

DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING LISTENING COMPREHENSION SKILL OF ENGLISH MAJORED SOPHOMORES AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY IN VIET NAM

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ABSTRACT

Listening is regarded to be an essential skill that adds to the success of English learning and daily conversation. It is also a difficult skill for learners who study English as foreign language. However, the learners frequently face the numerous obstacles which cause an obstruction in learning listening skill. For this reason, the current research is carried out with the aim of investigating the difficulties in listening comprehension skill encountered by English majored sophomores at Tay Do University. In fact, 60 sophomores majoring in English were selected to take part in the study. The collected data and information from two instruments (questionnaire and interview paper) were all analyzed. The findings revealed that pronunciation, intonation, accent, vocabulary, grammar, length, speech rate, psychological and background knowledge were difficulties in listening subject encountered by English majored sophomores. This research could help students recognize problems and improve their listening ability.

KEYWORDS: *Listening, English majored sophomores, University*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

It is believed that English is extremely vital in everyday life. It is regarded as the world's second language. As a result, listening to English is critical for students. Listening is thought to be quite popular in daily conversation as well as the language development process. If students learn English successfully, they may transform their lives into fantastic opportunities for good careers with high income. That is why English is one of the most significant languages in the world.

Furthermore, the importance of listening skills in the language acquisition process cannot be overstated. It is obvious from the student's linguistic growth as a result of language learning. According to Pourhosein and Ahmadi (2011) "Out the four main areas of communication skills called listening, speaking, reading, and writing, listening is the most important of all." "Listening is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom." (Ferris, 1998; Murphy, 1991). Listening is a vital skill for improving students' English learning, particularly in communication. However, due to the intricate and delicate nature of hearing comprehension in a second or foreign language, listening is classified as the most difficult skill. Thus, having high listening comprehension skills is not a simple task when English learners are confronted with multiple impediments to understanding the material. Hamouda (2013) emphasized that comprehending speech is a very difficult activity for students. Learners face a lot of problems when they listen to a language.

For those above reasons, the investigation on "Difficulties in learning listening comprehension skill of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University" was conducted.

1.2 Research aim

The research attempted to investigate the difficulties in listening comprehension of English majored students at Tay Do University. It would be expected that the findings of this review paper provide good views for not only the learners but also teachers to have a reasonable learning and teaching strategies for learning language, especially listening comprehension skill.

1.3 Research question

The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. Do English majored sophomores at Tay Do University have difficulties in listening comprehension?
2. What difficulties do English majored sophomores at Tay Do University face during learning listening comprehension skill?

1.4 Significance of the research

The research is done to help sophomores majoring in English realize their problems in learning English listening. In addition, the teacher of English can change the teaching methods and suggest possible solutions in Listening to support their students improve listening English better. Furthermore, it is critical for learners to identify their listening comprehension challenges and select which learning techniques are appropriate for them to practice in order to become better listeners. As a result, this research might be beneficial material for individuals who want to use the findings as a foundation for additional research in this field.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions of listening comprehension

Listening comprehension has traditionally been regarded as the most difficult skill among the four language skills. In the communication process, listening is the ability to receive and explain messages. Furthermore, listening is the key to communicate; it serves some of the possible purposes; it directly supports other skills such as writing and speaking.

There are numerous definitions of listening skills.

Brown (2004) explained "Listening is a spoken or written response from the student that indicates correct (or incorrect) auditory processing." In order to become better listeners, the learners must think actively when they are listening. Many language-learning activities involve listening, both inside and outside of the language classroom. The improvement in listening skills will serve as a foundation for the development of other language skills.

Vishwanath (2013) defined "Listening skill is key to receiving messages effectively. It is a combination of hearing what another person says and psychological involvement with the person who is talking." Herbert (2004) defined "Listening skills are essential for learning since they enable students to acquire insights and information, and to achieve success in communicating with others."

As a result, it is widely admitted that "Listening comprehension is not only merely the process of a unidirectional receiving of audible symbols, but also an interactive process." (Brown, 2001). Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood. If people do not understand what the other person is saying, then they will not know how to respond correctly. Therefore, being an able listener is very important to understand interest and concern of both the person and situation.

Basing on the definitions provided above, it is possible to conclude that listening is one of the abilities of every human being who can be seen directly, but not everyone in the world can listen to English except those who are their native speaker or first language.

In conclusion, it is clear that listening skills play a critical role in students' academic lives. However, the guidance to make it possible is still unclear and necessitates further investigation, so this study attempts to fill the gap while also raising students' awareness of negative factors influencing the outcomes of their listening.

2.2 The importance of Listening Comprehension

No one can deny the necessity of listening skills in a range of different language circumstances since receiving linguistic information is the cornerstone of learning a language.

Listening is considered a foundation in acquiring language. Emphasizing the importance of listening in language learning, Peterson (2001) stated that there is no other sort of linguistic input as simple to absorb as spoken language obtained from listening through listening, learners can gain an understanding of the inner workings of language systems at various levels, laying the groundwork for more fluent productive abilities." Most people believe that being able to write and speak in a second language demonstrates that they understand the language; however, this is not the case if they lack effective listening skills. That is, "Listening is the fundamental skill in language learning, and students will spend more than half of their time functioning in a foreign language listening." (Nunan, 1998).

Moreover, listening comprehension is an element in learning other skill. Being an important skill for communication so that listening is the most primary tool for language learning process and enhancing of the student's ability to perceive speech, the amount of input they get will increase and thus support the student language acquisition. Krashen (1989) averred that, "People acquire language by understanding the linguistic information they hear." Thus, language acquisition is achieved mainly through receiving understandable input and listening ability is the critical component in achieving understandable language input. Besides, Krashen et al. (1984) argued that, "Acquisition takes place only when students absorb enough comprehensible input."

In conclusion, listening has an important role both in daily life and in academic contexts as it is crucial for people to sustain effective communication. Emphasizing the importance of listening, Anderson and Lynch (2003) stated that, "Listening skills are as important as speaking skills because people cannot communicate face-to-face unless both types of skills are developed together." Also "Listening skills are also important for learning purposes since through listening students receive information and gain insights." (Wallace et al. 2004).

2.3 Strategies of listening comprehension

Goh (2000) said that, "It is very important to teach listening strategies to students and before doing this, teachers should increase learners' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, and phonology." According to Vandergrift (1999), "The development of strategy is significant for the training of listening and learners can guide and assess their own understanding and answers."

Regarding all the strategies for listening, Rost and Ross (1991) expressed that there are three main types of strategies: metacognitive, cognitive and social strategies.

2.3.1 Metacognitive strategies

Metacognitive methods are a type of self-regulated learning that includes attempts to plan, check, monitor, choose, modify, and assess, ect. For example, in metacognitive planning tactics, learners would explain the objectives of a forthcoming listening assignment and pay attention to specific components of language input or situational circumstances that aided in task comprehension (Vandergrift, 1999)

Wenden (1998) mentioned "Learners who use metacognitive strategies can learn faster and integrate the knowledge outstandingly, can be constant receivers and deal with all situations, have self-confidence to get help from partners, teachers, or family, and can observe and assess themselves." Salataci (2002) indicated that the application of metacognitive strategies in the listening process boosts learners' self-confidence, motivation, and capacity to accomplish tasks.

2.3.2 Cognitive strategies

The cognitive strategies relate to comprehending and storing input in working memory or long-term memory for later retrieval. Derry and Murphy (1986) defined "Cognitive strategies as problem-solving techniques that learners use for the acquisition of knowledge or skill." They are investigated from the aspects of bottom-up strategies, top-down strategies.

Bottom-up strategies are word-for-word translation, adjusting the rhythm of speech, repeating the oral text, and focusing on prosodic aspects of the text. Listening for precise details, detecting cognates, and recognizing word-order patterns are examples of bottom-up methods. Nunan (1999) expressed "Bottom – up processing refers to the listening process that starts with discriminating sounds, identifying words and comprehending grammatical structures and build eventually to comprehension of meaning."

Besides, top-down processing is dependent on the listener, who draws on prior knowledge of the topic, the circumstance or context, the kind of material, and the language. Listening for the core concept, forecasting, making conclusions, and summarizing are all top-down strategies. Brown (2006) defined top-down processing as the process of "Using our prior knowledge and experiences; we know certain things about certain topics and situations and use that information to understand."

Vandegrift (2004) expressed the learner use two methods: top-down or bottom-up depending on the goal of listening. In other words, both processes usually happen together in real-life listening. Cahyono and Widiati (2009) stated that successful listeners are those who can employ both bottom-up and top-down processes by blending new information with prior knowledge.

2.3.3 Social/ affective strategies

Vandergrift (2003) and Abdalhamid (2012) expressed that socio-affective strategies are techniques that listeners use to cooperate with others, to check their comprehension, and to reduce their apprehension. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) said that affective strategies are very significant because the learning situation and learners' social-psychological factors are closely related to each other.

Wilson (2003) said that socio-affective strategies are related to students' interaction with other speakers and their reactions towards learning. Habte Gabr (2006) stated in socio-affective strategy, students should know how to decrease anxiety, feel confident during listening activities, and raise motivation in improving listening skill.

2.4 Potential difficulties in listening comprehension

During the process of learning foreign language, especially listening, learners often meet many obstacles. Learning English is no different. This section will discuss the prevalent elements that influence the listening abilities of English major sophomores.

2.4.1 Linguistic factors

Linguistic factors, which include pronunciation, intonation, accent, vocabulary, and grammar are the most important aspects influencing a student's listening ability.

Pronunciation, intonation and accent

Initially, accurately pronouncing a word is a vital skill throughout the listening comprehension process. Ur gave a declaration (1984), which stated that "if a word is pronounced differently from the way it was said when it was learnt, the listener may not recognize it as the same word, or may even miss its existence completely." Because of their mispronunciation, students frequently feel weird with native speakers' pronunciation, even when they already know the word. They should strive to learn about linguistic elements of words such as stress falls, weak forms, and strong forms. Ur (1984, p. 4) said that, "If the listeners learn to pronounce the sound accurately himself, it will be much easier for him to hear them correctly when being said by someone else."

On the other hand, when students learn a new language, their mother tongue can be a major impediment to properly pronouncing the language. As a result, they frequently struggle to detect the pronunciation of native speakers. Learning how to recognize and choose sound signals based on pronunciation is the first stage in developing listening comprehension; hence, pronunciation knowledge must be learned. When students' pronunciation expertise is lacking, their ability to distinguish suffers affecting their listening comprehension.

The second factor in this section is intonation, which also influences listening ability. Crystal (1969) emphasized "The importance of making generalizations about intonation based on authentic, unscripted speech, and the roles played by prosodic features such as tempo, pitch range, loudness and rhythmicity in communicative functions usually attributed to intonation."

Brazil et al. (1980) also argued that "Intonation in English might also conveys a speaker's involvement in a conversation as well as a desire to take turns of talk or leave the conversation." As a result, we may conclude that accent is a critical component of linguistic information that influences English listening acquisition.

The final, English is a worldwide language with multiple dialects in many places including English, American English, and Australian English and etc. Because of the diverse accents, English learners may feel unfamiliar with the terms mentioned by the speaker at first.

An understanding of the features of learner accents and their impact on intelligibility can help teachers identify and address characteristics of learner pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 1997). The primary aim is that students be understood. Good pronunciation is needed for this, but a "perfect accent" is not (Harmer, 1991)

In class lectures, students are familiar with the accent of teachers who are non-native speakers. Therefore, they will have an interruption in the whole listening comprehension process because unfamiliar accents make a trouble for the listeners.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary knowledge is an important aspect that helps learners recognize words quickly, which is important for listening comprehension. Listeners may meet unknown terms in a listening activity, causing them to pause and check the meaning of that word.

At that time, the flow of information will be missed. Everyone who is studying a new language as a second language should begin by knowing the vocabulary of that language. In reality, this is the foundational skill for the four key English skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. "Vocabulary is a vital component of language ability and offers much of the essentials for language learners to speak, listen, read, and write so effectively," assert Richard and Renandya (2002, p.252) In English, vocabulary is an important part of English listening skills. In learning to listen, the lack of vocabulary is a big obstacle for students. A word can have multiple meanings in context." Knowledge of the vocabulary used by speakers is another quality for good listening comprehension. Some words have multiple meanings when they are used in different contexts. Most students can only identify the most common meaning of the word. In order to become an effective learner, one must understand a broader range of vocabulary" (Samuels, 1984, p.183). When confronted with a new word, students are unable to grasp the essential points in listening because they focus too much on listening word by word. As a result, when students listen, they frequently struggle to discern the appropriate meanings of words. Furthermore, because to a lack of vocabulary, pupils would misinterpret the speakers' views. Underwood (1989, p.17) says that "for people listening to a foreign language an unknown word can be like a suddenly dropped barrier causing them to stop and think about the meaning of the word and thus making them miss the next part of the speech".

In general, vocabulary is an essential component of English listening since students will struggle to become competent listeners if they do not have a sufficient vocabulary. Overcoming these problems allows listeners to communicate effectively and hear messages clearly, resulting in improved communication.

Grammar

Grammar is defined as the rules of words and how words are combined to form sentences. Grammar is a critical foundation that students must understand when learning a language.

In general, a word's form may change unexpectedly in certain grammatical contexts of sentences. Furthermore, in sentences, each form of a word has different positions that serve different meanings and implications, so students must understand sentence structures thoroughly. Furthermore, students may encounter difficulties with unfamiliar grammar structure sentences because there are many sentence types that are complex and very different from the home language. Based on Graham (2006) said understanding is unlikely to occur with precision if the learner is unable to differentiate the main clause from a subordinate clause and is unable to comprehend their links, while understanding the meaning of every word in the sentence. When students are taught the psychological analysis approach, they soon grow accustomed to examining linguistic structure (Buck, 1995; Goh, 1998). As a result, a lack of grammatical expertise might lower English listening capabilities.

For the reasons stated above, having solid grammar knowledge is vital for studying English as well as studying listening or understanding what speakers are saying throughout the listening process.

2.4.2 Background knowledge

A lack of prior information is an impediment to learning. It could be short but accurate and convincing. On the other hand, many researchers have tried to find out more about prior or background knowledge in a much more complicated manner. Dochy and Alexander (1995) claimed that it is the whole of a person's knowledge, including explicit and tacit knowledge, metacognitive and conceptual knowledge. Also, according to Biemans and Simons (1996) defined "new knowledge" is created when learners enter "a learning environment" with relevant things that they know. Therefore, students need to prepare the listening materials based on topics which are political issue, business report, daily conversation and etc.

Moreover, (Anderson and Lynch, 1988) stated that the second kind of knowledge which its lack presents a problem in the listening comprehension is the linguistic knowledge. In this case, listeners can clearly hear but unable to understand. This is due to their low proficiency and their bad level in grammar, syntax, phonology and the semantic features in the target language. Even if listeners can understand the surface meaning of the text, they may have considerable difficulties in comprehending the whole meaning of the passage unless they share the same background knowledge. Nonverbal clues such as facial expressions, nods, gestures, or tone of voice can also be easily misinterpreted by listeners from different culture.

To summarize, the learner's background is an excellent agent in listening comprehension. Soureshjani (2011) said that having prior knowledge is a critical aspect to good understanding of any sort of reading and hearing materials, hence language learners who want to increase their reading and listening comprehension should have more exposure to reading and listening materials.

2.4.3 The length and speech rate

This section will discuss the delivery speed control of speakers during the listening process and the length of the listening texts.

Underwood (1989) said that speed can make listening passage difficult. If the speakers speak too fast students may have serious problems to understand L2 words. This coincides with the results of the study is done by Hasan (2000) indicated that unfamiliar words, difficult grammatical structures, and the length of the spoken passages are the most important factors that cause problems for learners' listening comprehension.

Moreover, it is not easy for a lower level student to listen more than 30-minute-long listening, then completing the desired activities.

Therefore, "If the text containing a lot of information, it is not easy to store everything in mind, exceptional listening ability and strategy required to understand." (Caroll, 1977).

In conclusion, this is a considerable factor when the teacher designs the listening test so that it can be suitable with their student's level.

2.4.4 Psychological obstacles

There are various aspects that impact students' English listening abilities that are closely tied to linguistic and background knowledge issues. One of them might be psychological obstacles. The most problematic element causing many pupils' difficulty in listening to English is a psychological obstacle. It refers to difficulties caused by environmental factors such as fear, hesitation, adaptation, etc. Dulay et al. (1982, p.4) expressed when a student is exposed to a new language, his first internal hurdles are posed by the individual's emotional barriers.

Furthermore, a lack of attention is a psychological obstacle in English hearing, therefore pupils are unable to notice the essential aspects in listening comprehension. In other words, anxiety might be seen as a barrier in a student's psyche. (Wheless, 1975, p.263) said, "The fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing or not being able to adjust psychologically to the message sent by others." The duration of the spoken sentences is another hurdle that students face when listening. Actually, when students listen to long text lectures, they often feel stressed and ashamed since they are unable to retain all of the nuances and take down all of the material. Hasan (2000, p.143) knew that, "The length of time students listen may cause memory problem or even fatigue and this would distract listener's attention from grasping the meaning of the text when there is a lapse in concentration."

As a result, students must overcome this disadvantage in order to improve their performance in the English listening course.

2.5 Summary of literature review

This chapter defined listening comprehension as the ability to grasp the meaning of communications or speech. Knowing speech sounds, grasping the meaning of individual words, and comprehending the structure of sentences are all part of the listening process. It also emphasizes the importance of the listener's expectation, the circumstance, previous knowledge, and the subject.

Furthermore, several practices are employed to improve listening comprehension abilities. They are methods or activities that directly help to the understanding and retention of hearing input. This chapter discussed tactics such as metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, and social strategies. Metacognitive methods were a type of self-directed learning. It may be divided into three categories: pre-listening planning methods, while-listening monitoring strategies, and post-listening assessment tactics. Cognitive techniques for understanding and storing input in working memory or long-term memory for later retrieval. They are studied from the perspectives of bottom-up and top-down strategies. Bottom-up processing refers to using the incoming information as the foundation for comprehending the message. Top-down processing, on the other hand, is the capacity to forecast the meaning of communications based on signals such as background knowledge, the circumstance, and so on. Emotions and attitudes are elements that are employed in social methods to collaborate with others, verify knowledge, or reduce fear.

However, due to challenges, being a good listener is quite challenging. Pronunciation, intonation, accent, vocabulary, and grammar are all typical linguistic factors that influence English majors' listening comprehension abilities. The first linguistic element is the pronunciation of words that differ from their written form. Following that is intonation, which is the cause of confusion in a discussion due to variances in emphasis and intonation. The next issue is accent, which has a significant impact on listening comprehension abilities. Fourth, most children struggle with listening comprehension due to a lack of vocabulary. Grammatical structure is the final linguistic aspect to consider. Another aspect that contributes to difficulty in listening to texts is speed. Students will be unable to follow the readings if the speaker speaks quicker than usual. Furthermore, it is difficult for pupils to remember anything if they are required to listen to a long book containing a lot of information. Furthermore, prior knowledge of a topic is an essential component that might lead to poor listening comprehension. Last but not least, the most challenging aspect producing many issues in many pupils' listening comprehension is psychological impediment.

In conclusion, the literature study demonstrates the concept of listening comprehension as well as listening comprehension methodologies. The problems of hearing comprehension are also highlighted, including linguistic factors with pronunciation, intonation, accent, vocabulary and grammar; the speed and the length of the texts; background knowledge and psychological obstacle.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

The aim of this research was to discover the problems in listening comprehension of English majored sophomores at Tay Do University in Can Tho City. To collect data, it was employed quantitative and qualitative methods which equated to a questionnaire, students' interview paper and teacher's interview paper. The main key of this study was participants. They were sixty English majored sophomores, and three teachers of English.

3.2 Participants

This research was completed with the participants of 60 second-year students majoring in English language in different classes. There were 15 males and 45 females. Their ages ranged from 19 to 21 and they came from both rural and urban area. Participants spoke Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English was considered as their foreign language. They have learnt English from 6 to 12 years. They were given a questionnaire and interview in order to get information about problems in learning listening comprehension skill. Furthermore, to make the research more accurate, three teachers of English at Tay Do university were also invited to answer interview questions.

3.3 Instrument

The questionnaire, students' interview paper and teacher's interview paper were the instruments. They were used to collect the participants' ideas about difficulties in learning listening comprehension skill. The aim of this questionnaire was to find out the student's problems in English listening. Besides, interviews were also a useful tool for collecting information. The students and the teachers completed interview to share their opinions which were essential for the survey.

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of two parts.

The first part contained 6 questions to collect some general information of participants. The second part included 21 statements which were evaluated base on 5 scales: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree. It was classified into the following groups.

Table 1: The gist of questionnaire

Question/Statement	Summary of the question's/statement's content
From 1 to 6	Students' background
From 7 to 10	Pronunciation, intonation and accent
From 11 to 14	Vocabulary
From 15 & 16	Grammar
From 17 & 18	Background knowledge
From 19 to 21	Length of texts
From 22 & 23	Speed rate
From 24 to 27	Psychology

3.3.2 Students' interview paper

The second data gathering instrument in this part was students' interview paper. 15 students were randomly invited. The paper consisted of five questions focusing on three primary points: attitude, challenges with learning listening, and some suggested remedies to those problems. The participants' ideas were quite valuable to this research on listening comprehension difficulties.

3.3.3 Teacher's interview paper

The teacher's interview paper was the third survey tool. Three teachers of English were invited. The paper consisted of three questions about common difficulties that students faced and how teachers dealt with them.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Results

This section was central to the study. It showed the essential information and ideas from 60 English majoring sophomores. The results were separated into two sections: results of the questionnaire and results of the interview.

4.1.1 Results of the questionnaire

The questionnaire provided with a variety of relevant information from participants which was separated into two sections, student's background information and common problems in listening comprehension skill.

a. Students' background information

Students' living condition

The student's living environment was the most important factor affecting their learning process, especially listening comprehension skills. The figure below indicated the percentage of the living environment of the participants.

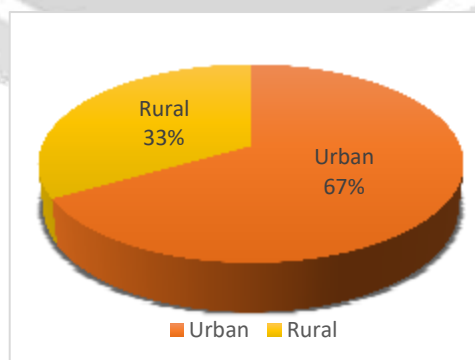


Figure 1: Students' living condition

Figure 1 showed that 66.67% of English majoring sophomores were from rural areas whereas only 33.33% were from urban areas. In reality, the capacity to learn a foreign language well or poorly was influenced by the location of the learners, specifically English subjects. Obviously, learning English in rural areas had many disadvantages for students because of the lack of equipment. Furthermore, most high school lessons focused on grammar and vocabulary, which did not assist students enhance their language abilities, particularly listening skill.

Students' years of learning English

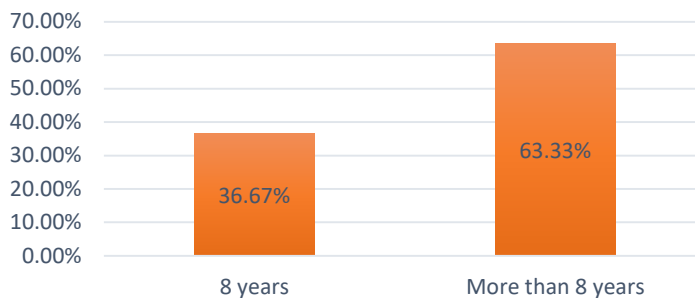


Figure 2: Students' years of learning English

The number of years studying English also affected students' listening comprehension skills. According to figure 2, participants had been studying English for 8 years with 36.67%. They studied this subject for 8 years before going in university. Besides, the highest one is the students' years of studying English which was more than 8 years (63.33%). It was a wonderful thing that the percentage of students learning English for more than 8 years was higher than the percentage of students studying for 8 years. Despite the fact that students had spent many years learning English and had gained valuable study experience, they still faced a variety of challenges in their listening comprehension skills.

Student's weekly practicing time

Table 2: Student's weekly practicing time

Period(s) a week	Percentage
Less than 5 periods	25%
About 5 periods	60%
More than 5 periods	15%

Of all 20/60 students who did study English listening at high school, there were 5 students spending less than 5 periods a week practicing listening to English (25%). 60% said that they also practiced listening for about 5 periods a week. Especially, there was 15% of students practicing listening to English for more than 5 periods. There was nothing unexpected about the hours spent in high school learning English, specially listening skills. Students not only learnt English but also learnt different social subjects. As a result, they limited opportunity to work on their listening skills.

Students' attitude toward the importance of listening comprehension

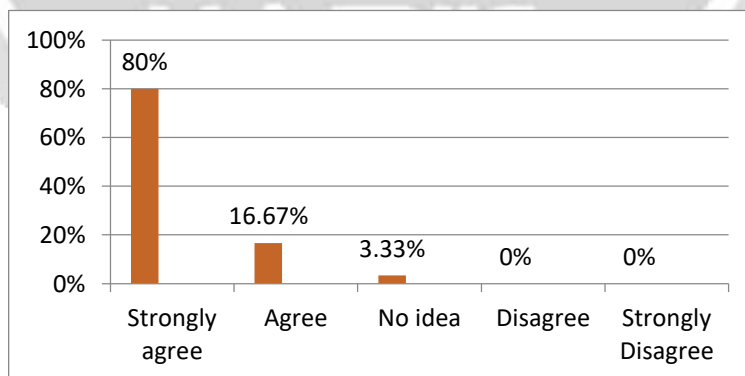


Figure 3: Students' attitude toward the importance of listening comprehension

Figure 3 showed the data relating to the significance of listening comprehension based on participant opinions. In particular, 80% agreed that listening comprehension was very important, and 16.67% agreed that listening was important. On the other hand, 3.33% said the function of listening comprehension was normal and no one agreed that listening was not significant at all. Indeed, when learning English, listening comprehension skills are very important in communication. They will no longer be shy of communicating after they have perfected listening skills. More significantly, they will be motivated to learn more effectively.

Students' self-evaluation on listening comprehension

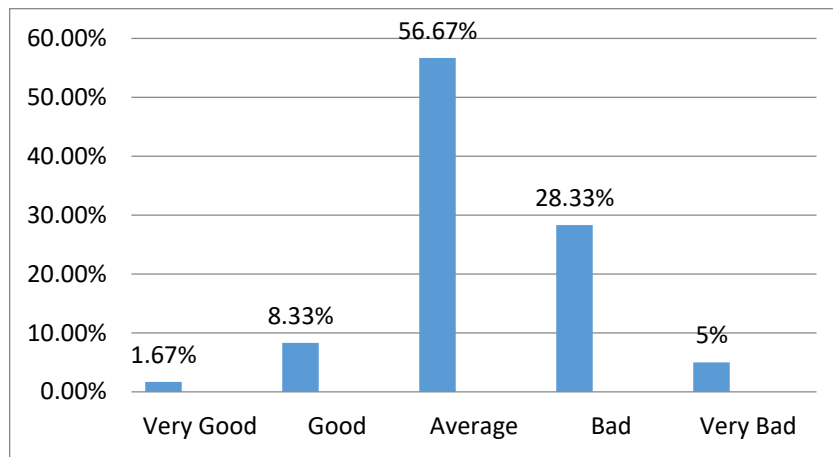


Figure 4: Students’ self-evaluation on listening comprehension

As seen in Figure 4, 10% of students said their English was enough for conversation (1.67% very good and 8.33% good). Furthermore, 56.67% indicated that their listening comprehension skills were average. Besides, 28.33% said they had poor English listening skills. Unfortunately, 5% of the students who hardly understood the messages during the listening tasks or communication. To conclusion, in order to have suitable studying methods, a student must evaluate if their listening skills are enough. In simpler terms, this question is designed to inform students about their listening comprehension skills so that they can focus more on improving them.

Student’s linguistic factors difficulties in listening English

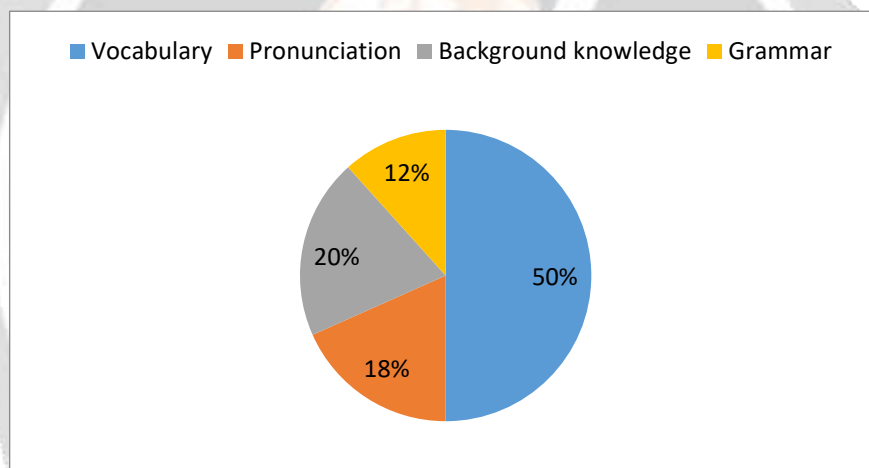


Figure 5: Student’s linguistic factors difficulties in listening English

Linguistic factors were another aspect influencing students' listening comprehension skills. Vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and background knowledge were some of the most common challenges with linguistic factors. Figure 5 showed that the participant faced a difficulty with vocabulary, which accounted for 50%, followed by background knowledge (20%), pronunciation (18.33) and grammar (11.67%). This data was useful because it helped to identify the problems that students had when improving listening comprehension skills.

b. Students’ difficulties in listening comprehension

Table 3: Difficulties in pronunciation, accent and intonation

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
7. Your mispronunciation will be the obstacles in listening comprehension.	36.67%	58.33%	1.67%	3.33%	0%
8. You cannot recognize some familiar words with different accents.	30%	58.33%	11.67%	0%	0%
9. Sometimes, you misunderstand the utterance because of intonation.	30%	66.67%	3.33%	0%	0%

10. The mother tongue affects on your English listening comprehension.	26.67%	60%	13.33%	0%	0%
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In statement 7, "Your mispronunciation will be the obstacles in listening comprehension." More than 90% agreed (36.67% strongly agreed and 58.33% agreed), whereas 1.67% were caught in middle to the opinion that their mispronunciation would be an obstacle to listening comprehension. Furthermore, only 2.33% of participants disagreed with this; they thought that mispronunciation was not their weakness in listening.

According to statement 8, "You cannot recognize some familiar words with different accents." Over 90% agreed (30% strongly agreed and 58.33% agreed) that they found it difficult to distinguish words with various accents, even when the words were extremely familiar to them. 11.67% gave no comment on this statement because they had no idea.

In statement 9, " Sometimes, you misunderstand the utterance because of intonation." 30% of the respondents strongly approved, 66.67% approved and only 3.33% were neutral.

With the last one, statement 10, "The mother tongue affects on your English listening comprehension." A majority of participants agreed (26.67% chose strongly agreement and 60% chose agreement). Nevertheless, 13.33% did not respond and none of them did not think so or strongly opposed.

Table 4: Difficulties in vocabulary

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
11. Your English listening comprehension skill is influenced by your vocabulary knowledge.	50%	41.67%	8.33%	0%	0%
12. You misunderstand because the vocabulary has different meaning in different context.	33.33%	50%	15%	1.67%	0%
13. Unfamiliar words make you difficult to understand listening text.	41.67%	48.33%	10%	0%	0%
14. You have a habit of translating all the information you heard into mother tongue.	36.67%	50%	13.33%	0%	0%

Looking at table 4, in statement 11, "Your English listening comprehension skill is influenced by your vocabulary knowledge." 50% chose strongly agreement and 41.67% chose agreement. 8.33% gave no comment on this statement.

According to statement 12, "You misunderstand because the vocabulary has different meaning in different context." More than 80% believed they had been misunderstood since the word had many different meanings depending on context (3.33% fully agreed and 50% agreed). Furthermore, 15% chose the neutral choice while just 1.67% completely comprehended the listening texts.

Continuing with statement 13, "Unfamiliar words make you difficult to understand listening text." 41.67% strongly agreed and 48.33% agreed with this statement. In fact, 10% indicated that they were neutral because they did not take any idea.

Finally, in statement 14, "You have a habit of translating all the information you heard into mother tongue." Many students agreed with this idea, with 36.67% strongly agreed and 50% agreed. However, 13.33% chose neutral.

Table 5: Difficulties in grammar

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
15. You encounter the difficulty in listening because of unfamiliar grammar structures.	35%	58.33%	6.67%	0%	0%
16. Lack of grammar knowledge can cause misunderstanding the listening text.	33.33%	58.33%	8.34%	0%	0%

Looking at table 5, it was clear that practically all of the respondents agreed with statement 15, "You encounter the difficulty in listening because of unfamiliar grammar structures." There were 35% strongly approved the idea, 58.33% agreed and 6.67% gave neutrality.

In statement 16, "Lack of grammar knowledge can cause misunderstanding the listening text." Most of students believed that it was true (58.33% agreed and 33.33% fully agreed). 8.34% of them did not have any idea.

Table 6: Difficulties in background knowledge

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
17. Lack of background knowledge is one of your fences in listening.	46.67%	45%	8.33%	0%	0%
18. It is hard to understand the listening text with unfamiliar topics.	36.67%	53.33%	10%	0%	0%

In statement 17, "Lack of background knowledge is one of your fences in listening." The findings showed that 90% approved (46.67% gave strong agreement and 45% showed their concurrence). On the other hand, 8.33% stayed hesitated.

The final one was statement 18, "It is hard to understand the listening text with unfamiliar topics." The percentage of respondents that agreed was 90%. As can be seen from the table, several options were agreement (53.33%) and strongly agreement (36.67%). The students also provided neutrality (10%). No one selected disagreed and strongly disagreed with it.

Table 7: Difficulties in the length of texts

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
19. The long speech will affect your listening comprehension.	25%	61.67%	13.33%	0%	0%
20. You miss the information when trying to think about the meaning of spoken text.	16.67%	58.33%	25%	0%	0%
21. Long listening text makes you feel stressful and embarrassed.	30%	55%	15%	0%	0%

Obviously from table 7, in statements 19, "The long speech will affect your listening comprehension." It is very clear that over 85% (25% extremely approved and 61.67% agreed) agreed that they were affected by listened to long spoken text. The remaining students chose for the neutral option. No one selected disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Furthermore, statement 20, "You miss the information when trying to think about the meaning of spoken text." The number of students choosing agreement was the highest (58.33%). Besides, also 16.67% decided on strongly agreement and 25% did not take any idea.

Lastly, in statement 21 "Long listening text makes you feel stressful and embarrassed." 85% agreed (55% approved and 30% extremely approved). However, 15% were unwilling to make a decision.

Table 8: Difficulties in speed rate

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
22. You cannot follow well if the speaker speaks too fast.	51.67%	35%	13.33%	0%	0%
23. You find it difficult to understand the listening text if the speaker does not pause long enough.	30%	58.33%	8.33%	3.34%	0%

According to statement 22, "You cannot follow well if the speaker speaks too fast." More than 85% (51.67% strongly agreed and 35% agreed) said that the percentage of students who grasped the message in the listening texts was very low or that they did not understand what they heard. The remaining (13.33%) had no options.

For the last statement, "You find it difficult to understand the listening text if the speaker does not pause long enough." Practically all students (30% strongly agreed and 58.33% agreed) believed that they faced difficulties understanding the listening text when the speaker did not pause long enough whereas 8.33% expressed a neutral attitude. In contrast, a small percentage of students (3.34%) were confident in listening to the text at a fast rate.

Table 9: Difficulties in psychology

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
24. Psychological factors cut down your ability of receiving information.	36.67%	50%	13.33%	0%	0%
25. You often get anxiety when listening.	43.33%	46.67%	6.67%	3.33%	0%

26. You are not motivated in listening.	31.67%	33.33%	28.33%	6.67%	0%
27. You feel bored and stop concentrating on the spoken text because it is too long.	26.67%	45%	21.66%	6.67%	0%

As can be seen in table 9, it indicated that no one strongly disagreed. Starting with statement 24, "Psychological factors cut down your ability of receiving information." 36.67% strongly agreed and 50% agreed that psychological factors reduced their capacity to receive information. Some participants had no answers (equivalent to 13.33%).

Turning to the results from statement 25, "You often get anxiety when listening." 43.33% entirely agreed and 46.66% agreed that they often got anxiety when listening. Yet, 6.67% chose the neutral state and 3.33% decided to select disagreement.

The next statement "You are not motivated in listening." declared that they were not motivated to listen. There were several different ideas from the responses. Over 60% approved of this idea (31.67% strongly agreed and 33.33% agreed) and 28.33% had no idea. On the contrary, the rest of those who could be motivated to listen (6.67%).

For the last statement, "You feel bored and stop concentrating on the spoken text because it is too long." The analysis indicated that many students agreed (26.67% strongly agreed and 45% agreed), whereas 21.66% expressed neutrality. In contrast, 6.67% answered disagreement.

4.1.2 General report from the interview paper

Students' interview paper

Another instrument was also essential for carrying out an intensive and reliable research. After analyzing the interviews of 15 English majored sophomores carefully, the final results were accord with the results of the questionnaires.

Question 1, "Do you like listening comprehension skill? Why/Why not?" 15/15 participants answered that they liked this skill. One stated that they liked this skill because it allowed them to be more confident while communicating and understanding what native speakers said. Another one said that they could watch English movies without subtitles and acquired a lot of new vocabulary. The remainder believed that listening comprehension was critical for their major and would help them better in learning the cultures of many countries around the world.

Question 2, "Why is listening comprehension skill important to English learners?" All respondents agreed that listening was an important ability for the English learning process. They also stated that listening gave them confidence while communicating. They could develop their vocabulary, pronunciation, and communication skills by practicing listening comprehension. Especially, they could learn many things from other countries.

Question 3, "What are your challenges when studying listening comprehension skill?" All 15 participants encountered the following obstacles in the listening subject as pronunciation, intonation, accents, vocabulary, delivery speed, grammar structures, and background knowledge. Participants complained about the difficulties they had in listening as:

They claimed that they were confused by pronunciation, intonation, different accents and strong or weak shape of the created sounds during the listening process: "I get trouble when native speakers speak the local language.", "Having a variety of accents and pronunciations causes me to misunderstand.", "Native speakers' pronunciation varies from the way I learn."

Furthermore, vocabulary and grammar skills made it extremely hard to learn listening because a lack of vocabulary or mispronunciation caused them to misunderstand the texts: "Because I don't have a large vocabulary, I can't interact with native speakers.", "My grammar is very poor so I am not confident when I speak."

Besides from the difficulties mentioned, the students who took part in this interview also discussed a new topic, the speech rate and the length of the text: "My challenge is that sometimes the speaker speaks too fast, making it hard for me to remember all of the information at the same time.", "Sometimes foreigners speak too quickly for me to understand them.", "It's hearing that they speak so quickly and use so many slangs."

Moreover, there were several aspects that went beyond the barriers outlined: "Students outside chat really loudly, which interferes with my listening.", "The quality of the teacher's loudspeaker is so bad that I can't hear the lecture topic."

Question 4, "What should you do to improve your listening comprehension skill?" Students proposed some solutions to improve their listening skill. They suggested that listening to a lot of English every day and do it for a long period of time: "Student needs practiced listening skill everyday with different accents.", "I will learn more vocabulary and grammar, beside that I also try to listen more.", "To improve my listening comprehension skill, I should practice with teachers, listen to music or watch English films.", "I often watch movies, read the newspaper in English to improve my listening skill."

Question 5, "How often do you practice English listening? Where do you practice it (in the classroom, on the Internet, etc.)?" Students said that they usually rehearsed listening skill. Beyond listening lessons in class, they frequently practiced

this skill by watching films, news, talks show on Internet or some Youtube channels (Ted, Langmaster, and etc). They also bought a lot of books or material related to this skill.

Teacher's interview paper

Teacher interview questions are also useful in researching and identifying students' difficulties at Tay Do University.

Question 1, "Do your students have difficulty in learning listening comprehension skill?" All of the teachers said "Yes". They believed that it was a difficult skill for students to learn. Because most students learnt reading and writing in high school more than listening.

Question 2, "What are difficulties in listening comprehension do they often get?" The teachers stated that most students had issues with intonation and accent, and students also had psychological problems with listening comprehension: "Because there are so many different accents, students may struggle to understand the entire listening text.", "They often have flat intonation.", "They cannot recognize the words because of wrong pronunciation.", "They are bored in listening."

Question 3, "What your suggestions or your methods to help them over those difficulties?" All teachers identify their students' weaknesses and provide helpful advice: "Give the game for them to raise the interest in listening.", "Find the useful material for them to reference.", "They should improve their listening and speaking skills by listening to different accents to recognize vocabulary."

4.2 Discussion

The result of the survey was to find out the common difficulties in listening comprehension of sophomore English majors at Tay Do University. Their disadvantage is that they do not get good listening comprehension from high school. Since the majority of students come from rural areas (66.67%), their learning of listening comprehension is still limited due to a lack of equipment. As a result, they are unfamiliar with learning listening comprehension at university. Despite the fact that this subject has many disadvantages for students, they still have a positive attitude toward it (10/10 shared the idea that they liked learning through listening when participating in answering the interview question 1). Moreover, after going through the analysis of the questionnaires and the interview papers, it is obvious that students meet various obstacles in learning listening subject which mostly fell on linguistic factors (pronunciation and vocabulary), the length and speed of text, psychological and background knowledge. Let's discuss one by one to understand on such problems.

Firstly, the most difficult factor influencing their listening comprehension is pronunciation. Students are unable to grasp what others are saying and cannot recognize familiar words with different accents. Furthermore, because they are used to non-native speakers' pronunciation, they find it difficult to learn their mother tongue. Another issue that belonged in this category was the difficulty in understanding the meaning of spoken text based on the various accents. To solve this problem, students should focus on listening to English lectures and reading a variety of books to develop their pronunciation.

Secondly, vocabulary and grammar are also not the strength of sophomores. Students' misunderstand vocabulary since vocabulary has many different meanings in different contexts. Furthermore, mother tongue influences listening comprehension, thus students frequently translate what they hear into their mother tongue. In addition, grammatical structure is an issue that students face when listening to the text. Grammar is complicated and difficult to learn. Especially students spend little time doing grammar exercises. To solve this problem, students should spend a lot of time doing English grammar exercises. Students need to increase their awareness of learning vocabulary as well as grammar.

Finally, it is realized that students' listening ability is also affected by background knowledge, length of spoken text, delivery speed, and psychological. More specifically, they may not understand the content of the listening text due to a lack of background knowledge. So it is the major challenge students face in class during the listening classes. Furthermore, a long speech causes them to not fully understand the topic when listening; consequently, it causes problems with their memory. They could not remember all of the other information from the long speeches. Moreover, a long and fast-listening text causes them to lose attention and catch up with the idea, so they miss the message of the topic.

In conclusion, the findings of this study found that sophomores had a number of challenges when it came to learning the subject of listening comprehension.

5. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

There is no denying the importance of listening in learning and communication. To be able to learn English well, students need to acquire listening comprehension skills. However, during the research process, students still have many difficulties with their listening skills. The most common challenges they faced after obtaining the results of this study by gathering information from the students. Students encounter various kinds of listening problems in learning comprehension, such as mispronunciation; a variety of intonations and accents; unfamiliar words; poor grammar knowledge; the length of the spoken text; the rate of speech; anxiety and nervousness; and lack of background knowledge. Students should practice listening to a variety of English lessons with many intonations and voices. In addition, they need to learn more new words

by taking notes or reading books every day, etc. They should also spend more time learning English, particularly through listening. As a result, students must work hard to overcome these challenges.

This analysis reveals the challenges that sophomore English majors face. Problems will be clarified so that they have a more effective listening method. They can suggest an effective methodology for improvement based on the problems stated.

5.2 Implications

Thanks to two survey tools that are questionnaires and interview papers, there are three implications for reference.

Firstly, for students, if they want to succeed in a certain field, they need to understand their true ability. Especially listening comprehension skills, students need to practice regularly through listening materials (magazines, English stories, English movies, etc.) to improve vocabulary as well as grammatical structure. The next solution is to focus on listening to many English speeches from many different countries to get used to different accents, intonations and pronunciations. What is more, regularly using extensive listening topic is a good way to develop students' background knowledge and familiarize with the speed of speakers.

Second, teachers need to activate students' awareness by having students listen to the vocabulary then let them guess what the word means. In class, teachers need to give them different types of exercises such as creating a game in English so that they are interested and motivated to learn. Furthermore, students are encouraged to participate in English learning clubs and groups at the school because this is a good environment to help them improve.

Finally, it is hoped that the results of this study will contribute to a clear, honest and accurate view of the listening comprehension field of Tay Do University.

5.3 Recommendations

The other researches should be conducted on a larger sample of the population, including both English majors and non-English majors. In addition, it is necessary to conduct further research on other issues such as the learning environment and the tools that students use in learning listening and to provide measures for students to overcome obstacles. Besides, teachers can also evaluate, comment, and provide solutions to help students improve their listening comprehension skills.

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