

FACTORS INHIBITING STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION IN AN UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH STUDIES PROGRAM

Tho Huynh Thi Cam, Tay Do University, Vietnam
Nghi Nguyen Linh Xuan, Can Tho University, Vietnam
Nga H.T. NGUYEN, Tay Do University, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

Recently, English has played a vital role in many fields in Vietnam and in the whole world. Therefore, having a good level of English is a favourable condition for many learners to study and work in other countries. Among English skills, listening skill has been a problematic skill, particularly in a foreign language context. The purpose of this study was to determine the factors inhibiting listening comprehension of English Studies students. The study was designed as a descriptive study by using the appropriate data collection tool, which is a quantitative method with a Likert-type questionnaire with five levels. The questionnaire was administered by 80 seniors and juniors majoring in English Studies High-quality program from the Faculty of Foreign Languages at Can Tho university to collect research data on factors affecting listening comprehension. Then, the statistics package for the social science program was used to analyze the obtained data. The results showed that these factors were divided into five main groups: speakers, listeners, listening process, listening tasks and quality of listening equipment and environment. This study also revealed some differences related to difficulties between seniors and juniors, such as memorization ability, listening to the main idea, sound conditioning. The results discussed would help students as well as teachers have more insight into the difficulties that students are unlikely to encounter while studying and taking the listening test. Simultaneously, appropriate strategies and recommendations would be also mentioned for both teachers and students in teaching and learning to improve the effects caused by objective and subjective factors on listening comprehension.

Keywords: *listening, listening comprehension, factors inhibiting listening comprehension, English studies*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Listening is one of the most important language skills. Feyten (1991) states that more than 45% of communication time is spent listening. This clearly shows how important this skill is to general language proficiency. English has long been regarded as an international language and is widely spoken around the world. At Can Tho University (CTU) in Vietnam, all new students except English Studies and English Education are required to complete a basic English course. This is because school regulations require students to reach Level 3 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

In the Asian background, Vietnamese researchers and educators have found that the listening methods taught in Vietnam do not produce good results for foreign language learners. At the school level, the curriculum is designed by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) and is test-oriented. This will allow English teachers to focus on preparing students for tests and exams (Hiep, 1999 & Tuy, 1999). Tuy (1999) and Hiep (1999) emphasize that with these teacher-centred language teaching methods, the Vietnamese produce students who can achieve the best results in their courses, tests and exams but fail to communicate effectively in real-life situations. According to Hamouda (2013), English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners have serious problems understanding listening because schools focus primarily on grammar, reading comprehension, and vocabulary. For many years, students have been studying English in elementary, junior and high school before entering

college. However, the focus of the English course in this student's experience is on language structure, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and translation skills. As a result, when these learners are suddenly exposed to college-level audio material, they will have a hard time developing the necessary listening skills. Listening and speaking skills are insignificant in many books and teachers do not consider these skills in their classrooms. Hamouda (2013) states that understanding speech is a very difficult task for students. Learners face a lot of problems when they listen to a language. Therefore, the misuse of ELT teaching methods that emphasize grammar and the practical translation may prevent Vietnamese students from achieving success in listening comprehension.

There are many reasons why it is difficult for learners to listen. According to Ur (1996), English learners often face difficulties while listening, such as: (1) Not recognizing the sounds that British people speak, and (2) Having the habit of having to understand all the words in a sentence to understand the content of the lesson, (3) Can't understand when native speakers speak English quickly and naturally, (4) Need to listen many times to understand, (5) Find it hard to grasp everything information and cannot predict what the speaker is about to say, and (6) If listening for a long time, learners will feel tired and lack of concentration.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine the factors inhibiting the listening skills of English majors at the Faculty of Foreign Languages of Can Tho University. This study also suggests research topics that researchers and teachers can carry out in the classroom, as well as the pedagogical impacts that support teachers and lecturers, focusing on appropriate methods suitable for listening practice and listening practice.

1.2 Significance of the study

This study will be a good reflection for English students where they can determine factors that can affect the level of their listening comprehension. By using quantitative research method, this study provided valuable and in-depth insights into the perceptions of university students in connection with their own learning styles. Because of the importance of listening, it is really essential to highlight the problems that face second language (L2) students in listening comprehension. Consequently, students' awareness can be raised in order to enhance their levels of listening comprehension and improve their outcomes of foreign language learning. In addition, the findings of this study can offer suggestions for pedagogical implications. It is better for students to be given the actual training and practices of language teachers in using a specific strategy to improve better listening comprehension.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Listening

2.1.1 Definition of listening

Listening has been defined by many researchers. Chastain (1971) defined listening as the ability to understand original accents at normal speed. Morley (2001) said that listening involves listening discrimination, good grammar the selection of necessary information, memories and the connection of this information with the process between the meaning of sound and form. Goss (1982) defined listening as a process of understanding what is listened and organizing it into a lexical element which means it can be distributed. Students listen to oral speech, for sound, classify it into lexical and syntactic units, and include the message. Listening is a procedure of taking what the speaker says, creating and expressing meaning, negotiating the meaning with the speaker and reaction, and creating meaning through participation, creativity, and empathy.

Listening is a very complex process because it forces students to be involved in multitasking. Rost (2002) defined listening as a complex process of interpretation where the listener coincides with what they listen, what they know. A complex network of interacting situation variables to determine the meaning of the conversation. The requirements of the process, such as the point of view of the interlocutor of reciprocity, the principle, etc. (filling the void of what one listens with the knowledge of the language and the world), and the future meanings. When performing academic listening, students must distinguish the sound to create meaning from the message spoken. This is a process where language learners store and retrieve the stored information. However, the method of learning information processing information exposure can vary between individuals. It depends on factors such as the talking environment and the ability to remember. They will understand the world very differently. According to Rost (2009), listening helps us understand the world around us and is one of the important elements of successful communication.

Listening is not just an act of receptivity - many physiological and cognitive processes are performed simultaneously. The recognition of listening is a complicated activity and an important role in the acquisition of languages has considerably influenced the practice of modern language teaching. For example, the opinion that listening as an active and interactive process places students in roles other than as passive recipients of audio input (Rost, 1993). Listening is one of the most difficult skills for foreign language students because of the process complexity and various types of knowledge needed to successfully listen (Fields, 2008b; Graham & Macaro, 2008). Feyten (1991) stated that more than 45% of the time of communication is spent on listening, which clearly shows how important this competence is for common language skills. Traditionally, listening skills have been taught individually or sometimes combined with speaking tasks.

2.1.2 The role of listening in language learning

According to Pourhosein Gilakjani and Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi (2011), in the four main areas of communication skills called listening, speaking, reading and writing, listening is the most important. According to Mendelsohn (1994), listening contributed 40% to 50% of daily communication activities; whereas speaking contributed 25 to 30%; reading between 11 and 16%, and writing only around 9%. With the highest proportion engaged insufficient communication, listening must be considered a precursor of the language. Listening has an important place in learning because it is one of the four main skills in language acquisition. Although other skills such as reading, speaking, and writing are very important for language development, listening contributes especially to linguistic expertise. Listening arouses language perceptions because it is the skill obtained first developed by someone. Learning to listen to the target language improves linguistic capacity. Lundsteen (1979) stated that listening is the first skill that arises. He continued that the children listened before speaking. Hedge (2000) showed that modern societies prefer to change from print media to sound and its members. Therefore, the importance of listening cannot be ignored. He stressed that listening was very important in the English class.

Listening is considered an important skill in communication because it helps students absorb information about the world around them. Hamouda (2013) stated that listening skills are very important in absorbing the input table. In particular in learning languages for communication purposes, listening plays a vital role, because it helps language learners acquire pronunciation, the stress of words, vocabulary and syntactic, and understand the information. The delivered message can only be based on tones, pitch and stress; and it's just possible when we listen. Doff (1995) and Ziane (2011) recommended that listening has a significant influence on the development of speaking capacity and other complementary skills. Additionally, listening skills precede speaking skills without one or the other is really impossible. If a student can listen to English well, they will easily listen to the radio, study, watch movies or communicate with strangers. If we compare two students, someone who lives in a country where the target language is the first language of other languages living in a country where English is only spoken in the academic place. The difference is that the first student can learn English more easily, efficiently and quickly than the second. Therefore, students need to be exposed to as much English as possible.

As Guo and Wills (2006) said that "it is an environment where people get most of their education, their information, their understanding of the world and human problems, ideal, conscious values." Goss (1982) indicated that in listening comprehension, listeners try to build meaning when they take information from listening sources. Therefore, when listening without understanding, students find it difficult to communicate effectively. Without understanding the input correctly, learning cannot enhance. Simultaneously, without listening skills, no communication can be performed. To understand shades in certain languages, someone must be able to listen. When we understand the speech of language while listening, it is easier to improve other skills and gain confidence.

According to Morley (2001) and Rost (2001), listening is the most important skill for linguistics because it can be used primarily in everyday life and develops faster than other language skills. They indicate that it makes it easier to develop other language skills. Listening is a very complicated process because it requires students to be involved in multitasking. When listening to academics, students must distinguish the sound to create meaning from the message spoken. This is a process where language learners store and retrieve the stored information. However, the method of learning information processing information exposure can vary between individuals. It depends on factors such as the talking environment and the ability to remember. They will understand the world very distinctively. Bourne, Dominowski and CoFTus (1979) referred to what is called a "personal" human information processing system "where information processing can be done differently from each element of the entire system. And information retrieval process.

Rost (1994) explained the importance of listening in a foreign language class as follows:

1. Listening is important in language classes because it contributes to learners. Without understanding the input at the right level, learning cannot be started.

2. Oral language provides interaction facilities for students. Because students must interact to gain understanding. Access to language speakers is the most important. In addition, the failure of students to understand the language they listen is a motivator, not an obstacle, for interaction and learning.

3. Authentic oral language is a challenge for students to understand language as *native* speakers use it.

4. Listening exercises provide teachers with ways for students to draw attention to new forms (vocabulary, grammar, new interaction patterns) in language.

2.1.3. The definition of listening comprehension

The term "listening comprehension" has been determined by different authors. According to Richards, John Platt, and Heidi Platt (2000) and Pourhosein Gilakjani and Seyedeh Masoumeh Ahmadi, they focused on the role of linguistic units such as phonemes, words and grammar structures and prediction roles, situations and contexts of listeners, previous knowledge and topics. Dirvent and Oakesthott-Taylor (1984) defined listening comprehension as a product of teaching methodologies and suitable requirements such as the clarity of speech, clarity of oral language, speech, and speech perception. Listening comprehension is a language learning centre, but it is the least understood and least studied competence. Listening comprehension is a linguistic skill that is important to be developed. Language learners want to understand target language speakers (L2), and they want to be able to access various L2 texts with audio and visuals available today via network-based multimedia.

Devito (1995) defined listening as "an actual process for perceiving, evaluating and reacting in communication". Listening comprehension is a process where a person perceives others through the directions (especially sound organs), gives meaning to the message, and understands it. This is a fundamental and indispensable principle of personal communication in social life. According to Buck (2001), listening is a complicated activity that requires listeners to process audio signals and data received and interpret it based on linguistic and non-verbal knowledge. People who learn a second or foreign language can have many problems with their listening comprehension. In research, An Ngoc Nguyen (2011) said that listening comprehension skills are considered as one of the most difficult skills among the four language skills for students who do not specialize in universities and colleges currently.

Different researchers have focused on different problems and highlighted various listening challenges for foreign or second language students. (Goh, 2000 and Liu, 2002). With regard to listening comprehension, Rubin (1994) showed five influential factors. These are (1) the characteristics of listening lessons such as pauses, intonation, stress and poetry, the difference between the first and second languages, etc. (2) Interlocutor characteristics include gender and language proficiency. (3) The characteristics of the assignment, namely memory, concentration, age, gender, the ability to use the first language, background knowledge and (5) processing characteristics of information when it sounds like using a listening strategy. It seems very important that phonetic problems and vocabulary are the two types of challenges faced by students during the perception stage.

According to Chastain (1988), listening comprehension is divided into four components. The first is the ability to distinguish all sounds, intonation patterns, and accents in a second language and to distinguish between them and similar sounds in the original language. The second is an understanding of the entire message emitted by the speaker. The third is the possibility of maintaining the message in one's auditory memory until it can be processed. The speed of presentation and the level of difficulty of content must be adjusted for students. Language activities can be understood to improve listening memory. Improving the easier sentences to more complex sentences must be slow and sustainable. The delivery rate must be increased according to the understanding of the students (Chastain, 1988). So in the end the ingredient is understood.

Underwood (1989) stated that teachers must prepare their students for the following situations:

a. Attend a class. The purpose of this activity is to understand the main ideas and recognize the main information of ideas.

b. Listen to the announcement, news and weather forecast. The main objective of the auditors is to achieve information relevance.

c. Listen to plays, watch TV or listen to the radio for entertainment. The purpose of this activity is to entertain ourselves.

d. Listen to someone speak. In this situation, the auditors are interested in the opinion and attitude of the speaker.

e. Follow the instructions. The purpose of listeners is to successfully execute functions.

2.1.4. Listening comprehension strategies

Listening strategies are techniques or activities that directly contribute to the withdrawal of listening input. In recent days, several listening strategies have been developed for all different listening situations and teaching listening skills. Language students are facilitated to adjust the behaviour of listening to them to handle various situations, types of input, and the purpose of listening. Listening strategies can be classified as cognitive strategies, metacognitive strategies, and social-emotional strategies.

Cognitive strategies involve understanding and capturing input in short-term or long-term memory for later use. The comprehension process begins with the received which was examined as a sequential formation rate and decoding process. According to Goh (1998), students use cognitive strategies to help them in processing, maintaining, and remembering new information. There are two types of cognitive strategies in listening: bottom-up and top-down. Top-down strategies are based on listeners; listeners depend on the knowledge of the topic, the context of listening, the type of text, and language, and they help listeners interpret what they listened. Top-down strategies are to listen to the main ideas, predict, and draw summaries. This type of processing allows listeners to establish equality between their speech structures and communicative functions in the specific situation of social interaction to achieve certain communication goals. This includes the previous listener's knowledge of the language, along with their knowledge of the communication situation, the topic of discussion, participants and their relationship to achieve meaningful understanding.

On the other hand, the bottom-up processor implies relying on their knowledge of language code to achieve progressive meaning construction, ranging from phonetic levels to discriminant levels. The bottom-up strategy is to focus on specifics while listening and recognizing the word sequence pattern. Listening to the bottom-up involves decoding language, and what they have to do by using data obtained directly from the saying signal to understand it. These processes are tools to unite understanding rather than the purpose of understanding (Rost, 2011). Brown (2006) described that bottom-up processing involves the use of the knowledge of voice listeners, words, and discourse markers to establish an understanding of what we listen to. In this case, he explained that it is important to listen to certain voices and keep them long enough in our work memory; so they can connect with each other to allow the interpretation of the message before entry information is processed. In the real world of listening, the bottom-up process and top-down often occur together. Listening comprehension is not limited from top to bottom or bottom-up. It should be an interactive and interpretive process where listeners apply their previous linguistic knowledge and language skills to understand the message. Stages must include activities that encourage students to process text and top-down activities that provide practice in understanding language code, especially through contextual (bottom-up).

Listeners also use the metacognitive strategies to plan, monitor, and evaluate their listening. According to Rubin (1988), the metacognitive strategies are management techniques used by students to control learning through planning, testing, evaluation, and changing. According to Baker and Brown (1984) and Abdalhamid (2012), there are two types of metacognitive skills: cognitive knowledge and cognitive regulation. Cognitive knowledge implies that learners are aware of what is happening and cognitive regulation concerns what learners should do to effectively listen. According to Henner Stanchina (1987), metacognitive strategies play an important role in listening comprehension. The use of the metacognitive strategies activates one's thoughts and leads to increased academic performance as a whole. The metacognitive strategies train language students to cope with listening demands. It is clear that the metacognitive strategies make their learning more effective, so they can maximize the received information and thus can be used to improve their listening skills. According to Wenden (1998), students who use the metacognitive strategies can learn faster and integrate excellent knowledge, can be a constant receiver and handle any situation, with confidence in receiving assistance from partners, teachers, members or families and can observe and evaluate yourself.

Vandergrift (2003) and Abdalhamid (2012) revealed that social-emotional strategies are the techniques used by listeners to cooperate with others, test their understanding, and reduce their apprehension. O'Malley and Chamot (1987) showed that the four listening strategies, cognitive, social and emotional strategies have the greatest

influence on the context of learning. Wilson (2003) stated that social-emotional strategies involve student interactions with other speakers and their responses to learning. Habte-Gabr (2006) stated that in social relations strategies, students must know how to reduce anxiety, feel confident in listening activities and increase motivation to improve listening skills. Gardner and Macintyre (1993) stated that emotional strategies were significant because the learning situation and the factors of psycho-social students were closely related. There is a significant relationship between low anxiety and high listening performance: that is, the use of emotional strategies makes it easy and improves listening (Aneiro, 1989).

Goh (2000) stated that it is very important to teach students listening strategies and before doing this, the teacher must increase the knowledge of students about vocabulary, grammar and phonology. According to Vandergrift (1999), building important strategies to practice listening and student skills can guide themselves and evaluate understanding and answers. These strategies can vary based on student levels.

2.2. Factors inhibiting EFL students' listening comprehension

According to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz and Tugrul Mart (2014), there are many difficulties that learners may encounter in the process of listening comprehension and the aim is to find out problems and try to solve them. Yagang (1994) stated that there were four sources for listening comprehension problems. They are the message, the speaker, the listener, and the physical environment. Boyle (1984) also shared the same opinion and stated that the factors of the listener, speaker, moderate and environment are the main components affecting listening comprehension.

2.2.1. Factors related to students' themselves

Listening can be a problem for L2 listeners when they try to understand the full meaning of a sentence, as revealed by Ur (1984). While listening, L2 students often feel anxious if they miss a word, which is also described as less utilized in professional English. Underwood (1989) included general obstacles facing students while listening, such as transmission speeds, the inability to repeat words, limited vocabulary, failure to follow signs such as transitions, lack of knowledge of context, concentration, and usually prefer to try to understand every word from what they listen. According to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz and Tugrul Mart (2014), when listening to text containing known words, it would be very easy for students to recognize. If students know the meaning of words, this can trigger their interests and motivations and can have a positive effect on the students' listening comprehension. Many words have more than one meaning and if they are not used appropriately in the right context, students will be confused.

When listeners lack vocabulary, background knowledge notes, memorization, assessment, inference techniques; psychological stress; if the ability to concentrate is not high, failure to listen well cannot be avoided. Failure to pay attention to linguistic slang and direction also makes listening comprehension difficult for outstanding people. Underwood (1989) suggested that students only know a limited number of words so it is difficult for them to listen unknown words, then, inhibits their ability to understand what has been said before them. Students usually lack the effort to understand every word while listening, especially in L2 they cannot transfer their L1 skills easily. Failure or laziness in building their vocabulary gradually reflects a lot in listening to them and makes them not have high enthusiasm in obtaining language skills. The power of the listener's concentration or listening ability greatly influences their listening skills, which does not occur in cases of acquiring other language skills (reading, talking and writing) even if they are done for a longer period of time.

The problem of perception involves the inability of listeners to distinguish sounds and words in the flow of speech (Fields, 2008b). Phonetic problems and vocabulary are the two types of challenges facing listeners during the perceptual stage. Phonetic problems include difficulties in understanding different intonations, stress, and pitch (Ur, 1984). Such problems are often linked to the linguistic competence of the listeners (Goh, 1999). Underwood (1989) reported that what makes listening more difficult is not familiar with sound signals and signals while speakers move from one point to another in informal settings, because of the results in a particular pitch and intonation pattern. The speaker uses a discourse marker to prove that they move thinking, giving examples, or repeating things as indicated by Underwood (1989). Not being able to listen what these markers are will prevent students from following a constant stream of reasoning.

Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014) said that the level of students can play an important role when they listen to the long sections and keep all information in mind. It is difficult for junior students to listen for more than three minutes and complete listening assignments. Short listening passages make it easier for students to understand. Student concentrations are one of the important factors that influence listening

comprehension because it can be difficult for students to focus on learning. Listening with understanding, even any small interruption in concentration can damage a lot. Goh (2000) conducted research through diaries, semi-structured interviews, and online listening problems considering the English process as a second language listener based on Anderson's (1995) cognitive listening model. The problem that he found included: the recognition of words, segmentation, text omission, and focus (related to cognitive stages); quickly forgetting what is listened and therefore cannot form a mental representation of input (as far as parsing is concerned), and understand the words and not the message in question (with regard to use).

EFL Vietnamese students are learning English in their home country, where English is not the dominant native language. Students from an environment where English is not the language of the country are unlikely to listen the real language; therefore these students are not used to listening languages created by native speakers. Underwood (1989) also assumed that another border of cognitive is the lack of visual aids. In class, EFL students often listen sounds without seeing the view of the speaker and body language. They state that language has a strong relationship. Ur (2007) clarified that listening comprehension was a problem for EFL students because what they listened in the class was not exactly the same as in real life. In class, there is a repetition of teachers, which means that teachers often repeat listening to the text more than once, allowing students to answer all questions much more easily. However, in daily situations, listening to radio or broadcast, watching programs on television, etc., auditors cannot get the opportunity to repeat and replay what the speaker said. Probably, the speaker can say it again, but it's no more than that.

Additionally, the lack of guided strategies is a factor that makes it difficult for students to listen. EFL students think that it is easy to understand what their teacher says because they have been accustomed to it for a long time, but listening to audio content is very difficult for them because they have never been guided in the usage strategies. As a result, they eliminate some important strategies to make listening easier and simpler. These skills are developed from time to time through practising and training. Lack of training in the list of skills is an important barrier. Boredom and frustration are other obstacles to listening comprehension because they can affect the level of attention required to listen. This happens when the passion is low because of the lack of participation in the topic, lack of inspiration, the failure of the time in which the teacher presents the meaning of material in a way that is stimulating, or introducing lectures with monotonous voices, sleep stimulation.

2.2.2. Factors related to listening task

Hasan (2000) paid attention to problems related to the listening task; for example, unknown words, long texts, and complex and difficult grammar structures cause misinterpretation. When authentication documents are being used today, listening materials often consist of everyday conversations, which can contain many words and expressions every day, including slang such as certain words including objectives, guys to people, etc. Usually, speakers mainly use everyday languages that are not taught in school settings, so students who often make contact with English or formal books may not be familiar with articulation. According to Seferoglu and Uzakgoren (2004), several other listening problems related to the type of listening material. Bloomfield et al. (2010) and Walker (2014) stated that one serious problem with listening comprehension regards the pronunciation of words differently from the way they appear in printing. Because of the fact that oral language changes with a written language form, the recognition of words that form oral speech can cause some difficulties for students.

In addition, various oral language features such as stress and intonation have an important role in certain situations. Munro and Derwing (1999) showed that too much-accented noise can cause significantly reduced coverage. Stress is considered an important but difficult part, different from students who learn English as a second language. The main reason why British students often experience difficulties in the pronunciation and understanding of listening is that they often use genuine language stress when speaking new languages (Small, 2005). Stress is extremely important in translating the meaning in phrases and sentences because it is used to describe the point of a word where changes in pitch, vowels are stretched, or in sentences that might be a compound sentence or complex sentences. Although written English is quite similar in the world, there are countless pressures in oral English which can make it more difficult for students to attend conversations.

Intonation also affects text understanding. The intonation is the way that a sentence is pronounced. The music of speech is intonation, an important factor in conveying meaning, and occurs in almost all languages. Furthermore, intonation also plays an important role in the discourse because it indicates when the speaker finishes what they want to say to people and shows agreements or disagreements (Harmer, 2007). English is a language with intonation to express emotions in similar sentences, the meaning of each intonation will be very different. The original speaker did not speak evenly but raised or lowered their speech tones as they spoke. The

most common example is when they ask simple questions. So, if you use the wrong intonation, it can offend. For this reason, Levis (1999/2002), Levis and Pickering (2004) and Jenkins (2004) emphasized the importance of teaching intonation in context, preferably at the level of speech, rather than in separate sentences.

Various researchers discussed the speed of tasks and their influence on listening. According to Underwood (1989), there are several obstacles to effective listening comprehension, namely listeners do not have control over the speed of speech. The biggest problem with listening comprehension is that listeners cannot control how quickly speakers speak. If the speaker speaks too fast, students may have trouble in seriously understanding the words of L2. In this situation, listeners cannot control the speed of the speakers and this can cause problems with listening comprehension. It is very difficult for students to build meanings from information delivered quickly and cannot manage speaker speed. Osada (2004) found that the factors that interfere with Japanese listening comprehension refer to fast-talking speeds and the inability to see the sound of English

2.2.3. Factors related to listening context/ environment

A reason that makes listening comprehension more difficult is a noisy listening environment, with a lot of noise. Other listening disorders recorded by Watson & Smeltzer (1984) and Yagang (1994) are sounds, whether they come from the surrounding environment or are produced by listening equipment. It refers to interference in the environment such as the sound of the classroom door slamming wind, the cell phone rings, and students talking outside the hall are some examples of physical obstacles with noise from different corridors and classrooms. Besides, some students also have difficulty listening the sound of the teacher. Because of the noise of class and laboratory preparation that is inadequate, students cannot concentrate on listening. In addition, the quality of the recorded material is also considered as one of the factors that made students have difficulty in listening comprehension. In some lessons, the teacher uses recording materials that do not have high quality. The quality of the sound system can affect the auditory of students (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, 2014).

The cultural background of students can play an important role in their listening comprehension. When students do not have cultural knowledge of a language, it can take time for students to capture the specific situation. Graham (2006) found the fact that students who are not familiar with the topic of listening presented in a really uninteresting way leading to listening comprehension issues. If listening assignments involve totally different cultural materials, then students can have significant problems with their understanding. Brown (1994) showed that the relationship between language and culture is to unite. Grades can contain truly unexpected communities compared to what students have experienced before. In this situation, students may have difficulty visualizing what has been told. Bloomfield Wayland, Rhoades, Blodgett, Linck and Ross (2010) report that regional accents can affect messages spoken to be understood by listeners and that familiar voices are easier to understand than foreign voices. Buck (2001) mentions many problems in listening activities such as unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar subjects, rapid speech and unknown voice. Different accents can be a barrier to listening because they interfere with the ability to understand the meaning of words that are pronounced differently. For instance, in a country like China, where there is a lot of cultural diversity, accents can vary between people in the state in the region.

Learners must be familiar with the cultural knowledge of languages that considerably affects students' understanding. A common understanding of the culture and history of a country can facilitate the listening process. Vandergrift (2007) and Walker (2014) stated that listeners can use pragmatic knowledge to make conclusions and determine the implicit sense of speakers and must be given special attention by the teacher when teaching listening comprehension. Teachers are responsible for providing background knowledge of pre-listen activities (Azmi, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul, 2014). For example, if the listening task is about Thanksgiving Day and is quite confusing for students in the country, the language taught may be strange.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research questions

The study tries to answer the following research questions:

- What are the factors that inhibit EFL students' listening comprehension?
- Are there statistically significant differences in students of different age groups' perceptions of factors inhibiting their listening comprehension?

3.2. Research design

This research was designed as a descriptive study with quantitative methods. Given the nature of the questions given above, the quantitative method works for research; in other words, a descriptive study. Hadi's (1994) study which has been stated here only describes the situation or state of the object or phenomenon without looking to attract some of the most appropriate conclusions. Suryabrata (2008) indicated that the purpose of descriptive research is a systematic, factual and accurate description of reality and the characteristics of the population. According to Siegel (2015), the selection of a suitable design depends on the purpose of its own research. On the basis of the definition and description above, descriptive research is carried out to clearly understand the phenomena and reality of student difficulties in learning listening skills through collecting and gathering knowledge, and data fundamentals descriptively. Therefore, when looking back at the purpose of this study, namely to evaluate the difficulties of a group of EFL students in listening comprehension in real-class settings, a quantitative design was used to ensure the validity of the study.

3.3. Research participants

The current research was conducted with students majoring in English Studies to explore their difficulties in learning listening skills. In this study, a total of 80 junior and senior students majoring in high-quality program English Studies students from School of Foreign Languages at Can Tho University, Vietnam, participated in this study. More specifically, there were 40 final year students and 40 juniors. The fact that research was only selected in the juniors and the last-year students who were carried out on the basis that they were experienced English learners. Regarding English language skills, they have enough opportunities to learn and experience knowledge related to listening comprehension in class and outside the classroom, self-studying for years. Thus, they would have an understanding and visualization of the factors that make them difficult in listening comprehension when learning English. Conversely, seniors and sophomores as soon as possible are still in the early stages of the learning process and may not be confident enough to interact in a real context. On this basis, researchers identified juniors and the last-year students were invited to participate in this study.

3.4. Research instrument

The tools for this study included a questionnaire with 42 questions divided into three parts. A questionnaire was developed to collect relevant data on factors causing listening difficulties. The questionnaire supports researchers to easily collect data with large sample sizes (Bartram, 2019; Kabir, 2016; Phellas, Bloch & Seale, 2011). According to Nasaji (2015), "Questionnaire is a very flexible tool, which has the advantage of having a structured, easy and convenient format for respondents, low cost and fast management for many cases covering large geographical areas." To answer the research question, the researchers decided to use the type of tool which was a questionnaire to collect data.

3.4.1. Questionnaire

Quantitative data were collected by designing a questionnaire to determine students' opinions majoring in English Studies about their listening skills. After considering the theory of listening and difficulty in studying skills in line with the reality of practising these skills of students, the researchers came to the conclusion to adopt the questionnaire of Lotfi (2012).

In the second part, the author uses the Likert scale to design a questionnaire. Sugiyono (2012) clarified that the Likert scale was used to measure attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of a person or a group of people towards social phenomena. The level of opinion in this study was a 5-Likert scale rating, namely, 1- Nothing is hard, 2- Almost nothing is hard, 3- There is a little difficulty, 4- There are relatively many difficulties, 5- There are lots of difficulties, with 36 sentences divided into three clusters, including General Evaluation, Detailed Evaluation and an Open Question. A scale without a neutral score was chosen to encourage subjects to scrutinize each item and express a valid opinion about it. In addition, to avoid persecuting effects that the learners' language ability might have on the attempt to understand items written in English, the questionnaire was translated into the learners' native language. The first part, General Assessment, contains only one question designed to investigate students' general perceptions of listening learning and their abilities. The other 35 question items in the Detailed Assessment are written in the form of a numerical rating scale to test students' listening experience difficulties related to objective factors and subjective factors listed in the questionnaire. More specifically, there were 22 questions for subjective questions, whereas objective questions accounted for 13 questions. The final question includes an open-ended question to further investigate students' opinions and other factors that they often have difficulties in listening comprehension.

3.4.2. Collecting the data for the questionnaire

Questionnaires were sent to 80 high-quality program English Studies students from course 44 to course 45. Because of the complicated epidemic situation of Covid-19, the researchers collected data indirectly through Google Forms. Before asking students to take a survey, the researchers briefly reviewed the explanation of the form, length, and research purposes. Students were informed that the results of the questionnaire would be kept security and would not affect their points in class.

3.5. Data collection procedure

Most of the statements of the questionnaire were adapted from Lotfi's (2012). An open-ended question is added to the end of the questionnaire as a means to gather more new and creative ideas from students. To collect data for the survey, English Studies students were asked to answer a questionnaire voluntarily through Google Forms. Students are asked to fill in their general personal information and complete the second part with 36 Likert-type questions. For an open-ended question, students are not required to answer, if they have new ideas and awareness about their own difficulties in listening comprehension, they will answer this open-ended question and vice versa. Then, participants' responses were analyzed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 26 tools.

3.6. Data analysis

For quantitative analysis, the code data obtained from the questionnaire was transferred to the statistical package for Social Science Statistics (SPSS) version 26. Regarding the 5-point Likert scale statement, Alpha Cronbach was used to test the reliability of quantitative data collected. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the average score of students' perceptions of the role of listening development and problems. Additionally, to make data entry faster, all alphanumeric data has been encoded as numbers. After inserting items and variables such as gender, age, and major into SPSS, the researchers adjusted suitable attributes for each variable such as label, value or decimal for each questionnaire. Then, the researchers sorted the data after putting all 80 questionnaires into the SPSS software to ensure the most accurate results. Based on the results, the researchers can identify factors that influence the listening comprehension of the research discussion.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Findings

4.1.1. The reliability of the questionnaire

The quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS and with a Cronbach's alpha of .829 (Table 4.1). The questions were reliable and the collected data from those questions could be used for further analysis.

Table 4.1: The reliability of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.829	36

The level of students' perceptions and difficulties of listening skills have Cronbach's Alpha coefficient ranging from 0.763 to 1.263 greater than 0.6. Thus, the results of testing the reliability scale with Cronbach's Alpha coefficient showed that the measurement variables ensure reliability. Therefore, the scale would be used in the next analysis steps.

4.1.2. General perceptions of students about difficulties

The first question proposed to find out the general perception of students about the problem of listening difficulties and it is presented in the following table.

Table 4.2: General perceptions of students about difficulties

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
The level of difficulty	1	5	3.43	.093	1	5	3.53	.095

Table 4.3: Percentage of each level of difficulties

	N	Percentage
Almost nothing is difficult	10	12.5
There is a little difficulty	34	42.5
There are relatively many difficulties	24	30
There are many difficulties	12	15

In the first part of the questionnaire, students were asked to assess the difficulty of their listening skills. The statistics showed a relatively high average score between juniors and seniors. This question item reported that seniors had a mean of 3.43 with a standard deviation of 0.93, while juniors had a mean of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.95. This means that nearly 43% respectively 34 students rated they had few difficulties in listening skills and 12% said they could understand 70% of listening information. In contrast, 24 students with a percentage of 30% said that they had relatively many difficulties in listening and 10% of the students had a lot of difficulties in their listening comprehension. In general, the listening skills of juniors and seniors had improved more after completing 3-4 listening modules organized by the faculty.

4.1.3. Factors affecting listening comprehension

Factors that cause students to have problems in listening comprehension are categorized into different sources including problems related to the listening process, the speakers, the task, the listeners themselves and the quality of equipment and environment. The collected data was analyzed in detail below:

Table 4.4: The level of subjective and objective factors inhibiting listening

	N	Mean	Min	Max	SD
Subjective factors	22	2.99	2.49	3.48	.979
Objective factors	13	3.27	2.80	3.64	.941

Table 4.4 shows that there was a rather high difference in the mean scores of students' perceptions of subjective and objective factors for their listening skills of 2.99 and 3.27 respectively. To determine the difference in mean scores between the four groups, a one-sample T-Test was administered based on the average score of each aspect of the listening difficulties. For the subjective aspect, the results showed that the average score of the participants' difficulty level was Mean score (M)=2.99, Standard Deviation value (SD)= .979. This showed that the level of the subjective factors was relatively close to the average level. Regarding the objective factor, the results illustrated that the average score of participants' difficulty mean was 3.27 (SD=.941). This showed that the level of the objective factors was higher than the average. From here, objective factors were assessed by students as affecting their listening skills more than subjective factors.

4.1.3.1. Factors related to the speakers

Table 4.5: The level of factors related to the speakers

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Speakers speak too fast	1	5	3.10	1.150	1	5	3	1.176
Speakers speak with varied accents	1	5	3.28	1.062	1	5	3.13	1.114
Speakers speak swallowing and linking	1	5	3.33	.997	1	5	3.58	1.035
Unfamiliar stress patterns	1	5	2.85	.893	1	5	2.75	.899
Unfamiliar intonation patterns	1	5	3.23	1.230	1	5	3.13	1.223

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
Number of speakers more than 2	1	5	3.20	.939	1	5	3.33	.997

According to the final year students, the most prominent feature of the table was that speakers often swallowed words or slurred word-to-word, making it impossible for them to listen better (with an average of 3.33 and a fairly low standard deviation of .997). This is followed by the fast speed of the speakers with the mean of 3.10 and the relatively high standard deviation of 1.150. The number of speakers appearing in the listening passage was more than 2, the appearance of many strange intonation patterns and the different and various accents of the speakers witnessed the similar ratios, i.e between 3.20 and 3.28 each. Unfamiliar stress patterns toward the last-year students' attitudes received the lowest mean of 2.85 and a quite low standard deviation of .997.

Meanwhile, juniors shared some of the same views as final-year students. They found that speakers swallowing and linking word by word gave them the most difficulty (M= 3.58, SD= 1.035) and they had fewer difficulties with unfamiliar stress of the words and sentences. With the mean value of 3.33, the number of speakers more than 2 in the listening task was rated quite high in terms of the level of difficulty perceived by the juniors. There were fairly similar levels in the fast speed and the different accents of the speakers and unfamiliar intonation patterns, with a ratio of 3 to 3.10. When speakers spoke at a fast rate, it was difficult for them to understand what was being said and the different accents and intonations also made it difficult for students to understand because they were not exposed to different accents much.

4.1.3.2. Factors related to the listeners

As mentioned in the literature, researchers wanted to classify the problem of listening into several main categories as felt by the participants. The students themselves also have a significant impact on their listening skills. The details were presented in the following table:

Table 4.6: The level of factors related to the listeners

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Temporarily forget the words that cannot be heard to	1	5	2.45	1.085	1	5	2.78	1.025

focus on the next part.

Listen and understand the meaning of known and familiar words quickly	1	5	2.55	.846	2	5	2.8	.823
Quickly remember words or phrases just heard	1	5	3	1.062	1	5	2.8	1.114
Remember the content of the parts that have just been heard even when hearing new words.	1	5	3.2	.823	1	5	3.13	.966
Remember the content even when concentrating hard on understanding every word or phrase.	1	5	3.43	1.130	1	5	3.3	1.203
Use appropriate listening strategies to understand the content of the listening lesson.	1	5	3.43	1.130	1	5	3.3	1.203
Understand a listening text even though you cannot understand every single word.	2	5	3.35	1.075	1	5	3.3	1.159
Ability to concentrate on listening	2	5	2.6	.810	2	5	2.88	.853
Control anxiety before doing listening task	2	5	3.28	1.037	2	5	3.30	.992
	1	5	2.7	.853	1	5	2.83	1.035

The students' own ability was also considered as one of the important factors that made their listening skills more difficult. This had been shown specifically through the statistics listed in Table 6. Regarding the level of difficulty of final-year students, the ability to remember the content even when listening attentively and to understand all the words received the highest mean of 3.43 and the standard deviation was 1.130. Then, the seniors who did not use reasonable and effective listening strategies, lacked proper listening, grasped the flow of speech, with the second-highest mean of 3.35. It seemed that seniors had some difficulties with their memorization and concentration during listening with the average ranging from 3.0 to 3.28. As soon as the listening lesson begins, the students will often be overwhelmed by the strange sounds around as well as their anxiety, making them unable to concentrate on listening and remembering the information they listen.

Simultaneously, memorizing only familiar vocabulary and temporarily ignoring new words scored the lowest mean of 2.55 and 2.45 respectively. This also meant that some problems with listening habits have caused the seniors to not understand the text. When encountering a new word, only about 12.5% of the students decided to rank at level 2, meaning they could ignore the speech and continue listening, while 40% and 32.5% chose levels 3 and 4. As a result, having the appearance of difficult words in the listening test and time pressure had made it impossible for students to concentrate on listening and complete their test well. However, with an average score of 2.7, it also proved that students also tried to control their anxiety well before starting the listening test.

According to the feedback of the juniors, similar to the seniors, the ability to remember and pay high attention to listening were also significant challenges for them because these factors were all at the mean of 3.30 with standard deviations of 1.203, 1.159 and .992, respectively. They ranked in the second place with a mean of 3.13. It showed the fact that the juniors also often felt quite frustrated when they could not understand the entire

listening text. On the other hand, because students have focused their efforts on predicting and understanding the entire listening passage through every single word, they may then overlook and may easily forget words or phrases that they have just listened and lose their mind away from the fluency of speech. Students mentioned mean is 2.88 and the standard deviation is .853.

Regarding difficulties in remembering and understanding familiar vocabulary and listening new phrases, the mean was slightly lower than 3 with a high standard deviation ($M=2.8$ and 2.78 , $SD= .823$, 1.025 and 1.114). Their responses were moderately inconsistent. It might be because many students had a good memory and concentration to understand the meaning of a long text while listening, on the contrary, many of them did not. Furthermore, it was understandable that when students came across a new word, they almost forgot the previously mentioned content as well as the next part in the listening passage, which made them feel confused and anxious. . Most of the participants in this study agreed that they listened to every word. Regarding anxiety, surprisingly, before starting to listen, juniors showed little anxiety because they had good control over their mood, so the mean score seemed relatively low ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.035$). However, compared with seniors, the mean of anxiety control of juniors was higher than seniors'. This also proved that seniors also had more experience in managing their anxiety and ability to concentrate more than juniors.

4.1.3.3. Factors related to the listening process

Statistical Table 7 showed procedural listening problems that seniors and juniors faced while learning listening comprehension. Problems perceived by the seniors related to lack of concentration as soon as they had difficulties in understanding the content had the highest mean ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.219$). This was followed by listening problems stemming from the fact that students could not relate what they listened in the previous part of the listening and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words by associating them with known words. ($M = 3.43$ and 3.40). Based on respondents' responses to difficulties in making sense of the entire listening passage through the available knowledge, information and understanding related to the listening topics, it was shown in the table that the mean score was quite high ($M = 3.15$ and 3.18).

Table 4.7: The level of factors related to the listening process

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Make meaningful personal associations with the new information.	2	5	2.98	.891	1	5	3.12	.992
Predict the content of the listening text from the visuals and pictures	1	5	2.65	.864	1	5	2.58	.874
Relate what I listen with something from an earlier part of the listening text	1	5	3.43	.904	1	5	2.95	.959
Check whether correctly understand the meaning of whole chunks of the listening text.	1	5	3.18	1.083	1	5	3.13	1.067
Find out what the main purpose of the task is.	1	5	2.63	.925	1	5	2.45	.959

trouble understanding the content.

Guess the meaning of unknown words by linking them to known words.	1	5	3.53	1.219	1	5	2.92	1.248
Check understanding of the text based on what you already know about the topic.	1	5	3.40	1.277	2	5	3.55	1.197
Information processing skills								
	2	5	3.15	0.864	1	5	3.15	1.001
	1	5	2.73	1.086	1	5	2.75	1.149

In addition, due to the fact that students could not link to their previous knowledge, they had difficulties making meaningful personal connections with a mean of 2.98 (SD=.864). Because students tried to focus on each word, they did not listen clearly or listen the entire content of the text, nor could they directly and immediately use the given facts and information along with the pictures, and illustrations to guess those parts of the text. Students who encountered problems related to using context to guess parts of a listening passage and were confused during information processing demonstrated mean values of 2.65 and 2.73 and standard deviations of .864 and 1.086 respectively. In terms of finding the main idea of the text, out of the nine items of questions related to the listening process, a positive result could be found because they could easily find the main purpose of listening to the text that they would listen to because it had the lowest mean of 2.63 with a low standard deviation of .925. It could also be completely understood that the process of listening to the main idea of the text was not difficult for the seniors.

Regarding the attitudes of juniors, the most difficult factor related to the listening procedure was the ability to guess the meaning of difficult and new words and phrases by linking them with their own existing vocabulary, getting a high mean of 3.55. However, the SD value of these factors was very high (SD = 1.197), which meant that the students had relatively different views on this issue. It seemed that there was a relative degree of similarity between problems understanding the full meaning of a text through personal association with one's own information, knowledge and understanding because the mean of these problems was mostly between 3.12 and 3.15 (standard deviation from .992 to 1.067). Regarding the difficulties in making sense of the whole section related to students' self-understanding, 14-15 out of 40 students chose levels 4 and 5. It meant they had quite many problems answering questions from speakers because they tried to understand every single word.

Identified problems with concentration, memory or even fatigue would distract students from making sense of the content and they might miss the rest of the listening text when they had trouble concentrating, so they could not relate to anything from the previous section to continue focusing on listening. It resulted in the mean of these two issues also being considered quite high 2.95 and 2.92 and standard deviations of .959 and 1.248 respectively. When asked to modify the message given by the speaker in the listening passage, students often felt confused even though they were able to complete all the question items relevant to the listening. Therefore, the problem that students could not control and successfully process the process of receiving information was rated at a relatively high level (M = 2.75, SD = 1.149). In contrast to the seniors, the students perceived the ability to predict the image with a low average level (M=2.58). They seemed to have the ability to predict through available data and images to understand and infer the content and meaning of the listening text. The lowest mean score belonged to listening to the main idea of the text (M= 2.45, SD = .959). This was also seen as a similarity between seniors and juniors. Perhaps, for students, listening to ideas was a regular exercise as a daily activity in class that they had to complete, so they were quite familiar with this work and had little difficulty with types of exercises in the form of understanding the main idea of the text.

4.1.3.4. Factors related to the listening task

As can be seen in the table, the two entries which had many unfamiliar words and unclear pronunciation of words received the highest mean ($M = 3.55$ and 3.5) with standard deviations of 1.108 and $.934$ respectively.

Table 4.8: The level of factors related to the listening task

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Listen for the main idea of the text..	1	5	2.88	1.042	1	5	3.10	.982
Answer the questions related to the details in the listening text	2	5	3.15	1.001	2	5	3.35	.921
Answer questions related to the main idea of the listening text.	1	4	2.35	.662	1	5	2.63	.838
There are too many unfamiliar words	1	5	3.55	1.108	1	5	3.5	1.062
There are words which are not pronounced clearly in the listening text	1	5	3.5	.934	1	5	3.45	1.085
There are difficult grammatical structures	1	5	2.75	1.032	1	5	3.13	1.067
Ending sound (es,ce,se,ed,k,t,...)	1	5	3.08	1.118	1	5	3.30	1.018

According to seniors' perceptions, unfamiliar words as well as unclear pronunciation in listening to the audio were obstacles for students to grasp essential information. This was followed by listening and answering the details for the questions, which were considered specific information with a slightly relative mean of 3.15 and the standard deviation at 1.001 . Regarding the ability to listen to specific information, the results of the table showed that seniors had difficulties recognizing signal words to use in answering questions. Students also had difficulties in listening because of their confusion or unclearly listening words ending in es, ed, se, k, d, t.... The degree of problems was evaluated by seniors with a mean score slightly higher than 3 ($M=3.08$), but the highest standard deviation is 1.118 . In terms of listening for the main idea, they had relatively less difficulties in doing this kind of task. Listening to the main ideas received a mean score ($M = 2.88$), but a high standard deviation ($SD = 1.042$). It can be concluded that seniors had different opinions when listening to the main ideas of the text. The level of students assessing listening and catching main ideas was also shown by the lowest mean of the

factor that was answering questions related to the main idea ($M=2.345$, $SD= .662$) . It could also be concluded that students had fewer difficulties in listening and grasping the main idea of the listening text. Furthermore, complicated grammatical structures were considered non-challenging factors for seniors' listening comprehension skills, with a mean of 2.75. A high numerical SD value of 1,032 indicates different opinions among students.

As for the juniors' feedback, it was clearly seen in Table 8 that the juniors had the same opinions as the seniors. More specifically, unfamiliarity with new words, jargon and idioms as well as unclear pronunciation also scored the highest mean ($M=3.5$ and 3.45). It could be inferred that unfamiliar words and difficult pronunciation hindered their listening comprehension. In contrast, listening and grasping the main ideas also had the lowest mean ($M=3.10$ and 2.63), which means that the seniors also had fewer difficulties in listening and completing tasks related to the topic than the seniors. With mean values of 3.35 and 3.30, it could be explained that seniors found it difficult to listen and deduce detailed information and usually confuse sounds ending in ed, es,s,se ,t,d,.... This could be explained because students did not have much knowledge about listening as well as limited English vocabulary. Complicated grammatical structures were considered factors that caused a lot of burden in learning how to listen. This may be because students did not get a lot of grammar practice in class, making them unable to fully listen to sentences with more complex grammatical structures than usual.

4.1.3.5. Factors related to listening equipment and environment

In addition to the problems that come from the student's own subjective factors and the factors heard by the speaker and the text, the listening device and the listening environment also play an important role in listening skills. The difficulty level assessed by both third and final year students is briefly presented in the following table:

Table 4.9: The level of factors related to listening equipments and environment

	Course 44 (N=40)				Course 45 (N=40)			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
The quality of the CD player.	1	5	3.38	1.079	1	5	3.08	1.023
The quality of acoustic conditions in the classroom.	1	5	3.60	.841	1	5	3.68	.730
Noises and other interrupted sounds.	1	5	3.65	.921	1	5	3.55	.876

Students' listening skills were also partly affected by the learning and listening environment. The noise inside as well as outside was an obstacle to understanding. Because of the noise in the classroom and the poor preparation in the classroom, many seniors said that they could not concentrate on listening with the highest mean rating of 3.65 and a standard deviation of .921. Most of the seniors also pointed out a difficulty they encountered in the listening comprehension part due to the poor quality of the classroom acoustics with the average level being quite high. (M=3.60, SD=.841). Seniors had the most similar opinions about the influence of bad recordings, quality or poor quality CD-player. However, it seemed to have improved a lot because final-year students just reported the lowest mean (M= 3.38, SD= 1.079).

Given the poor quality of the acoustics in the classroom and the noise emanating from the hallways and other classrooms, some juniors had difficulty listening the teacher's voice. The average score drawn from the table of juniors appeared very high at 3.68 and 3.55 respectively (SD= .730, SD= .876). The reason could be that the classrooms were not well soundproofed so it made the sound quality worse making them unable to listen to the teacher from their listening test. At the same time, students were easily distracted because they could listen all the sounds from outside during the listening process. Moreover, in the same opinion as the seniors, the poor quality CD player was also an inhibitor of students' listening comprehension, but it only had the lowest mean of 3.08. This is also quite understandable because new and modern listening devices have been invested a lot for language classes at Can Tho University.

4.1.3.6. Other factors affecting listening comprehension

The questionnaire was designed with 36 Likert-type questions with five degrees from 1 to 5. Moreover, at the end of the questionnaire, an open question was also added to ask the participants to answer following their individual opinions about the other factors influencing their listening comprehension apart from the available issues designed by the author.

After collecting the data, there were more extra different ideas provided. First of all, most of the students agreed that health problems were also considered as one of the factors affecting their listening results. This problem was specifically cited by a junior, for example, " when I have a fever, I cannot concentrate with 100% of my ability during the listening session". From here, we can also understand that poor health also affects students' ability to concentrate as well as listening results.

In addition, some students mentioned that the length and different topics of the listening test and difficulties related to grammar knowledge and lack of vocabulary also affected their listening comprehension skills. However, these opinions were quite similar to some items mentioned by the author in the questionnaire and also clearly analyzed through the data tables above. However, the answers from the open-ended questions at the end of the students had also contributed to the reader's better understanding of the factors that affect the listening comprehension of English Studies students.

4.2. Discussion

As discussed in the results above, the two main aspects of the questionnaire aimed to explore the perception of EFL students of CTU with respect to the level of difficulty in listening comprehension and what were the factors that affected their ability to listen comprehension the most, "subjective" or "objective". Evidence from the data showed that most CTU EFL students had relatively many difficulties in listening and there are more objective factors than subjective factors. After that, the factors continued to be divided into five other sub-categories, namely the speaker, the listener, the listening task, the listening process and the listening devices and environment to analyze and evaluate more specifically the students' difficulties in listening.

Factors related to the speakers

The most significant evaluated problem related to speakers was because speakers often had the habit of speaking quickly, so the phenomenon of swallowing words or linking word by word occurred and was often experienced by students if they did not have knowledge about this problem. Munro and Derwing (1999) showed that too many accents could lead to impaired comprehension. According to Goh (1999), 66% of learners considered the speaker's voice to be one of the most important factors affecting the listener's comprehension. Buck (2001) pointed out that when listeners listened an unfamiliar accent such as Indian English where there is enormous cultural diversity, accents may differ among the people of regional states for the first time after studying American and British English, they would experience serious listening difficulties. Students may not get used to the combination of sound, lexis and the collocation that helps them make guesses to fill the missing parts. This would definitely interrupt the entire listening comprehension process.

According to Underwood (1989), there were several barriers to effective listening comprehension. He considered this much of a problem, stating, "The greatest difficulty with listening comprehension is the inability of the listener to control a speaker's speed of speech." The biggest problem with listening comprehension was that the listener cannot control how quickly the speaker was speaking. The "rapid speaking speed" category obtained a relatively high mean, indicating that L2 learners seemed to be afraid of the fast speaking speed of native speakers. This may be caused by the fact that English is a period of linguistic stress and the rate of presentation is too fast for those whose original language is a syllable (Griffith, 1991).

Another problem was due to the variety of accents as well as difficult pronunciation and stress. In this regard, Brown (2001, p. 254) posited that "since English was a language with so many accents, spoken English could be terrifying for some learners because of the many syllables spilling over between stress points." According to him, intonation patterns were important for understanding "question, statement, emphasis, sarcasm, endearment, insult, instigation, praise, etc." (Brown, 2001, p. 254). It could be explained that listeners had a different tendency to get used to the stresses they mainly listen (Yagang, 1994). According to Vandergrift (2007) and Walker (2014), in addition to identifying words despite their unfamiliar pronunciation, students should try to decide which words to memorize. The dominant features of spoken language such as place of stress, weak form and strong word forms, and intonation also affected the comprehension of oral texts. In addition, when a large number of speakers appeared in the listening task, it was easy for students to be confused because they could not keep up and remember which person's opinion was. This often happens in the form of listening tests that have to answer questions such as Whose proposal is this? Whose task is this?...

Factors related to the listeners

Both seniors and juniors shared the same ideas about this factor. Both groups shared that the biggest challenge is that they did not have their own appropriate listening strategies. They seemed to lack a lot of experience in psychological control, anxiety, preparation before, during and after listening and also the ability to remember, concentrate and process information. Research had shown that there was a positive relationship between motivation, the use of metacognitive strategies, and success in listening (Vandergrift, 2005). Without a clear strategy, students are easily confused when taking the listening test because they will not know how to start, which will then lead to bad results.

Regarding listening activities, students always had difficulties grasping the information that the speaker was discussing. Most students could listen and understand the main content as well as the entire listening if there were many familiar words in the listening passage. However, when the listening task appeared with many new words, it would be difficult for them to catch up with the information. That was because the students had quite a limited vocabulary and their short-term memorization capacity was limited. Underwood (1989) claimed that lack of vocabulary is a hindrance for most students in general listening. They often just got in the habit of trying to understand individual words instead of deducing them along with the content, so they were easy to interrupt and miss the content behind. According to Graham (2006), the research had also revealed that trying to listen and understand individual words was some of the problems reported by learners.

Besides, anxiety and concentration are also assessed as factors that hinders students in listening comprehension. King & Behnke's (2003) came to the conclusion that anxiety levels in listening activities could reduce listening comprehension ability. According to Noro (2006) when students felt frustrated or unable to concentrate, they wanted to give up listening activities. They did not feel confident and could not listen well. They did not usually practice their ears and they did not know how to improve this skill because they needed to get used to listening

to English to develop their ability. Elkhafaifi (2005) notes that anxiety is generated by the listening tasks themselves and as a result, anxiety can easily disrupt the listening process.

Factors related to the listening process

Both groups of students agreed that it was difficult to guess the meaning of unknown words because it took them a long time to memorize all the content of the task and reconnect before they could fully understand the meaning of the words. Therefore, this activity occupied the highest level for the listening process. Hasan (2000) emphasizes that when faced with a new word, listeners tend to figure out the meaning rather than infer from the context. Anderson and Lynch (2003) reported that listeners may or may not process speech, or speech may contain words or phrases that can be fully listened by the listener but can not understand because of syntax or semantic problems.

In addition, a large number of the participants found it quite easy to listen to and understand the main ideas of the listening passage, but difficult to listen, understand, synthesize detailed ideas, and organize ideas in a listening session to analyze the relationship between them. These students were confused about how to extract the details of a listening text. Anderson and Lynch (2003) emphasized that the listener paid full attention to the message and tries to construct a coherent interpretation from it. As suggested by Underwood (1989), listeners might not be able to perceive cues that indicate a speaker is moving from one point to another, giving an example or repeating a point, and so on

Factors related to listening task

Students also encountered a few obstacles from the listening material. The most prominent features were both groups of students regarding unfamiliar topics and vocabulary. These discussions may incorporate words, expressions, or terms that are unfamiliar to the learner. Underwood (1989) listed common obstacles that students face when listening, such as transmission speed, inability to repeat words, limited vocabulary, failure to follow cues such as transitions, lack of context knowledge, ability to concentrate, and habitual preference for trying to understand every word in what they listen. According to Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz and Tugrul Mart (2014), when listening to texts containing known words, it would be very easy for students to understand them. If students know the meaning of words, this could spark their interest and motivation and could have a positive effect on students' listening comprehension. A lot of words have more than one meaning and if they are not used appropriately in their proper context, students will get confused.

Another factor highly appreciated by students was that the words in the listening passage were not pronounced clearly, making it easy for students to confuse words. Bloomfield et al. (2010) and Walker (2014) expressed that one of the serious problems of listening comprehension concerned the pronunciation of words differently from how they appear in print. Because of the fact that spoken language changed with the form of written language, recognizing words that make up oral speech could cause some difficulties for students. In English, there are many words that have the same sound but have different meanings and spellings, and similarly, there are some words that have the same spelling, opposite meanings, and different pronunciations. There are even some words that are similar in spelling, and pronunciation, and sometimes have the same meaning but differ in type and stress, such as distinguishing between nouns and verbs. For example, "record" with the stress on the first syllable is a noun, whereas with the second syllable, "record" is a verb. Therefore, if students do not know the rules well, they are easily confused while listening. Particularly for juniors, they also had problems with different pronunciations of words ending in /s/, /ed/, /ch/, /t/,... Juniors received different assessments than seniors. Maybe it is because the seniors have been practicing and getting used to a lot of exercises of this type for about 4 years, but sometimes you are still a little confused. (M=3.08, Table 8)

Long text and too much detail were one of the factors that could distract students in listening comprehension tasks. Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Tugrul Mart (2014) said that students' level could play an important role as they listened to long sections and kept all the information in mind. It is difficult for students to listen for more than three minutes and complete the listening tasks. Short listening passages make it easier for learners to understand and reduce their fatigue. The speed of presentation and difficulty level of the content must be adjusted to suit the learners. In addition, often listening tests are designed to include many tasks and there will also be many conversations and speeches that will take place, which is also a factor that makes it difficult for students to listen. Students cannot listen to more than one conversation at a time. This will lead to misinterpretation or misunderstanding.

Factors related to listening equipment and environment

The difficulty of the device and the environment listening or in other words physical arrangements were also visible. Based on the findings, it could be seen that there was no difference between the two groups of students. An inevitable reason that made listening comprehension more difficult was the noisy listening environment, with a lot of noise. These referred to distractions in the environment such as classroom doors slamming in the wind, cell phones ringing, and students talking outside the halls were some examples of physical barriers. If the listening task was done with the students' background noise, it was certain that they would not have good listening results because they were interrupted no matter how hard they tried to concentrate on the task. For example, external noise or pronunciation differences affected learners more than native speakers. Although learners could deal with this situation in their own language, Ur (2007) provided some explanations for why foreign language learners were not able to deal with such problems in their own target language.

In addition, the problem stems from the poor quality of CD-player. The majority of students reported challenges they experienced in listening intelligibility stemming from poor recordings or poor audio and tape quality. If the message is transmitted with an accompaniment of extraneous audio or "noise", some messages may not be received by listeners. In a foreign language situation, unfamiliar elements of the message may be perceived in a noise-like manner, so that some parts of it will be lost during transmission to the receiver. In some lessons, teachers use some not-so-high quality recording materials. The quality of the sound system can affect the listening ability of the learners (Azmi Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Tugrul Mart, 2014).

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Summary of the findings

Data collected from survey questionnaires was analyzed to answer the two main questions raised at the beginning of the study and draw conclusions. They can be summarized into the following main parts:

The factors encountered by students

The study explored students' perceptions of listening difficulties related to English listening comprehension. In general, students majoring in English Studies in High-quality programs reported that their average difficulty listening was approximately 3.5 with levels 3 and 4 accounting for 42.5% and 30% respectively, which means they had relatively many difficulties in listening comprehension. Objective factors such as the quality of sound and classroom, many vocabulary, stress, intonation and multivoicedness of speakers were rated by students with a higher average level than subjective factors. More specifically, in terms of speakers, word swallowing and linking as well as the number of speakers in the listening passage more than 2 were the biggest challenges for both seniors and juniors with the mean of 3.45 and 3.23 respectively, followed by a variety of speakers' voices and unfamiliar intonations. Among the factors related to learners, students reported psychological causes, inappropriate listening strategies as well as the habit of trying to listen to every word as common problems. In contrast, listening, understanding and remembering familiar words were not difficult for them because of the mean below 3.

The element of guessing the meaning of words based on context and related words and detailed ideas in the text was considered the most difficult step in the listening process. This was followed by focusing on the text even when having difficulty understanding the content and checking the understanding of the text based on what is known about the topic. In addition, when it came to the difficulty level of the listening task, they all had a common assessment that there were many unfamiliar words and not clearly pronounced, especially the last sounds were the biggest obstacle for listeners. On the other hand, the students had a lot of experience in listening and grasping the main idea of the lesson because the average is 2.49. Finally, both the quality of the CD player and the classroom equipment in the classroom also contributed a lot to the learning effectiveness of listening students.

Apart from the factors mentioned in the questionnaire, some students also indicated that they usually got trouble with their health such as fever, stomach, headache and so on that impact their listening comprehension.

5.2. Conclusion and implications

This study aimed to investigate the factors inhibiting listening comprehension of English Studies in a High-quality program. The tool for data collection was a 36-item questionnaire, for 80 seniors and juniors majoring in

the High-quality program English Studies at Can Tho University. Besides, the perception of both two groups is considered to have no significant difference.

Based on the results of the Literature study and the answers from the students' questionnaires, the researchers propose some suggestions for teachers and students about difficulties in learning listening skills.

5.2.1. Implications for teachers

First of all, listening activities must be provided based on the needs of the students, and the teacher must provide listening materials to the students to help them better understand the natural way of speaking by native speakers. For example, teachers can provide students with supplementary exercises from other sources for practice as well as helpful websites to improve listening skills. Furthermore, teachers should ask their learners to always listen to music, documentaries and radio and television news, talk directly with native speakers or on the Internet so that they can create and reinforce habits. get used to listening well in yourself. Listening activities should be presented according to their level of complexity; that is, listening activities should be offered from very simple texts for junior students and move to very complex authentic documents for advanced students.

Secondly, they also need to pay attention to student psychology. Both anxiety and depression will disrupt their learning and it turns out as a barrier to their listening test understanding. Teachers should give their students essential feedback about their performance as it can motivate them to correct errors and increase their motivation, and help them develop their confidence in the listening exercises. Being aware of the problems their students face in academia is necessary to find a good listening strategy and teaching activities to make students better listeners.

Thirdly, teachers should combine teaching listening with teaching pronunciation and communication for students to reduce the negative impact of listening to many different British accents. For example, teachers should familiarize students with pronunciation rules to help them listen natural rapid speech patterns and ask them to imitate the pronunciation of native speakers. Furthermore, teachers can play music in foreign languages for students to listen to. Introducing a new medium of listening to spoken language can help students better absorb information instead of just reciting the language. The teacher can provide lyrics for the track associated with the sheet music. This allows students to combine reading strengths with listening comprehension to help improve their listening skills.

Next, before starting to listen, teachers should provide background knowledge and language knowledge to their students while listening to different listening materials. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to discuss what they already know about a topic and their understanding of components of language such as sounds, words, intonation, and grammatical structures. Then, teachers teach vocabulary, instructing students how to process information before and when listening. Before the listening task is distributed, the teacher should guide the students to underline the keywords and anticipate information and vocabulary that may be related to the listening topic, then take students to listen back and practice speaking through the script. Simultaneously, teachers should carefully check the listening equipment and environment before listening in order to reduce bad influences and interrupting troubles.

Finally, teachers should design listening tasks and provide them with appropriate listening skills and strategies. For instance, they can rely on listening patterns to guide students to intelligently listen and capture information to avoid situations where students cannot keep up with the flow of the listening. In addition, raise students' awareness of the benefits of taking notes and learn how to use synonyms, antonyms or paraphrases to prepare them better for listening because speakers tend to not use the same words and structures in the text.

5.2.2. Implications for students

To improve their own skills, students must first have self-discipline and initiative in learning and practising listening and memorization every day. Apart from in class, students should make their own study plans and gain more experience and skills for listening. For example, the students need to improve their own vocabulary because without vocabulary, they will not be able to understand the content of the listening, easily miss important information of the listening and not keep up. Moreover, they also need to practice their pronunciation skills to avoid confusion between homonyms. They should spend some time on joining clubs or meeting and chatting with foreigners to practice their communication skills and improve their listening comprehension. In addition, they can also improve their knowledge and information related to the topics of the listening tasks by watching the news, reading newspapers and reading bilingual books. They can not only relax but also practice

their listening by listening to music and watching English movies. When attending classes, students should make a habit of taking notes and actively speaking and discussing with friends and teachers. Finally, each student should have listening strategies that are appropriate for them and also know how to adjust those strategies while they are ineffective for them and constantly improve their own strategies.

5.3. Recommendations for future research

It is hoped that the results of the present study will be useful for further studies to explore the factors affecting the listening comprehension skills of English students to carry out longitudinal studies. The scope of the study needs to be expanded with a large number of participants from both first- and second-year English majors or English language students from other universities. Additionally, further studies should investigate significant differences between English Studies seniors and juniors. In other words, further studies on the topic should involve more participants and include more in-depth qualitative data to gain multiple perspectives on the issue of listening.

Secondly, in fact, the current research just covered a category related to listening, hence, an integrated study of other skills would be a good idea.

Further research should consider using more tools and more research methods, such as an interview with students of different backgrounds and achievements, to get more insight into the listening problems and techniques. Furthermore, research can be conducted by observing some listening tests as well as interviewing some teachers to gain insight into listening difficulties and strategies.

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