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EXPLORING THE LINK BETWEEN PHONEMIC AWARENESS AND LISTENING PERFORMANCE AMONG ENGLISH MAJORS IN PALEMBANG

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Abstract: This study examined the relationship between phonemic awareness and listening performance among English major students, employing a quantitative correlational design to collect data from 83 students through a phonemic awareness assessment and a cloze listening test. The results showed that while most students demonstrated moderate levels of phonemic awareness, their listening proficiency remained low, with the majority scoring in the poor or failed categories. The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.772$, $p < 0.05$) between phonemic awareness and listening performance, with phonemic awareness accounting for nearly 60% of the variance in listening achievement. These findings highlighted the foundational role of phonemic awareness in listening comprehension. The findings also suggested that explicit phonological training, authentic listening exposure, and differentiated instruction were critical to improving students' auditory processing skills. Recognizing individual learner differences and integrating systematic phonemic awareness activities into English language instruction were essential strategies for fostering comprehensive language proficiency. However, the study was limited by its sample size and geographic scope, as it focused solely on English major students from a single region. Future research involving more diverse populations across multiple institutions is recommended to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: *listening-performance, phonemic-awareness, relationships*

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INTRODUCTION

Listening skills are a vital component of language proficiency, particularly for students majoring in English, as they form the basis for effective communication and comprehension. Listening involves intricate cognitive and auditory processes that enable individuals to decode, interpret, and derive meaning from spoken language (Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020; Rost & Brown, 2022; Rost, 2024). For English majors, proficiency in listening is essential for engaging with authentic language inputs, such

as lectures, discussions, and multimedia materials, and for building other linguistic skills like speaking, reading, and writing (Hue, 2024; Sarbunan, 2024; Akapo, Danjuma, & Hussaini, 2024; Nuralisa, Qalyubi, & Mirza, 2025). Despite its importance, listening is one of the most challenging language skills to master, especially in academic contexts where students are exposed to diverse accents, varying speech rates, and complex sentence structures (Newton and Nation, 2020; Goh and Vandergrift, 2021: Aizawa et.al, 2023). These challenges underscore the necessity of investigating factors that influence listening performance to support students in achieving their academic and professional goals.

Phonemic awareness, defined as the ability to identify, differentiate, and manipulate phonemes—the smallest units of sound in a language—is increasingly recognized as an essential factor in language acquisition (Lee, 2020; Rice et.al, 2022; Genelza, 2022;). This skill plays a critical role in phonological processing, enabling students to segment auditory input, recognize patterns in spoken language, and connect phonemes to their corresponding graphemes (Genelza, 2022; Hayes-Harb and Barrios, 2021). While phonemic awareness has traditionally been linked to literacy development, particularly in reading and pronunciation, its potential impact on listening comprehension remains underexplored. Listening requires students to process auditory signals in real-time, segment them into meaningful units, and interpret connected speech, tasks that phonemic awareness can significantly enhance (Trang, 2020; Rost and brown, 2022;). However, the relationship between phonemic awareness and listening proficiency, particularly among students majoring in English, has yet to be thoroughly examined.

Existing research has often focused on cognitive and metacognitive strategies, such as predicting, summarizing, and evaluating, as factors influencing listening skills (Maftoon and Fakhri Alamdari, 2020; Ahmadi Safa and Motaghi, 2024; Al-Khresheh and Alruwaili, 2024). While these strategies are undoubtedly important, they do not address the foundational role of phonemic awareness in auditory processing. Furthermore, the majority of phonemic awareness studies have centered on early childhood education, leaving a gap in understanding its relevance for older students, particularly advanced students in English language programs (Ciesielski and Creaghead, 2020; Krimm and Lund, 2021). The listening demands of advanced students differ significantly from those of beginners, requiring a deeper understanding of phonological nuances, contextual cues, and complex discourse. Additionally, the impact of individual differences—such as linguistic background, motivation, and prior exposure to English—on the relationship between phonemic awareness and listening skills remains insufficiently explored (Inceoglu, 2019; Yu and Zellou, 2019; Turker et.al, 2021).

This research seeks to bridge these gaps by investigating the link between phonemic awareness and listening skills among students majoring in English. By examining this relationship, the study aims to extend the scope of phonemic awareness research beyond its traditional focus on literacy to include listening comprehension. It targets advanced students who face unique challenges in processing diverse accents, speech rates, and complex linguistic structures (Kim et.al 2029; Johnson, Heugten, & Buckler, 2022). Investigating how phonemic awareness contributes to listening proficiency at this level can provide valuable insights into designing instructional strategies that enhance listening skills. Moreover, the study considers the influence of individual differences, analyzing how factors such as

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linguistic background, motivation, and exposure mediate the relationship between phonemic awareness and listening performance (Turker et.al, 2021; Sok, Shin and Do, 2021).

The findings of this study have the potential to inform language teaching practices by emphasizing the importance of integrating phonemic awareness activities into listening instruction. For example, teachers could design exercises that focus on identifying phonemes in connected speech, distinguishing minimal pairs, and recognizing word boundaries in authentic audio materials (Nasim et.al, 2022; Almusharraf et.al, 2024). Such activities would help students develop the auditory discrimination skills necessary for effective listening. Furthermore, the research could guide the development of assessment tools that measure both phonemic awareness and listening proficiency. Identifying specific phonemic features that contribute to listening skills would enable teachers to create targeted evaluations that provide a clearer picture of students' strengths and areas for improvement.

This study also has implications for instructional material design, particularly for diverse students. Materials could include audio recordings featuring various accents, speech rates, and intonation patterns, allowing students to practice processing different types of auditory input. These resources would help students build resilience and adaptability in listening, which are crucial for navigating real-world communication (Dua et.al, 2024). Additionally, tailoring instructional strategies to individual learner profiles could create a more inclusive learning environment. Incorporating phonemic awareness activities aligned with students' readiness, interests, and needs would further enhance their ability to process auditory input effectively (Bowers and Ramsdell, 2023; Qorib, 2024).

Listening proficiency is indispensable for students majoring in English, as it facilitates engagement with authentic language inputs and supports the development of other linguistic skills. Phonemic awareness, as a fundamental component of phonological processing, has the potential to significantly enhance listening comprehension. However, the relationship between phonemic awareness and listening skills remains underexplored, especially among advanced students. By addressing this gap, this study aims to provide new insights into how phonemic awareness contributes to listening proficiency and how teachers can design instructional strategies to support students in achieving their language goals. Through its focus on advanced students, individual differences, and the integration of phonemic awareness into listening instruction, this research seeks to make a novel contribution to the field of language education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a quantitative correlation design to examine the relationship between phonemic awareness and students' listening performance. Creswell (2012) defines correlation research as a statistical approach to identify the consistency or pattern of variation between two or more variables. The study used the correlation coefficient (r) to quantify the relationship between phonemic awareness (predictor variable) and listening achievement (criterion variable. To collect data, the study utilized two tests: a phonemic awareness assessment developed by Heggerty (2015) and a listening test using the cloze test method. The phonemic awareness assessment evaluated nine auditory skills through 90 questions, which were presented via audio recordings. The skills tested in the phonemic

awareness test were (1) recognizing initial sounds, (2) recognizing final sounds, (3) recognizing medial sounds, (4) blending sounds together, (5) segmenting words into sounds, (6) producing rhyme, (7) substituting a sound with another, (8) adding onset to a rhyme, and (9) deleting initial sounds.. The score ranged from 0-100. The students who scored above 80 were considered to have a high level of phonemic awareness and those who scored below 80 were considered to have low phonemic awareness. The listening test, based on Taylor's (1953) cloze test procedure, required students to fill in blanks in four passages after listening to the recordings of the texts. This test aligned the cognitive demands of listening comprehension with those of phonemic awareness.

The reliability and validity of the instruments were confirmed through a preliminary try out. The phonemic awareness assessment was pre-validated by Heggerty (2015), while the cloze test's reliability was measured using SPSS (version 28) with the Kuder-Richardson formula (KR20), resulting in a reliability coefficient of 0.861. For data analysis, the study employed correlation analysis, applying Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the relationship between the variables. Additionally, regression analysis was used to measure the contribution of phonemic awareness to listening performance. These statistical tools provided insights into whether phonemic awareness significantly influences listening comprehension among English Education students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Result of Students' Phonemic Awareness Test

Table 1. The score of phonemic awareness test

Score Interval	N	%
91-100	0	0
81-90	10	12.05
71-80	27	32.53
61-70	32	38.55
51-60	11	13.25
41-50	3	3.62
31-40	0	0
21-30	0	0
11-20	0	0
0-10	0	0
Total	83	100
Mean score	69.18	

The distribution of students' scores on the phonemic awareness test indicates that the majority demonstrated moderate proficiency in this area. Specifically, 38.55% of students scored between 61–70, while 32.53% achieved scores in the 71–80 range. A smaller proportion (12.05%) attained scores between 81–90, indicating a relatively stronger performance, and 13.25% fell within the 51–60 range. Only 3.62% of the students scored between 41–50, and notably, no student scored below 41 or above 90. The absence of scores in the 91–100 range suggests that none of the students reached an excellent level of phonemic awareness. However, the lack of

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scores below 41 implies that most students demonstrated at least a basic level of phonological understanding. The mean score of 69.18 places the overall group performance within the upper-moderate range, suggesting a relatively adequate, though not advanced, level of phonemic awareness among the participants.

Result of Listening Comprehension Test

Table 2. The scores of listening test of the fifth semester students

Score Interval	Category	N	%
86-100	Excellent	2	2.41
71-85,9	Good	5	6.02
56-70,9	Average	9	10.84
40-55,9	Poor	28	33.74
<40	Failed	39	46.99
Total		83	100
Mean Score		41.48	

The results of the listening comprehension test reveal a generally low level of proficiency among the students. Nearly half of the participants (46.99%) fell into the "Failed" category, scoring below 40, while an additional 33.74% were categorized as "Poor" with scores ranging from 40 to 55.9. Combined, these two lowest categories accounted for over 80% of the students, indicating that the majority struggled significantly with listening comprehension tasks. Only 10.84% of students performed at an "Average" level (scores between 56 and 70.9), and a small minority achieved "Good" (6.02%) or "Excellent" (2.41%) scores. The mean score was 41.48, which falls within the lower end of the "Poor" category, further highlighting the general weakness in listening comprehension among the participants. In determining the normality of the data, Shapiro-Whilk test in SPSS version 24 was used. The distribution of the data can be considered to have a normal distribution if the significance (2-tailed) is higher than 0.05. The result of the normality test of this study is shown in the table below:

Table 3. The Result of normality test

Test of Normality			
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
PA	.062	83	.200
Listening	.087	83	.180

The results indicated that the distribution of scores for phonemic awareness was not significantly different from a normal distribution ($D = 0.062$, $p = 0.200$), and similarly, the distribution of listening comprehension scores also did not significantly deviate from normality ($D = 0.087$, $p = 0.180$). Since both p-values are greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the scores for both variables are normally distributed, justifying the use of parametric statistical tests in subsequent analyses such as Pearson's correlation.

Correlation Coefficient Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to find the correlation between phonemic awareness and listening performance.

Table 4. The Results of Correlations Test

Correlations			
		PA	Listening
PA	Pearson Correlation	1	.772**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	83	83
Listening	Pearson Correlation	.772**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	83	83

The results showed a strong positive correlation between the two variables, with a correlation coefficient of r = 0.772, which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$). This indicates that students with higher levels of phonemic awareness tend to achieve better results in listening comprehension tasks. The strength of the correlation suggests that phonemic awareness is a substantial predictor of listening performance.

Simple regression analysis was used to find out the regression equation and the contribution of phonemic awareness to listening. The result was shown in the following table:

Table 5. The Results of correlations Test

Model Summary							
				Std. Error	Change Statistics		
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.772[a]	.596	.591	13.012	.596	119.603	.000

The model summary indicates a strong positive relationship, with a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.772. The R Square value of 0.596 shows that approximately 59.6% of the variance in listening comprehension scores can be explained by students' phonemic awareness levels. The Adjusted R Square of 0.591 accounts for the slight adjustment due to sample size, indicating that the model is a good fit for the data. The standard error of the estimate is 13.012, which reflects the average distance that the observed values fall from the regression line. The F-test for the overall significance of the model was significant, $F(1, 81) = 119.603$, $p < 0.001$, indicating that the regression model provides a statistically significant prediction of listening comprehension performance based on phonemic awareness.

Discussions

This study explored the relationship between phonemic awareness and listening comprehension among English major students in Palembang, South Sumatera. The

findings contribute to the growing body of literature that underscores the integral role of phonological processing skills in second language (L2) listening performance.

Consistent with prior research (Becker & Sylvan, 2021; Rice et al., 2022), the results demonstrate that although students exhibit moderate phonemic awareness, advanced phonological sensitivity remains limited. This suggests that phonemic awareness continues to be a foundational component beyond early literacy development, extending into higher education contexts where complex linguistic input is encountered. The limited number of students achieving high proficiency in phonemic awareness implies gaps in their ability to efficiently decode spoken language, particularly in academic settings characterized by rapid speech, intricate syntactic structures, and varied accents (Newton & Nation, 2020). These challenges are further highlighted by difficulties in phonological tasks such as medial sound recognition, phoneme blending, and word segmentation, which are essential for parsing continuous speech during listening comprehension (Hayes-Harb & Barrios, 2021).

The observed deficits in listening comprehension reflect the multifaceted complexity of this skill, which involves not only phonological processing but also the integration of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Rost & Brown, 2022). The poor performance on the cloze listening test underscores that weaknesses at the fundamental decoding level significantly constrain students' ability to construct coherent meaning from auditory input (Goh & Vandergrift, 2021). These findings align with Yao, Jun, and Dai's (2024) contention that impaired phonological awareness disrupts early stages of the listening process, thereby diminishing the efficacy of higher-order comprehension strategies.

The strong positive correlation found between phonemic awareness and listening performance corroborates theoretical models positioning phonological processing as a core determinant of listening comprehension success (Ehri, 2022; Rost, 2024). The regression analysis further substantiates this link by demonstrating that phonemic awareness accounts for a substantial proportion of variance in listening scores, indicating its predictive power. This reinforces prior findings (Trang, 2020; Genelza, 2022) that phonemic awareness remains critical throughout advanced stages of L2 acquisition and should not be neglected in pedagogical frameworks.

These results have important instructional implications. Traditional listening instruction often emphasizes top-down strategies at the expense of systematic phonological training. This study advocates for the integration of explicit phonemic awareness exercises, including minimal pair discrimination, connected speech processing, and word boundary identification, which have been shown to enhance auditory decoding skills (Nasim et al., 2022; Tsang, 2020). Moreover, incorporating authentic listening materials that reflect natural language variability—such as diverse accents, speech rates, and intonation patterns—is essential to prepare learners for real-world communicative demands (Parks, Faw, & Lane, 2024; Rukthong & Brunfaut, 2020).

Furthermore, the heterogeneity in student phonemic awareness and listening proficiency underscores the need for differentiated instruction tailored to individual learner profiles (Bowers & Ramsdell, 2023). Scaffolded interventions that address specific phonological deficits while simultaneously fostering more advanced listening skills may optimize learning outcomes.

Additionally, this study acknowledges the role of extrinsic and intrinsic learner factors, including first language background, exposure to English, and motivation, which modulate phonemic awareness and listening ability (Turker, Seither-Preisler, & Reiterer, 2021; Tai & Zhao, 2024). These variables should be considered when designing and implementing listening curricula to maximize their effectiveness.

Future research should focus on experimental designs assessing the impact of targeted phonemic awareness interventions on listening outcomes. Comparative studies examining various phonological training approaches—such as minimal pair exercises versus rhythm and intonation training—would be valuable. Longitudinal investigations tracking the development of phonemic awareness and listening skills over time would further elucidate their dynamic interplay and inform instructional sequencing.

Exploring the interaction between phonemic awareness and cognitive capacities, including working memory and executive functions, also represents a promising avenue for research, potentially leading to more comprehensive and effective pedagogical models (Yu & Zellou, 2019; Yao, Jun, & Dai, 2024). Expanding these investigations to diverse learner populations across educational and cultural contexts would enhance the generalizability of findings and support inclusive instructional design.

This study affirms the foundational role of phonemic awareness in L2 listening comprehension among advanced learners. The evidence highlights the need to integrate explicit phonological training, authentic listening experiences, and differentiated instruction within language education programs to improve students' auditory processing and overall communicative competence.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

To conclude, the findings of this study highlight the crucial influence of phonemic awareness on listening comprehension among English major students. Although students exhibited moderate phonemic awareness, most struggled with listening proficiency, indicating that their foundational phonological skills are insufficient to handle the complexities of authentic spoken English. The strong link between phonemic awareness and listening performance emphasizes the need to incorporate explicit phonological training into English language teaching. Additionally, the use of authentic listening resources and personalized teaching methods is essential to address the diverse needs and experiences of learners. Factors such as linguistic background, motivation, and prior exposure to English should shape instructional approaches to foster more inclusive and effective learning environments. Expanding phonemic sensitivity development across all stages of language education, rather than confining it to early literacy, is key to helping students achieve greater academic success and communicative competence.

The findings carry important pedagogical implications for English language instruction at the tertiary level. First, there is a clear need to integrate explicit phonemic awareness training into the curriculum, moving beyond traditional top-down listening strategies to include systematic, targeted exercises that develop students' ability to discriminate and manipulate phonemes. This can enhance their foundational decoding skills and support more effective processing of spoken language. Second, the use of authentic listening materials—featuring natural speech variability such as diverse accents, speech rates, and intonation—should be

prioritized to better prepare students for real-world communication challenges. Third, recognizing the diverse learner profiles within the classroom, instructors should adopt differentiated instructional strategies that account for individual differences in linguistic background, motivation, and prior English exposure. Such tailored approaches can maximize engagement and learning outcomes, ensuring that instruction is responsive to varied learner needs. Ultimately, extending phonemic awareness development throughout all stages of language education will equip students with the necessary auditory skills to succeed academically and communicate effectively in diverse contexts.

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