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IDENTIFYING STUDENTS' ENGLISH LEARNING NEEDS TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: A CASE OF MTSN 1 JEPARA

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Abstract

This study aims to explore students' needs in English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara as an initial stage for developing English teaching materials. A mixed methods research design was employed by integrating quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches. The participants consisted of 31 ninth-grade students selected through random sampling and one English teacher as a supporting participant. Data were collected using test and non-test instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, and a pre-test. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were analyzed thematically to support data interpretation. The findings reveal that English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara is conducted within a supportive instructional environment, as indicated by positive perceptions of teaching methods, learning materials, assessment practices, and strong teacher guidance. Nevertheless, the results also indicate that listening and speaking skills are less developed than reading and writing skills, and teachers face challenges in providing varied and innovative listening materials. These findings emphasize the need for developing more innovative and practice-oriented English learning materials, particularly to enhance students' listening and speaking skills.

Keywords: *Needs analysis; English learning; Mixed methods; Teaching materials*

Introduction

In recent years, the challenges in the field of education have become increasingly complex, particularly in relation to curriculum demands and the quality of learning outcomes. Educational quality is closely related to how curriculum policies are implemented in classroom practices, especially in responding to students' learning needs (Pakpahan et al., 2023). English has an important role in supporting students' academic development and preparing them for global communication. This role becomes more significant as English proficiency is increasingly required for accessing global information and participating in international academic contexts (Sejdiu et al., 2025). At the junior high school level, English is taught as a compulsory subject that is expected to equip students with essential language skills. Recent educational reforms emphasize the importance of student-centered and communicative learning approaches rather than teacher-dominated

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instruction (Shewangizaw, 2024). This is in line with Sadiqzade (2025) studies showing that active student engagement contributes positively to language learning outcomes. Therefore, continuous evaluation of English learning is necessary to ensure that instructional practices align with curriculum goals and students' needs.

English learning at the junior high school level covers four fundamental language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Ideally, students are expected to develop these skills in a balanced manner so that they can use English effectively in both written and spoken forms. Balanced development of receptive and productive skills is considered a key indicator of successful language learning (Sukma et al., 2025). Vocabulary mastery also plays a crucial role as it supports students' comprehension and language production. Previous studies have shown that vocabulary knowledge strongly influences students' ability to understand spoken and written texts (Corpuz et al., 2024; Rahayu et al., 2023). However, in practice, students often demonstrate uneven development across these language skills. Several studies report that students tend to perform better in reading and writing than in listening and speaking, particularly in EFL classroom contexts (Casado & Tesone, 2024; Marconi, 2022). This imbalance indicates the need for greater attention to underdeveloped language skills.

A number of studies have reported that English learning in junior high schools still encounters various challenges. One of the main challenges is the limited opportunity for communicative practice during classroom activities (Taye & Teshome, 2025). Teachers often rely heavily on textbooks as the primary learning resource, which may restrict instructional variation. Teacher-centered instruction has been found to reduce students' opportunities to actively use English in meaningful contexts (Balla, 2023). As a result, students may achieve satisfactory scores in written assessments but experience difficulty expressing ideas orally. Similar findings suggest that insufficient exposure to authentic listening input negatively affects students' listening comprehension (Ramiza et al., 2025). In addition, the lack of varied learning media has been associated with low student engagement in listening activities (Shofi & Masruroh, 2024). These conditions indicate that current instructional practices may not fully accommodate students' learning needs.

To address these challenges, identifying students' actual learning needs becomes a crucial step in improving English learning quality. Needs analysis is widely recognized as a fundamental component in curriculum and materials development (Gozali et al., 2022). It aims to identify learners' needs, lacks, and wants in relation to specific learning objectives (Dewi & Qamariah, 2023). Understanding learners' needs helps bridge the gap between students' current abilities and expected learning outcomes (He & AlSaqqaf, 2025). Through needs analysis, educators can design instructional materials that are relevant and responsive to learners' conditions. Previous studies by Abdallah (2025) & Azadovna (2025) indicate that needs-based instruction can improve learning effectiveness and student motivation. Conversely, without proper needs analysis, teaching materials may fail to address students' actual learning difficulties. Therefore, needs analysis plays a strategic role in effective instructional planning.

In the context of English language teaching, needs analysis focuses on identifying students' language skills, learning preferences, and learning difficulties. Needs analysis provides empirical data related to learning materials, teaching methods, and assessment practices (Sari et al., 2020). The data obtained can guide teachers in selecting appropriate instructional strategies. Research suggests that needs

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analysis is particularly important in junior high school settings where students have diverse learning backgrounds (Mansor et al., 2024). It also helps determine which language skills require greater instructional emphasis. Furthermore, needs analysis can serve as a foundation for developing innovative learning media and classroom activities (Alyusfitri et al., 2024). Such innovations are expected to enhance student engagement and promote more active language use.

MTsN 1 Jepara is an Islamic junior high school known for its strong academic performance and supportive learning environment. The school is equipped with adequate facilities that support classroom learning activities. Students generally demonstrate good achievement in English, particularly in vocabulary mastery and reading comprehension. High academic achievement does not necessarily indicate that all language skills have been developed equally. Preliminary observations show that listening and speaking skills still require further improvement. Learning activities tend to focus more on written tasks rather than communicative practice. These conditions highlight the importance of examining English learning needs in this specific context.

Based on the background described above, this study aims to explore students' needs in English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara. The study focuses on students' perceptions of learning materials, teaching methods, evaluation practices, and language skills. Understanding students' needs is essential for improving instructional quality and designing appropriate learning innovations (Amalia et al., 2024). These conditions highlight the urgency of conducting a needs analysis to identify students' actual learning needs as a basis for improving instructional quality. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights for English teachers in enhancing classroom practices. In addition, the results can be used as a basis for developing suitable learning materials or instructional media. This study also contributes to the discussion on needs analysis in English language teaching at the junior high school level. Ultimately, it is hoped that the findings will support more effective and student-centered English learning.

Research Method

Research Design

This study employed a mixed methods research design by integrating qualitative and quantitative data. The use of a mixed methods approach allowed the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of students' English learning needs from both numerical data and descriptive information. Quantitative data were used to identify general patterns related to students' abilities and perceptions, while qualitative data were used to provide deeper insights into the learning process. This research design was chosen because needs analysis requires both statistical trends and contextual explanations. The study aimed to describe the actual conditions of English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara as they occur in the classroom. By combining two types of data, the research findings could be interpreted more accurately. Therefore, the mixed methods design was considered appropriate to achieve the objectives of this study.

Participants

The participants of this study were 31 ninth-grade students of MTsN 1 Jepara. The students were selected using random sampling to ensure that each student had an equal opportunity to be involved in the study. This sampling technique was applied to represent the overall population of ninth-grade students fairly. In addition to students, one English teacher was involved as a supporting participant. The

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teacher provided information related to teaching strategies, learning materials, and classroom conditions. The inclusion of the teacher as a participant helped enrich the data obtained from students. Thus, the participants were considered relevant to address the research objectives.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study consisted of test and non-test instruments. The test instrument was a pretest designed to identify students' English proficiency, particularly related to their basic language skills. The pretest provided quantitative data regarding students' initial English ability. Meanwhile, the non-test instruments included questionnaires and interview guidelines. The questionnaire was used to collect data related to students' perceptions of learning materials, teaching methods, assessment practices, and language skills. The interview guideline was prepared to obtain in-depth qualitative data from the English teacher. These instruments were selected to support data triangulation in the needs analysis process.

Data Collection Method

Data collection was conducted in June 2025 at MTsN 1 Jepara. The process began with the distribution of a needs analysis questionnaire to the students during regular learning activities. Students were asked to complete the questionnaire independently to ensure honest responses. After the questionnaires were collected, the pretest was administered to measure students' English proficiency. The pretest was conducted in a controlled classroom setting to maintain consistency. In addition, an interview was conducted with the English teacher to obtain information about the English learning process and students' learning difficulties. All data were collected systematically to reflect the real conditions of English learning at the school.

Data Analysis Method

All collected data were analyzed descriptively by integrating quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires and pretest were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns. The results were presented in the form of percentages and average scores. Qualitative data from the teacher interview were analyzed by identifying key themes related to students' learning needs and classroom practices. The qualitative findings were used to support and explain the quantitative results. This integration allowed the researcher to compare findings from different data sources. As a result, the data analysis provided a comprehensive description of students' English learning needs.

Results

a. Questionnaire

The questionnaire was administered to 31 ninth-grade students of MTsN 1 Jepara to identify their perceptions of English learning related to teaching methods, learning media, materials, assessment, and language abilities.

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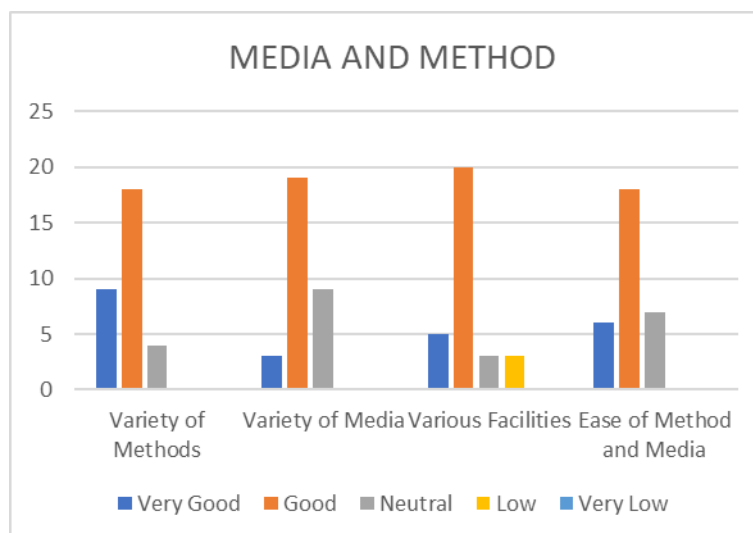


Figure 1. Graphic of Media and Method

The results show that students generally perceived English learning positively. Regarding teaching methods, 18 students rated the variety of methods as good and 9 students rated it as very good, while only 4 students selected neutral. Similarly, the ease of using methods and media was rated positively by 18 students as good and 6 students as very good, with 7 students choosing neutral. However, the variety of media received 19 good responses and only 3 very good responses, while 9 students selected neutral, indicating that media variety could still be improved. In terms of facilities, 20 students rated them as good and 5 as very good, but 3 students rated them as low, showing minor limitations in facilities.

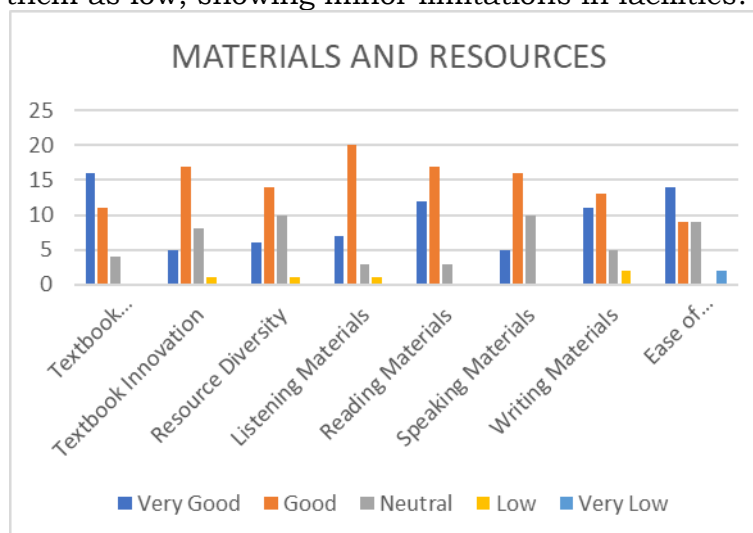


Figure 2. Graphic of Learning Materials and Resources

In relation to learning materials and resources, textbook completeness received very positive responses, with 16 students rating it as very good and 11 as good, while 4 students selected neutral. Reading materials were also highly rated, with 17 students choosing good and 12 choosing very good, and no low responses. Listening materials were perceived positively, with 20 students rating them as good and 7 as very good, although 1 student rated them as low. Speaking materials showed more neutral responses, with 16 students rating them as good and 5 as very good, while 10 students selected neutral. Writing materials were generally rated positively, with 13 students selecting good and 11 selecting very good, though

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2 students rated them as low. Regarding ease of understanding, 14 students rated it as very good and 9 as good, while 9 students selected neutral and 2 students rated it as very low.

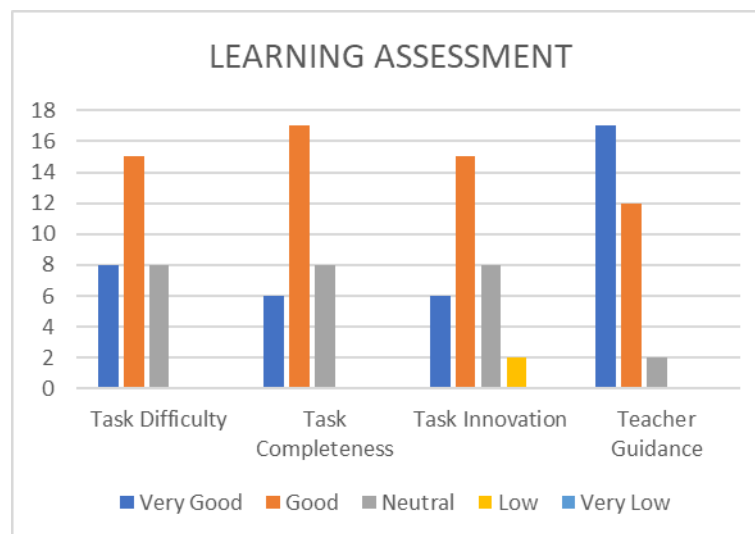


Figure 3. Graphic of Learning Assessment

Concerning learning assessment, task difficulty was perceived as appropriate, with 15 students rating it as good and 8 as very good, while 8 students selected neutral. Task completeness was also rated positively, with 17 students choosing good and 6 choosing very good, and 8 students selecting neutral. However, task innovation received more varied responses, as 15 students rated it as good and 6 as very good, while 8 students selected neutral and 2 students rated it as low. Teacher guidance received the strongest positive responses, with 17 students rating it as very good and 12 as good, and only 2 students selecting neutral.

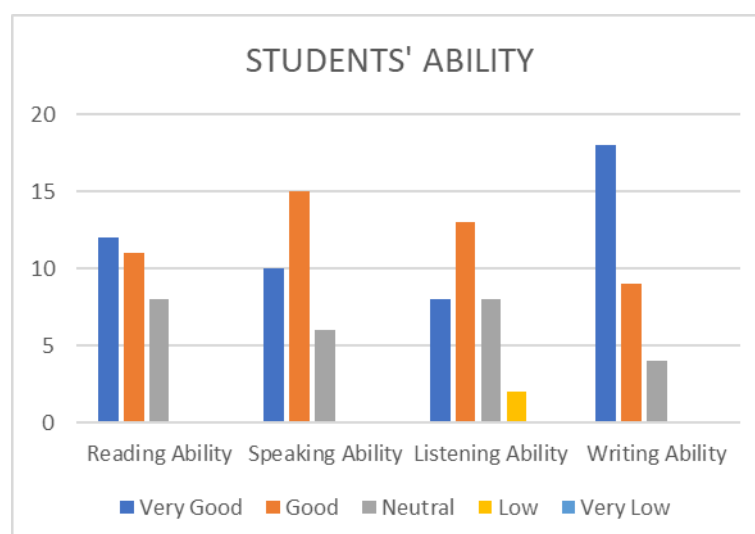


Figure43. Graphic of Students' Ability

Regarding students' self-perceived English abilities, reading ability was rated highly, with 12 students selecting very good and 11 selecting good, while 8 students chose neutral. Writing ability showed the highest confidence level, as 18 students rated it as very good and 9 as good, with only 4 neutral responses. Speaking ability was also rated positively, with 15 students selecting good and 10

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selecting very good, and 6 students choosing neutral. Listening ability showed comparatively lower confidence, as 13 students rated it as good and 8 as very good, while 8 students selected neutral and 2 students rated it as low. Overall, the questionnaire results indicate that students were more confident in reading and writing skills, while listening and speaking skills required greater attention in English learning.

b. Interview

The interview was conducted with the English teacher of MTsN 1 Jepara to obtain deeper information about the English teaching and learning process. The interview covered several aspects, including curriculum implementation, teaching methods, learning resources, learning challenges, and material development. It was conducted using an interview guideline and recorded using a mobile phone for documentation purposes. The duration of the interview was approximately 30 minutes. The results showed that MTsN 1 Jepara was still implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the current odd semester. The teacher stated that the school planned to shift to the national curriculum in the following even semester. This curriculum transition was part of the school's academic planning.

Regarding instructional time, the teacher explained that the allocation of English learning hours was regulated by the vice principal for curriculum affairs. Ninth-grade students received four instructional hours per week. Meanwhile, seventh- and eighth-grade students each received three instructional hours per week. This allocation indicates that English learning receives sufficient time, especially for ninth-grade students. In terms of learning resources, the teacher stated that the main materials were derived from school-developed modules. These modules were prepared collaboratively by the Madrasah Working Group (KKM). In addition, the teacher also utilized various online resources to enrich the learning materials.

The teacher stated that the main objective of English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara is to enable students to master the four English language skills. These skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Vocabulary mastery is also emphasized as an essential component supporting these skills. In classroom practice, the teacher applied a combination of theory and practice. The lesson usually began with an explanation of the material. This explanation was followed by practical activities. Examples of these activities included dialogue practice for speaking skills and narrative text writing for writing skills.

The teacher explained that students faced different learning difficulties depending on their individual abilities. Some students experienced difficulties in understanding grammar concepts. Others struggled with memorizing vocabulary and using it appropriately. Speaking and listening skills were also considered challenging for many students. To address these difficulties, the teacher implemented several strategies. These strategies included grammar memorization exercises, such as learning verb forms in passive voice. The teacher also provided dialogue practice to help improve students' speaking ability.

According to the teacher, vocabulary mastery has a significant influence on students' success in learning English. Limited vocabulary was identified as one of the main challenges faced by students. The teacher explained that many students did not receive intensive English instruction at the elementary school level. As a result, students needed time to adapt to English learning at the madrasah level. The teacher emphasized that students often understood English theory but struggled to apply it in practice. Therefore, additional support was needed to help

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students use English actively. Vocabulary development was considered a priority in improving students' language skills.

The teacher stated that the development of digital learning materials was necessary to support English learning. Digital materials were considered especially helpful for improving vocabulary mastery. The teacher suggested the use of audio and video media for listening activities. This suggestion was based on the availability of television facilities in all classrooms. The teacher believed that these facilities could be maximized for listening practice. In addition, the teacher recommended that future English learning materials focus more on practical-based tasks. These tasks included dialogue activities and the use of narrative and recount texts to support contextual language learning.

c. Pre-test

The pre-test was administered to 31 ninth-grade students of MTsN 1 Jepara to identify their initial English proficiency before further instructional development.

Table 1. Pre-test Score

SCORE PRETEST		
No.	Name	Score
1	AAA	80
2	AB	80
3	AZT	100
4	ADA	100
5	AAP	100
6	DAR	100
7	DNA	100
8	FKM	60
9	FMA	100
10	IT	90
11	KEAU	100
12	KAD	100
13	MAR	100
14	MN	80
15	MNS	90
16	NAS	90
17	NAD	100

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18	NI	100
19	NAF	100
20	NKH	100
21	NNH	100
22	PAW	80
23	RAN	70
24	SKN	90
25	SA	100
26	SVCK	100
27	SAL	60
28	SRP	90
29	TMH	80
30	TK	100
31	VFN	100
Average Score		91,6129
Lowest Score		60
Highest Score		100

The results show that students achieved relatively high scores, with an average score of 91.61, a highest score of 100, and a lowest score of 60. A total of 18 students achieved the maximum score of 100, indicating strong performance among more than half of the participants. In addition, 5 students scored 90, 5 students scored 80, and 1 student scored 70. Only 2 students obtained the lowest score of 60, showing that low achievement was limited to a small number of students. Overall, the score distribution indicates that most students demonstrated good to very good English proficiency in the pre-test. These results suggest that students generally possessed strong foundational English knowledge at the time of the assessment.

Discussion

The findings from the questionnaire, interview, and pre-test collectively indicate that English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara is conducted within a generally supportive and well-organized instructional environment. Students expressed positive perceptions toward teaching methods, learning materials, and teacher guidance, which aligns with the interview findings showing that English instruction is systematically planned and supported by adequate instructional time. The high average score obtained in the pre-test further suggests that students possess

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strong foundational knowledge of English, particularly in areas related to vocabulary recognition and reading comprehension. Such results indicate that students have developed sufficient receptive language competence, which is often associated with exposure to structured materials and routine classroom instruction. This tendency is also reflected in students' self-assessment, where reading and writing skills were rated higher than other language skills. Similar findings were reported by Gurler & Konca (2023), who noted that learners in EFL contexts often demonstrate strong basic knowledge while still experiencing gaps in certain skill areas. Likewise, Simasangyaporn et al. (2025) emphasized that high academic achievement does not necessarily represent balanced language mastery, highlighting the importance of conducting needs analysis to uncover students' actual learning needs beyond surface-level performance.

Despite students' strong performance in reading and writing, both questionnaire responses and interview data reveal that listening and speaking skills remain relatively underdeveloped. Students reported difficulties in understanding spoken English and showed limited confidence when engaging in oral communication during classroom activities. The teacher also confirmed that although students generally understand theoretical explanations, they often struggle to apply this knowledge in real communicative situations. This condition reflects a common imbalance between receptive and productive skills in EFL classrooms, where written language tends to receive greater instructional emphasis. Limited exposure to authentic listening input and communicative speaking practice further contributes to this issue. Gurler & Konca (2023) found that listening is frequently perceived as the most challenging skill due to insufficient interaction with authentic audio materials. Similarly, Dewi Rakhmawati et al. (2023) demonstrated that the lack of varied audio-visual input significantly affects students' listening comprehension development. In addition, ESP-oriented needs analysis conducted by Namtapi (2022) highlighted that learners require more practice-based oral activities to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and communicative competence. Therefore, listening and speaking emerge as priority skill areas that require targeted instructional improvement.

The findings related to learning media and assessment practices indicate that while existing teaching methods and materials are generally perceived as adequate, innovation in instructional delivery remains limited. Students' neutral responses regarding media variety and task innovation suggest that learning activities may not fully engage them in active language use. This perception is supported by the teacher's explanation, which emphasized the need for more practical and interactive learning activities. An analysis studies have shown that limited media variation often leads to passive learning experiences, particularly in language classrooms (Asrifah et al., 2025). The availability of classroom facilities, such as televisions, provides a strong potential for integrating audio-visual materials into listening instruction. This potential aligns with the findings of Arbain (2025) and Bakla & Demiröz (2024), who reported that the use of English videos significantly improves students' listening proficiency and motivation. Furthermore, Yu et al. (2024) emphasized that task-based and media-supported instruction is crucial in addressing learners' practical language needs. Although teacher guidance was rated very positively, needs analysis literature suggests that strong instructional support should be complemented by innovative tasks to promote active language use (Cao, 2025; Lai, 2024). Consequently, the development of innovative, practice-oriented learning media and assessment tasks is essential to support balanced English skill development.

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Conclusion

This study concludes that English learning at MTsN 1 Jepara has been implemented within a supportive instructional environment, as reflected in students' positive perceptions of teaching methods, learning materials, assessment practices, and strong teacher guidance. The findings from questionnaires, interviews, and pre-test results indicate that most students possess strong foundational English abilities, particularly in reading and writing skills, suggesting adequate mastery of receptive language competencies. However, the results also reveal that listening and speaking skills remain less developed compared to other language skills, despite students' relatively high academic achievement. This condition indicates that receptive skills tend to develop more effectively than productive skills in conventional classroom learning contexts. Furthermore, interview findings show that limited vocabulary mastery and insufficient exposure to authentic listening and speaking activities contribute to these challenges. The availability of audio-visual facilities and digital learning resources provides considerable potential to enhance students' listening and speaking skills through more innovative and practice-oriented instruction. Therefore, the results of this needs analysis can serve as an important foundation for developing English learning materials and activities that are more closely aligned with students' actual needs, particularly in improving communicative competence.

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