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Exploring Listening Anxiety among EFL Students at UIN Alauddin Makassar: Levels, Factors, and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to identify the level of listening anxiety among students of English as a foreign language at Universitas Islam Negeri Alauddin Makassar, the factors contributing to it, and the strategies used to reduce it. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. Quantitative data were collected through a listening anxiety questionnaire completed by 90 second-semester students of the English Education Study Program and analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with six participants and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that most students experienced a moderate level of listening anxiety (81 students, 90.0%), with a mean score of 105.17, while seven students (7.8%) experienced high anxiety and two students (2.2%) experienced low anxiety. Internal factors included limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, panic, and physical and psychological conditions. External factors included fast speech rate, poor audio quality, classroom environment, and lecturer-related factors. Limited vocabulary and fast speech rate were the most dominant causes. Students reduced their anxiety through independent listening practice, peer support, and physical and mental preparation.

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INTRODUCTION

Mastery of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become increasingly important in the global education system, including in Indonesia, because it supports academic needs, opens access to global information, and strengthens competitiveness in the job market. Among the four language skills, listening holds a fundamental position because it is the most frequently used skill in daily communication and serves as a foundation for the development of the other skills. Nevertheless, listening is both important and difficult to learn (Alzamil, 2021) . From an Islamic perspective, listening also holds an important place, as reflected in the command to listen attentively when the Qur'an is recited (QS. Al-A'raf: 204), which parallels the demand for concentration and mental readiness in understanding spoken language.

Because of this importance, researchers and educators need to pay close attention to the variables that affect how well students learn to listen, including psychological elements such as listening anxiety that can impede learning. Foreign language anxiety is among the most significant affective factors in the success of second or foreign language learning. In EFL contexts, many students experience difficulties in listening activities, and these difficulties are often accompanied by anxiety, tension, and worry that interfere with their ability to understand spoken English.

One of the most influential affective factors in foreign language learning is anxiety. (horwitz et al., 1986) described foreign language anxiety as a situation-specific phenomenon, while (Krashen, 1982), explained that negative emotions such as anxiety can form a mental barrier (the *affective filter*)

that prevents language input from being processed. In listening, anxiety is especially relevant because learners must process spoken information in real time without the chance to naturally repeat the input.

(Liu & Yuan, 2021)(Liu & Yuan, 2021)Empirical evidence shows that listening anxiety is a serious problem. A meta-analysis found that listening anxiety had the greatest effect on EFL learning performance among the various types of anxiety, followed by test, speaking, reading, and writing anxiety (dikmen, 2022) . Su, (2025) reported moderate levels of listening anxiety and metacognitive awareness among EFL learners, with listening performance negatively correlated with anxiety ($r = -.27$). Higher anxiety was also associated with lower performance among Chinese undergraduates (Liu & Yuan, 2021), and a review of 49 foreign language anxiety studies published in *System* between 2004 and 2023 showed that EFL learners in several countries experience moderate to high levels of listening anxiety (Yu, 2024) . This anxiety does not stand alone(Öztürk, 2023) found links among classroom, reading, and listening anxiety among 341 Turkish university students, and Zhang & Wu, (2024) showed that listening motivation correlated negatively with anxiety among Chinese EFL learners.

In Indonesia, particularly in Islamic universities such as UIN Alauddin Makassar, English majors face significant challenges in learning listening skills. The learning context is characterized by limited exposure to authentic English outside the classroom, coupled with an education system that has long emphasized text-based learning more than communicative approaches. Astrid et al., (2024) observed that Indonesian EFL students' listening anxiety is shaped by several factors at once, which shows that the problem is not confined to one aspect of learning. In a study of speaking anxiety among Indonesian senior high school students, Marlia et al., (2023) found that most students experienced difficulties in communication skills (average score of 2.84), indicating that students often feel anxious when using English and that this anxiety can hinder their active participation. The phenomenon affects not only academic ability but also the development of communicative competence, which is essential for students' professional futures in an Indonesia that is increasingly integrated with the global community.

Listening anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon involving cognitive, affective, and physiological dimensions that interact with one another. Its impact is not limited to declining academic performance: it can also affect motivation, class participation, and self-confidence, and may lead learners to avoid listening activities altogether. At the same time, the relationship between anxiety and listening is not always straightforwardly negative. Zhang & Wu, (2024) noted that the relationship between motivation and anxiety in listening is dynamic and that a moderate level of anxiety can sometimes produce optimal efficiency, whereas excessive anxiety becomes debilitating. Understanding the level at which anxiety operates, and why, is therefore a prerequisite for helping students manage it.

Previous studies have identified various factors that contribute to listening anxiety. Le My & Do, (2022) , studying 84 non-English-major students in Vietnam, found that anxiety mostly arose from distractions while listening, unfamiliar accents and pronunciation, overly fast speech, and lecturers' attitudes. (Yan, 2023) , using the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) and interviews with 176 English majors at a Chinese university, found that the main sources were inability to understand vocabulary, speech rate, lack of background knowledge, and speakers' accents. Babakhanova, (2024) reported fairly high anxiety among 109 high school students in Kazakhstan, especially when facing various pronunciations, with limited vocabulary, recording speed, time constraints, and lack of concentration as additional factors. In Indonesia, (Astrid et al., 2024) identified lack of listening skills, lack of attention, mood, and classroom environment as the main factors. (Liza & Kembaren, 2022) found that low interest in learning, lack of environmental support, and limited vocabulary caused anxiety among senior high school students in West Sumatra, and Dewi, (2025) showed that psychological problems, unfamiliar vocabulary and complex grammar, learning materials and processes, and the styles of lecturers and peers affected students with high listening anxiety in Purwokerto.

These factors can be grouped into linguistic factors (such as vocabulary, accent, and speech rate), psychological factors (such as panic, fear of making mistakes, and low confidence), and pedagogical and environmental factors (such as lecturer behavior, materials, audio quality, and classroom conditions), together with socio-cultural influences on students' learning (Iftanti & Prastiyo, 2021) . Learner characteristics also matter: learners with higher metacognitive awareness tend to experience lower anxiety and perform better in listening (Su, 2025) , and the mode of instruction can

change how anxiety is experienced, as higher listening anxiety was reported among Chinese undergraduates who studied online during the COVID-19 period (Liu & Yuan, 2021).

Various strategies to reduce listening anxiety have also been examined. Repeating the listening text had positive effects on listener performance, metacognitive strategy use, and anxiety (Holzknecht & Harding, 2024) . Metacognitive interventions, including those combined with dialogic interaction, reduced listening anxiety and improved comprehension (Bozorgian et al., 2024) , improved listening performance and metacognitive awareness among learners with high and low working memory capacity (Muhammadpour et al., 2024) , and improved listening comprehension and self-efficacy among lower-proficiency learners (Milliner & Dimoski, 2024). In terms of technology, mobile-based language learning applications improved listening and speaking skills and reduced foreign language anxiety (Bai, 2024) , and AI-driven speech recognition had a positive impact on listening comprehension and anxiety reduction (Xiao, 2025) .

Taken together, previous research has used qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods designs and has identified a wide range of linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and environmental sources of listening anxiety, as well as strategies ranging from text repetition and metacognitive instruction to technology-assisted learning. Yet these strands of research have rarely been brought together in a single study that measures the level of anxiety, explains its causes, and documents the coping strategies students themselves use.

However, most of these studies were conducted in East Asia and the Middle East, whereas comprehensive research on listening anxiety in Indonesian Islamic universities remains limited. Research in Indonesia has also tended to be descriptive and limited to identifying problems, without exploring contextual strategies from students' perspectives. UIN Alauddin Makassar has distinctive student characteristics and a learning environment in which the integration of Islamic and general sciences shapes foreign language learning experiences. This study addresses that gap by combining quantitative measurement and qualitative exploration to (1) identify the level of listening anxiety, (2) identify the factors that contribute to it, and (3) explore the strategies used to reduce it among EFL students at UIN Alauddin Makassar. The novelty of this study lies in combining these three aspects in a single mixed-methods inquiry in an Indonesian Islamic higher education context.

The setting of this study adds a further dimension. At UIN Alauddin Makassar, English Education students study within an institution that integrates Islamic and general knowledge, and they are expected to develop English proficiency both for academic study and for their future roles as teachers and professionals. Listening courses are a central part of that preparation because they train students to understand lectures, conversations, and media in English, which are the same kinds of input they will later need to select, explain, and model for their own learners. If anxiety interferes with listening at the beginning of their studies, the effects can accumulate across later courses, which makes early attention to the problem important.

A further gap concerns whose voice is heard in research on coping. Much of the existing evidence on strategies comes from interventions designed by researchers and tested on groups of learners, and it says relatively little about the informal strategies students already use on their own. Knowing what students do, and what they say helps, is valuable because it indicates which strategies are realistic in their daily circumstances and where instruction might build on existing habits rather than replace them.

Accordingly, this study was guided by three research questions: (1) What is the level of listening anxiety among EFL students at UIN Alauddin Makassar? (2) What factors contribute to their listening anxiety? (3) What strategies do they use to reduce it? The study focuses on second-semester students of the English Education Study Program because students at this stage are still adapting to university-level English instruction and to the demands of listening courses, which makes them a particularly informative group for examining anxiety at an early point in their studies.

Students' achievement in language learning is determined not only by cognitive abilities such as comprehension and memory but also by affective factors. The affective domain refers to the emotional aspects of learning, including feelings, attitudes, motivation, interest, self-confidence, and anxiety, which shape how learners respond to learning situations (Bloom et al., 1964) . (Brown, 2007) noted that positive affective conditions enhance learners' participation, confidence, and success, whereas negative emotional conditions such as fear and anxiety can hinder involvement and reduce performance. Anxiety is considered one of the most influential affective variables. Krashen, (1982)

proposed that when anxiety is high, the affective filter becomes stronger, blocking input from reaching the language acquisition system and reducing comprehension, whereas learners who are relaxed, motivated, and confident have a lower filter and acquire more input.

Listening anxiety is a specific form of foreign language anxiety that occurs when learners feel tense, worried, or fearful while engaging in listening activities in English. It arises largely because learners must process spoken information in real time without the opportunity to naturally repeat the inputhorwitz et al., (1986) identified communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation as the components of foreign language anxiety, and each has a clear counterpart in listening: learners may fear misunderstanding spoken input, worry about their performance in listening tests, or be concerned about being evaluated negatively when they cannot answer. (Kim, 2000) developed the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) to measure this construct specifically, and the scale has since been widely used in studies of EFL listening.

The factors that contribute to listening anxiety can be classified as internal and external. Internal factors originate within the learner and include limited vocabulary, insufficient listening skills, low self-confidence, and insufficient background knowledge. External factors originate in the learning situation and include fast speech rate, unfamiliar accents, poor audio quality, and inappropriate teaching methods. Both kinds of factors disrupt concentration and understanding, and, in line with Krashen's (1982) hypothesis, they raise anxiety, strengthen the affective filter, and reduce comprehension.

Strategies for overcoming listening anxiety need to address both cognitive and emotional aspects of listening. Krashen (1982) argued that reducing anxiety is essential for language acquisition and that a supportive, low-anxiety environment is the key condition. Metacognitive strategies that involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's listening can strengthen learners' sense of control (Bozorgian et al., 2024; Muhammadpour et al., 2024). Technology that allows listeners to pause, replay, and adjust the pace of audio gives opportunities for repeated exposure, which parallels the benefits found for repeating listening texts (Bai, 2024; Holzknecht & Harding, 2024; Xiao, 2025). Teachers can further reduce anxiety through pre-listening activities, appropriate materials, positive encouragement, and collaborative learning in pairs or groups, and learners themselves can use relaxation and self-preparation techniques.

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis and the foreign language anxiety theory of Horwitz et al. (1986). Listening anxiety is positioned as a key variable influenced by internal and external factors and manageable through particular strategies, so that the affective filter is lowered and listening comprehension improves (Figure 1). Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on affective factors in EFL listening in Indonesian Islamic higher education. Practically, its findings are expected to help lecturers, study programs, and students design listening instruction that pays more attention to psychological aspects.

The significance of this study is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the study contributes empirical evidence to the literature on affective factors in EFL listening by testing Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis and Horwitz et al.'s (1986) conceptualization of foreign language anxiety in an Indonesian Islamic higher education setting, and by showing how quantitative levels and qualitative explanations can be combined. Practically, the findings are expected to benefit several parties. For lecturers, they provide an understanding of the specific sources of anxiety in listening classes so that teaching methods, materials, audio quality, and classroom atmosphere can be adjusted. For students, they raise awareness that listening anxiety is common and manageable and offer examples of strategies used by peers. For the study program and the university, they can inform the design of listening courses, language laboratory facilities, and supporting programs. For future researchers, they provide a basis for further studies on affective factors in language learning.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Setting

This study used a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative data were collected first to measure the general level of listening anxiety, and qualitative data were then collected through interviews with participants selected on the basis of the questionnaire results to explore the contributing factors and the strategies used. The two data types were integrated at the interpretation stage to obtain a fuller understanding and to triangulate the findings. The study was conducted at the English Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher

Training, UIN Alauddin Makassar, which offers an intensive EFL curriculum that includes listening courses.

A mixed-methods design was chosen because listening anxiety has both measurable and experiential dimensions. The quantitative stage made it possible to determine the general level of anxiety across a relatively large group of students and to select interview participants on a systematic basis, while the qualitative stage allowed students to explain in their own words why they felt anxious and how they coped. Using the two together produced a more complete picture than either could provide alone.

The research site was chosen because the English Education Study Program at UIN Alauddin Makassar includes listening courses in its curriculum and enrolls students from varied educational backgrounds, so that variation in listening experience and anxiety could be expected. The site was also accessible to the researcher, which supported the sequential collection of questionnaire and interview data.

Participants

The population was second-semester students of the English Education Study Program in the 2025/2026 academic year. The quantitative sample was selected through purposive sampling, using the criterion of second-semester students who were taking or had taken courses involving English listening skills, which yielded 90 respondents. For the qualitative stage, six students were purposively selected from respondents who were willing to be interviewed, taking into account variation in anxiety levels in the questionnaire results; two of them were in the high category and four in the moderate category. Interviewing stopped when no significant new information emerged (data saturation). Interview participants are referred to in this article as R05, R07, R16, R59, R64, and R68.

Second-semester students were chosen because they have begun to experience university-level listening instruction but are still adapting to the demands of academic English, so their anxiety is likely to be visible and their recollections of listening classes are recent. Table 1 shows the profile of the six interview participants, whose total questionnaire scores ranged from 85 to 127.

Table 1 Profile of Interview Participants

Code	Total Score	Category
R05	85	Moderate
R07	91	Moderate
R16	127	High
R59	100	Moderate
R64	117	Moderate
R68	124	High

Instruments

The quantitative instrument was a 33-item listening anxiety questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) by (Kim, 2000) , translated into Indonesian and adapted to the Indonesian EFL context. The items covered anxiety related to text comprehension, speech rate, classroom environment, and personal performance, using a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The instrument was validated by experts in language education and psychology, and item consistency was examined using Microsoft Excel. The qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview guide of ten open-ended questions about experiences of anxiety, the influence of lecturers, difficulties and loss of concentration while listening, and ways of coping with anxiety; the guide was adapted from previous research on students' anxiety in listening classes.

The questionnaire used first-person statements about feelings and reactions during listening, such as nervousness when facing unfamiliar spoken English, worry about missing words, and reactions to fast speech or unclear audio, and respondents indicated the extent to which each statement applied to them. The interview guide was designed to explore the questionnaire themes in depth. Its open-ended questions allowed participants to describe specific incidents, to explain their feelings and the circumstances that triggered them, and to describe what they did to cope. Follow-up questions were used to clarify answers and obtain detailed explanations.

The interview questions moved from general to specific. Participants were first asked whether and when they felt anxious in listening classes, then about the role of the lecturer and the classroom, then about the specific difficulties and moments of lost concentration they had experienced, and finally about what they did, or thought should be done, to reduce anxiety. This order allowed participants to settle into the conversation before discussing more sensitive experiences and made it possible to compare accounts across participants.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Forms with an explanation of the study's purpose, instructions, and assurance of anonymity, and participants were given one to two weeks to complete it. Interviews were conducted face to face on campus, lasted approximately 30 minutes per participant, were recorded with permission, and were transcribed verbatim. Because the interviews were conducted in Indonesian, the excerpts reported below were translated into English by the researcher. The whole data collection process took four to six weeks and observed research ethics, including data confidentiality and informed consent.

Data collection took place in two stages. In the first stage, the questionnaire was distributed and the responses were scored and categorized. In the second stage, participants for the interviews were selected from the categorized respondents, contacted, and interviewed individually. Because the interview participants were selected on the basis of the questionnaire results, the qualitative data could be interpreted in relation to the students' measured levels of anxiety.

Several ethical and quality considerations guided the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the procedures, and their right to decline or withdraw before they completed the questionnaire or were interviewed. Questionnaire responses were anonymous, and interview participants are identified only by codes so that their identities are not revealed. To support the quality of the data, the questionnaire was reviewed by experts before use, the interview guide was kept consistent across participants while allowing follow-up questions, and the interview findings were compared with the questionnaire results during interpretation as a form of triangulation.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics in Microsoft Excel. Each response on the five-point Likert scale was assigned a score, as shown in Table 2. Reverse scoring was applied to items worded opposite to the anxiety construct, such as statements expressing confidence or comfort in listening, so that higher scores consistently indicated higher anxiety (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2021). Table 3 shows how the scores of such items were reversed.

Table 2 Likert Scale Scoring of Questionnaire Items

No.	Response	Score
1	Strongly disagree	1
2	Disagree	2
3	Neutral	3
4	Agree	4
5	Strongly agree	5

Source: DeVellis and Thorpe (2021).

Table 3 Reverse Scoring of Items Worded Opposite to the Anxiety Construct

No.	Response	Original Score	Reversed Score
1	Strongly disagree	1	5
2	Disagree	2	4
3	Neutral	3	3
4	Agree	4	2
5	Strongly agree	5	1

Source: DeVellis and Thorpe (2021).

With 33 items scored from 1 to 5, total scores ranged from 33 to 165. Total scores were classified into three categories using the class interval formula (Sugiyono, 2019), as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Categories of Listening Anxiety

No.	Category	Score Interval
1	High	122–165
2	Moderate	78–121
3	Low	33–77

Source: Sugiyono (2019).

The interview data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) . The analysis began with full transcription of the recordings and repeated reading of the transcripts to become familiar with the data. Important statements were then coded, the codes were grouped into potential themes and sub-themes on the factors contributing to anxiety and on strategies for reducing it, the themes were reviewed against the transcripts, and the final themes were interpreted narratively and related to the questionnaire findings and to previous research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Listening Anxiety

Table 5 presents the distribution of listening anxiety levels among the 90 students who completed the questionnaire. Scores ranged from 49 to 127, with a mean of 105.17 (SD = 11.99) and a median of 104, placing the group as a whole in the moderate category. Eighty-one students (90.0%) were classified as having moderate anxiety, seven students (7.8%) high anxiety, and two students (2.2%) low anxiety.

Table 5 Distribution of Students' Listening Anxiety Levels (N = 90)

Category	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High	122–165	7	7.8
Moderate	78–121	81	90.0
Low	33–77	2	2.2
Total	**33–165**	**90**	**100.0**

Note: Mean total score = 105.17 (SD = 11.99), moderate category.

Figure 2 shows how the individual scores were distributed. Most scores clustered between 90 and 119, with relatively few students at either extreme, which is why the mean fell in the middle of the moderate range. Only one student scored in the 40s and one in the 70s, and nine students scored between 120 and 129, seven of whom were in the high category. Thus, listening anxiety was experienced by almost all students, although in most cases it was not severe.

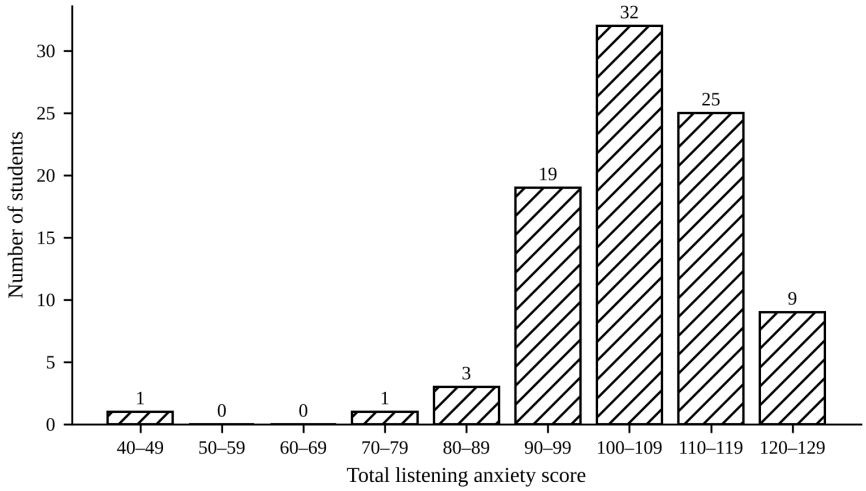


Figure 1 Distribution of Students' Total Listening Anxiety Scores

Factors Contributing to Listening Anxiety

Thematic analysis of the interviews with six participants produced two main themes on contributing factors, namely internal and external factors, and one theme on the strategies students used to reduce anxiety. The themes and sub-themes are summarized in Table 6. Because the interviews were conducted in Indonesian, the excerpts below are English translations.

Table 6 Summary of Themes and Sub-Themes from the Interviews

Theme	Sub-Theme	Main Finding
Internal factors	Language competence	Limited vocabulary and similar-sounding words hinder understanding of audio (mentioned by all six participants)
	Accent recognition	Unfamiliar accents, such as British and American, cause misinterpretation of words
	Anxiety and panic	Panic when forgetting vocabulary, fear of missing words, and failing to answer within limited time
	Physical and psychological conditions	Fatigue, lack of sleep, and loss of focus reduce concentration
External factors	Speech rate	Audio is too fast, making key words hard to catch (mentioned by all six participants)
	Learning environment	Noisy classroom, unclear audio quality, and seating at the back of the room
	Role of the lecturer	Tense atmosphere and demands for answers without audio repetition increase anxiety; explanation before answering reduces it
Strategies	Independent practice	Listening to English films, songs, and podcasts and practicing regularly
	Social support and environment management	Sitting near peers who are good at listening and using *ice breaking* before the audio is played
	Self-preparation	Adequate sleep, mental readiness, prayer, and reviewing material or asking the lecturer for the audio

Internal factors

Internal factors arise from within the learner and comprised four sub-themes. The first was language competence. Limited vocabulary was the most prominent internal factor and was mentioned by all six participants. R16 explained:

> "I think it's just a lack of vocabulary, and also there are some words that sound similar, so it's kind of hard to understand." (R16)

R59 related the problem to an earlier stage of study:

> "There wasn't any this semester, but there was last semester. Maybe it's because I was still in my first semester back then, so I felt like my vocabulary wasn't very extensive yet, and sometimes I had trouble understanding the vocabulary, but not that often." (R59)

R05 stressed that vocabulary knowledge is the first thing a listener needs:

> "The first thing is to expand your vocabulary, of course, because if you don't have a broad understanding, it's as if you're getting nowhere since the audio is in English, and if you don't know certain words, you won't know how to spell them, and that's the main problem." (R05)

These accounts show that unknown or similar-sounding words interrupt comprehension in the middle of an audio passage, leaving a gap that listeners cannot easily fill because they cannot pause the speaker. The resulting sense of falling behind increases anxiety, which is the mechanism described by Krashen's (1982) affective filter.

The second sub-theme was accent recognition. Differences in accents, such as those between British and American English, led to misinterpretation of words. R64 stated:

> "Sometimes there are accents that sound unfamiliar, and if, for example, the audio quality isn't good, what I hear and what I write end up being different." (R64)

Accent difficulty is classified here as an internal factor because it reflects the learner's limited exposure to varied English pronunciation, although it interacts with external conditions such as audio quality.

The third sub-theme was anxiety and panic. Several participants panicked when they forgot vocabulary or could not answer within the limited time. R59 described a moment of sudden forgetting:

> "It happened once, back in my first semester, when I suddenly forgot the vocabulary, and I suddenly panicked and got anxious." (R59)

R64 identified panic as the most frequent obstacle to concentration:

> "I usually can't concentrate because I panic first, you know? Panic is the factor that comes up most often." (R64)

R68 felt anxious because "I'm afraid I'll miss a word when the audio plays." These statements reflect the fear of failing to understand and of giving wrong answers, which corresponds to the test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation components identified by Horwitz et al. (1986).

The fourth sub-theme was physical and psychological condition. Fatigue and lack of sleep reduced concentration. R64 admitted sometimes coming to class unwell:

> "I stayed up late the night before, so I have trouble concentrating during class the next morning." (R64)

R68 likewise linked anxiety to a loss of focus, saying that it tends to occur "when I lose my focus or concentration, or when I'm tired." Listening requires sustained attention to a stream of speech that cannot be paused, so even a short lapse caused by tiredness can lead to missed information and then to worry.

Taken together, the internal factors show a chain of events that begins with a linguistic limitation and ends in an emotional reaction. A learner who does not recognize a word or an accent loses part of the message, becomes worried about what has been missed, and then panics when asked to respond, and fatigue makes each step in this chain more likely. The internal factors were not isolated from one another, which is why participants often described several of them in the same account.

External factors

External factors relate to conditions outside the learner and comprised three sub-themes. Speech rate was the external factor mentioned most often and by all six participants. Fast speech shortened

processing time, so that key words were missed and concentration was lost. R05 said that he felt anxious when:

> "the speaker in the audio speaks too fast, so I have a hard time picking out the key words." (R05)

R16 recalled that the audio in the first listening class was "played too fast, so it was kind of hard to understand," and R68 described the same difficulty:

> "Often, when the audio plays, the speaker talks very quickly and at length, so when I try to understand it, I might not be able to process it properly." (R68)

R07 added that at the beginner stage, the audio played is usually too fast for learners. That all six participants named speech rate suggests that the pace of listening materials is a shared pressure point for students at this stage, in line with the findings of Yan (2023) and Le My and Do (2022).

The learning environment was also a source of distraction, in the form of classroom noise, unclear audio quality, and seating position. R16 reported:

> "When some of my classmates are talking while the audio is playing it's hard to focus on the audio because my classmates are making so much noise." (R16)

R68 gave a similar example of a friend being noisy while the audio was playing, which disrupted his concentration. R07 noted that students sitting at the back of the classroom have difficulty hearing the material and therefore need the audio repeated, while R64 complained that the audio was sometimes unclear, partly because of the speakers. These conditions are not caused by learners' ability, but they make an already demanding task harder and raise anxiety.

The role of the lecturer was dual: it could increase or decrease anxiety depending on teaching practices. R05 described lecturers who put "too much pressure on students, teaching in a way that's too serious, so that students get a little nervous about answering." R07 made a similar point about classes that feel tense:

> "It's the lecturer who make the classes so tense; that's what usually makes it hard to learn, so there aren't any fun classes; they're all just so tense." (R07)

R16 was anxious because of how answers were demanded:

> "After the audio is played, there's no time to review it, but the lecturer immediately asks for an answer even though I haven't figured out the answer yet." (R16)

In contrast, R68 had a reassuring experience because the lecturer "explains it first before we answer, so we don't feel too lost when answering." This contrast shows that pedagogical approaches influence students' affective responses and that supportive teaching can reduce anxiety even when other factors, such as audio speed and vocabulary, remain challenging.

In summary, the external factors were conditions that students could not easily change by themselves: the speed of the recording, the quality of the sound system, the noise made by classmates, and the way a lecturer organized the activity. Students nevertheless described them as strongly affecting their anxiety, which indicates that these conditions deserve as much attention as learners' own skills. Importantly, the participants who described the most severe anxiety, R16 and R68, both in the high category, mentioned several external conditions at once, namely speech rate, classroom noise, and lecturer practices, which suggests that high anxiety is associated with the accumulation of difficulties rather than a single cause.

Strategies to Reduce Listening Anxiety

The interviews produced three sub-themes of strategies that students used to manage and reduce anxiety. Independent practice was the most frequently mentioned, in the form of exposure to authentic English materials through films, songs, and podcasts. R68 stated, "I often listen to English songs, English podcasts, and English movies," and R64 recommended podcasts in particular:

> "Listen to podcasts often. If, for example, you don't like [podcasts], you can listen to English-language music; technology has come a long way these days." (R64)

R05 believed that "as we practice, that anxiety will definitely decrease and become less intense." Regular practice familiarized students with pronunciation patterns, natural speech speed, and varied accents, thereby reducing the uncertainty that fuels anxiety.

R05 elaborated on why practice matters:

> "Well, of course, by continuing to practice because as we practice, that anxiety will definitely decrease and become less intense, since we've already gained experience through our practice sessions, so we won't be caught off guard when we listen to the audio." (R05)

The second sub-theme was social support and environment management. R16 chose to sit at the front near friends who were better at listening because "it's kind of calmer and more relaxed," and R68 suggested an *ice breaking* activity before the lesson or before playing the audio "to create a more conducive classroom environment." These strategies show that students recognize the classroom atmosphere as something that can be shaped, either by their own seating choices or by activities that relieve tension.

The third sub-theme was self-preparation, both physical and mental. R64 tried to go to bed early when a listening class was scheduled for the next day:

> "If I know I have a listening class tomorrow, I try to go to bed early." (R64)

R05 emphasized mental preparation and practice the night before, together with staying focused during the audio:

> "Prepare yourself, don't panic or be afraid to answer. And most importantly, the night before, we need to prepare ourselves and practice. Also, once the audio starts playing, we need to stay focused and not get hung up on a single keyword in the answer." (R05)

R07 prayed often and, when something was hard to understand, reviewed the material or asked the lecturer for the audio to study further. Together, these strategies target the sources of anxiety that students identified: practice addresses vocabulary, accent, and speech rate; social and environmental strategies address distraction and tension; and self-preparation addresses fatigue and panic.

Reading Table 6 across themes shows a close correspondence between problems and responses. Vocabulary, accent, and speech rate, the most frequently mentioned problems, are met by the most frequently mentioned response, independent listening practice. Classroom noise, tension, and rushed answers are met by social and environmental strategies and by participants' expectations of lecturers. Fatigue and panic are met by self-preparation. Students thus not only identified the sources of their anxiety but also had a fairly clear sense of what would reduce it, which is a useful starting point for instruction that builds on strategies students already use.

For transparency, Table 7 gives the original Indonesian wording of ten key excerpts quoted above, one or more for each sub-theme.

Table 7 Original Indonesian Wording of Key Interview Excerpts

Sub-Theme	Participant	Original Excerpt (Indonesian)
Language competence	R16	*kayaknya kurangnya kosa kata sih kak terus itu lagi kayak ada kata yang mirip-mirip sehingga kayak sulitki juga dimengerti*
Accent recognition	R64	*Kadang ada aksen yang terdengar asing terus kalau misalnya kualitas audio tidak bagus jadinya apa yang saya dengar dengan apa yang saya tulis itu berbeda*
Anxiety and panic	R64	*biasanya saya tidak bisa konsentrasi karena panik duluan gitu kak, faktor yang paling sering muncul itu panik kak*
Physical and psychological conditions	R64	*semalam saya begadang jadi paginya pas kelas itu saya kurang konsentrasi*
Speech rate	R05	*ketika pembicara dalam audio tersebut berbicara terlalu cepat sehingga saya agak kesulitan untuk menemukan kata kuncinya*
Learning environment	R16	*Ketika kelas berisik kayak teman-teman yang lain itu ada yang bicara juga pas audio diperdengarkan jadi kayak kurang konsen mi di audionya karena teman-teman berisik*
Role of the lecturer	R68	*dia menjelaskan terlebih dahulu lalu kita jawab, makanya kita tidak terlalu linglunglah pada saat menjawab*
Independent practice	R68	*saya sering kali mendengarkan lagu-lagu bahasa inggris, podcast bahasa inggris dan film-film bahasa inggris*
Social support and environment management	R68	*sebelum memulai pelajaran atau memutar audio lebih baik ice breaking terlebih dahulu untuk lebih membuat ruang kelas lebih kondusif*
Self-preparation	R64	*Kalau misalnya sudah tau kalau besoknya mau kuliah listening saya usahakan untuk tidur lebih awal*

Note: Excerpts are shortened to the parts quoted in this article.

Discussion

The finding that 90.0% of students were in the moderate category shows that listening anxiety is common among EFL students, although for most it did not reach a high level. This is consistent with Su (2025), who reported moderate listening anxiety among EFL learners, with Yu's (2024) review reporting moderate to high anxiety across countries, and with Astrid et al. (2024) on Indonesian university EFL students. Moderate anxiety still deserves attention because it was sufficient to disrupt concentration and comprehension during listening, as the affective filter hypothesis would predict (Krashen, 1982). The seven students in the high category also need special attention from lecturers, since their anxiety is likely to interfere more strongly with learning.

Limited vocabulary and fast speech rate emerged as the most dominant causes, and both were mentioned by all participants. This is consistent with Yan (2023), who identified inability to understand vocabulary and speech rate as main sources of anxiety, and with Le My and Do (2022), who found speech rate and accents to be triggers. The reason can be explained by the real-time nature of listening: unknown words create a processing gap, and fast speech reduces the time available to close it, so listeners miss important information and worry about answering incorrectly. Fear of missing words and panic at failing to answer also reflect the fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety components of Horwitz et al.'s (1986) framework. This interplay of linguistic and psychological factors agrees with Babakhanova (2024), who concluded that the two influence each other in producing listening anxiety, and with Liza and Kembaren (2022) and Dewi (2025), who also found vocabulary limitations and psychological problems among the causes.

The accounts of fatigue and loss of focus show that students' physical and psychological condition is part of the explanation, which supports the view that listening anxiety has cognitive, affective, and physiological dimensions that interact. Participants who were tired or poorly prepared

were less able to cope with the same audio and the same classroom conditions, which helps to explain why students in the same class, hearing the same audio, report different levels of anxiety.

The environmental and lecturer-related findings support Astrid et al. (2024), who identified the classroom environment as a main source of listening anxiety among Indonesian students, and Le My and Do (2022) and Dewi (2025), who also found effects of lecturers' attitudes and styles. Students' request for audio repetition before answers are demanded agrees with Holzknecht and Harding (2024), who found that repeating the listening text reduced anxiety and improved listener performance. Thus, students' anxiety does not arise solely from limited ability but is also shaped by how listening activities are designed and managed in the classroom. The contrast between tense and reassuring lecturer practices indicates that lecturers have considerable influence over the affective climate of the class.

The strategies reported by students were mostly independent practice and exposure to authentic materials, peer support, and physical and mental preparation. These strategies are consistent with Krashen's (1982) emphasis on lowering the affective filter through familiarity, comfort, and confidence. Formal metacognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating, which proved effective in intervention studies (Bozorgian et al., 2024; Milliner & Dimoski, 2024; Muhammadpour et al., 2024), did not emerge as a separate theme in these data, suggesting an opportunity to integrate them into instruction. Students' use of podcasts and digital media also parallels research showing the benefits of technology for listening learning (Bai, 2024; Xiao, 2025).

Linking the quantitative and qualitative strands gives a fuller picture. The two interviewees in the high category (R16 and R68, with scores of 127 and 124) described the most varied sources of difficulty, including similar-sounding vocabulary, missed words, fast and lengthy speech, noisy classrooms, and pressure from answer demands. The interviewees in the moderate category (R05, R07, R59, and R64, with scores of 85 to 117) described the same difficulties but also reported more of the coping resources discussed above, such as regular practice, preparation the night before, and reviewing material afterward. This pattern is suggestive rather than conclusive because it rests on six interviews, but it is consistent with the idea that anxiety depends on the balance between the demands of a listening situation and the resources a learner has to meet them.

Table 8 sets the interview participants' questionnaire scores beside the difficulties and coping strategies they described, as reported in this article.

Table 8 Joint Display of Questionnaire Scores and Interview Findings

Code	Score (Category)	Difficulties Mentioned	Coping Mentioned
R05	85 (Moderate)	Vocabulary; fast speech; lecturers who put pressure on students	Regular practice; mental preparation and practice the night before
R07	91 (Moderate)	Audio too fast for beginners; difficulty hearing from the back; tense classes	Prayer; reviewing material; asking the lecturer for the audio
R16	127 (High)	Similar-sounding vocabulary; fast audio; classroom noise; answers demanded without repetition	Sitting at the front near friends who are better at listening
R59	100 (Moderate)	Limited vocabulary in the first semester; panic after suddenly forgetting a word	Not covered in the excerpts reported here
R64	117 (Moderate)	Unfamiliar accents; unclear audio; panic; fatigue	Going to bed early before listening classes; listening to podcasts and music
R68	124 (High)	Fear of missing words; loss of focus when tired; fast and lengthy speech; noisy classmates	Listening to songs, podcasts, and films; suggesting ice breaking

Note: Based on the excerpts reported in this article.

The context of an Islamic university also appears in the data. One participant included prayer among the ways of coping, which echoes the emphasis in Islamic teaching on listening attentively and relying on God in difficult moments, and which shows that students may draw on religious practices as a source of calm. At the same time, the strategies students reported were largely the same as those reported in secular settings, such as practice, sleep, and peer support, which suggests that the core mechanisms of listening anxiety are shared across contexts even though their expression and the resources for coping differ.

The moderate level of anxiety found here also invites a cautious reading of the earlier suggestion that some anxiety can be facilitative (Zhang & Wu, 2024). The present study did not measure performance, so it cannot determine whether students' moderate anxiety helped or hindered their listening. The interviews, however, describe it mostly in debilitating terms, as loss of concentration, panic, and missed words. This indicates that, for these students, even moderate anxiety is better treated as something to be managed than as a motivating state to be encouraged.

Returning to the three research questions, the findings can be summarized as follows. First, listening anxiety among these students was generally moderate, with a small group experiencing high anxiety. Second, the anxiety was associated with internal factors, namely limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, panic, and physical and psychological condition, and with external factors, namely speech rate, learning environment, and the role of the lecturer. Third, students used independent practice, social support and environment management, and self-preparation to cope. The three answers are connected: the level of anxiety observed reflects the factors that students described, and the strategies they use are directed at those same factors.

These results also bear on the pedagogical recommendations made in earlier studies. Astrid et al. (2024) recommended that listening instruction pay attention to students' attention, mood, and the classroom environment, and the present data support this by showing that students' attention is easily disrupted by noise, fatigue, and fear of missing words. The students' own suggestions, such as ice-breaking activities and the repetition of audio, are modest and practical, and they show that effective changes need not require major resources. Lecturers can begin by pacing activities so that students have time to listen, think, and answer, by checking sound quality before class, and by explaining the task before the audio is played.

The findings also refine how the affective filter can be understood in this setting. In Krashen's (1982) account, the filter is largely a property of the learner's affective state. The participants' accounts show that the filter can be raised by conditions in the classroom, such as a recording that is too fast, a noisy room, or a lecturer who demands immediate answers, in addition to conditions within the learner, such as limited vocabulary or fatigue. In practical terms, this means that the filter is partly a product of the learning situation and can therefore be lowered by changing that situation, not only by changing the learner.

Finally, the similarity between the sources of anxiety reported here and those reported in Vietnam (Le My & Do, 2022), China (Yan, 2023), and Kazakhstan (Babakhanova, 2024) is striking given the differences in language backgrounds, educational systems, and institutional cultures. Vocabulary, accents, and speech rate recur across these settings, which suggests that the core difficulties of foreign language listening are largely shared. What differs is the local organization of teaching and the resources available to learners, which is why contextual studies such as this one remain useful for deciding which responses are most appropriate in a particular institution.

Implications

For students, the findings suggest that listening anxiety is common and manageable, and that vocabulary building, regular exposure to authentic English through films, songs, and podcasts, adequate sleep, mental preparation, and sitting near supportive peers are practical ways to reduce it. For lecturers, the findings suggest creating a supportive and relaxed classroom atmosphere, for example through ice-breaking activities; providing clear audio and adequate equipment; allowing repeated listening and giving students time to think before answers are required; introducing different accents and speech rates gradually; and integrating vocabulary-building activities and extensive listening into courses. For the study program, the findings support attention to listening facilities, such as classroom acoustics and language laboratories, and to the inclusion of metacognitive strategy training in listening courses. For future researchers, the findings point to the value of examining other variables such as listening self-efficacy, motivation, and learning strategies.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The quantitative data were self-reported and came from one study program at one semester level. The six interviewees came from the moderate and high anxiety categories, so the experiences of students with low anxiety are not represented. The study also did not measure listening performance, so the relationship between anxiety and comprehension was not tested directly, and the effectiveness of the strategies reported by students has not been tested experimentally.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that most second-semester EFL students at UIN Alauddin Makassar experienced a moderate level of listening anxiety (81 of 90 students, with a mean score of 105.17), while seven students experienced high anxiety and two experienced low anxiety. The anxiety was influenced by internal factors, namely limited vocabulary, unfamiliar accents, panic, and physical and psychological conditions, and by external factors, namely speech rate, audio quality, classroom noise, and lecturers' teaching practices, with limited vocabulary and fast speech rate as the most dominant causes. Students reduced anxiety through regular listening exposure and practice, peer support, and physical and mental preparation. These findings indicate that reducing listening anxiety requires joint efforts by students and lecturers: vocabulary building and independent practice by students, and a supportive classroom atmosphere, clear audio, and audio repetition by lecturers. Future research is recommended to examine variables such as listening self-efficacy, motivation, learning strategies, and listening proficiency with larger samples and in different contexts, and to test the effectiveness of the identified strategies through experimental designs.

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