

SOME FACTORS AFFECTING THE ENGLISH LISTENING SKILL OF STUDENTS IN ADVANCED PROGRAMME

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Abstract

English listening is one of the compulsory modules in the advanced program of the University of Economics and Business Administration – Thai Nguyen University (TUEBA) and plays an important role in students' English language ability as well as in their future career perspectives. However, the English learning process of students is influenced by many factors. This article will help to identify, analyze the strengths and weaknesses and give some recommendation to improve the English language teaching and learning process in TUEBA's advanced program.

Keywords: *English language, listening skill, advanced programme*

1. Introduction

In the globalization trend that is strongly taking place worldwide, English has occupied a dominant position being the most commonly used language in international transactions. In Vietnam, with the aim of training future talented bachelors, as well as master at least one foreign language to meet the higher and higher employment needs. English is the most dominant and important language in Vietnam university education system [1, pages 22 – 37].

Basing on the employment demands of labour market, and to help train the highly qualified workforce in the condition of international integration, the University of Economics and Business Administration – Thai Nguyen University (TUEBA), has implemented a advanced program. Every major subject of this programme is taught in English, thus, the English language is a compulsory subject that every first-year student of this programme has to take before entering his/ her following years at the university. This subject consists of modules helping students to develop their English language skills and abilities in order to support them with the necessary language to study their majors in English.

Studying a foreign language is a complicated process in which the development of language ability is influenced by many factors [2, pages 67 – 74]. Furthermore, listening skill is one of the most challenging ones for students because of many objectives as well as subjective reasons, especially for those who do not major in the English language. To overcome this challenge and master the listening skill, students have to spend a lot of time and try a lot; these will discourage students to continue trying to master this skill.

Through the results of our study, we have identified the factors influencing the learning and practicing the process of English listening skill, thus, we make some suggestions to help students apply in studying English listening skill process of students of advanced program in particular and of students of TUEBA in general.

2. Literature review

Devine (1982), claimed that listening is the primary means by which incoming ideas and information are taken in.

Wolvin and Coakley (1988) concluded that, both in and out of the classroom, listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of verbal communication.

Listening is central to the lives of students throughout all levels of educational development (Coakley & Wolvin, 1997).

Listening is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom (Ferris, 1998; Vogely, 1998).

Both instructors (Ferris & Tagg, 1996) and students (Ferris, 1998) acknowledge the importance of listening comprehension for success in academic settings.

Numerous studies indicated that efficient listening skills were more important than reading skills as a factor contributing to academic success (Coakley & Wolvin, 1997).

Gebhard (2000: 143) states that listening is not a passive skill but an active one because we need to be receptive to others, which include paying attention to explanations, questions, and opinions.

The various difficulties that commonly occur in the listening comprehension such as; making a prediction, guessing unknown words, recognizing the main point and many other such difficulties are still encountered by the students in the listening comprehension subject (Hamouda, 2013). Thus, this condition should be handled seriously in order to reduce the problems in listening classes and make the students easy to comprehend what they listen to.

Furthermore, there are many factors that cause these conditions, related to the factors that affect a listening subject. (Boyle, 1984) classifies the factors that impact EFL listening comprehension in three ways based on a survey of China teachers and students: the first is speaker factors such as; the linguistic ability of the speaker, the quality of the speech signal, the personality of the speaker, etc; the second is factors in the oral text such; the complexity of the lexis and syntax, the degree of cohesion, etc; and the third one is listener factors, such as intelligence, memory, gender, motivation and background knowledge.

Takeo and Takatsuka (2007) show the result that point out several factors that affecting listening comprehension. Vocabulary/grammar, reading comprehension, and repeatability are among the factors that give impact in listening.

3. Subject and Methodology

3.1. Study contents

3.1.1. Scope, subject, object and length of the study

We chose students of TUEBA's K15 advanced program to conduct the survey and collect the data to be analyzed.

The subject of our study is the English language issue in which listening skill is included.

The object of our study is students of TUEBA's K15 advanced program.

The length of our study is from January 2019 to May 2019.

3.1.2. Methodology

From the practice of teaching and studying the English language of TUEBA's K15 students of advanced program, by using the observations, questionnaires, and interviews, we have analyzed the factors which make them difficult for students of the programme to learn English listening skill. Along with the study of literature and theories of English language teaching, we have recommended some suggestions to students of the programme to overcome the difficulties and improve their studying results.

3.1.4. Primary data collections

To conduct the study, we have applied the data collection process by asking 40 students TUEBA's high-quality programme to do the questionnaire. There are 12 questions and they are divided into 3 main sections to assess the attitudes of students to study the English listening skill, the difficulties they usually meet when studying and practicing this skill and their wishes to improve their English listening skill.

After using the questionnaire, we interviewed 15 students (they are chosen subjectively basing on the results of the placement test) about the teaching and studying the skill.

3.1.5. The analysis

The data from the questionnaire and the interview were collected and analyzed by using Microsoft Excel software and using the descriptive method to interpret.

4. The results and discussions

4.1. The attitudes of students to study English listening skill

Most of the students consider listening skill is an important skill when learning a foreign language and they had had a positive aim to study it. Many students said that besides studying this skill as a subject of their course, they also study this skill in order to improve their language ability to help them not only in studying their major at TUEBA but also in their future jobs. Furthermore, many of the students (about 95%) said that listening skill is one of the most frequent skills used in their communication. Thus, we can see that students are having a positive attitude toward studying English listening skill.

When being asked about the consideration of the factors influencing listening ability, 53% of the students claimed that vocabulary is the most important factors, 30% chose the pronunciation and speed of the speech. Factors of making prediction/ inference, grammar accounted for 10% and 7% respectively. This shows that students have identified the factors need focusing on and improving is their vocabulary and pronunciation.

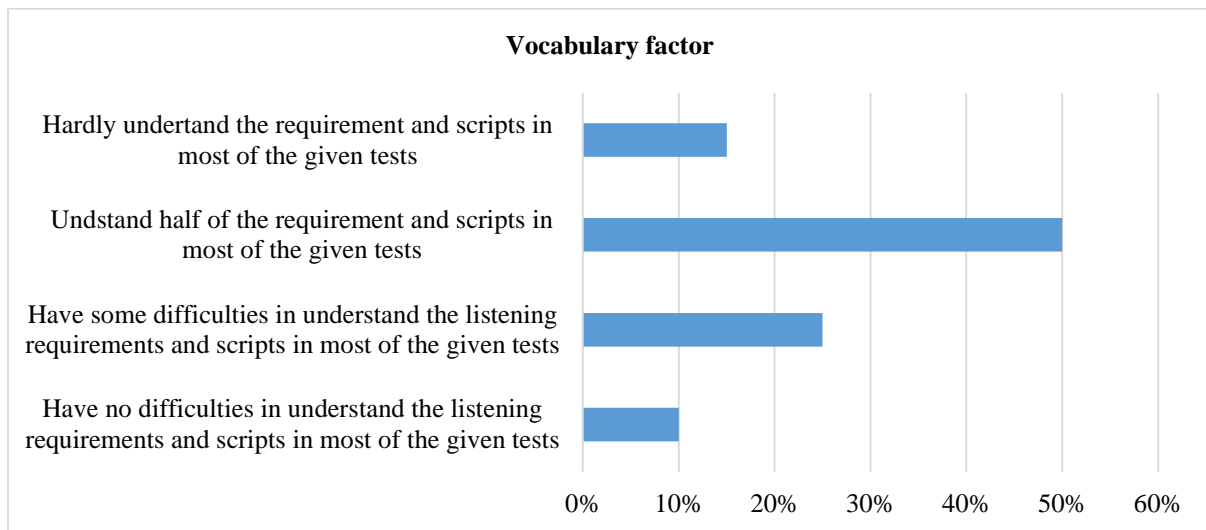
In the practices of listening, although being instructed the steps to do the listening, over half of the students didn't read the introduction of the listening tasks. Especially, by analyzing the data, most of the students had difficulties in understanding the unknown words. Only 12.5% of the students knew the adequate amount of vocabulary to do the test tasks. Most significantly, over 85% of the students didn't do any extra activities to improving their listening ability outside classes.

4.2. The difficulties students usually meet when practicing listening skill

According to Sitti Asriati (2017) referred to (Hamouda, 2013): "The various difficulties that commonly occur in the listening comprehension such as; making a prediction, guessing unknown words, recognizing the main point and many other such difficulties are still encountered by the students in the listening comprehension subject." So, there are many factors influencing the listening comprehension of the students. Through the practice of teaching and studying English listening skills of students in TUEBA's high-quality programme, by observation, there are some more factors influencing the listening skill of the students, which are:

4.2.1. Vocabulary factor

In fact, most of the student have studied the English language in middle and high school for over 7 years, however, the amount of vocabulary of students is very limited, so vocabulary is still a big problem to students when they had to deal with listening tasks in understanding the requirements as well as the scripts to give the correct answers of those tasks. By analyzing the figures, there are 65% of the students had difficulties in understanding almost or all of the requirements and the scripts of the listening tasks due to the lack of vocabulary. This factor can lead to a situation of not understanding either the requirements of the tasks or the scripts, so students will find it hard to continue listening, so they will choose the answers randomly.

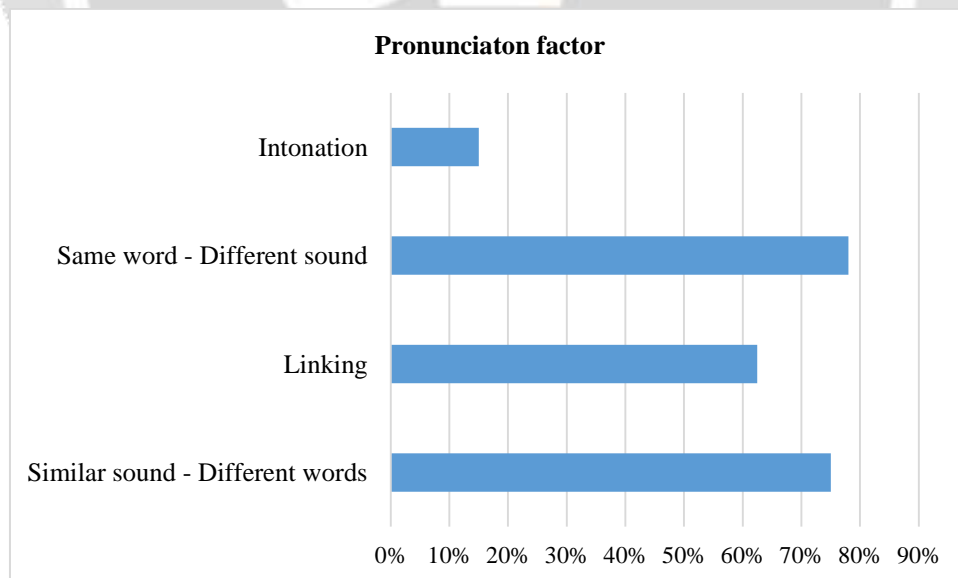


Graph 1: Vocabulary factor

Source: Figures from the authors' survey – May 2019

4.2.2. Pronunciation factor

This factor is divided into 5 criteria. From the data in graph 2, we can see that two main challenging issues are “similar sound - different word” words and “same word – different sound” words which relatively account for 75% and 78% of the students of TUEBA’s high-quality programme had difficulties in understanding the key information from the listening scripts to give the correct answers. Approximately 62.5% of the students couldn’t identify the single words because of linking phenomenon. Only 15% of the students had difficulties in understanding the listening requirements and scripts. This pronunciation factor can make students misunderstand important information. We can have a better look at the figures in graph 2.



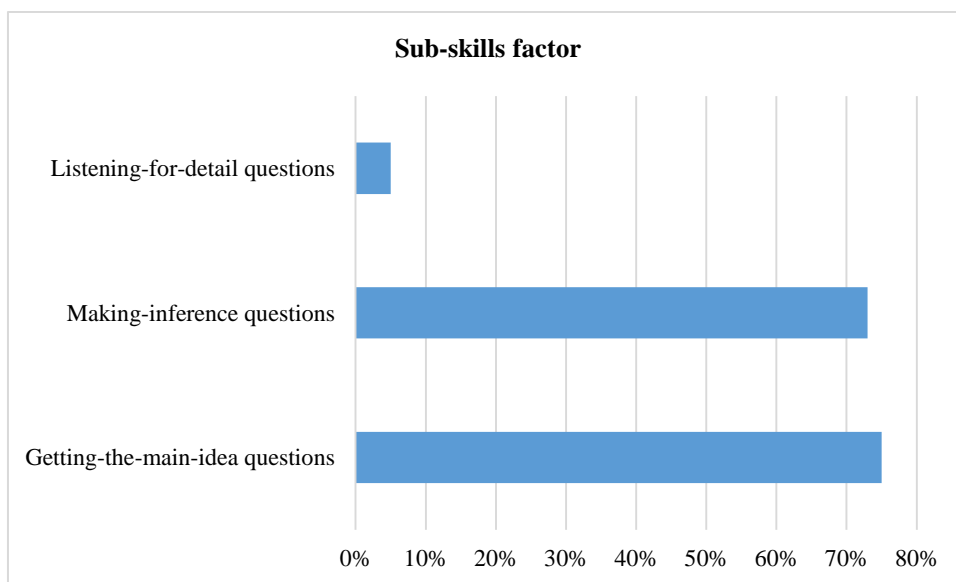
Graph 2: Pronunciation factor

Source: Figures from the authors' survey – May 2019

4.2.3. Sub-skills factor

Besides the challenges from the vocabulary and pronunciations factors, students of TUEBA's high-quality programme also had to face with another challenge from the lack of knowledge of listening sub-skills practices, which are getting the main idea and making inferences. Approximately 75% of the students couldn't

do the getting-the-main-idea question and almost the same number of the students (73%) couldn't do the making-inference questions. Whereas, most of the students know how to get information to answer the listening-for-detail questions, which take the percentage of 95%.



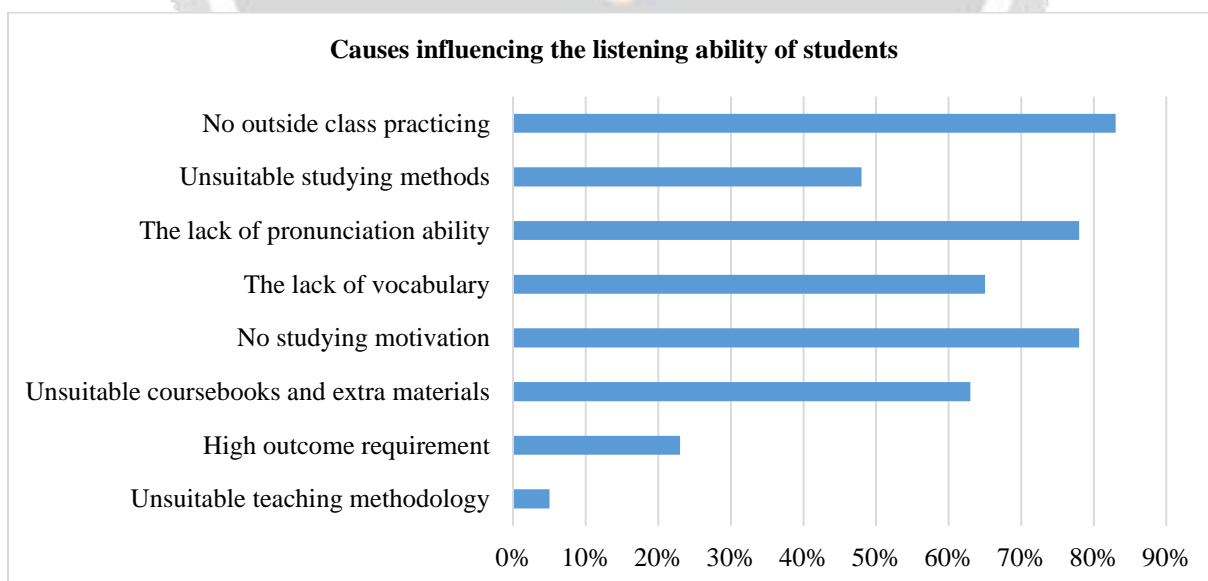
Graph 3: Pronunciation factor

Source: Figures from the authors' survey – May 2019

4.3. Some causes influencing the listening ability of students

We have identified 8 causes which influence the listening ability of students of TUEBA's high-quality programme, we also have classified them in subjective and objective causes.

Subjectively, 78% of the students didn't have the right motivation in studying the English language in general and in studying listening skill in particular, nearly half of the students didn't have the right studying methods, maybe because of these reasons, 83% of the students admitted that they didn't do any outside class extra listening activities.



Graph 4: Some causes influencing the listening ability of students

Source: Figures from the authors' survey – May 2019

Talking about objective causes, by analyzing the figures in graph 4, 63% of the students said that the unsuitable course books and extra materials made them difficult to get into the listening tasks. This means that

the current listening coursebook is not really suitable for the students in the high-quality programme of TUEBA. Almost all students highly appreciate the teaching staff who had good teaching methodology and were enthusiastic in teaching. However, 23% of the students thought that the high outcome requirement or the course they were taking was one of the cause putting them under the high pressure.

5. Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1. Recommendations

Basing on the analyzing some factors affecting the English listening skill of TUEBA's students of high quality training programme, we would like to recommend some suggestions in order to help to enhance the teaching and learning English listening skill of lectures and students of TUEBA's students of the programme in particular and of the other students of TUEBA in general.

5.1.1. Improve students' awareness of the importance of learning the English language to help them in their studying at the university as well as support them in their future jobs.

5.1.2. Focus on teaching and studying vocabulary and pronunciation in order to increase students' listening ability.

5.1.3. Apply a flexible teaching methodology, which is more suitable for students. Mix many other teaching activities to attract students.

5.1.4. Provide students with necessary listening sub-skills and make students practice the inside and outside class.

5.1.5. Apply advanced technology in teaching listening skills, use the E-learning system to help students practice outside class.

5.2. Conclusions

Although the study was conducted on a small scale, it clearly depicted the facts of teaching and studying English listening skill in TUEBA's high-quality programme. In the era of international integration, the demand for using the English language in employees' jobs is really crucial. The fact of teaching the English language in general and teaching listening skills, in particular, are facing with many limitations and challenges while the requirements of English language abilities are higher and higher. So, in order to catch up with the development of modern society as well as employment requirements, TUEBA needs to develop the contents, the curriculum of the English language subjects, especially those of high-quality programme.

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