to technology and the internet further narrow their space for independent learning.

Additionally, the lack of exposure to English in real-life usage makes it difficult for students to understand the context and nuances of the language. This is exacerbated by emotional challenges, such as anxiety and low self-confidence, which have a direct impact on their ability to listen to and understand English. Despite these obstacles, this study demonstrates the students' incredible fortitude and drive, demonstrating that substantial language learning gain is possible with the correct assistance and engaging teaching methods.

Collaborative approaches including educators, legislators, and community people are crucial to successfully addressing these issues. We can improve these students' listening comprehension abilities, which will ultimately improve their academic performance and allow them to participate more actively in their social and community endeavors, by making educational materials easily accessible, creating a nurturing emotional environment, and using context-appropriate teaching techniques.

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