

COMPARING THE EFFECTS OF SHORT-TERM VOCABULARY PREPARATION ON IELTS LISTENING PART 4 PERFORMANCE AND LEARNER CONFIDENCE

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Abstract: In EFL pedagogy, pre-task vocabulary preparation is frequently recommended as a practical strategy to support listening comprehension. Yet a fundamental practical question remains unresolved: does the timing of short-term vocabulary preparation matter when the available study window is brief? This study directly compares two common classroom preparation conditions: same-day preparation (one day in advance; Group A, $n = 26$) and just-in-time preparation (30 minutes in class; Group B, $n = 30$) with the participating of Vietnamese third-year English-major students completing IELTS Listening Part 4. Using independent-samples t-tests, the study analyses between-group differences across six perceived listening difficulty items, four confidence items, and five pre-listening strategy items, all measured through a post-test questionnaire. The data reveal that the two preparation conditions produced largely equivalent outcomes: no statistically significant differences were found for perceived difficulty, confidence, or strategy use on the majority of items. Critically, both groups reported very low perceived test performance (0% Agree on self-rated success), confirming that neither short-term condition was sufficient to produce confident listening outcomes. Students' expressed preferences for longer preparation (Group A preferred 3 days; Group B preferred 1 hour) further indicate that both groups recognised the inadequacy of their allocated preparation time. These findings have direct implications for classroom practitioners deciding how to allocate vocabulary preparation time before IELTS Listening Part 4 tasks.

Keywords: IELTS, Listening Part 4, short-term vocabulary preparation, same-day preparation, just-in-time vocabulary learning, EFL, listening difficulties, learner confidence, pre-listening strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that pre-task vocabulary preparation or the provision of target lexical items before a listening or reading task has long been recommended as a pedagogically effective technique for reducing the cognitive load imposed by unfamiliar words and facilitating more comprehension (Nation, 2001; Teng, 2014). In real classroom and test-preparation contexts, however, teachers rarely have the luxury of administering vocabulary lists days or weeks in advance. More commonly, the available preparation window is brief. This practical constraint raises a question that has received surprisingly little direct empirical attention: when preparation time is short, does the precise timing of vocabulary exposure make a meaningful difference to learners' perceived difficulties, confidence, and strategic behavior during IELTS Listening Part 4?

This question is not trivial. Cognitive learning theory suggests that even small differences in retention interval can produce measurable differences in retrieval success, as the spacing effect predicts superior consolidation for material reviewed at expanding rather than massed intervals (Ebbinghaus, 1885; Kornell, 2009). From this perspective, one-day preparation should yield better vocabulary retention than 30-minute preparation, and this advantage in retention should translate into reduced perceived difficulty and greater confidence during the listening task. At the same time, affective research in language learning suggests that the mode of vocabulary delivery may independently influence learners' confidence and strategic engagement, regardless of the absolute duration of preparation (Ellis, 2005; Arnold, 1999).

Vietnam provides a particularly relevant context for this investigation. Vietnamese EFL students preparing for IELTS are frequently enrolled in intensive preparation courses where classroom time is limited and homework compliance is variable (Tran & Duong, 2020; Bui & Duong, 2018). Understanding whether a carefully structured 30-minute in-class vocabulary activity can match the outcomes of a one-day home-study assignment has direct implications for how teachers should allocate instructional time within these constraints.

The present study draws on questionnaire data collected from two groups of third-year Vietnamese English-major students, including Group A (one-day preparation, $n = 26$) and Group B (30-minute in-class preparation, $n = 30$), who

completed IELTS Listening Part 4 as part of a broader vocabulary-listening study. Three research questions guide the analysis:

RQ1. Do Group A and Group B differ significantly in the nature or frequency of perceived listening difficulties during IELTS Listening Part 4?

RQ2. Do Group A and Group B differ significantly in their confidence and affective responses to vocabulary preparation?

RQ3. Do Group A and Group B adopt meaningfully different pre-listening and during-listening strategies?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Short-Term Vocabulary Preparation and L2 Listening

The role of pre-task vocabulary preparation in L2 listening has been examined through the lens of both cognitive load theory and vocabulary acquisition research. Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) predicts that listeners whose mental resources are consumed by lexical search have reduced capacity available for the higher-order processes of discourse integration, inferencing, and strategic gap-filling that effective IELTS performance demands. Pre-task vocabulary exposure reduces this bottom-up processing burden by pre-activating lexical representations, allowing listeners to allocate more cognitive resources to top-down comprehension (Berne, 1995).

Empirical evidence supports the beneficial effects of pre-listening vocabulary instruction on comprehension outcomes for L2 learners across a range of proficiency levels and listening formats (Berne, 1995; Teng, 2014). However, the critical variable of preparation duration has been inconsistently operationalized across studies. Most research comparing vocabulary preparation conditions has contrasted longer preparation periods (days or weeks) against no-preparation controls (Bonk, 2000; Stæhr, 2009). The specific comparison between same-day and just-in-time preparation has received minimal dedicated attention.

Nation (2001) argues that vocabulary knowledge must be not only present but also readily retrievable to support real-time comprehension. The distinction between deliberate and automatic lexical access is therefore critical: a learner who studied a word list the previous evening may have stronger declarative knowledge of target items than one who studied the same list 30 minutes earlier, but if neither has encountered the words frequently enough to activate automatic retrieval, the practical difference in comprehension performance may be negligible. This theoretical prediction motivates the present study's focus on perceived outcomes rather than objective comprehension scores alone.

2.2 Affective Dimensions of Vocabulary Preparation

Beyond its cognitive effects, pre-task vocabulary preparation exerts measurable affective influence on learners' readiness and task engagement. Arnold (1999) identified anxiety reduction as a key mechanism through which preparatory activities facilitate L2 performance: knowing that one has studied relevant vocabulary activates a sense of preparedness that reduces state anxiety and promotes a more confident, exploratory approach to task completion. Ellis (2005) further demonstrated that pre-task planning enhances both linguistic performance and affective engagement, with greater planning time associated with greater confidence gains.

In the Vietnamese EFL context, affective variables including test anxiety and self-efficacy have been identified as significant predictors of IELTS performance, independent of linguistic proficiency (Tran & Duong, 2020). This suggests that vocabulary preparation activities may be valuable not only for their direct lexical benefits but also for their confidence-building effects.

2.3 Pre-Listening Strategies and Vocabulary Use

Pre-task vocabulary preparation can activate both types of strategy: at the cognitive level, known vocabulary items serve as lexical anchors for contextual inferencing during listening; at the metacognitive level, advance familiarity with topic vocabulary enables listeners to predict content structure and allocate attention strategically (Berne, 1995).

A particularly important strategic behavior in the context of IELTS Listening Part 4 is the avoidance of attempting to decode every word sequentially in favor of selective attention to content words and flexible inferencing across gaps. Field (2008) identified word-by-word processing as characteristic of less proficient L2 listeners and as a predictor of comprehension failure, particularly when speech rate is high. The degree to which vocabulary preparation promotes or inhibits this maladaptive strategy is therefore a theoretically relevant outcome for the present comparison.

2.4 Perceived Listening Difficulties in the IELTS Context

Difficulties in IELTS Listening Part 4 are well-documented. Fast speech rate and unfamiliar vocabulary have consistently been identified as the most prevalent obstacles reported by L2 listeners across Asian EFL contexts (Azmi et al., 2014; Graham, 2006; Underwood, 1989). A particularly problematic difficulty is what Rost (1994) termed the 'real-time pressure' of listening: the inability to pause, re-read, or revisit content means that any processing failure cascades through subsequent segments of the passage. This manifests as the 'miss next part' phenomenon, which has been identified as the single most prevalent listening difficulty in Vietnamese EFL contexts (Tran & Duong, 2020; Duong & Chau, 2019). The present study examines whether this and related difficulties differ in frequency or severity between the two short-term preparation conditions.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Participants were drawn from a broader vocabulary-listening study conducted at a public university in southern Vietnam. The present analysis focuses exclusively on Group A (one-day preparation, $n = 26$) and Group B (30-minute in-class preparation, $n = 30$), the two groups for whom complete individual-level questionnaire data were available. All participants were third-year Vietnamese English-major students aged 21–22 years who had completed eight credit hours of Listening Skills courses. Their baseline listening proficiency was assessed as B1 (CEFR) on the basis of a PET-format listening examination completed at the end of the preceding academic year. Participant characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

Table-1
Participant characteristics by group

Characteristic	Group A — Same-Day (1 day)	Group B — Just-in-Time (30 min)
n	26	30
Year of study	Third year	Third year
Age	21–22	21–22
CEFR baseline	B1 (PET-equivalent)	B1 (PET-equivalent)
Listening credit hours completed	8 of 12	8 of 12
Vocabulary delivery mode	Take-home list; independent self-study	In-class guided review with researcher

Note. CEFR = Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. PET = Preliminary English Test. Group A received a take-home vocabulary list one day before the testing session. Group B received the same vocabulary list in class, 30 minutes before testing.

3.2 Vocabulary Preparation Conditions

The vocabulary preparation material consisted of a list of 10 target lexical items drawn from the IELTS Listening Part 4 passage used in the study. All participants were explicitly informed that these items would appear in the passage. Group A participants received the list as a take-home task one day before the testing session and were instructed to study the words independently using any method they chose, such as consulting dictionaries, writing example sentences, or reviewing collocations. Group B participants received the same list in class, 30 minutes before the testing session, with the researcher providing guided instruction covering each word's meaning, pronunciation, and a brief contextual example. This guided format for Group B was designed to maximise the effectiveness of the constrained time window while ensuring a standardized delivery across participants.

3.3 Instruments

The post-test questionnaire comprised three sections, all administered digitally through Microsoft Forms immediately after the listening test. Section 1 contained six items assessing perceived listening difficulties using a five-point frequency scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Section 2 contained four items assessing confidence and affective responses to vocabulary preparation using a five-point agreement scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Section 3

contained five items assessing pre-listening and during-listening strategy use, also on a five-point agreement scale. A final open-ended item asked participants to indicate their preferred vocabulary preparation time for future IELTS listening tasks.

3.4 Data Analysis

All questionnaire items were scored on their respective five-point scales and analysed using independent-samples t-tests to assess between-group differences, with the significance threshold set at $\alpha = .05$. Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d*, interpreted as small ($d \geq 0.20$), medium ($d \geq 0.50$), and large ($d \geq 0.80$) following conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 1988). Means (*M*) and standard deviations (*SD*) are reported for all items. Open-ended preferred preparation time responses were coded thematically and tabulated by frequency. All statistical analyses were performed in Python 3 using the statistics standard library.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Perceived Listening Difficulties (RQ1)

Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, t-statistics, and effect sizes for all six perceived difficulty items, along with the combined Usually + Always percentages as an indicator of difficulty prevalence. Across the majority of items, the two groups reported comparable levels of difficulty, with no statistically significant between-group differences on five of the six items. This pattern of equivalence is itself a substantively important finding: it suggests that increasing available preparation time from 30 minutes to one full day did not meaningfully reduce the perceived difficulty of IELTS Listening Part 4 for this proficiency cohort.

The one item that reached statistical significance was Q2, fast speech rate as a listening obstacle (Group A: $M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.64$; Group B: $M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.76$; $t(54) = 2.071$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.55$). This is a medium effect, indicating that Group A participants reported greater difficulty with speech rate than Group B participants. This finding expects that more preparation time would reduce rather than increase perceived difficulty. A plausible interpretation is that Group A participants, having studied vocabulary independently at home the previous day, approached the listening task with elevated expectations of recognition: they anticipated hearing their studied items clearly and were correspondingly more sensitive to the disruption caused by connected speech features such as assimilation and reduction. Group B participants, by contrast, may have had lower recognition expectations following their brief 30-minute guided review, causing them to adopt a more tolerant, holistic listening approach from the outset.

The miss-next-part difficulty (Q5) was consistently high across both groups (Group A: 80.8% Usually/Always; Group B: 90.0% Usually/Always), with Group B reporting a marginally higher mean ($M = 4.70$) than Group A ($M = 4.27$), though this difference did not reach significance ($t = -1.875$, $p = .066$, $d = -0.52$). This pattern suggests that the real-time processing bottleneck identified by Rost (1994) is robust across both preparation conditions and is not substantially ameliorated by short-term vocabulary study of any duration. Unfamiliar vocabulary remained highly prevalent for both groups (Group A: 84.6%; Group B: 70.0%), reinforcing Nation's (2006) estimate that listening comprehension requires a substantially larger vocabulary than short-term preparation can realistically provide.

Table-2
Between-Group Comparison of perceived listening difficulties

Item	Group A M (SD)	Group B M (SD)	t (54)	Cohen's d	Usually+Always % A / B
Q1. Cannot recognize word sounds/forms	4.00 (0.80)	3.63 (0.72)	1.793	0.48	69.2% / 50.0%
Q2. Fast speech rate causes missed parts	4.42 (0.64)	4.03 (0.76)	2.071*	0.55	92.3% / 73.3%
Q3. Confuse one word for another	3.88 (0.82)	3.83 (0.91)	0.222	0.06	69.2% / 63.3%
Q4. Too many unfamiliar words/phrases	4.19 (0.80)	3.87 (1.07)	1.296	0.34	84.6% / 70.0%

Q5. Miss next part while processing earlier	4.27 (1.00)	4.70 (0.65)	-1.875	-0.52	80.8% / 90.0%
Q6. Hard to sustain concentration	3.69 (1.12)	3.23 (1.28)	1.430	0.38	61.5% / 40.0%

Note. * $p < .05$ (two-tailed independent-samples t-test, $df = 54$). Cohen's d : small ≥ 0.20 , medium ≥ 0.50 , large ≥ 0.80 . M = mean on five-point frequency scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). Usually + Always percentages represent the proportion of participants rating the item 4 or 5.

4.2 Confidence and Affective Responses to Vocabulary Preparation (RQ2)

Table 3 presents the confidence and affective response data for both groups. The most striking finding is unequivocal: not a single participant in either group agreed that they had performed well on the listening test (C1, Agree + SA = 0.0% in both groups). This unanimous self-assessment of poor performance, combined with comparable mean scores below the scale midpoint (Group A: $M = 2.62$; Group B: $M = 2.30$), confirms that neither short-term preparation condition was sufficient to produce confident subjective outcomes. This finding is an important implications for practitioners who advocate for just-in-time or same-day vocabulary preparation as a performance-enhancing intervention.

Despite this shared experience of poor subjective performance, both groups reported meaningful positive appraisals of the vocabulary preparation itself. Item C2 was endorsed by 73.1% of Group A and 83.3% of Group B (Agree or Strongly Agree), with no statistically significant between-group difference ($t = -0.684$, $p = .497$, $d = -0.18$). Similarly, C3 without vocabulary preparation, performance would have been worse, which was endorsed by 80.8% of Group A and 73.3% of Group B, again without significant between-group difference ($t = 1.091$, $p = .280$, $d = 0.30$). These consistent endorsement rates across groups suggest that learners in both conditions perceived vocabulary preparation as genuinely protective, even when they did not perceive it as sufficient to produce success.

Confidence improvement (C4) showed a small, non-significant advantage for Group A ($M = 3.54$, $d = 0.20$), consistent with Ellis's (2005) observation that greater planning time is associated with marginally greater affective readiness. However, the small effect size and lack of statistical significance indicate that even this advantage was not robust in the present sample. Taken together, the confidence data suggest that the affective benefits of short-term vocabulary preparation are largely insensitive to whether that preparation occurs one day or 30 minutes before the task.

Table-3
Between-Group Bomparison of confidence and affective responses to vocabulary preparation

Item	Group A M (SD)	Group B M (SD)	t (54)	Cohen's d	Agree+SA % A / B
C1. I performed well on the test.	2.62 (0.50)	2.30 (0.53)	—	—	0.0% / 0.0%
C2. Vocabulary preparation was very helpful for my comprehension.	3.96 (0.72)	4.13 (1.14)	-0.684	-0.18	73.1% / 83.3%
C3. Without vocabulary preparation, I would have performed worse.	4.00 (0.98)	3.73 (0.83)	1.091	0.30	80.8% / 73.3%
C4. My confidence improved noticeably through vocabulary preparation.	3.54 (0.86)	3.37 (0.85)	0.750	0.20	57.7% / 46.7%

Note. No t-test was computed for C1 due to zero variance in both groups (all participants selected Disagree or Strongly Disagree). M = mean on five-point agreement scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Agree + SA = percentage selecting 4 or 5.

4.3 Pre-Listening and During-Listening Strategy Use (RQ3)

Table 4 presents the between-Group Bomparison of strategy use. As with the difficulty and confidence data, the predominant pattern is one of equivalence: four of the five strategy items showed no statistically significant between-group differences. This suggests that the mode and duration of short-term vocabulary preparation did not substantially alter participants' strategic orientation toward the listening task.

The one significant difference was S5: 'I tried to hear and process every single word' (Group A: $M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.02$; Group B: $M = 2.83$, $SD = 0.83$; $t(54) = 2.043$, $p < .05$, $d = 0.56$). Group A participants were significantly more likely than Group B participants to adopt a word-by-word processing approach during the listening task. This finding aligns with Field's (2008) characterization of word-by-word processing as a less efficient listening strategy, and with the Q2 finding that Group A reported greater sensitivity to speech rate: both patterns suggest that one-day self-directed preparation may inadvertently reinforce a bottom-up, word-focused processing orientation, as learners who have invested time studying individual vocabulary items may feel compelled to locate each studied word in the audio stream rather than processing the text holistically.

Group B participants, who received guided in-class preparation with explicit contextual framing, showed a marginally stronger tendency to use proper nouns to predict the passage topic before listening (S2: $M = 3.93$ vs. 3.73 , $d = -0.33$) and to use known vocabulary to infer unknown content during listening (S3: $M = 3.63$ vs. 3.35 , $d = -0.35$), though neither difference reached significance. These trends suggest that guided in-class preparation, despite its brevity, may be more effective than independent home study at promoting the top-down, predictive processing orientation that is characteristic of skilled L2 listening (Vandergrift, 1997; Rost & Wilson, 2013). This interpretation should be treated cautiously given the non-significant effect sizes, but it represents a hypothesis worth testing in future studies with larger samples.

Table-4
Between-Group Comparison of pre-listening and during-listening strategy use

Strategy Item	Group A M (SD)	Group B M (SD)	t (54)	Cohen's d	Agree+SA % A / B
S1. Used provided vocabulary to predict target words before listening.	3.85 (0.61)	3.50 (0.94)	1.655	0.43	73.1% / 66.7%
S2. Used provided vocabulary to predict passage content before listening.	3.73 (0.67)	3.93 (0.58)	-1.201	-0.33	69.2% / 86.7%
S3. Used proper nouns to predict the topic of the passage.	3.35 (0.85)	3.63 (0.81)	-1.293	-0.35	50.0% / 70.0%
S4. Used known vocabulary to infer unknown parts during listening.	3.58 (0.64)	3.20 (0.85)	1.889	0.50	65.4% / 46.7%
S5. Tried to hear and process every single word.	3.35 (1.02)	2.83 (0.83)	2.043*	0.56	46.2% / 23.3%

Note. * $p < .05$. M = mean on five-point agreement scale. Agree + SA = percentage selecting 4 or 5. Cohen's d: small ≥ 0.20 , medium ≥ 0.50 .

4.4 Learners' Preferred Preparation Time

The open-ended item asking participants to specify their preferred future preparation time yielded a striking divergence between groups (Table 5). Among Group B participants, who had experienced 30-minute in-class preparation, the modal preference was 1 hour (56.7%, $n = 17$), with only 16.7% ($n = 5$) preferring immediate pre-listening preparation. This pattern suggests that 30-minute preparation, while perceived as helpful, felt inadequate to the majority of Group B participants: they desired approximately double their actual preparation time, gravitating toward a middle ground between just-in-time and same-day preparation.

Among Group A participants, who had experienced one-day preparation, the modal preference was 3 days (50.0%, $n = 13$), with a further 19.2% ($n = 5$) preferring one full week. Taken together, 69.2% of Group A participants desired substantially more preparation time than they received. This escalating preference is consistent with Schmitt's (2000) observation that learners who experience the benefits of vocabulary preparation tend to overestimate how much additional preparation would further improve their performance, particularly when their actual test experience confirms that their preparation was insufficient.

The divergence in preferences between the two groups has a practical implication that extends beyond the immediately counterintuitive: learners who experience teacher-guided in-class preparation are more likely to identify a realistic, achievable preparation goal (1 hour) than learners who experience self-directed home study, who may set aspirationally longer targets (3 days to 1 week) that are less feasible within typical course structures. This suggests

that structured in-class vocabulary activities, even brief ones, may be more effective at calibrating learners' preparation expectations toward achievable goals.

Table-5
Preferred vocabulary preparation time by group (open-ended item, col. 29)

Preferred Preparation Time	Group A n (%)	Group B n (%)	Observation
Right before listening (< 30 min)	1 (3.8%)	5 (16.7%)	Group B favours immediate prep
1 hour	3 (11.5%)	17 (56.7%)	Most popular for Group B
1 day	4 (15.4%)	4 (13.3%)	Similar across groups
3 days	13 (50.0%)	3 (10.0%)	Most popular for Group A
1 week	5 (19.2%)	1 (3.3%)	Group A desires longer prep

Note. Response options were open-ended and subsequently categorised. 'Right before listening' includes responses equivalent to 'trước khi nghe' in the original Vietnamese.

5. DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Vietnamese students learning English as a foreign language at a B1 level who are doing IELTS Listening Part 4, there is almost no meaningful difference between preparing vocabulary one day ahead or just 30 minutes before. These two ways of preparing produced statistically similar results on 12 out of 14 measures. The only two differences were that students who prepared one day ahead (Group A) were more affected by fast speech and tended to process the listening word by word. This suggests that preparing on the same day might lead to a slightly less helpful listening strategy, not a better one.

This finding has a clear message for language teachers. When preparation time is short, a well-planned 30 minute vocabulary activity in class is not meaningfully worse than asking students to study on their own at home for a whole day. In fact, the guided classroom activity may even help students develop better prediction skills for listening, though this needs more research. Teachers can feel confident using class time for structured pre-listening vocabulary work instead of leaving it to homework, which students might rush through or do unevenly (Tran & Duong, 2020).

However, both groups of students felt they had done poorly on the test and wanted much more preparation time than they received. This points to a second important lesson. Neither type of short-term preparation is enough to truly improve performance on IELTS Listening Part 4 for B1 level learners. The vocabulary needed to understand the academic talks in Part 4 is estimated at 6,000 to 7,000 word families (Nation, 2006). This level cannot be reached with only a day or less of preparation. Teachers and students who expect short-term vocabulary study to boost performance, rather than just build confidence and reduce anxiety, will likely be disappointed.

The practical advice from these findings is to use two approaches together. Short vocabulary sessions before each IELTS practice task should be kept as a way to build confidence and focus attention. But these should be part of a larger, long-term plan to build vocabulary systematically. This means using methods like spaced repetition (Kornell, 2009; Nakata, 2011), studying the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000), learning about word parts (Schmitt & Zimmerman, 2002), and doing extensive listening (Krashen, 1989). Over time, this builds the vocabulary needed to handle IELTS Listening Part 4.

6. CONCLUSION

This study looked at a question that matters directly for the classroom. Does it make a difference if vocabulary preparation for IELTS Listening Part 4 happens one day or 30 minutes before the task? Using questionnaire answers from 56 Vietnamese EFL students in two short-term preparation groups, the findings suggest it largely does not, at least for the types of outcomes measured here. Group A (one-day preparation) and Group B (30-minute guided preparation) reported very similar levels of difficulty, confidence, and strategy use. Only two items showed a real difference. Both of these differences, greater sensitivity to fast speech and more word-by-word processing in Group A, suggest that same-day self-study might lead to slightly less effective listening strategies, not better ones.

Both groups also felt they had done poorly on the test, and both wanted much longer preparation time than they had. These results together suggest that short-term vocabulary preparation, no matter the exact timing, is not enough to overcome the vocabulary limits that affect IELTS Listening Part 4 performance at the B1 level. While such preparation is useful for building confidence and focusing attention, real progress in listening requires ongoing, long-term vocabulary teaching, not last-minute strategies.

This study has some limits. The sample size, while enough for the analysis done ($n = 56$ total), is not large enough to detect very small differences between groups. The study was also limited to one school and one IELTS Part 4 listening passage, which means the findings may not apply more broadly. Also, because the study did not measure actual listening scores and focused only on what students reported, what students felt and what they actually understood might not match. Future research should combine actual listening scores with questionnaire data, use larger and more varied groups of students, and explore whether guided in-class preparation leads to more helpful strategies than self-study of the same length across different skill levels.

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