



Difficulties in Listening to Shengdiao (Tones) in Words and Phrases Among Grade IX Students at MTs An-Nuriyah Bontocini

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study aims to identify the difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tone) in words and phrases experienced by ninth-grade students at MTs An-Nuriyah Bontocini, Jeneponto Regency. The sample consisted of 20 students selected through purposive sampling technique. Data were collected through listening tests and questionnaires. The research results show that students have difficulty distinguishing tones in Mandarin, especially the fourth tone. There are two main factors that influence these difficulties. Internal factors include limited understanding of the tonal system, lack of self-confidence, and ineffective learning strategies. External factors include the quality of learning media, the teacher's teaching methods, and the classroom environment. Some students stated that the audio used was unclear, and the learning process needs to be improved through more consistent practice and the use of more interactive media.

Keywords: Learning Difficulties; Listening; Mandarin Language; Shengdiao; Words Phrases

Introduction

Language is a system of sound symbols used in communication, both individually and collectively (Wiratno, 2014). In the context of globalization, the ability to speak foreign languages has become an important necessity, especially for international languages such as Mandarin. One of the most important languages in the world is Mandarin. It has been successful in raising interest among Mandarin learners worldwide due to its enormous speaker base and China's status as a major economic force. (Nurhusna, et al, 2024). This language has characteristics that distinguish it from Indonesian, one of which is the use of tones or shēngdiào in forming word meanings. Errors in tone pronunciation can lead to changes in meaning and cause misunderstandings in communication. There are four aspects of competence in basic Chinese learning, namely listening 听力 (tīnglì), reading 阅读 (yuèdú) as receptive skills, and speaking 口语 (kǒuyǔ) writing 写作 (xiězuò) as productive skills. Listening is a person's ability to understand words or sentences spoken by a person or certain media (Fahmi, et all, 2024).

Almost all schools in Indonesia offer Chinese language courses and tutoring classes. However, most schools lack comprehensive Chinese teaching materials, and the lack of a language environment and interest is also a big obstacle for students learning Chinese, making it difficult for some students (Monica & Iden, 2024).

Based on observations at MTs An-Nuriyah Bontocini, it was found that many ninth-grade students still have difficulty distinguishing tones in Mandarin, particularly the second and third tones. This issue indicates a weakness in students' listening skills, particularly in recognizing differences in sounds and tones. This research highlights the difficulties faced by

junior high school students in listening to the entire tones of Mandarin, both in the form of words and phrases.

Aslamiah (2020) states that learning difficulties are obstacles and constraints experienced by students in learning. To identify learning difficulties in different branches of knowledge, it is very important to consider the general factors that cause learning difficulties. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four elements that must be learned in the field of language studies. Therefore, these components must be mastered by students in order to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

According to Tarigan (2015), listening is the process of hearing oral symbols that requires full attention, understanding, appreciation, and interpretation to obtain information, grasp the content or message, and comprehend what the speaker has conveyed through speech or spoken language.

According to Hermawan (2012), listening skills are influenced by internal factors such as concentration, physical condition, and motivation, as well as external factors such as the environment and the speaker's delivery style. These factors can greatly affect students' ability to understand spoken language, especially tonal languages like Mandarin.

The tones in Mandarin, or Shengdiao (声调), are an important element in the pronunciation of words that distinguishes the meaning of one word from another. "The pitch value of the first tone in Mandarin is 55, the pitch value of the second tone is 35, the pitch value of the third tone is 214, and the pitch value of the fourth tone is 5." Zhao Yuanren (2011). The pitch values for the four tones in Mandarin are as follows: Yīnpíng (Level Tone) 55, Yángpíng (Rising Tone) 35, Shǎngshēng (Dipping-Rising Tone) 214, Qùshēng (Falling Tone) 51. Zhao Yuanren dalam 现代汉语 (2008):

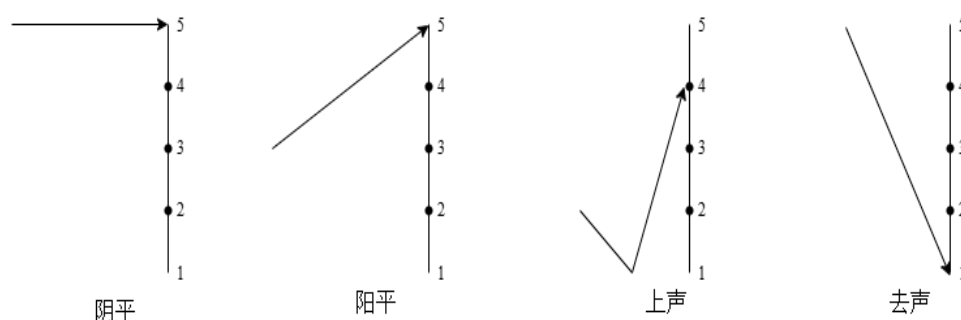


Figure 1. Diagram shengdiao (none) Mandarin Language (现代汉语, 2008)

Words are the foundation of sentence formation. In Mandarin, words are divided into concrete words (实词 shící) and abstract words (虚词 xūcí). Concrete words or 实词 (shǐcí) are words that have a concrete meaning and can stand alone to form a sentence. Abstract words or 虚词 xū cí are words that do not have a concrete meaning and cannot stand alone as part of a sentence (Anggraeni, 2019).

According to Sakura (2014), a phrase is a phrase composed of two or more words that does not exceed the limits of a clause's function. The term phrase mentioned in Chaer (2015) is a form of two or more words that fills one of the syntactic functions.

This research aims to identify which Mandarin tones are the most difficult for students to recognize through listening, as well as to analyze the causes of these difficulties. Unlike previous research that generally discusses tone teaching, this study specifically highlights the challenges in tone listening skills within the context of junior high school education and focuses on words and phrases. The results of this research are expected to contribute to the development of more effective Mandarin teaching methods, particularly in improving students' listening and tone pronunciation skills.

Research Methods

This research is a qualitative descriptive study aimed at identifying the difficulties faced by ninth-grade students at MTs An-Nuriyah Bontocini in listening to the tones (shengdiao) of the Mandarin language. The sample consisted of 20 students from the IX Al-Hadits (B) class, purposively selected because they had been studying Mandarin for more than one year. Data were collected through listening tests and a mixed questionnaire (closed and open), then analyzed using the Miles & Huberman model. The research results show that students have difficulty distinguishing tones, especially the fourth tone. The contributing factors include internal factors such as limited understanding of the tonal system, lack of confidence, and ineffective learning strategies, as well as external factors such as the quality of learning media, teaching methods of the teacher, and the classroom environment. It is recommended that the learning process be improved through consistent practice and the use of more interactive media.

Results and Discussion

A. Results of the shengdiao (tone) listening test on words.

Here are the results of the shengdiao (tone) listening test on words conducted by ninth-grade students, which show the number of errors in recognizing and distinguishing tones.

Table 1. Student Errors in the Shengdiao (Tone) Listening Test

<i>Shēngdiào</i>	Word Question	Number of incorrect answers	Total	Total Correct Answers	Error percentage
First <i>Shēngdiào</i> “_”	shēng	8	74	120	61.67%
	shī	13			
	shū	13			
	tiān	13			
	hēi	13			
	jiā	14			
Second <i>Shēngdiào</i> “/”	xué	12	45	60	75%
	xué	15			
	míng	18			
Thrid <i>Shēngdiào</i> “v”	lǎo	12	42	60	70%
	bǎn	14			
	kǎo	16			
Fourth <i>Shēngdiào</i> “\”	xiào	14	99	120	82.5%
	jiào	17			
	shì	18			
	zuò	20			
	yè	14			
	shì	16			

From the analysis of the listening test results of ninth-grade students, it can be seen that the fourth shengdiao is the most difficult tone for students to listen to, with the highest number of errors being 99 mistakes at a percentage of 82.5%. This indicates that students have difficulty recognizing the sharply falling tone. Shengdiao 2 and shengdiao 3 are also quite confusing for students, with a total of 60 errors at percentages of (75%) and (70%), respectively, mainly due to the similar rising and falling-rising tone patterns. Meanwhile, shengdiao 1 is the easiest tone to recognize, with the lowest number of errors at 74 errors with a percentage of (61.67%).

B. Analysis of Difficulty Listening to shengdiao (tone) in words.

The following is the analysis of the difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tones) conducted by the students:

1. First shengdiao (yīn píng)

The first shengdiao in Mandarin is represented by a flat tone "-". From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). This can be seen from the following analysis results:

a. shēng

In question number 1, part A, shēng, which comes from the word 学生 (xuéshēng), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it was found that five students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, while one student incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, one student incorrectly placed the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel, and another student did not write the tone at all.

b. shī

In question number 1, part B, shī, which comes from the word 老师 (lǎoshī), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that four people misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, while four other students chose the fourth tone. In addition, five other students did not write down the tone at all.

c. shū

In question number 1, part C, shū, which comes from the word 书 (shū), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that five students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, two students misheard the third tone, and six other students misheard the fourth tone.

d. tiān

In question number 1, section D, tiān, which comes from the word 明天 (Míngtiān), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, two students misheard the third tone, and five other students misheard the fourth tone.

e. hēi

In question number 1, section E, hēi from the word 黑板 (Hēibǎn), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that two students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, three students misheard the third tone, and four students misheard the fourth tone. Additionally, 3 students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels, and one other student did not write the tone at all.

f. jiā

In question number 1, section F, jiā, which comes from the word 家 (jiā), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it was observed that seven students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, while six students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, one student mistakenly placed the tone on the consonant instead of the vowel.

2. Second Shengdiao (yáng píng)

The second shengdiao in Mandarin is represented by a flat tone "/". From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). This can be seen from the following analysis results:

a. xué

In question number 2, part A, xué, which comes from the word 学生 (xuéshēng), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it was observed that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, while three students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. In addition, there was

one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and four other students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

b. xué

In question number 2, part B, xué, which comes from the word 学校 (xuéxiào), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it was observed that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, three students misheard the third tone, and three students misheard the fourth tone. Additionally, three students answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and two other students mistakenly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

c. míng

In question number 2, part C, míng, which comes from the word 明天 (Míngtiān), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that six students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, one student incorrectly chose the third tone, and five students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. In addition, six other students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

3. Third Shengdiao (shàng shēng)

The third Mandarin tone is represented by the flat tone "v". From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). this can be seen from the following analysis results:

a. lǎo

In question number 3, part A, lǎo, which comes from the word 老师 (lǎoshī), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that two students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, while one student incorrectly chose the second tone. In addition, seven students answered the tone correctly, but the placement was not accurate, and three other students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

b. bǎn

In question number 3, part B, bǎn, which comes from the word 黑板 (Hēibǎn), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that seven students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, two students misheard the second tone, and three students misheard the fourth tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and another student misplaced the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel.

c. kǎo

In question number 3, section C, kǎo, which comes from the word 考试 (kǎoshì), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it was observed that six students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, while three students incorrectly chose the second tone. Additionally, there were four students who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and three other students misplaced the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

4. Fourth Shengdiao (qù shēng)

The fourth Mandarin shengdiao is represented by a flat tone "v". From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). this can be seen from the following analysis results:

a. xiào

In question number 4, part A, xiào, which comes from the word 学校 (xuéxiào), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, two students incorrectly chose the second tone, and three students incorrectly chose the third tone. In addition, there was one student who answered the tone correctly,

but the placement was incorrect, and six students incorrectly placed the tone on the consonant instead of the vowel.

b. jiào

In question number 4, part B, jiào from the word 教室 (jiàoshì), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, one student incorrectly chose the second tone, and six students incorrectly chose the third tone. In addition, six students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

c. shì

In question number 4, part C, shì from the word 教室 (jiàoshì), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that six students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, eight students incorrectly chose the second tone, and one student incorrectly chose the third tone. In addition, one student incorrectly placed the tone on the consonant instead of the vowel. And one other student did not write in any tone at all.

d. zuò

In question number 4, section D, zuò, which comes from the word 作业 (zuòyè), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that two students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, two students misheard the second tone, and two students misheard the third tone. Additionally, three students answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and eleven students mistakenly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

e. yè

In question number 4, section E, yè, which comes from the word 作业 (zuòyè), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it appears that six students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, four students incorrectly chose the second tone, and one student incorrectly chose the third tone. Additionally, two students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And another student didn't write the tone at all.

f. shì

In question number 4, section F, shì from the word 考试 (kǎoshì), many students still make mistakes in listening to that word. Based on the test results, it was observed that six students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, six students incorrectly chose the second tone, and one student incorrectly chose the third tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and two other students misplaced the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

C. Results of the shengdiao (tone) listening test on phrases.

Here are the results of the shengdiao (tone) listening test on phrases conducted by ninth-grade students, which show the number of errors in recognizing and distinguishing tones.

Table 2. Student Errors on the Shengdiao (Tone) Phrase Listening Test

<i>Shēngdiào</i>	Phrase Question	Number of incorrect answers	Total	Total Correct Answers	Error percentage
First <i>Shēngdiào</i> “-”	gāo	14	75	140	53.57%
	zhī	13			
	hē	11			
	bān	9			
	shēng	12			

	shī	12			
	bāng	18			
Second <i>Shēngdiào</i> “/”	xué	13	45	60	75%
	xué	14			
	xí	18			
Third <i>Shēngdiào</i> “v”	hěn	13	77	200	38.5%
	nǐ	9			
	qǐ	15			
	nǐ	8			
	xiǎng	17			
	shuǐ	0			
	wǒ	4			
	lǎo	15			
	wǒ	6			
	yǔ	12			
Fourth <i>Shēngdiào</i> “\”	xìng	10	148	200	74%
	Xiè	14			
	xiè	14			
	duì	16			
	bù	17			
	Bù	15			
	dào	16			
	Rèn	14			
	shì	14			
	Hàn	18			

From the results of the listening test analysis on the phrases of ninth-grade students, it can be seen that Tone 4 is the most difficult for students to recognize, with the highest number of errors at 148 errors with a percentage of 74%, followed by Tone 2 with 45 errors at a percentage of 75%, which is also quite confusing due to its rising pitch pattern. Meanwhile, Tone 1 is easier to recognize with a total of 75 errors at a percentage of 53.57%, and Tone 3 is the easiest to distinguish with a total of 77 errors at a percentage of 38.5%, indicating that the up-and-down pattern is clearer to students compared to other tones.

D. Analysis of Difficulty in Listening to Shengdiao (Tone) in Phrases.

The following is the analysis of the difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tone) conducted by the students:

1. First Shengdiao (yīn píng)

The first shengdiao in Mandarin is represented by a flat tone "-". From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of shengdiao (tone). This can be seen from the following analysis results:

a. gāo

In question number 1 part A, gāo from the phrase 很高兴 (hěn gāoxìng), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, while four other students incorrectly chose the third tone. In addition, two students answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and four other students mistakenly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

- b. zhī
In question number 1, part B, zhī from the phrase 不知道 (Bù zhīdào), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, one student incorrectly chose the third tone, and three students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and four students misplaced the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And one other student did not write the tone at all.
- c. hē
In question number 1, part C, hē from the phrase 想喝水 (Xiǎng hē shuǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that two students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, three students misheard the third tone, and four students misheard the fourth tone. In addition, one student incorrectly placed the tone on a consonant instead of on a vowel.
- d. bān
In question number 1, section D, the bān from the phrase A 班的学生。 (A bān de xuéshēng.), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, four students misheard the third tone, and one student misheard the fourth tone. In addition, one other student did not write down any tone at all.
- e. shēng
In question number 1, section E, the shēng from the phrase A 班的学生。 (A bān de xuéshēng.), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the fourth tone. Additionally, there were two students who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and one student misplaced the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel. And six other students did not write the tone at all.
- f. shī
In question number 1 section F, shī from the phrase 我们的老师 (Wǒmen de lǎoshī), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, while four students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. In addition, two students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And three other students did not write the tone at all.
- g. bāng
In question number 1, section G, bāng from the phrase 帮我吗? (Bāng wǒ ma?), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that nine students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, three students misheard the third tone, and six students misheard the fourth tone.
2. Second Shengdiao (yáng píng)
The second shengdiao in Mandarin is represented by a flat tone "/". From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). this can be seen from the following analysis results:
- a. xué
In question number 2, part A, xué from the phrase A 班的学生。 (A bān de xuéshēng.), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and three students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the

placement was incorrect, and three students mistakenly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And two other students did not write the tone at all.

b. xué

In question number 2 part B, xué from the phrase 学习汉语 (Xuéxí Hànyǔ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that two students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and two students incorrectly chose the third tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and nine students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

c. xí

In question number 2, part C, xí from the phrase 学习汉语 (Xuéxí Hànyǔ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that seven students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and four students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. In addition, three students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And four other students did not write the tone at all.

3. Third Shengdiao (shàng shēng)

The third Mandarin tone is represented by the flat "v" sound. From the results of the listening comprehension test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). this can be seen from the following analysis results:

a. hěn

In question number 3, part A, hěn from the phrase 很高兴 (hěn gāoxìng), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that eight students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, two students misheard the second tone, and one student misheard the fourth tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and one student mistakenly placed the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel. And one other student did not write the tone at all.

b. nǐ

In question number 3, part B, nǐ from the phrase 谢谢你。 (Xièxiè nǐ.), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, and three students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, there were two students who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and one student mistakenly placed the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel.

c. qǐ

In question number 3, part C, qǐ from the phrase 对不起 (Duìbùqǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that one student misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, three students misheard the second tone, and six students misheard the fourth tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and two students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And two other students did not write the tone at all.

d. nǐ

In question number 3, section D, nǐ from the phrase 认识你们。 (Rènshì nǐmen.), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, and one student incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and one student misplaced the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel. And one other student didn't write the tone at all.

- e. xiǎng
In question number 3, section E, xiǎng from the phrase 想喝水 (Xiǎng hē shuǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that eight students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, one student misheard the second tone, and three students misheard the fourth tone. In addition, five students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.
 - f. shuǐ
In question number 3, section F, shuǐ from the phrase 想喝水 (Xiǎng hē shuǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the second tone, and two students incorrectly chose the fourth tone. Additionally, there were five students who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and eight students misplaced the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And one other student did not write the tone at all.
 - g. wǒ
In question number 3, section G, Wǒ, which comes from the phrase 我们的老师 (Wǒmen de lǎoshī), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that one student misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone. Additionally, one student answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and two other students did not write the tone at all.
 - h. lǎo
In question number 3, section H, lǎo from the phrase 我们的老师 (Wǒmen de lǎoshī), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that one student misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, one student misheard the second tone, and one student misheard the fourth tone. In addition, ten students answered the tones correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and two other students did not write down the tones at all.
 - i. wǒ
In question number 3, part I, wǒ from the phrase 帮我吗? (Bāng wǒ ma?), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that two students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and one student incorrectly chose the second tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and one student mistakenly placed the tone on a consonant instead of a vowel. And one other student did not write the tone at all.
 - j. yǔ
In question number 3, section J, the yǔ from the phrase 学习汉语 (Xuéxí Hànyǔ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that four students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, three students misheard the second tone, and four students misheard the fourth tone. In addition, there is one more student who did not write down any tone at all.
4. Fourth Shengdiao (qù shēng)
The fourth tone in Mandarin Chinese is represented by a flat tone “ˋ”. From the results of the listening test given to the students, many students still cannot distinguish the sound of the shengdiao (tone). this can be seen from the following analysis results:
 - a. xìng
In question number 4, part A, the xìng from the phrase 很高兴 (hěn gāoxìng) is still misunderstood by many students. Based on the test results, it appears that five students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and two students incorrectly chose the second tone. In addition, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and two students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

b. nǐ

In question number 4, part B, nǐ from the phrase 谢谢你 (Xièxiè nǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that five students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and one student incorrectly chose the second tone. In addition, eight students made mistakes in placing the tone on consonants, when it should have been on vowels.

c. nǐ

In question number 4, part C, nǐ from the phrase 谢谢你 (Xièxiè nǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and three students incorrectly chose the second tone. In addition, eight students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

d. duì

In question number 4, section D, "duì" from the phrase 对不起 (Duìbùqǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that one student misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the third tone. Additionally, there were seven students who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and eight students made mistakes in placing the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

e. bù

In question number 4, section E, the "bù" from the phrase 对不起 (Duìbùqǐ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that eight students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, five students misheard the second tone, and one student misheard the third tone. In addition, one student incorrectly placed the tone on the consonant instead of the vowel. And two other students did not write the tone at all.

f. bù

In question number 4, section F, the "bù" from the phrase 不知道 (Bù zhīdào) is still misheard by many students. Based on the test results, it appears that nine students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, three students incorrectly chose the second tone, and three students incorrectly chose the third tone. In addition, one student incorrectly placed the tone on the consonant instead of the vowel.

g. dào

In question number 4, section G, the "dào" from the phrase 不知道 (Bù zhīdào) is still misheard by many students. Based on the test results, it appears that three students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and six students incorrectly chose the third tone. In addition, six students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And one other student did not write the tone at all.

h. rèn

In question number 4, section H, rèn from the phrase 认识你们 (Rènshì nǐmen), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that five students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, and four students incorrectly chose the second tone. Additionally, there was one student who answered the tone correctly, but the placement was incorrect, and three students mistakenly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels. And one other student did not write the tone at all.

i. shì

In question number 4, part I, shì from the phrase 认识你们。 (Rènshì nǐmen.), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it appears that 14 other students did not write down the tones at all.

j. yǔ

In question number 4, section J, yǔ from the phrase 学习汉语 (Xuéxí Hànyǔ), many students still make mistakes in listening to that phrase. Based on the test results, it

appears that seven students misheard the tone (shēngdiào), choosing the first tone, three students misheard the second tone, and six students misheard the third tone. In addition, two students incorrectly placed the tone on consonants instead of vowels.

E. Factors affecting the difficulties of ninth-grade students at MTs An-Nuriyah Bontocini, Jeneponto Regency, in listening to the shengdiao (tone) of the Mandarin language

1. Internal Factors

Internal factors that affect students' difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tone) in Mandarin were obtained through two types of questionnaires, namely closed questionnaires and open questionnaires.

a. Closed Questionnaire

To determine the influence of internal factors on students' difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tone), a closed questionnaire was distributed. The results can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Closed questionnaire results Internal factors affecting the difficulty of listening to Shengdiao (tone)

No	Statement	Percentage (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
Internal Factor			
1	I have difficulty understanding the tonal differences in Mandarin.	60	40
2	I feel nervous when listening to Mandarin audio.	10	90
3	I lack confidence in learning the tones of Mandarin.	70	30
4	I feel tired, making it hard to concentrate while learning notes.	35	65
5	I don't have a specific study strategy to understand Mandarin tones.	35	65
6	I find it difficult to simultaneously catch the tones in Mandarin audio.	70	30
7	I didn't pay close attention while doing the Mandarin tone listening activity.	35	65
8	I'm not focused, daydreaming or thinking about things while listening to the tone of Mandarin.	25	75

Based on the results of the closed questionnaire that have been analyzed, it can be concluded that there are several important aspects that reflect the internal conditions of students in the process of learning tones.

Most students have difficulty distinguishing tones in Mandarin, which indicates a low understanding of the phonological characteristics of each tone. However, students generally do not feel nervous when listening to Mandarin audio, which indicates that anxiety is not a dominant factor in their difficulties.

Furthermore, the students' low self-confidence also becomes one of the significant obstacles in understanding and listening to tones well. However, fatigue is not the main obstacle, as most students do not feel tired, which affects their concentration while studying. Some students are known to have special learning strategies that

help them understand Mandarin tones, although many still find it difficult to listen to tones simultaneously through audio. On the other hand, most students show a positive attitude towards listening activities, such as listening carefully and focusing without being distracted by other things. This shows that despite the comprehension barriers, there is also effort and attention from the students in following the Mandarin tone lessons in class.

b. Open-ended questionnaire

Based on the analysis results from the open-ended questionnaire, it was found that there are several internal factors affecting students' difficulties in listening to the tones (shengdiao) of the Mandarin language.

From the aspect of understanding and basic skills, these become the dominant factors. Some students still have difficulty distinguishing between the types of tones due to a lack of understanding of the tone system in Mandarin. This indicates that a weak initial understanding can be an obstacle in the listening process.

The factor of self-confidence also plays an important role in students' ability to listen to shengdiao (tones) in Mandarin. The lack of self-confidence experienced by some students becomes one of the main obstacles in the learning process, especially when it comes to distinguishing and understanding the differences between tones that require high precision and concentration. When students are not confident in their own abilities, they tend to feel doubtful, nervous, or even avoid efforts to understand more deeply, thereby hindering the learning process.

On the other hand, students who have self-confidence tend to be bolder and more focused in listening, and are not easily swayed by confusion or doubt when determining pitch differences. This can be seen from the statement of one of the students who said:

"Yes, because with confidence, we no longer hesitate in choosing answers." (SN)

"Yes, because when we are doubtful or nervous, the tone that will come out is different and doesn't sound the same." (ANL)

This statement shows that self-confidence not only affects students' attitudes towards learning but also directly impacts their accuracy in listening to and understanding Mandarin tones more effectively.

If viewed from the emotional aspect of learning, most students show a positive attitude, feeling comfortable and motivated in learning Mandarin tones. However, there are also students who feel less interested or face difficulties because they do not have an interest in the language. This is evident from one of the following quotes:

"Just okay because I don't really like languages except Arabic." (AS)

Next, in terms of learning strategies, it was found that some students do not yet have effective approaches or methods for understanding the tones of the Mandarin language. The lack of readiness in determining learning strategies causes them to have difficulty in listening and accurately distinguishing between different tones. This shows that without a clear strategy, the learning process becomes less directed and tends to be passive. In fact, there are some students who do not have any strategy at all due to a lack of interest in the subject. As shown by two students who stated that they do not have a study strategy because they prefer to focus on other subjects:

"There isn't any because I just want to focus on Arabic." (RF) and (SA)

2. External Factors

External factors affecting students' difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tones) in Mandarin were obtained through two types of questionnaires, namely closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires.

a. Closed Questionnaire

To determine the influence of internal factors on students' difficulties in listening to shengdiao (tone), a closed questionnaire was distributed. The results can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Closed Questionnaire Results External factors affecting the difficulty of listening to Shengdiao (tone)

No	Statement	Percentage (%)	
		Agree	Disagree
External Factor			
9	The teacher did not provide a clear example of tone while teaching.	15	85
10	The audio recording used is not clear enough to be understood.	60	40
11	The time for learning notes in class is too short.	25	75
12	My learning environment does not support Mandarin tone learning.	25	75
13	The pitch listening exercises are not done regularly in class.	50	50
14	The teacher's presentation technique makes it difficult for me to understand the tones in Mandarin.	25	75
15	TThe technology for learning Mandarin listening is less varied, making it difficult to practice tonal differences (shengdiao).	65	35
16	The teacher appeared nervous while teaching the tonal listening (shengdiao) of Mandarin.	10	90

Based on the results of the closed questionnaire analysis, it can be concluded that there are several external factors that significantly affect students' understanding of Mandarin tones.

The teacher has provided clear examples of tones during the learning process, which has helped some students understand the pronunciation of tones. However, the audio recordings used as learning media are considered unclear and suboptimal, making it difficult for students to distinguish each note accurately.

The allocated learning time for tone material is considered sufficient by the students, but most feel that the listening practice for tones still needs to be improved so that understanding becomes deeper and more sustained.

The students' learning environment is considered quite supportive in the process of learning Mandarin tones. This includes classroom comfort and a conducive learning atmosphere, although in reality, not all students receive a uniform learning experience.

The technique of presenting material by the teacher also helps students understand the differences between tones. The teacher is considered capable of delivering material in a structured manner and does not show nervousness while teaching, which has a positive impact on students' learning motivation.

The use of technology in listening comprehension learning is still relatively lacking in variety. This leads to limitations in practicing tone listening in a more interactive and comprehensive manner. Therefore, innovative learning media is needed so that students are more interested and find it easier to distinguish the tones of the Mandarin language.

b. Open-ended questionnaire

Based on the analysis of the open-ended questionnaire, it was found that there are several external factors that also influence students' difficulties in listening to

the tones (shengdiao) of the Mandarin language. These factors include the quality of learning media, the teacher's teaching methods, and the classroom environment.

In terms of the quality of learning media, some students expressed that the audio recordings used in the learning process were unclear, which hindered their understanding of the tones in Mandarin. The unclear audio makes it difficult for students to distinguish between similar tone patterns. This is reflected in one of the following student quotes:

"Yeah, but it's not very clear." (NAA)

In addition, the limitations of the technology used also pose a challenge. A student conveyed that the use of simple devices like mobile phones is not sufficient to support understanding of the material on pitch. As quoted:

"Not because the teacher only uses a cellphone" (AS)

In terms of the teacher's teaching methods, most students gave positive feedback and felt that the teacher had explained the material well. However, there is still hope that teachers can add more exercises and use more interactive learning media so that students' understanding can improve to the fullest.

The classroom environment also becomes a significant factor. Although the majority of students feel that the classroom environment supports the learning process, there are some students who state that the classroom situation is less conducive. One of the reasons is the low frequency of the teacher's attendance in teaching Mandarin, as expressed by a student:

"Not really because our Mandarin teacher rarely shows up." (AIA)

This is also supported by other students' suggestions who hope for an improvement in teachers' discipline in teaching:

"Be more diligent in coming to teach" (RRT)

From these findings, it can be concluded that external factors such as the clarity of teaching media, the effectiveness of teaching methods, and a supportive classroom environment are very important in supporting students' success in listening to Mandarin tones.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the ninth-grade students of MTs An-Nuriyah Bontocini experience significant difficulties in listening to shengdiào (tones) in Mandarin, with the fourth tone being the hardest to recognize due to its sharp falling pattern, which requires precise understanding and consistent practice. The second tone is also often confusing due to its similarity with the third tone, while the first and third tones tend to be easier for students to recognize.

These difficulties are caused by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include limited understanding of the tonal system, lack of self-confidence, and ineffective learning strategies, which hinder students' ability to accurately distinguish tones. External factors include unclear or low-quality audio media, teaching methods that are not varied or interactive, and classroom environments that do not support active listening practice.

To address these issues, efforts are needed to improve the quality of learning through the use of more interactive and high-quality learning media, the implementation of engaging and student-centered teaching strategies, and the provision of regular and focused tone listening exercises. This improvement is expected to help students develop listening skills and enhance their ability to distinguish Mandarin tones more accurately.

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