

AN INVESTIGATION INTO CHALLENGES IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION AMONG ENGLISH-MAJORED FRESHMEN AT UNIVERSITY OF LANGUAGES AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

Hoang Anh Phong

University of Languages and International Studies, Faculty of English Language
Teacher Education
Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension skill has become a great concern to not only learners but also language teachers recently. People used to narrow down the assessment of one's language ability to reading and writing skills, as only the two skills have official assessment in schools and education systems. However, with the tremendous growth of communication in the technological era, people are reconsidering the necessity of speaking and listening skills for their practicality. In the context of ULIS, especially FELTE students who are majored in the English language, listening comprehension skill has become a critical issue. This study aims at identifying challenges that the students encounter the most in their learning of listening skills, specifically from four factors: the learner, the speaker, the material, and the physical setting. The participants comprised 150 mainstream first-year students majoring in English Language. The instrument of the data collection was a survey-questionnaire, which was considered the most effective and common method of collecting data on attitudes and opinions (Makey & Gass, 2005). The findings of this research would reveal the difficulties that ULIS first-year students encounter the most.

Keywords: listening comprehension, difficulty, English-majored first-year students

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, brief information about the paper is provided. Five main points presented are (1) statement of the problem and rationale for the study, (2) research aims and research questions, (3) research design, (4) significance of the study and (5) outline of the research paper.

1.1 Statement of the problem and rationale for the study

Listening plays a pivotal role in human's daily life. It serves numerous different purposes such as a means of communication, a source of entertainment, an useful tool to achieve academic purposes or to obtain information. It is estimated that of the total time spent on communicating, listening accounts for 40-50%; speaking: 25-30%; reading: 11-16% and writing: about 9% (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). This finding was supported by Wolvin and Coakley (1988) who confirmed that listening consumes more of daily communication time than other forms of human communication. Moreover, Morley (1999), together with Scarcella and Oxford (1992), claims that listening is the most frequently used skill in daily life communication. In addition, according to Devine (1982), listening is the primary means by which people absorb incoming ideas and information. Furthermore, gaining effective listening skills is of paramount importance for students to achieve academic success (Ferris, 1998; Coakley & Wolvin, 1997; Ferris & Tagg, 1996).

When it comes to foreign language learning, listening is also an indispensable part because it provides the language input for learners (Rost, 1994). Without the ability to absorb the input, language learners can never successfully acquire the language (Krashen, et al., 1984). However, it is by no means easy for language learners to master listening skills as listening is a complicated process requiring a combination of different cognitive skills and types of knowledge (Graham & Macaro, 2008; Field, 2008; Vandergrift, 1999). Hence, language learners, especially those who learn English as a foreign language in a non-native environment where real practice chances are narrow, have considerable difficulties in acquiring good listening skills (Nowrouzi, Tam, Zareian & Nimehchisalem, 2015).

In Vietnam specifically, countryside students have no exposure to English language apart from what they receive in the classroom. Students' fundamental means of listening English come from the teacher's voice. In addition, English teachers in rural areas have a tendency to utilize their mother tongue in English classes to deliver their lessons and explain the grammars or lexical meanings more easily. Hence, students' exposure to spoken English, together with their opportunities to practise listening, is limited. Furthermore, the low quality of cassettes and other listening facilities has a detectable effect on the process of practicing and testing listening, especially in the countryside, where the cassette players are either of poor quality or running out of batteries. As a consequence, students have difficulties in listening because of the low-standard sound. For those reasons, most of the students in rural and mountainous areas, suffer a terrible shock when learning listening skills in the university. In spite of the diversity of literature in this field, little attention has been paid to different types of obstacles that students have to encounter when they take the listening courses at university as well as the frequency of their struggles. Moreover, in the context of University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University (VNU), English-majored students are required to take language courses in all four English skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening as early as the first semester of the first year. Unlike at high school when all these four skills are almost integrated into one subject with the focus on reading and writing, at ULIS, listening is one compulsory, separate subject receiving the same amount of attention and focus as other skills. Nevertheless, little research provides a detailed description of first-year students' issues in learning listening. Thus, with the purpose of helping students to be fully aware of their problems and enhance their listening skills, this study, entitled Difficulties in listening comprehension among English-majored freshmen at University of Languages and International Studies, was conducted to raise the

perception of students about the importance of listening in learning English as well as their listening difficulties. Additionally, this research provides some valuable insights into such an important issue of all language learners and proffers pedagogical implications for both teachers and students.

1.2 Research aims and research question

The study aims at investigating the difficulties that English-majored first year students at the University of Languages and International Studies face when they study listening. As far as the researcher is concerned, listening is the most difficult skill for first year students, especially for those who come from the countryside and remote areas. Hence, listening comprehension is somewhat a terrible nightmare for them. This study is undertaken with a view to identifying the factors leading to their problems with listening skills and providing implications for teachers and students to make improvements.

The objectives above can be summarized in one following research question:

What are the difficulties in learning English listening encountered by ULIS English-majored mainstream freshmen?

1.3 Research design

This research was undertaken as a descriptive study utilizing quantitative method, that is, to take advantage of survey questionnaire as the main research tool to collect data. The population of the research is English-majored first year students at ULIS because they have just entered university after passing the entrance examination and may be unfamiliar with the new learning environment, which makes them struggle with various problems in learning language skills. Thus, digging deep into their problems is the first step to help them improve their listening skills as well as other language skills. The participants were chosen randomly from first year mainstream students (QH2022) to avoid biased results. In general, in this study, the researcher employed quantitative method to collect data and analyze information collected from survey questionnaires - the main data collecting instrument.

1.4 Significance of the study

With this study, the researchers expected to gain insights into the problems that English-majored freshmen at ULIS have to encounter when they learn listening skills. As a result, once completed, the research would bring a multitude of considerable benefits to both teachers and students. First of all, the results of the study would raise awareness among teachers of English to have a better understanding of their students' listening difficulties and examine their own pedagogical methods to improve students' listening comprehension, so that they can take initiatives to exploit suitable methods and to better engage their students in in-class activities during listening periods. Besides, the findings of this study also help learners to identify their difficulties in listening comprehension to ascertain what further learning strategies are necessary; as learners need to be aware of the factors which contribute to their difficulties in listening. Lastly, this research could offer useful references for further studies on the related topic area.

1.5 Outline of the research paper

This paper consists of five chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction: This part focuses on describing rationale, aims, method, significance and outline of the study. One research question is also included in this part.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: This part lays the theoretical foundation for the study with definitions of key terms and review of some related studies worldwide.

Chapter 3: Methodology: This part gives information about the setting of the research, sampling method, data collection instrument, and data analysis methods of the research.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion: This part presents, analyzes, and gives discussion about the findings that were obtained from the questionnaires.

Chapter 5: Conclusion: This part ends the study with a summary of the main points discussed in this study. It also mentions the limitations of the study and includes recommendations and suggestions for further studies. Following this chapter are Reference lists and Appendices.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter sheds light on the literature of the study; especially the definitions and classifications of the key terms as well as a number of studies related to the research topic will be provided.

2.1 Listening comprehension

2.1.1 Listening comprehension

Because of its huge merits on human lives and its fundamental role in language acquisition, listening skill is receiving more and more attention from researchers. So far, there have been myriad definitions of listening proposed by different linguists. According to Chastain (1971) and Mendelsohn (1994), listening is the capability of understanding the spoken language of native speakers. Meanwhile, Dakin and Howatt (1974) and Thomlison (1984) both defined listening as the ability to identify and understand what others are saying. They agreed that this is a complicated process involving understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension of meaning. Pearson (1983) stated that "Listening involves the simultaneous organization and combination of skills in phonology, syntax, semantics, and knowledge of the text structure, all of which seem to be controlled by the cognitive process". According to Hirsch (1986), listening is a process involving "neurological response and interpretations of sounds to understand and to give meaning by reacting, selecting meaning, remembering, attending, analyzing and including previous experience". Brown (2001) also supported this idea, claiming that one aspect of listening is "the psychomotor process of receiving sound waves through the ear and transmitting nerve impulses to the brain". Listening can also be defined as an active process during which listeners construct the meaning from oral input (Bentley & Bacon, 1996). Rost (2002) shared this viewpoint of Bentley and Bacon (1996), defining listening as a process of receiving information from the speakers, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speakers and responding, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination, and empathy. Scott Shelton (2008) opined that listening is a demanding process in which listeners must be able to deal with different accents or pronunciation, unfamiliar lexical items, and syntactic structures, background noise as well as to consciously attempt to not switch off or become distracted while listening.

In conclusion, from all the above-mentioned definitions, we perceive that listening is a complicated, active and dynamic process requiring an assemblage of different factors. The term 'Listening comprehension' has also been defined by different authors. Brown and Yule (1983) defined listening comprehension as the listeners' ability to understand what they have heard. Another viewpoint held by Dirven and Oakeshott-Taylor (1984) is that "Listening comprehension is the product of teaching methodology and is matched by terms such as speech understanding, spoken language understanding, speech recognition, and speech perception". According to Buck (2001), "listening comprehension is an active process of constructing meaning and this is done by applying knowledge to the incoming sound". Listeners can comprehend the oral input through sound discrimination, previous knowledge, grammatical structures, stress, intonation and other linguistic or non-linguistic clues (Nadig, 2013; Hamouda, 2013; Rost, 2002). In general, listening comprehension is also an active and

interactive process in which listeners can comprehend language input and construct the meaning through various means, both linguistic and non-linguistic ones.

2.1.2 The importance of listening skills in language learning

Listening is of paramount importance to language learners. According to Numan (1998), listening is the basic skill in language learning and over 50% of the time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening. Moreover, Rost (1994) claimed that “Listening is vital in the language classroom because it provides input for learners. Without understanding input at the right level, any learning simply cannot begin”. Several studies prove that aural input plays such a vital role in language acquisition and cognitive development. Krashen (1985) believed that understanding linguistic information is the key to acquiring a language. Moreover, the more the students listen, the more vocabulary, proficiency and the better language usage they have (Barker, 1971). These claims are supported by Stevenson (2010) who pinpointed that:

For learners of English, listening is vital because it is through this sense that they receive information on vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spoken word order, as well as the stress patterns of words, phrases, and sentences. In addition, added to these is the effect that different accents, voice tone, and pitch can have on their comprehension of the message. (para. 5)

In addition to serving as a receptive skill, providing essential language input for learners, listening also contributes significantly to the development of other language skills (Vandergriff, 1997). This idea was fortified by the explanation of Nation (1990) that “Listening gives learners the information to build up the knowledge necessary for using the language. When this knowledge is built up, learners can begin to speak. The listening period is a time of observation and learning, which provides the basis for other language skills”. To recapitulate, listening plays an indispensable role in language acquisition. Not only is this skill a tool to obtain language input and communicate with others but it also boosts learners’ proficiency in other aspects of language acquisition.

2.2 Difficulties in learning English listening as discussed in previous studies

In terms of the definition of listening problems, listening difficulties are defined as the internal and external characteristics that might interrupt and hinder text understanding as well as real-life information processing problems that take place at various stages of listening comprehension (Goh, 2000). Listening is a receptive skill because learners do not need to produce language to deal with listening sections. However, for many English learners, listening comprehension is viewed as the most challenging compared with other English language skills: reading, writing and speaking. In fact, learning to listen in the second language is more problematic because it does not only require the listeners’ language competency but also is attributed to the speakers, the content of the listening materials, the physical setting in the classroom and even the inevitable physical problems arising from the learners themselves.

This present paper focuses on the four following factors with a view to exploring the predominant causes that lead to learners’ difficulties in English listening comprehension. The list of these factors was adapted from a number of different sources in order to maximize the coverage of this research.

2.2.1 Speaker-related difficulties

Some research has been carried out to test the correlation between some speaker-related factors in the recording and listening comprehension troubles faced by students. According to Flowerdew and Miller (1992) and Underwood (1989), many English learners claim that the greatest obstacle they face while listening is their inability to control the speed of the speakers. When the rate of the speech gets faster, listeners even do not have enough time to

process the lexical and grammatical information, and they will begin to miss parts of the text. At a certain speed, their processing will tend to break down completely; and they will fail to understand the conversation (Buck, 2001). Galvin and Cooper (1999) affirmed that if speakers speak too fast (i.e. more than 120 to 180 words a minute), the audience will be caught in mental confusion as they fail to catch up with the information given.

Furthermore, the accent of the speakers also hinders the learners in their effort to learning English. Buck (2011) pinpointed that an unfamiliar accent can cause problems by disrupting the whole comprehension processor and make comprehension almost unattainable for a listener. This problem may occur due to the fact that many foreign learners are used to their own teacher's accents or to the standard module of British or American English (Buck, 1990). Thus, when coming across unfamiliar accents, they become discouraged, leading to the failure in listening comprehension.

Similarly, it should be taken into account that hesitations and pauses in spontaneous speech cause perceptual problems and comprehension errors for non-native speakers, according to Hasan (2000). When people speak, they often hesitate, repeat themselves, say things that are ungrammatical and change their minds halfway through a sentence. These things are a natural feature of speech and may be either a help or a hindrance, depending on the students' level.

2.2.2 Learner-related difficulties

Aside from the difficulties caused by the speakers, the learners themselves are similarly of a hindrance. The first obstacle is posed by lexical items. It is undeniable that a robust vocabulary improves all areas of communication in general and assists the second-language listening ability in particular. Vocabulary knowledge is an important predictor that is strongly correlated with L2 listening ability (Zeeland, 2013). It was also stated in Underwood's study (1989) that limited vocabulary can pose a great obstacle to most students in listening comprehension. Butt et al. (2010) also shared the same viewpoint that a limited amount of vocabulary prevents the students from grasping the content in general and recognizing the missing words and phrases in particular. It was claimed that listeners should recognize 50% of the words in a text in order to understand it (Paran, 1996). Knowing the meaning of words can arouse students' interest and motivation, thus positively impacting their listening comprehension ability.

Unlike vocabulary, the role of grammar knowledge as a direct cause for English listening problems has been less explored, although there has been a range of research arguing that there may be a strong relation between complex grammatical structures and other skills such as reading and writing. Vogely's study (1998) indicated that the difficulty in listening comprehension is partly due to the structural component of the text. In cognitive psychology, Anderson (1988) affirmed that entirely mastering the English structures allows us to grasp the comprehensive meaning in the comprehension process. Both Field (2008) and VanPatten (1990) concluded that learners, in particular, early-stage learners, have difficulty in attending to both form and content in listening. In contrast, Mecartty (2000) stated that grammatical knowledge does not contribute significantly to listening or comprehension but vocabulary knowledge is of paramount importance in second language listening comprehension ability.

According to some researchers, the learners' background knowledge and cross-cultural understanding are important comprehension facilitator factors. Unfamiliar topics hinder the listening comprehension of the majority of the students. As stated in Underwood's study (1989), listeners may lack contextual knowledge which helps to boost the listening efficiency. This goes in accordance with Nuttall's declaration (1996) which showed learners should share certain assumptions about the subject to construct their understanding of the subject they listen on the basis of their experiences. Anderson and Lynch (1988) also stated the consistent conclusions that listening comprehension depends on the listeners' background knowledge and their familiarity with the scenarios in the task input. To elucidate, if there is a discrepancy between the subject and the previous experience of the learners, they will be panic and

confused; consequently, they may fail to listen. More notably, research has also been conducted on the effect of culturally specific words or idioms on listening comprehension. This was found by both Sasaki (2000) and Nissan et al. (1996) who agreed that replacing culturally unfamiliar words in listening comprehension sections with culturally familiar words can boost the examinees' understanding of information.

In terms of pronunciation, it is the “basic outward shell of a language” (Naizhao & Wills, 2006), hence this language element should be properly acquired to develop the listening skills. However, as a consequence of Vietnamese grammar-driven curriculum, many students become pronunciation ignorant. Ur (1984); Walker (2014); Bloomfield et al. (2010) and Goh (1994) shared the same idea that one of the serious problems of listening comprehension is related to the pronunciation of words that is different from the way they appear in print. There are words that most students normally recognize in their written form, but they find difficulty whenever they hear them in a stream of speech. In Chen's research (2005), it was discovered that it is difficult for learners at low-level to identify or differentiate individual sounds and linking sounds.

Last but not least, Yagang (1993) stated that listening is not a simple process; in contrast, it is a complex psychological one. It is believed that in a long comprehension exercise, the learners' grasp of the content is much better at the beginning and gets progressively worse during the listening process due to the psychological phenomenon. It means that when there is nervousness or a lack of interest, listeners cannot concentrate and quickly forget what is heard. Hasan (2000) and Hamouda (2013); Yagang (1993) supported that the lack of motivation and interest should be considered a precursor of physical factors negatively affecting listening comprehension.

2.2.3 Material-related difficulties

A lot of research has clearly shown that the length of the recording can be a major factor that negatively affects the learners' listening comprehension. It should be taken into consideration that if the students do the listening for a long time, they will be put under pressure. Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, and Mart (2014) stated that the level of students can have a significant role when they listen to long parts and keep all information in their minds. This is consistent with Hasan's declaration (2000) that the length of time students listen may cause memory problems or even fatigue and this would distract listeners' attention from grasping the meaning of the text, and learners may miss the rest of the text when there is a lapse in concentration.

Besides, the density of the information can cause another trouble for listeners. The dense passage is a long one (Rost, 2006) with a great amount of information included. Again, greater information density is believed to make higher cognitive demands of second language listeners, which may increase the effort involved in listening comprehension (Gilmore, 2004). Furthermore, if the text contains a lot of information, it is not easy to store everything in mind because of exceptional listening ability and strategy required to understand (Carroll, 1977).

In addition, passage complexity may also affect L2 listening comprehension. In some cases, the syntactic features of the text are rather complex, and simplifying the syntax of a passage does not consistently aid listening comprehension (Pica, Young, & Doughty, 1987). For instance, the use of long and complex sentences in the recording can create a challenge for non-native speakers to understand. Another factor lies in indirect passages, which include more implied information and can also be more difficult for L2 listeners to comprehend (Taguchi, 2008). Therefore, if the students do not have the ability to draw a clear outline of this text, they also fail to catch the information effectively.

Similarly, colloquial language is another problem that can set obstacles to listeners' comprehension in real-life listening. Daily monologues and dialogues may contain a lot of colloquial words and expressions as well as slang. Speech and writing are both variants of the same linguistic system, but they are linguistically different from each other. In speaking, especially in informal situations, people do not usually speak in sentences but speak with short

phrases or clauses, called idea units, strung together in a rather loose way. Vocabulary and grammar also tend to be far more colloquial and much less formal. There are many words and expressions that are only used in speech, never in writing. Brown (1992) pointed out that non-native learners who have been exposed to standard written English and bookish language sometimes find it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language.

A person needs around six thousand to seven thousand vocabularies to understand the ninety-eight percent of the authentic discourse (Nation, 2006). McCarthy (1990) even affirmed out that it takes native speakers years to acquire an acceptable knowledge of collocation. Besides, it is the real language or authentic material that causes great difficulty to students. Students have been exposed to materials that are designed for teaching and listening purposes. Therefore, the language in these materials, to some extent, have been simplified and contained less colloquial English. However, Heron and Seay (1991) highlighted the importance of authentic material for their great improvement in listening comprehension since authentic material related closely to the lives and language variety. In addition, most of ULIS students have been learning English with non-native teachers from high schools. On the grounds of that, if students listen to an informal conversation, it is for sure that it is much harder than listening to a formal conversation used mostly in English classroom. Consequently, they do not know what they are listening to. The real language includes colloquial words, expressions and even slangs which absolutely hardly bring the students any concepts about them.

Apart from the above difficulties, failure to recognize discourse makers – the signal words of the speakers, may also obstruct learners' listening comprehension. The speakers use the discourse makers to indicate that they are moving the ideas, giving examples, or repeating the previous points (Underwood, 1989). Different markers with particular expressions keep listeners grasp the turning points of the task. The listener can predict what may come next by using signal words. However, since speech signals are fast, continuous and fleeting, these signals can be missed especially by less proficient listeners (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Therefore, being unable to listen to these markers will prevent the learners from following the continuous stream of the speech, resulting in their failure to recognize the overall organization of the ideas in a text.

2.2.4 Physical-setting-related difficulties

Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment and facilities can interfere with the listener's comprehension. In addition, in a crowded classroom, the students who sit at the end of the classroom may not listen to the lessons clearly. According to Chetchumlong (1987), the scarcity of opportunities to listen to a variety of spoken texts with the aid of good types of equipment and learn English with native speakers, especially in rural areas, contributes to listening performance.

In addition, the material itself may be the main source of listening comprehension problems. According to Seferoglu and Uzakgoren (2004), some other listening comprehension problems are related to the poor quality of listening tapes. The majority of the students think the difficulties they encounter in listening comprehension are due to the bad recording quality and poor-quality tapes or disks. For example, the long use of a cassette may greatly reduce its quality. Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can also interfere with the listener's comprehension. In some classes, teachers use some recorded materials that do not have high quality. The quality of sound system can impact the comprehending of learners' listening (Bingol, Celik, Yidliz, & Mart, 2014).

Noise is another environmental barrier to comprehension. Noise, including both background noises on the recording and environmental noises, can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage. Sometimes inconvenience of classrooms affects students listening comprehension. According to Bloomfield et al. (2011) and Hamouda (2013), noise or distortion in the audio signal interferes with listening comprehension for listeners. In the large classrooms, students who are sitting on the back rows may not hear the recording as students

sit in front. Students who prefer to stay next to the windows also affected by the noise that comes from outside. As a consequence, students are distracted by the noise no matter how hard they try to focus on the task.

2.3 Review of related studies

Because listening is one of the most important skills to make a good communicator, which can be explained by a statement that people spend approximately 60% of their time listening (Rubin & Thompson, 1996), few studies were carried out to investigate the difficulties in studying listening skill of learners learning English as a foreign language.

Hamouda (2013) conducted a study aiming at investigating listening comprehension problems encountered by Saudi students in the English learning listening classroom. The participants of this research were 60 first-year students majoring in English language and translation at Qassim University who, according to the researcher, were offered the same listening course at university and had all passed the placement exam. Nevertheless, the research was not quite valid because the participants were not representative enough to generalize an overall conclusion applying to the target population of all Saudi students in the English learning listening classroom. The study needs to be conducted with more comprehensive samples including elementary, secondary and preparatory levels in different regions across Saudi Arabia. In addition, in this study, researcher Arafat utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. Regarding the quantitative method, questionnaires were used to get information about the difficulties students faced in English listening when taking the listening course. There were 4 main sections in the questionnaires, each of which aimed to find answers to one research question (about students' perception of listening skills, their previous English learning experience, their practice chance, and their difficulties). The second data gathering instrument was a semi-structured interview, whose purpose was to figure out how listening difficulties affected learners' listening comprehension and how teachers could help students overcome their listening comprehension problems. Generally, the items in the questionnaires and the interview were relevant and helpful for the researcher to make conclusions about the most common problems faced by students including unfamiliar words, the length of the spoken text, speed rate accents, pronunciation and lack of concentration as well as some suggestions to tackle these issues such as adapting materials and improving pedagogical techniques.

Abidin (2013) conducted related research which had the context in Malaysia. The research used qualitative method to collect data from three Chinese students taking English listening comprehension in University Science Malaysian. This study was a research report related to the problems encountered by Chinese students in listening comprehension learning. The interview aimed to investigate students' perspectives through the main question concerning the problems of the Chinese students in their English Listening Comprehension self-learning process, in three steps, which include the pre-listening, during listening and post-listening. Findings from this study indicate that the most common problem faced by Chinese students was the lack of prior knowledge regarding English vocabulary, and this inhibited their understanding of the listening process. Moreover, the differences in the accent of the native speakers hindered students from the proper understanding of the listening content, the short span of concentration, and the learning habits of Chinese students were discussed as the problems of the English listening learning process.

Ferris and Tagg (1996) focused more on academic listening and speaking tasks for students studying English as a second language. By conducting the survey with full-time professors of different colleges and universities, Ferris and Tagg could analyze and find out the difficulties among students in studying academic listening. Although students could be aware of the importance of listening skill, most of them were still quite hesitant and unwilling to participate in class discussions, interact with peers (except for those speaking their native language), and respond to questions. The implications drawn from this study suggested that teachers should

be the ones who helped to develop the communication strategies and listening strategies of students. Their study was a useful reference for students acquiring language as a second language. However, it would be better if the survey carried out according to both teachers' and students' opinions. It would be better if students who were in trouble could tell what their difficulties were.

Another related research was conducted by Anadapong (2011) at Bangkok University. This study was conducted with the participation of thirty of Business students at this University aiming to investigate their English listening problems and listening proficiency. Questionnaire, International English Language Testing System test, and Interview were the research instruments used in this study as tools to collect data. As a result, the data was analyzed using SPSS. The result of the study revealed that the main reason causing listening problems for the students was the listening text. However, the factors that mostly caused listening problems were a lack of practicing listening skills and a lack of exposure to different kinds of listening materials.

Darti and Andi Asmawati (2017) also conducted research aiming to find out the obstacles encountered by the students from three factors: listening material, listeners' factor, and physical setting. Descriptive method was employed to analyze and to discover the solutions about the problems. The research was conducted in the State Islamic University of Alauddin Makassar. The population of this study was second-semester students of the English Education Department of Tarbiyah and Teaching Faculty in the academic year of 2016/2017. There were 37 students involved in this study. Data were gathered by questionnaires and interviews while observation during listening was used to confirm students' answers. The results of analyzing students' obstacles toward listening comprehension showed that listening was a very difficult skill for students who studied a foreign language. However, there are some weaknesses that the researchers of this study might overlook. Although the number of participants was quite adequate to ensure the validity and reliability of the study, it would be better if more participants were involved, especially, teacher participants, as they would be the ones who provide deeper thoughts and viewpoints into the nature of the problems, as well as more useful solutions to the students. Although there are numerous studies conducted on this matter throughout the world, in the context of Vietnam, little research has been done to offer deeper insights into this issue. The setting, as well as the population of the related research in foreign countries, may be very different from Vietnam. Therefore, this research was conducted in order to dig deep into the situations in Vietnam, specifically in the context of the University of Languages and International Studies.

In summary, this chapter examines the prior literature related to listening difficulties. It has mentioned the importance of listening comprehension; the definition; and the potential listening problems students face when listening English. The following chapters will focus on the study - its methodology and findings – under the light of the theories discussed above.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the method employed to carry out the study is presented. Information about the setting of the study and participants is also included.

3.1 Research question

The objectives of this current study were to investigate the difficulties in listening comprehension encountered by English-majored mainstream freshmen at ULIS, as well as providing implications for teachers and students to make improvements. The objectives above can be summarized in one following research question:

What are the difficulties in learning English listening encountered by ULIS English major mainstream freshmen?

This question focuses on the difficulties in listening comprehension among these students and the frequency they face each difficulty.

3.2 The setting of the study

3.2.1 The research context

The research was carried out at the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education, ULIS, VNU which provides numerous English language teachers each year. The University of Languages and International Studies is one of the prestigious English training institutions where the communicative approach is considerably utilized and there are a variety of educational methods that have been effectively applied in the classrooms. The research was conducted in this context where students are supposed to take listening courses and master this skill which proves to be essential for their future occupations with a view to acquiring a thorough understanding of obstacles faced by first-year mainstream students in listening comprehension as well as finding plausible solutions to innovate listening pedagogical methods and improve academic outcomes. In addition, this research focuses on analyzing four main difficulties that originate from the listeners, the speakers, the listening text and the physical setting encountered by students in this setting.

3.2.2 Sampling

In terms of the quantitative method, simple random sampling was utilized. Specifically, 239 out of 269 first-year English-majored mainstream students were chosen entirely by chance to partake in the survey questionnaires. Simple random sampling was employed because it is easy to carry out, there is no need to divide the population into sub-populations or take complicated steps to categorize members of the population. Moreover, because each member of the population has an equal probability of selection, it is highly likely that this sampling method yields a representative sample to make inferences and generalizations.

3.2.3 Participants

This research was conducted with the participation of 239 first-year students from the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education at the University of Languages and International Studies in the academic year 2022-2023. There are two main reasons why we choose the first-year mainstream students majoring in English language at ULIS to be the main population of our research. First of all, it is obvious that they all reached a certain level of English after graduating from high school and have already passed the entrance exam to the university. Their proficiency of English language can be proved by the exam results with the criteria ranging from vocabulary items, grammatical aspects, and reading comprehension ability. Furthermore, they all experienced at least 10 weeks of learning English as a major in university; therefore, they have opportunities to study listening skills as a separate subject, unlike what they had undergone before. While in high school they tended to focus more on acquiring grammar knowledge and neglect other skills such as listening and speaking, in ULIS a totally different way of studying is provided, which includes listening as an individual subject. As a result, students will have to confront certain obstacles in their listening skills. The current first-year mainstream students at FELTE, ULIS belong to two different majors of training: English Language Teacher Education, and Translation and Interpreting. Consequently, there exist differences in their learning objectives and strategies as well as teachers' teaching materials and methods. Hence, our research was expected to explore their difficulties and discover which one was the most or least common among these freshmen to promptly solve the problems and boost their learning outcomes. The following part aims at finding out the general perception of freshmen about listening difficulties and their ability in learning listening. The data in this part was obtained from the first three questions of the questionnaire.

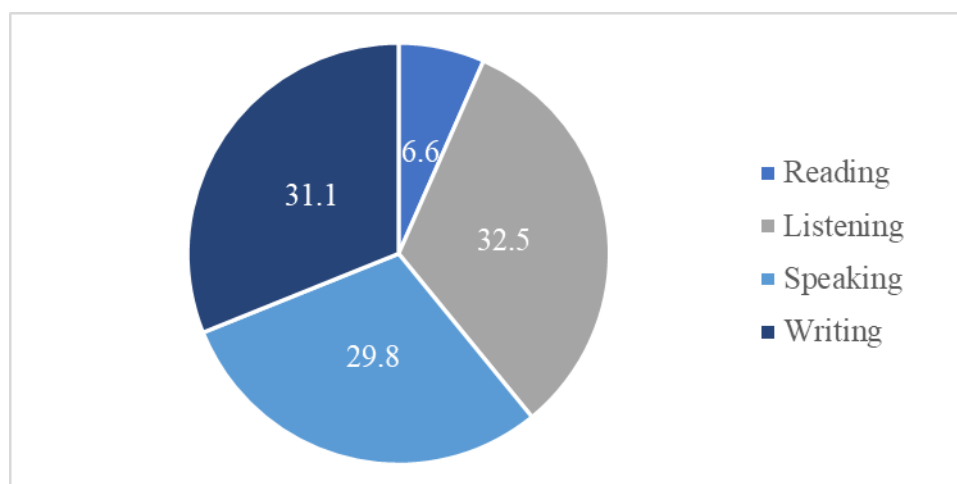


Figure 3.1 Students' perception of the most difficult English skill

Figure 3.1 gives information on participants' perceptions of the difficulty level of four English skills. It can be seen that the majority of the respondents, accounting for 32.5%, evaluated Listening as the most difficult skill. Ranked the second and third place in the level of difficulty perceived by the ULIS first-year students are Writing and Speaking skills with 31.1% and 29.8% respectively. When it comes to Reading skill, only 6.6% of the participants found it challenging.

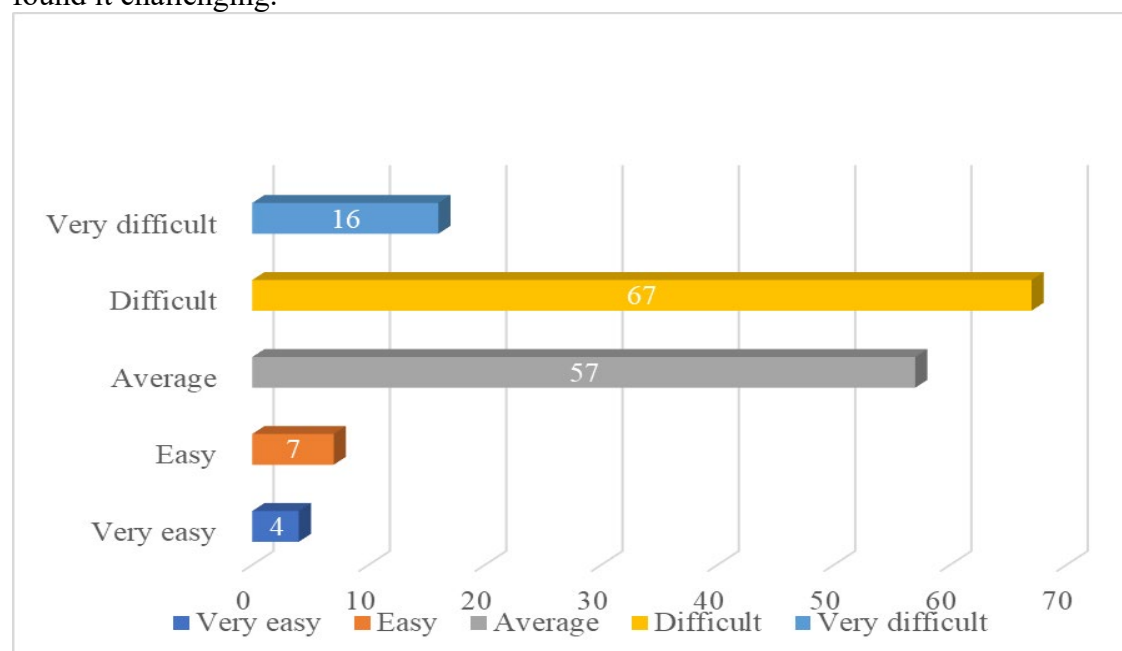


Figure 3.2 Students' assessment of the difficulty level of listening skill

Figure 3.2 illustrates how students assessed the level of difficulty of listening skill, ranging from very difficult to very easy. The biggest number of students found listening difficult while there were only 4 out of 151 respondents perceiving it to be very easy. In the meantime, the proportion of students stating that listening was very difficult accounted for about 10.6%. In addition, 57 students found it average and only 7 of them considered listening to be easy.

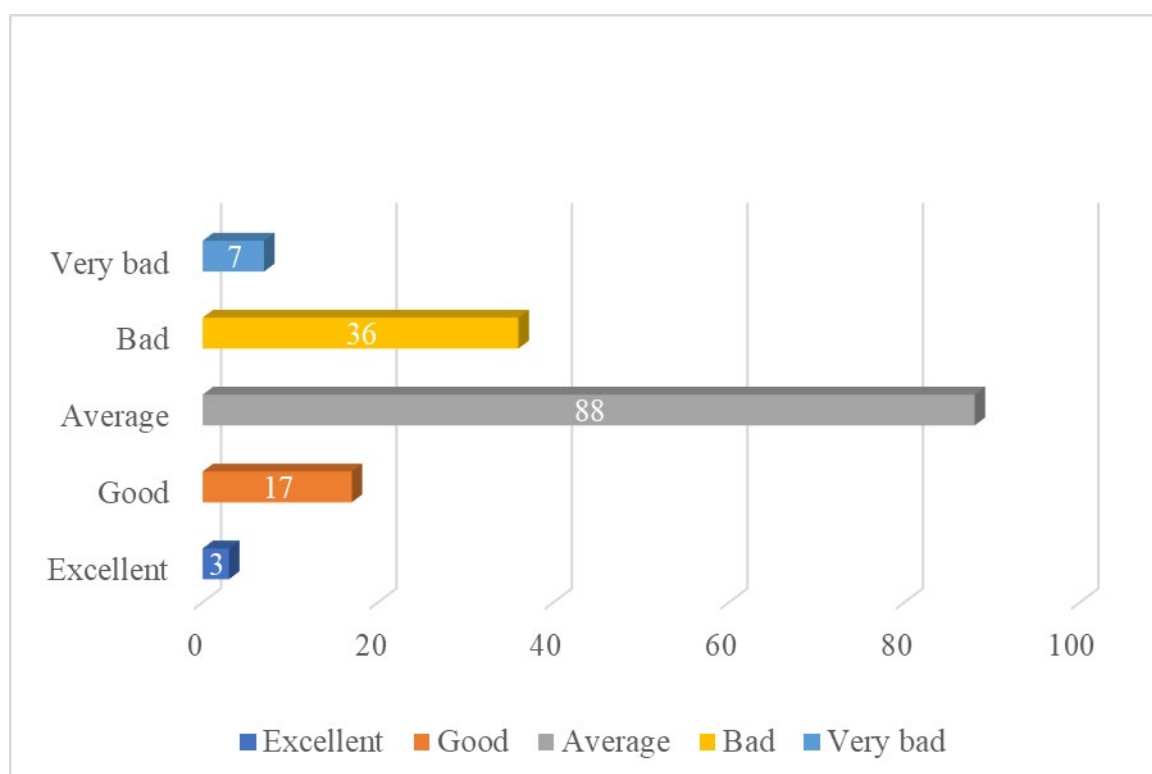


Figure 3.2 Students' self- assessment of their listening proficiency

Figure 3.2 provides data on how students assess their listening proficiency. The majority of respondents evaluated their listening as an average level. Only 3 out of 151 admitted that they were excellent at English listening. In contrast, there were just 7 students acknowledging they were very bad at listening.

3.3 Research methods

The research method employed to conduct this research is descriptive. This method was chosen because descriptive quantitative research was conducted to give detailed image about a phenomenon (Prasetyo, 2008). Additionally, Suryabrata (2008) stated that the aim of descriptive research was to make a systematical description, factual, and accurate about facts and the characteristics of the population. Based on the descriptions above, the researchers conducted descriptive research to collect quantifiable information to be used for statistical analysis of the population sample. It means to make a description of the difficulties in English listening among the first-year students at ULIS and the frequency of their encountering the problems.

3.4 Data collection instruments

3.4.1 Rationale for the instrument

The main data collection instrument of the research is a survey questionnaire, which was designed with the aim of finding out the answers to the research question: "What are the difficulties in learning English listening encountered by ULIS English major mainstream freshmen?". According to Mackey and Gass (2005), the questionnaire is "one of the most common methods of collecting data on attitudes and opinions".

This method was employed for three main reasons. First, this instrument is the most time-efficient method. Particularly, the researcher is able to quickly gather information from a large number of participants thanks to its typical short close-ended types of questions that are fast and easy to complete. Therefore, the data collected will possess a high standard of scientific objectivity. Second, most survey questionnaires are quantitative in nature and allow easy analysis of results. Third, this instrument is quite fair when compared to face-to-face interview

method because “When completing a questionnaire, there are no verbal or visual clues from an interviewer that may influence the person surveyed” (Jones, (n.d.)

In spite of those merits, the questionnaire also has some downsides. Firstly, researchers may have to deal with unreliable or unmotivated respondents (Moser & Kalton, 1971). Secondly, when using a questionnaire, researchers have little control to avoid blank answers by unwilling respondents. Another disadvantage of this method is the social desirability bias (Oppenheim, 1992) - the case in which questionnaire takers have the tendency to answer questions in a manner that will be viewed favorably by others. Being aware of those limitations of this instrument, the researchers tried to give careful instructions and explanations about the aim of our research conducting, the values their response to the study, as well as the confidentiality of all the information provided.

3.4.2 Description of survey questionnaires

A self-reporting questionnaire was developed to collect the relevant data about the listening difficulties faced by ULIS English-major freshmen in the Mainstream program. The questionnaire was designed partly based on the questionnaires by Hamouda (2013). At the beginning of the questionnaire is a brief introduction of the researchers, the title of the study, as well as a brief explanation of the purpose of it. The researchers also claimed that there was no right or wrong answer in order to retrieve reliable responses. In the end, there is a thank-you note and spaces for the participants to write their personal information should they want to gain the reward.

The questionnaire contains 29 question items. In more detail, in the first part of the questionnaire, three multiple-choice questions #1, #2 and #3 were designed to investigate the students’ general perception about learning listening and self-evaluation of their ability. 26 other question items (questions #4 to #28) were written in the form of a Likert scale from one to five. These 26 items were aimed at examining how frequently freshmen encounter listening difficulties listed out in the questionnaires. The levels of frequency are ranked from 1-5, from the least frequency to the most frequency. This type of close-ended questions is easier and faster for the researcher to analyze the results.

3.5 Data collection procedures

Phase 1: Piloting the questionnaires

In this phase, firstly, we submitted the draft of the questionnaire to the supervisor for comments and appropriate adjustments. Other changes to the wordings of the questionnaire and some questions’ contents were made to help eliminate ambiguity and avoid any misunderstanding from the participants. Next, the researchers delivered the questionnaires to 25 first-year students who had the same characteristics as the targeted population and 10 second-year fast-track students, asked them to read carefully the instructions and complete the survey. After that, the comments and constructive feedback from the students about the overall appearance of the questionnaire, the clarity of the instructions as well as the clearance of the questions were carefully taken. The researchers also checked the Cronbach’s Alpha index to ensure the study’s reliability. The final adapted questionnaire items were improved from the first drafts and delivered to the students to get the data for this study.

Phase 2: Data collecting process: questionnaire

The researchers made copies of the questionnaires and handed them to students of 8 classes. To be more detailed, 250 questionnaires in the Vietnamese version were delivered to ULIS English-majored freshmen in person, 239 were returned. Oral instructions were given clearly before students’ doing the survey; all the terms were clarified to assist participants in understanding correctly the wording in the questionnaires. Two researchers were also present to answer any questions arising in the process aiming to avoid any misunderstanding and ambiguity.

3.6 Data analysis method

Quantitative analysis strategies were applied in this study to analyze data from the questionnaires. As explained by Markey and Gass (2005), measures of frequency indicate how often a particular behavior or phenomenon occurs, and thus this type of descriptive statistics was well applied for this study. The answers from the questionnaires were then put in categories and the data was expressed in a numerical form so that the researchers could calculate the frequency of each problem in English listening comprehension as perceived by the students. In other words, the findings from questionnaires were analyzed to answer the research question: What are the difficulties in learning English listening encountered by ULIS English-majored mainstream freshmen?

3.7 Procedures of data analysis

Step 1: Preparing the data: Upon receiving back the questionnaires, the research sorted out and check whether (1) that questionnaire was completed; and (2) the given answers were consistent. Only after a questionnaire had met two criteria mentioned above could it be chosen for the next step.

Step 2: Reporting the statistics: In this step, the frequency of the difficulties that students encountered when listening English was calculated. Descriptive statistics analyses were carried out to understand the variables of data, including frequencies and percentages, statistics of central tendency (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation).

Step 3: Visualizing the collected data: Apart from being reported in written form with detailed numbers and description, the statistics were visualized using a range of charts, graphs, and tables. This made it so much easier to show the relationships for comparisons and contrasts.

3.8 Research ethics

Before administering the questionnaire, the researchers actively scheduled the time and location of the participants, and asked for permission and assistance from the teachers of said classes to conduct the survey. Participants can either choose to directly fill in the handouts, or flexibly access to the online version of the questionnaire via a provided QR code. Within 7 days, the participants will receive a compressed folder of learning materials as a token of appreciation via email if they wish, and only if emails are provided by the participants. During the data entry and analysis process, all of the collected questionnaire handouts with provided information were stored carefully and cautiously in a secured place, and can only be accessed by the researchers. Confidentiality is highly prioritized. Once the data collection is completed, all the questionnaire forms will be preserved, then will be disposed securely once the final paper is complete.

In summary, this chapter has focused much on the main parts of the study. It has demonstrated the setting of the study, description of the participants, sampling method, the research context, and research ethics. Information about the instruments, data collection and data analysis has also been provided. In the following part, the findings and the discussion of the findings will be presented.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the findings of the study are presented and analyzed based on the theoretical framework. Thereafter, a discussion of the findings is provided. The findings and discussion of the data gained from the employed data collecting instruments, namely questionnaire, offer answers to a research question: What are the difficulties in learning English listening encountered by ULIS English major mainstream freshmen?

4.1 Findings

Factors engendering students' difficulties in English listening comprehension are categorized into 4 different sources including problems related to the speakers, the learners themselves, the listening materials and the physical setting. The collected data is analyzed in detail below.

4.1.1 Speaker-related difficulties

Table 4.1.1

Mean and standard deviation for items corresponding with speaker-related difficulties

Listening problems	Mean	Standard deviation
The fast speed	3.28	0.865
The strange accent	2.19	0.959
The number of the speakers	2.61	0.824
Ending sounds	2.93	1.05
Reduced forms (liaison and elision)	3.26	1.031
Stress	2.85	0.984
Signal words	1.85	0.743
Colloquial words and slangs	3.01	1.105

Table 4.1.1 gives information about the mean and standard deviation figures for the listening difficulties resulted from the speakers. The most outstanding feature of the table is that the inability to recognize signal words has the lowest mean of just 1.85 and also witnesses the lowest standard deviation of 0.743. On the contrary, the fast speed of the speakers, despite receiving the highest mean score of 3.28, has a relatively low standard deviation of 0.865. This was followed closely by reduced forms including liaison and elision with the second highest mean of 3.26. Ranked third is colloquial words and slangs with the mean score of 3.01. In the meantime, these two above items also have a fairly high standard deviation of 1.031 and 1.105, respectively. Similarly, ending sounds also receive both a relatively high mean of 2.93 and a high standard deviation of 1.050.

4.1.2 Learner-related difficulties

As mentioned in the literature review chapter, listening difficulties are classified into four categories, among which the students themselves also influence their listening ability. The details are presented in the following table:

Table 4.1.2

Mean and standard deviation for items corresponding with learner-related difficulties

Listening problems	Mean	Standard deviation
Lack of vocabulary	3,41	0,968
Lack of background knowledge	3,17	0,943
Worries	3,3	1,119
Inability to concentrate	3,04	1,076
Incorrect pronunciation	3,01	1,046
Inability to predict content	3,19	1,207
Ineffective listening habits	3,42	0,882

Illustrated in Table 4.1.2 are the mean and standard deviation indices of listening difficulties from the learners themselves. In general, the mean score of all items in this part is relatively high at over 3.00, with the lowest mean of 3.01 experienced by incorrect pronunciation. Despite being the item with the lowest mean in this group, incorrect pronunciation has a quite high standard deviation of 1.046. In contrast, ineffective listening habits receive the highest mean of 3.42 and the lowest standard deviation of 0.882. In terms of mean value, in the

second place is lack of vocabulary with the mean of 3.41, which is just a little lower than the highest figure. This item also has a comparatively low standard deviation of 0.968.

4.1.3 Material-related difficulties

In addition to the problems coming from the speakers and the listeners, the potential obstacles also emerge from the material utilized for listening. The frequency of students' encountering these material-related obstacles are presented briefly in the table as follows:

Table 4.1.3

Mean and standard deviation for items corresponding with material-related difficulties

Listening problems	Mean	Standard deviation
Jargons and idioms	3.42	0.882
Complex grammar	2.85	0.828
Different types of recording	2.71	0.963
Long listening	3.1	0.992
Too much information	3.42	0.912
Distracting sounds	3.25	0.986

As can be observed from the table, item 19 - a large number of unfamiliar words, jargon and idioms, and item 23 - a large amount of information in the recording, both receive the highest mean of 3.42 with fairly low standard deviations of 0.882 and 0.912, respectively. Overall, standard deviations of all items in this part fluctuate between 0.828 and 0.992, which are comparatively low. In regard to the mean values, two items with the lowest mean are the appearance of both monologue and dialogue in the recordings and complicated grammatical structures in the listening text, which in turn receive the mean of 2.71 and 2.85.

4.1.4 Physical-setting-related difficulties

Table 4.1.4

Mean and standard deviation for items corresponding with physical setting-related difficulties

Listening problems	Mean	Standard deviation
Poor quality equipment	2.42	1.016
Background noises	2.67	0.957
The large classroom	2.07	0.907
The crowded classes	1.96	0.894

Table 4.1.4 indicates the statistics of listening difficulties induced by the physical setting. As can be seen from the table, all 4 items in this group receive quite low mean scores/values. Specifically, the factor having the highest mean is background noises with the figure being 2.67, followed by the poor quality of listening equipment and facilities (2.42). Large classroom is ranked third with the mean value of 2.07. Lastly, crowded classes receive the lowest mean of just 1.96 and also the lowest standard deviation of 0.894. The highest standard deviation is witnessed in the poor quality of facilities (at 1.016).

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Speaker-related difficulties

As can be inferred from the findings, the fast speed of the speakers is the most common obstacle faced by the participants. It can be seen that the students had a quite consistent evaluation of the difficulty caused by the fast speed of the delivery because this problem receives a fairly low standard deviation. This findings coincided with the results of the studies

done by Flowerdew and Miller (1992) and Hayati (2010) who have reported that their subjects unanimously rated speed of delivery as one of the greatest obstacles to understanding.

With regards to the liaison and elision which refer to the phenomenon in linking sounds between two words in a row, the findings pointed out that most of the respondents frequently encounter this problem. This result is also consistent with Ur's conclusion (1984), which stated that if a word is pronounced differently from the way it was said when it was learned, the listener may not tend to recognize it as the same word, or may even miss its existence completely. At this point, this problem interferes with the learners' listening comprehension.

It is clear that the inability to recognize signal words while listening is the least frequently encountered by students, and has the lowest standard deviation which can be easily deduced that almost all the participants perceive the signal words as a minor problem during listening process. This result is quite contradictory to the findings that were established by Gilakjani (2011) who claimed that signal words can be missed easily, especially by less proficient listeners. The participants of this study, who were ULIS first-year students, as described in the previous chapter, were quite less experienced in learning listening because this skill was not taught as a separate subject in the high school; however, from the findings, it can be deduced that they often have no major obstacles in recognizing signal words. In other words, somehow they are quite good at distinguishing signal words.

Additionally, the difficulty in recognizing the ending sounds ranks the third highest mean of 2.93; therefore, it is one of the most challenging factors in acquiring information in the listening material. This could be explained by the fact that their pronunciation has not been really good. Specifically, some ending sounds, for example /t/, /k/, /s/, /d/, etc are not paid much attention to when they speak English. As a result, they forget about them unconsciously while listening.

4.2.2 Learner-related difficulties

With the highest mean of 3.41 and 3.42, lack of vocabulary and ineffective listening habits are considered as the most frequently encountered by the students. And with the low standard deviation, the researchers could conclude that most of them do agree that these two problems are common and challenging. Even when the students have correct pronunciation and enough background knowledge, it will be a problem if they do not know the meaning of the words. These results also support Underwood's theory (1989) that limited vocabulary is a big obstacle to most students in listening comprehension. In the second place of frequency, with the mean of 3.30, some problems relating to psychological factors such as stress caused by homework or assignments and the nervousness about the examination, or tiredness can affect the listening effectiveness. According to Yagang (1994), the listening comprehension process was also a relatively complex psychological process. In psychological fields, it is stated that when a person feels nervous, his or her ability to listen is greatly reduced owing to the incapability of fully concentrating on the listening process. Most of the items among all the problems from the learners themselves have a fairly high standard deviation. Hence, the researchers could deduce that the participants do not have consistent viewpoint.

4.2.3 Material-related difficulties

In general, the above results indicate that the listening text itself can be the main source of listening comprehension problems. In particular, unfamiliar words, complex grammatical structures, long spoken text, different types of recording, dense amounts of information and distracting sounds pose listening difficulties to learners.

As can be seen in the findings section, two items unfamiliar vocabulary and dense information receive the highest means with fairly low standard deviations in terms of frequency. Unknown words and too much information in a recording are obstacles for the students to catch the needed information. Both these problems are frequently-encountered by the participants in learning listening. Although Ur's assertion (1984) justified that the difficulty in listening

comprehension is partly due to the length of the listening text, the majority of the students responded that a long spoken text has less interference with their listening comprehension when compared to the colloquial language and the density of information.

A large number of linguistic challenges such as unfamiliar words, jargons, and idioms are those that result from the English language itself. Some difficulties in understanding and remembering information are caused by both students' lack of English proficiency and their professors' use of English in class. Colloquial language is a special challenge for non-native speakers in understanding a text. The researchers can draw from this result that it is the real language or authentic materials that cause great difficulty to students. This is consistent with Brown's statement (1992) which pointed out that non-native learners who had been exposed to standard written English and bookish language sometimes found it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language. Students have been exposed to materials that are designed for teaching and listening purposes. Therefore, the language in these materials, to some extent, has been simplified and contained less colloquial English. In addition, most of ULIS students have been learning English with non-native teachers from high schools. On the grounds of that, if students listen to an informal conversation, it is for sure that it is much harder than listening to a formal conversation used mostly in English.

As observed in the research results, the amount of information in a passage may be a more predictive factor for comprehension difficulty than is overall passage length. While information density will tend to be highly correlated with passage length in authentic passages, such that more dense passages will tend to be longer than less dense passages; however, greater information density is believed to make higher cognitive demands of listeners, which may increase the effort involved in listening comprehension (Gilmore, 2004).

Distracting sounds rank as the second most frequent obstacles in English listening comprehension. Noise can take the listener's mind off the content of the listening passage. Sometimes the inconvenience of classrooms affects students listening comprehension, for example, students who prefer to stay next to the windows also affected by the noise that comes from outside. This result coincides with Hamouda's study (2013) which stated that because of the noise in classroom and the poorly preparation of lab, a great number of students claim that they cannot be concentrated on listening to the recording material.

In contrast, among some features of materials, the different types of recording (monologues, dialogues) and the complex grammar are respectively the least difficult ones. This can be explained by the fact that almost all the ULIS English-majored students have had a comprehensive and profound knowledge of English grammar gained from high schools, which obviously helps them encounter less difficulties when dealing with syntactic passage complexity in listening texts.

From the above results, therefore, it seems reasonable to generalize that recordings that contain many unfamiliar words and dense information hinder the listening comprehension of a large number of students.

4.2.4 Physical-setting related difficulties

Overall, the problems lie in the physical setting factors which receive the lowest mean scores are not as common as problems from the other three factors. What is worth noticing here is that the frequency of poor quality equipment and facilities receives the low mean scores which range from 1.96 to 2.67. This indicates that the quality of cassette players, the recorded tapes, or the equipment in the classroom do not significantly affect the students' performance in listening. In addition, the students have the most similar idea about the influence of class setting on learning listening, which was shown in the standard deviation. This result contradicts Seferoglu and Uzakgoren's research (2004) which stated that the majority of the students think the difficulties they encounter in listening comprehension are due to the bad recording quality and poor-quality tapes or disks. It can be drawn from this inconsistency that

the in-class facilities of ULIS, in particular, has been upgraded and there is an increasingly wider range of sources for authentic listening materials.

The least frequently influencing problem is sitting in crowded classes with the smallest mean of 1.96. It can be inferred that the volume of the classroom has a modest impact on getting information processes while listening. Besides, the students have the same viewpoint in this problem, which is indicated from the low standard deviation of 0.89. This result confirms the fact that most ULIS students attend English classes of small sizes (less than 30 students in each class).

In summary, the chapter has presented major findings obtained from the questionnaires. After that, the discussion of those findings has been given. The next chapter would focus on the summary of the findings, pedagogical implications, limitations of this research and suggestions for teachers of English, based on the results discussed before.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter provides a summary of all the findings in this research as well as implications from the findings. Limitations of this study and suggestions for further study are also discussed.

5.1 Summary of the findings

With the aim of answering the research question raised at the beginning of the study, the data collected from the survey questionnaire was analyzed to draw conclusion. The major findings are summarized as follows. The paper has explored the frequency that students encounter different types of difficulties caused by different factors as categorized in the literature review. Regarding the factors pertaining to the speakers, the factors from the fast speed of the delivery and the reduced forms were the most frequently faced by the students while most of them did not find it difficult when encountering the signal words. With regards to the factors relating to the learners themselves, most of the participants considered the lack of vocabulary and ineffective listening habits to be the major obstacle for them while listening English. In addition, the use of unfamiliar words such as jargon and idioms, as well as too much information in a recording, was perceived as the most popular problems when it came to the difficulties caused by the listening material itself. Lastly, the listening difficulties caused by the physical-setting did not show as major problems.

5.2 Implications

Based on the result study formerly, listening is perceived as one of the most difficult skills for students as foreign language learners even though they are students in English Education Department. Some of the problems described above are inevitable, for instance, certain features of the messages and the speakers. However, teachers and learners themselves can at least equip some essential solutions in order to discover more effective listening strategies. The researchers offer the following suggestions:

5.2.1 Implication for the teachers

With a view to finding good strategies to boost the listening proficiency among their students, the instructors are recommended to utilize some suggestions classified by three stages of an English listening session.

Pre-listening activities:

The pre-listening phase is vital because it builds a foundation for the whole listening process. The initial pre-listening activities prepare students by helping them activate their background knowledge and clarify their expectations and assumptions about the text. An ideal pre-listening task is the one in which the teacher, through carefully constructed questions, helps the students to activate the background information and language components needed to

comprehend the text without directly revealing this information to the students. Before each listening class, teachers should adopt and adapt listening materials that arouse their students' interests and match their background knowledge. Furthermore, pre-teach vocabulary, guiding students to underline certain keywords, guess the meanings of new words can help the students to familiarize with the topic, activate their prior knowledge as well as develop the confidence of students (Underwood, 1989). Lastly, by improving the learning environment of listening classes which includes listening laboratory facilities and the quality of cassettes tapes, teachers can enhance the concentration during listening period among their students.

While-listening activities:

The while-listening stage includes a series of activities that a learner does in the process of listening to a passage in order to elicit messages from spoken language. There are a variety of techniques that can be used to lead the students to focus on the general ideas of the text they are listening to. Directed listening helps the students to extract relevant information from the spoken discourse, which can greatly contribute to eliminating students' ineffective listening habits. The lecturers also need to be aware of students' psychological issues. Both anxieties and boredom will interrupt in their learning and it indicates as a barrier in their listening comprehension test. Teachers should familiarize their students with the rules of pronunciation as well as accents of different native speakers in order to help them hear the rapid natural speech to recognize the language in use. Another recommendation for teachers is to help their students to develop the necessary skills of listening comprehension such as listening for understanding particular information, listening for the main ideas, explanation and inference, listening for intended meaning through different tasks at different levels.

Post-listening activities:

In this stage, students take the knowledge they have gained from the listening texts and utilize it for further purposes. One suggested activity that can be applied for this phase is to force the students to summarize and make an outline of the information provided in the recordings. Additionally, instructors are advised to give their students the necessary feedback on their performance because it can promote their error correction and increase their motivation, which helps them to develop their confidence in listening exercises. Last but not least, lectures can also provide supplementary background knowledge and linguistic knowledge which are theme-related to the previous materials in order to boost their students' familiarity when dealing with the same topics subsequently.

5.2.2 Implication for the students

First and foremost, English learners should have a clear perception on the importance of listening skill when learning a second language, from which they can build a high degree of autonomy in approaching this skill. Secondly, The students need to train their listening at home intensively in order to help them overcome their problems and improve their linguistic ability. They need to be exposed to various accents by listening to the English songs or watching TV. This will also enrich their vocabulary accumulation automatically. More efficiently, many students can have a habit of checking new words in English dictionary from the beginning of their learning process. It is advisable that they guess new words, underline key words beforehand and take note the main ideas to keep up with the speed of the speakers. Finally, learners are recommended to develop their interest in the cultures of other parts of the world, especially the culture of target language (English) with a view to fostering their understanding in English listening comprehension.

5.3 Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

In spite of the researcher's great effort, this research still has some shortcomings.

First of all, due to the limited time, some other books, documents, articles and research papers that are related to this study could not be covered. The main sources of information to lay the foundation for this research are articles, journals, and previous research papers. Nevertheless, some other sources such as books have not been fully exploited. Hence, for further studies, researcher could dig deeper into this matter and create different, more innovative ways to categorize students' listening difficulties. Furthermore, the limited time also prevented the researcher from carrying out the interview, which would provide deeper insights into some unique cases to find out some feasible solutions to this issue. Therefore, the researcher recommends that further research should make use of qualitative method, specifically semi-structured interviews with students, to obtain more information about some effective listening strategies or techniques, making the research more comprehensive. Secondly, although the number of participants was sufficient to guarantee the validity and reliability of the study, it would be better if more participants were involved in the research, especially teacher participants as they could provide more insights into the nature of the problems as well as practical solutions to them. It is also highly recommended that other researchers conduct a study on a larger or different population such as the whole university students, sophomores, or non-English-majored students. Another suggestion is that further studies could be conducted into the causes of the problems, which would also help students overcome the obstacles and improve their listening skills.

REFERENCES

- Abidin, M. & Juan, W. (2013). English Listening Comprehension Problems of Students from China Learning English in Malaysia. *Language in India*, 13(4), 367-395.
- Ahmadi, A., & Gilakjani, A. (2011). A study of factors affecting EFL learners' English listening comprehension and the strategies for improvement. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(5), 977-988.
- Anadapong, S. (2011). *A study of English Listening Problems and Listening Proficiency of Business Students at Bangkok*. Bangkok: Thammasat University.
- Anderson, A. & Lynch, T. (1988). *Listening*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Asmawati, A. & Darti, I. (2017). Analyzing students' difficulties toward listening comprehension. *International Journal on New Trends in Education and their Implications*, 3(5), 211-225.
- Azmi, B. M., Celik, B., Yidliz, N., & Tugrul, M. C. (2014). Listening Comprehension Difficulties Encountered by Students in Second language Learning Class. *Journal of Educational and Instructional Studies in the World*, 4(4), 1-6.
- Bentley, S., & Bacon, S. (1996). The all new, state-of-the-art ILA definition of listening: Now that we have it, what do we do with it? *Listening Post*, 56, 1-5.
- Bloomfield, A., Wayland, S. C., Rhoades, E., Blodgett, A., Linck, J., & Ross, S. (2010). *What makes listening difficult? Factors affecting second language listening comprehension*. Maryland: University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Language.
- Brown, A. L. (1992). Design experiments: Theoretical and methodological challenges in creating complex interventions in classroom settings. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 2, 141-178. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327809jls0202_2
- Brown, G., & Yule, G. (1983). *Teaching the Spoken Language*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Essex: Longman.
- Buck, G. (2001). *Assessing Listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511732959>
- Carroll, J. B. (1977). *On learning from being told* (2nd ed.). Berkeley, CA: McCutchan's Learning & Instruction.
- Chastain, K. (1971). *The Development of Modern Language Skills: Theory to Practice*. Philadelphia: Center for Curriculum Development.
- Chen, Y. (2005). Barriers to Acquiring Listening Strategies for EFL Learners and Their Pedagogical Implications. *The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language*, 8(4).

- Chetchamlong, S. (1987). *Problems in Teaching English Listening of Teachers in Government Secondary Schools in Chon Buri*. Bangkok: Thesis Kasetsart University.
- Coakley, C. G., & Wolvin, A. D. (1988). *Listening* (3rd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Coakley, C., & Wolvin, A. (1997). Listening in the educational environment. In M. Purdy & D. Borisoff (Eds.), *Listening in everyday life: A personal and professional approach* (2nd ed.) (pp. 179-212). Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Dakin, J. & Howatt, A. (1974). *Language laboratory materials*, ed. J. P. B. Allen, S. P. B. Allen, and S. P. Corder.
- Devine, T. G. (1982). *Listening skills schoolwide: Activities and programs* (1st ed.). Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.
- Dirven, R., & Oakeshott-Taylor, J. (1984). Listening Comprehension (Part I). *Language Teaching: The International Abstracting Journal for Language Teachers and Applied Linguistics*, 17(4), 326-343. Retrieved from <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S026144480001082X>
- Ferris, D. (1998). Students' views of academic aural/oral skills: A comparative needs analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 289-318.
- Ferris, D., & Tagg, T. (1996). Academic listening/speaking tasks for ESL students: Problems, suggestions, and implications. *TESOL Quarterly*, 30, 297-320.
- Field, J. (2008). *Listening in the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Flowerdew, J., & Miller, L. (1996). Student perceptions, problems and strategies in second language lecture comprehension. *RELJ Journal*, 23, 60-80.
- Gilakjani, A. & Ahmadi, M. (2011). A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' English Listening Comprehension and the Strategies for Improvement. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 2(5), 977-988.
- Gilmore, A. (2004). A comparison of textbook and authentic interactions. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 363-374.
- Goh, C. (2000). A Cognitive Perspective on Language Learners' Listening Comprehension Problems. *System*, 28, 55-75.
- Graham, S., & Macaro E. (2008). Strategy instruction in listening for lower-intermediate learners of French. *Language Learning*, 58, 747-783
- Hamouda, A. (2013). An Investigation of Listening Comprehension Problems Encountered by Saudi Students in the EL Listening Classroom. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 2(2), 113-151.
- Hasan A. S. (2010). *Learners' Perceptions of Listening Comprehension Problems*. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13(2), 137-153.

- Hayati, A. (2010). The Effect of Speech Rate on Listening Comprehension of EFL. *Creative Education*, 107-114.
- Herron, C., & Seay, I. (1991). The Effect of Authentic Aural Texts on Student Listening Comprehension in the Foreign Language Classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, 1(24), 487-495.
- Hirsch, R. (1986). *Defining listening: synthesis and Discussion*, presented at the 7th annual meeting of the international listening association, USA, 1986.
- Hussain, I., Inamullah, H., Naseer-Ud-Din, M., Naz, F., & Butt, M. N. (2010). Role Of Motivational Factors In The Development Of Profession As A Teacher. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning (TLC)*, 7(3). Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.19030/tlc.v7i3.98>
- Krashen, S. (1985) Maturation constraints in the acquisition of a native-like accent in second language learning. *Language Sciences*, 36, 209-231.
- Krashen, S. D., Terrell, T. D., Ehrman, M.E., & Herzog, M. (1984). A theoretical basis for teaching the receptive skills. *Foreign Language Annals*, 17(4), 261-275.
- Mackey, A., Gass, S. M. (2005). *Second language research: Methodology and design*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- McCarthy, M. (1990). *Vocabulary*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Mecarty, F. (2000). Lexical and Grammatical Knowledge in Reading and Listening Comprehension by Foreign Language Learners of Spanish. *Applied Language Learning*, 11, 323-348.
- Mendelsohn, D. J. (1994). *Learning to listen: A strategy-based approach for the second-language learner*. San Diego, CA: Dominie Press.
- Morley, J. (1999). Current Perspectives on Improving Aural Comprehension. *ESL Magazine*, 2(1), 16-19.
- Moser, C. A., and Kalton, G. (1971). *Survey methods in social investigation* (2nd ed.). Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning.
- Nadig, A. (2013). *Listening Comprehension*. Encyclopedia of Autism Spectrum Disorders. New York: Springer Reference.
- Naizhao, G. & Wills, R. (2006). An investigation of factors influencing English listening comprehension and possible measures for improvement. *AER Journal*.
- Nation, I. (1990). *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. New York: Newbury House.
- Nation, I.S.P. (2006). How large a vocabulary is needed for reading and listening?. *Canadian Modern Language Review* 63(1), 59-82.
- Nissan, S., DeVincenzi, F., & Tang, K. L. (1996). *An analysis of factors affecting the difficulty of dialogue items in TOEFL listening comprehension*. Princeton, NJ: Educational

Testing Service.

- Nowrouzi, S., Tam, S. S., Zareian, G., & Nimehchisalem, V. (2015). Iranian EFL Students' Listening Comprehension Problems. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(2), 263-269.
- Nunan, D. (1998). Approaches to teaching listening in language classroom. *In proceedings of the 1997 Korea TESOL Conference*. Taejon, Korea: KOTESOL.
- Nuttall, C. (1996). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. Oxford: Macmillan.
- Oppenheim, A. (1992). Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude. *Measurement, London, Pinter*, 24(4), 411. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2450040506>
- Oxford, R. L., & Scarcella, R. C. (1992). *The tapestry of language learning: The individual in the communicative classroom* (1st ed.). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.
- Paran, A. (1996). Reading in EFL. Facts and Fiction. *ELT Journal*, 50(1), 25–34. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/50.1.25>
- Pearson, P. (1983). *Instructional implications of listening comprehension research*. Urbana, Illinois: Center for the Study of Reading.
- Pica, T., Young, R., & Doughty, C. (1987). The impact of interaction on comprehension. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21, 737-758. Retrieved from doi:10.2307/3586992
- Prasetyo, B., & Lina, M. (2008). *Metode penelitian kuantitatif*. Jakarta: PT Raja grafindo Persada.
- Rost, M. (1994). *Introducing listening*. London: Penguin.
- Rost, M. (2002). *Teaching and Researching Listening*. London: Longman.
- Rost, M. (2006). *Areas of Research That Influence L2 Listening Instruction in Current Trends in the Development and Teaching of the Four Language Skills*. Berlin: Inc. Uso-Juan.
- Sasaki, M. (2000). Toward an empirical model of EFL writing processes: An exploratory study. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 9, 259-291.
- Seferoglu, G., & Uzakgoren, S. (2004). Equipping Learners with Listening Strategies in English Language Classes. *Hacettepe University Faculty of Educational Journal*, 27, 223-231.
- Taguchi, N. (2008). The effect of working memory, semantic access, and listening abilities on the comprehension of conversational implicatures in L2 English. *Pragmatics and Cognition*, 16, 517-538.
- Thao, N. T. (2013). *A minor study on main difficulties in learning listening skills perceived by first-year students of Faculty of English Language Teacher Education, ULIS, VNU*. Vietnam: Vietnam National University.
- Thomlison, T. (1984). *Relational listening: theoretical and practical considerations*, presented at the Annual Meeting of the 5th International Listening Association, New Orleans,

1985.

- Thompson, I. & Rubin, J. (1996). Can strategy instruction improve listening comprehension?. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29(3), 331-342.
- Underwood, M. (1989). *Teaching listening*. New York: Longman Inc.
- Underwood, M. (1989). *Teaching Listening*. New York: Longman.
- Ur, P. (1984). *Teaching Listening Comprehension*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vandergrift, L. (1999). Facilitating second language listening comprehension: Acquiring successful strategies. *ELT Journal*, 53(3), 168-176.
- VanPatten, B. (1990). Studies in second language acquisition. *Cambridge University Press*, 12(3), 287-301.
- Vogely, A. (1998). Perceived strategy use during performance on three authentic listening tasks. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(1), 41–56.
- Walker, N. (2014). Listening: the Most Difficult Skill to Teach. *Encuentro*, 23, 167-175.
- Yagang, F. (1993). Listening: Problems and solutions. *In English Teaching Forum*, 31(2), 16-19.
- Yagang, F. (1994). Listening: Problems and solutions. In T. Kral (ed.) *Teacher Development: Making the Right Moves*. Washington, DC: English Language Programs Division, USA.
- Zeeland, H. (2013). L2 vocabulary knowledge in and out of context: is it the same for reading and listening? *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics*, 36(1), 52-70.

APPENDIX QUESTIONNAIRE DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH LISTENING COMPREHENSION AMONG ULIS ENGLISH MAJOR MAINSTREAM FRESHMEN

I am Hoang Anh Phong, the researcher of this research. I am doing research on the main difficulties in English listening comprehension perceived by first-year mainstream students of the Faculty of English Language Teacher Education at University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University. I would like to ask for your help with the questionnaire to collect the relevant data for our study. I would like to emphasize that **there are no right or wrong answers**; therefore, I expect you answer the questionnaire items frankly. All the questions are in the form of close-ended rating scales so I hope it will not take much of your time and effort to accomplish. The information will surely be kept confidential to avoid disturbing your privacy. Thank you in advance!

-
1. Which of these skills do you find the most difficult?
A. Listening B. Speaking C. Reading D. Writing
 2. Please circle a number from 1 to 5 that indicates your perception of the difficulty level of listening skills after one year studying at the university according to the scale below:
1. Very Easy (2) Easy (3) Average (4) Difficult (5) Very Difficult
 3. Please circle a number from 1 to 5 that best describes your ability of listening skills:
1. Very Bad (2) Bad (3) Average (4) Good (5) Excellent

The table below includes some problems in your learning listening. Rate each statement below on the scale of ① to ⑤ that shows how frequent you encounter it.

① Never ② Rarely ③ Sometimes ④ Usually ⑤ Always

Mark the circles corresponding with your answers. Should you change the answers, erase or cross them out, and mark the other ones.

		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
A. From the speakers	I have difficulties in listening because...					
4	The speakers speak too fast.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5	The speakers have strange accents.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6	There are too many speakers involved in the recording.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7	I cannot recognize the ending sounds (/e, es, ed, k, t,...).	①	②	③	④	⑤
8	I cannot recognize individual words resulted from liaison and	①	②	③	④	⑤

	elision phenomena.					
9	I cannot distinguish between the content and function words because of the stress.	①	②	③	④	⑤
10	I cannot recognize signal words (however, although, firstly, secondly,...).	①	②	③	④	⑤
11	The speakers use colloquial words and slangs.	①	②	③	④	⑤
B. From the learners	I have difficulties in listening because...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
12	I don't know the words/vocabulary.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13	I don't have the social and background knowledge of the topic.	①	②	③	④	⑤
14	I was worried.	①	②	③	④	⑤
15	I cannot concentrate.	①	②	③	④	⑤
16	I have bad/ incorrect pronunciation.	①	②	③	④	⑤
17	I cannot predict the content.	①	②	③	④	⑤
18	I have ineffective listening habits.	①	②	③	④	⑤
C. From the materials	I have difficulties in listening because...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
19	There are many unfamiliar words, jargons and idioms.	①	②	③	④	⑤
20	The audios/videos use complex grammatical structures.	①	②	③	④	⑤
21	There are both monologue and dialogue (or more) in the	①	②	③	④	⑤

	recordings.					
22	The audios/videos are too long.	①	②	③	④	⑤
23	There is too much information in the recording.	①	②	③	④	⑤
24	There are distracting sounds in the recording.	①	②	③	④	⑤
D. From the physical settings	I have difficulties in listening because...	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
25	The equipment and facilities have poor quality.	①	②	③	④	⑤
26	There are background noises.	①	②	③	④	⑤
27	The classroom is too large.	①	②	③	④	⑤
28	The classes are too crowded.	①	②	③	④	⑤
29	Others (please specify): ...	①	②	③	④	⑤

PERSONAL INFORMATION (OPTIONAL)

Name: _____

Class: _____

Email: _____

THE END

Thank you very much for your participation!