

EXPLORING FACTORS AFFECTING UNDERGRADUATE EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT TRA VINH UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract – *In modern society, the increasing popularity and development of English learning reflect its importance for both acquiring knowledge and interpersonal communication. Listening is an essential skill in both aspects. The exposure to different languages is likely to lead to difficulties in listening and understanding, so it is necessary for students to practice and improve their listening skills constantly during the learning process. This study aims to identify internal and external factors influencing students' listening comprehension skills and explore recommendations suggested by the participants to overcome challenges. A mixed-methods approach was employed. Data were collected from 60 English-major students through a questionnaire and a focus-group interview, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Results indicate that environmental noise, rapid speech rate, vocabulary limitations, and anxiety from listening are the main barriers to students' understanding. To address these issues, attendees recommended a blend of self-directed practices and educational assistance. Students are particularly urged to interact with English-language media, such as newspapers and films, and practice dictation to enhance their vocabulary and listening skills. Simultaneously, the participants emphasized the importance of cultivating a more encouraging classroom environment and incorporating pre-listening tasks, like introducing essential vocabulary beforehand.*

Moreover, enhancing the university's technical infrastructure is crucial for guaranteeing audio quality. These insights offer a solid basis for enhancing teaching and learning practices aimed at improving listening comprehension in comparable EFL environments.

Keywords: *external factors, internal factors, listening comprehension, mixed methods, undergraduate students, Vietnamese EFL context.*

I. INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as a lingua franca in today's worldwide society, where listening comprehension is the main means of linguistic input and intercultural communication. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), listening comprehension is frequently considered the most difficult yet crucial skill, often referred to as the 'Cinderella skill', for both professional and academic advancement [1, 2]. The capacity to comprehend spoken discourse is not just a stand-alone competence for English language majors in higher education, but rather a vital instrument for learning specialized information in a variety of fields. In fact, learners who struggle with listening frequently experience serious communication breakdowns and psychological obstacles [3].

In the specific context of Vietnam's higher education, there is an increasing demand for students to achieve high levels of communicative competence to meet international standards. At Tra Vinh University, English-major students are required to navigate a rigorous curriculum where specialized subjects such as Oral Translation, Public Speaking, and Teaching Methodology are delivered primarily in English. Students need to

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use their listening ability to absorb the information and knowledge that the instructor conveys. Proficient listening skills are more than just a language competence in this immersive academic setting. They are a must for assimilating knowledge. However, despite its significance, students often find it difficult to understand spoken language and decode meaning in real time [4, 5].

While various studies have explored pedagogical approaches to listening [6–9], there is still a research gap about the particular internal and external obstacles experienced by English majors in a regional university in Southern Vietnam. The research often concentrates on instructor-led viewpoints, frequently overlooking the ‘learner’s voice’ about their own environmental and cognitive challenges. Therefore, by investigating students’ perceptions of the factors affecting their listening comprehension and documenting their self-driven strategies for improvement, this study seeks to close this gap. By reorienting the focus to a student-centered ‘bottom-up’ approach, the current research offers a fresh viewpoint on how students at Tra Vinh University deal with listening challenges, which is useful for both students and curriculum designers.

The study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the EFL students’ perceptions of the internal and external factors affecting their listening comprehension?
2. What strategies do students recommend to reduce these listening challenges?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Definitions of listening comprehension*

The term ‘listening comprehension’ is defined by experts from different perspectives. First of all, according to Gilakjani et al. [3], listening comprehension, theoretically, is regarded as an active process in which listeners concentrate on certain elements of audio input, derive meaning from passages, and draw connections between what they hear and prior knowledge. Similarly, Syahreza et al. [10] said that to fully comprehend the communication message, listeners must engage in active listening. This process is known

as listening comprehension. English, culture, and general knowledge should be learned by the listeners to apply that knowledge to listening lessons on a variety of topics. As a result, the level of knowledge either facilitates or interferes with the act of listening. Listening comprehension refers to a variety of listening-related tasks, such as picking up on subtleties in a story, comprehending the basic flow of events in a short story, identifying word linguistic patterns, and conceiving the essential ideas [1]. Moreover, listening comprehension involves learners’ understanding the meaning of individual words, knowing speech sounds, and understanding the syntax of sentences [4].

Indeed, the ability to take in comprehensive information from a listener is known as listening comprehension. Listeners can comprehend essential ideas through broad knowledge, such as literature, culture, and the like.

B. *The importance of listening comprehension*

Several studies have demonstrated the importance of listening comprehension for both verbal communication and the learning process [2, 4, 6]. Ahmadi [2] made a point that learning and using a second language requires an understanding of spoken language. For practical communication tasks in the classroom, this is an essential skill.

In addition, according to Deregözü [6], listening comprehension is essential for oral communication since it controls how the conversation will proceed. In this procedure, a verbal or nonverbal response is provided based on the spoken word, enabling communication to proceed and occur as desired. Not only is listening comprehension necessary for productive conversations, but it’s also necessary for information collection.

Besides, English learners should master listening skills to succeed in school, communicate socially, and learn a language [4]. For learners to engage in oral communication, they must be able to listen well. Listening comprehension is a critical component in the development of other language abilities in any language course. More precisely, listening assists learners in accurately

pronouncing words and identifying their spoken form. Before they can recognize a new term, students must hear it several times while learning it. It is thought that listening offers complete support for learning and comprehending a new language. In short, listening comprehension is crucial in the learning process as well as oral communication.

C. Components of listening comprehension

Listening comprehension is a complex process involving distinct components and sequential stages. Chastain, cited by Ahmadi [2], identified four components of listening comprehension. The first is being able to discriminate every sound, intonation pattern, and voice characteristic in the second language, apart from the same sounds in the first language. The second component is the capacity to store the information in auditory memory until processing takes place. The third involves the understanding of the entire message uttered by the speaker. The last component focuses on grasping the speaker's intended meaning. Beyond these components, there are various steps involved in the actual listening process. Setting the scene is the initial stage. To replicate the speaker's message, listeners must be aware of the communicative framework in which real language is expressed. They then activate relevant prior information and apply it to anticipate potential concepts in the communication. Finally, they anticipate the general content of the message.

However, a straightforward procedure consisting of four main processes is provided by Cutler et al. in 2000, cited by Wong [11], including decoding, segmenting, recognizing, and integrating. During the decoding process, listeners identify the syllables, phonemes, and other linguistic units that make up the language. Listeners separate input into linguistic components, such as syllables and words, to segment it. Word recognition is thought to be the most difficult section for listeners since lexical competition occurs here.

D. External factors affecting listening comprehension

The physical environment is the first point that many academics raise when talking about listening comprehension. Trismasari et al. [12] found that learners' listening comprehension is affected by physical environments such as noise, unclear sound, poor quality (CD player), and visual clues (pictures, charts, videos). When low sound quality (CD player) and poor equipment (headset) were used in listening tasks in the classroom, participants became distracted [7]. Furthermore, the ability of the listener to comprehend what they are listening to might be significantly impacted by noise.

In further detail, Diora et al. [13] investigated the listening comprehension difficulties and their underlying causes among 32 students at an English Language and Literature Department, utilizing a descriptive qualitative approach. Their study revealed that suboptimal physical settings, ranging from environmental noise to substandard equipment such as malfunctioning sound systems and poor-quality audio media, significantly hamper the listening process. These factors are particularly disruptive given the high level of concentration necessitated by listening tasks.

In addition, Hardiyanto et al. [8] explored the impact of physical settings as a primary external determinant of listening comprehension. This descriptive qualitative case study involved six third-semester English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, categorized into three distinct proficiency levels. The findings revealed that environmental factors, specifically ambient noise from peer chatter and subpar audio equipment, significantly compromised students' concentration and overall listening performance.

Another factor influencing learning listening comprehension involves lengthy spoken passages, speed of spoken text, and variety of accents. The purpose of Maulidiyah et al.'s research [7] was to look into the listening comprehension issues that the learners are having. Aligning with this focus, Diora et al. [13] further identified that students find it challenging to understand passages with

a variety of accents. The American or British accents are well-known to the students; nevertheless, the Indian accent makes it challenging for them to pay attention to and comprehend what is being said. In addition, the speaker's very rapid speech rate and lack of pauses make it challenging for the listener to follow along.

The difficulties and impediments that impact students' listening comprehension abilities have been investigated in both the current study and earlier investigations. Furthermore, questionnaires were also utilized by researchers to get feedback from students on listening comprehension-related concerns. In contrast, Hardiyanto et al. [8] used the interview approach to gather data. When asked what external elements, such as the physical surroundings and listening materials, had an impact on their listening comprehension, the majority of students responded in the affirmative when questioned about those factors.

E. Internal factors affecting listening comprehension

Linguistic ability serves as a crucial internal element that greatly affects listening skills. Trismasari et al. [12], through a questionnaire administered to Grade 11 students, identified restricted vocabulary as a primary obstacle to decoding the target language. When learners possess an inadequate lexical base, their ability to process and internalize the intended message is significantly diminished. Moreover, the presence of unfamiliar phrases, slang expressions, and idioms further complicates the listening process and leads to cognitive overload, particularly in specialized contexts such as business reports or political discourses.

Similarly, Jyoti et al. [9] explored difficulties in listening comprehension, with sixty male and sixty female students studying English at three community schools in the Rupandehi area of Nepal. To determine the primary causes of the students' listening difficulties, they employed a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 24 items. Students find it challenging to understand

unfamiliar words. Besides, when the listening material has intricate grammatical patterns, they frequently struggle. Furthermore, learners have problems understanding the pronunciation.

In addition, Maulidiyah [7] said that students encounter obstacles related to a limited vocabulary. When students encounter unfamiliar words, colloquial language, and slang, they will have difficulty understanding the content of the listening text. Furthermore, complex grammatical structures are also a factor that hinders students' listening comprehension. Hardiyanto et al. [8] claimed that participants reported difficulty in listening comprehension related to linguistic aspects. These issues included pronouncing words differently, slang, colloquial language, and grammatical structures (reduced forms, wh- questions). In short, linguistic factors that hinder students' listening comprehension relate to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

The following researchers found that psychological factors affect students' listening comprehension. Evidence from Maulidiyah's study [7] revealed that when students listen to lengthy listening materials, they get tired and distracted. Students experience anxiety and worry when they are unable to comprehend the spoken text. Similar to the research of Maulidiyah [7], in the research done by Thai et al. [5], 115 first-year English majors from various Mekong Delta universities were among the attendees. The findings from surveys, interviews, and observations showed that anxiousness and inattention are two problems that students face when it comes to listening comprehension. Moreover, Diora et al. [13] and Jyoti [9] found that one of the listeners' problems with listening comprehension is anxiety and lack of focus. Students experienced a variety of difficulties, such as nervousness and sleepiness, which frequently resulted in decreased concentration and memory recall. They also had trouble with language barriers, including learning how to pronounce words correctly and interpreting foreign phrases. They thus experience anxiousness, become distracted, and are unable to effectively hear the audio.

In conclusion, psychological elements, such as anxiety, motivation loss, and boredom when faced with spoken language that is complicated or excessively lengthy, are the final aspect that influences students' listening comprehension.

F. Suggestions to improve listening comprehension

First of all, according to Diora et al. [13], students must practice frequently to expand their vocabulary. Watching Western films or listening to English music are two methods that students can use. Learners might pick up a variety of accents through music and watching movies. Additionally, Hoang et al. [4] emphasized the importance of autonomous practice outside the classroom. Their study suggested that engaging with English-language media, such as newspapers and television programs, effectively expands a learner's lexical range – a crucial component for enhancing listening proficiency. Furthermore, successful students often employ active learning strategies, including consulting dictionaries for unfamiliar terms, inferring meanings from context, and utilizing note-taking to bolster memory retention.

Farooqi [14] employed a qualitative approach to investigate the determinants of listening anxiety and identify effective mitigation strategies. The study highlighted that pedagogical interventions, such as pre-teaching essential vocabulary, selecting familiar topics, and repeating the input in the spoken text, are instrumental in reducing learner apprehension and improving decoding. These strategies facilitate a lower affective filter, allowing students to process auditory input more effectively and with greater confidence.

Gilakjani et al. [3] recommend that teachers start with listening materials that include non-native speakers to enhance listening skills and reduce learner frustration. As students' skills improve, passages chosen by teachers from native speakers can be gradually included as more complex tasks. Structured teaching in listening skills promotes learner independence and turns listening into a valuable developmental resource,

which reduces performance anxiety.

Moreover, according to Diora et al. [13], in order to boost students' enthusiasm for studying listening, teachers must come up with effective methods for teaching listening comprehension. In addition, teachers need to be able to establish a welcoming and comfortable learning environment. Regarding pedagogical implications, teachers must also increase students' understanding of the value of listening in the English language learning process to improve their listening comprehension [4]. The current study exploits students as research objects to offer recommendations for enhancing English listening comprehension, rather than lecturers. Although listening challenges have been thoroughly studied in the past, a top-down approach by concentrating on teachers' pedagogical perspectives has been favored. Understanding the 'learner's voice' of how students view these obstacles and what self-motivated tactics they believe work in a particular setting remains a study gap. The current study closes this gap by concentrating solely on students as primary research subjects. By giving student-centered ideas priority, this work adds a 'bottom-up' viewpoint to the field that enhances current teacher-led frameworks by providing context-specific solutions that are directly related to the students' real academic difficulties.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

A. Research design

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design to triangulate quantitative and qualitative data, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing listening comprehension. Specifically, a survey-based quantitative approach was employed to identify the primary determinants of students' listening difficulties. This was supplemented by a qualitative component, which aimed to elicit in-depth pedagogical suggestions from the participants' perspectives to mitigate these challenges.

The questionnaire was adapted from the validated instruments of two studies by Maulidiyah [7] and Jyori [9], comprising two sections. The

first section gathered demographic data, including gender and academic cohort. The second section focused on the core conceptual framework, categorized into external and internal factors. External factors encompass environmental settings (e.g., ambient noise, equipment quality, and seating) and characteristics of the listening materials (e.g., speech rate, accents, and unfamiliar topics). Internal factors, conversely, are subdivided into linguistic competencies (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation recognition) and psychological states (e.g., anxiety, motivation, and interest). Each of these four sub-categories contained five specific items, totaling 20 questions in the questionnaire. This detailed classification serves as a structural foundation for analyzing students' perceptions in the subsequent sections. Participants indicated their level of agreement using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'Strongly disagree' (1) to 'Strongly agree' (5).

Following the survey, a qualitative phase was conducted to explore student-led strategies for enhancing listening proficiency. The researcher facilitated a focus group interview via Google Meet with a sub-sample of six participants, purposively selected from the original 60 survey respondents. The semi-structured interview protocol centered on soliciting practical advice and actionable recommendations. Discussion primarily focused on identifying effective autonomous practices and pedagogical interventions that could bolster students' listening effectiveness and overall confidence. The following questions were used to conduct focus group interviews:

1. Do you frequently encounter difficulties during English listening comprehension tasks? If so, could you describe them?
2. Referring to the previous questionnaire, which specific factors (e.g., speed, noise, vocabulary) impact your performance the most?
3. What suggestions do you have for other students to improve their listening skills (considering physical settings, materials, linguistic, or psychological factors)?
4. Have you personally applied any of these

strategies? How effective were they in overcoming your challenges?

5. Based on your observations, what common difficulties do your peers face in the listening classroom?

6. Are there any other listening challenges you experience that were not mentioned in the initial questionnaire?

7. Having reviewed suggestions from other participants, which ones do you intend to apply to your future learning?

B. Participants

60 English majors from Tra Vinh University were chosen for the study using a convenience sample technique based on their availability and desire to take part. The sample comprised volunteers from four academic cohorts: K21 (12 students), K22 (13 students), K23 (15 students), and K24 (20 students) to capture a wide range of listening difficulties. The goal of this cross-sectional approach was to shed light on both enduring and changing listening challenges as students advance through various degree program levels. The study ensured that the data represented actual academic challenges faced in the local university setting by choosing individuals who were actively enrolled in English skills modules.

C. Data collection and analysis

To ensure that respondents could understand the questionnaire, it was first prepared and evaluated. Twelve English majors who were not part of the final study but had similar characteristics to the target sample participated in a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the instrument. The items were thoroughly examined after this pilot phase to ensure linguistic clarity and improve unclear language. Paper-based questionnaires were then used to increase response rates and guarantee student participation for the official data collection, which was conducted in classrooms. In order to compute descriptive statistics, quantitative data were first processed in Microsoft Excel and then analyzed

using SPSS software (Version 25). Concurrently, the qualitative information from the six Google Meet-conducted focus group interviews was transcribed, and the students’ recommendations were categorized using theme analysis.

Table 1: Reliability statistics of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.856	20

The frequency and internal reliability coefficient were calculated using all the data collected from the questionnaire completed by 60 students (Table 1). The reliability statistics table was reliable, with the figure of Cronbach’s Alpha $\alpha = 0.856$ for 20 items in total.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Factors affecting the listening comprehension of undergraduate EFL students

Table 2: Physical setting

Descriptive statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<i>Physical setting</i>	60	2.20	5.00	3.89	0.67
The noisy surrounding environment makes it difficult for me to listen.	60	2.00	5.00	4.26	0.93
The output quality of the speaker equipment is poor, so I can't hear the content clearly.	60	1.00	5.00	4.23	1.01
The unclear sound from the low-quality CD player of spoken text hinders my listening comprehension.	60	1.00	5.00	4.06	0.98
My seating position in class affects my ability to receive and follow information from spoken text.	60	1.00	5.00	3.33	0.95
The time to practice English listening in class is too short, affecting my listening comprehension.	60	1.00	5.00	3.55	1.19
Valid N (listwise)	60				

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for factors related to the physical setting. According to descriptive statistics, the combined mean score for the five items was 3.89 (SD = 0.67). Based on a 5-point Likert scale interpretation (where 1.00–2.40 is low, 2.41–3.40 is moderate, and 3.41–5.00 is high), this result indicates that participants frequently encountered physical environment barriers during their listening comprehension tasks. Specifically, participants indicated

that the background noise made it challenging for the listener to pay attention to the spoken text (M = 4.26, SD = 0.93). The poor speaker equipment’s output quality (M = 4.23, SD = 1.01) and the low-quality CD player’s unclear sound (M = 4.06, SD = 0.98) hindered their understanding of the auditory input. These findings suggested that essential details might be missed due to technical limitations and poor audio fidelity.

In contrast, environmental and situational factors such as the amount of time spent listening to English in class (M = 3.55, SD = 1.19) and sitting position (M = 3.33, SD = 0.95) were perceived as having a less significant impact on listening comprehension. Environmental noise is indicated from the results as a primary external barrier to students’ listening performance. Specifically, a majority of participants reported significant difficulty in isolating auditory details when background noise is present, which directly compromises their ability to comprehend effectively. This finding aligns with Maulidiyah [7], who observed that acoustic interference severely disrupts a learner’s concentration, thereby hindering the decoding process. Furthermore, the current study reveals that noise is not limited to external surroundings; internal classroom distractions, such as peer chatter, are equally detrimental. This observation is consistent with the findings of Hardiyanto et al. [8], Trismasari [12], and Diora et al. [13], who collectively assert that ambient noise creates a cognitive distraction that students struggle to overcome despite their efforts to focus.

The descriptive statistic from Table 3 (M = 3.94, SD = 0.56) adds up to a 5-item average of the influence that students believed the listening materials had on their listening comprehension.

The first challenge is the speed of listening to text (M = 4.11, SD = 0.88), which makes it difficult for learners to follow along. That is also the biggest challenge with listening materials. The next effect on learners’ listening comprehension is that listening topics are unfamiliar (M = 4.06, SD = 1.00). Topics that are strange and rarely exposed, such as politics, medicine, and the like,

Table 3: Listening materials

Descriptive statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<i>Listening materials</i>	60	2.80	5.00	3.94	0.56
A spoken text with a lot of accents affects my listening comprehension skills.	60	1.00	5.00	3.56	1.09
The speed of spoken text is too fast, which affects my listening comprehension	60	2.00	5.00	4.11	0.88
I find it difficult to interpret the meaning of a long spoken text.	60	2.00	5.00	3.96	0.86
I find it difficult to follow and understand the spoken text when the speaker lacks pauses.	60	2.00	5.00	3.98	0.91
I find it difficult to keep up with spoken text that has unfamiliar topics.	60	1.00	5.00	4.06	1.00
Valid N (listwise)	60				

made it quite difficult for students. Apart from that, learners find it challenging to interpret and understand speech if it lacks pauses ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 0.91$) and long spoken text ($M = 3.96$, $SD = 0.86$). On the other hand, an overly multivocal spoken text has little effect on students’ listening comprehension ($M = 3.56$, $SD = 0.88$). That means students are less affected by differences in accents.

Listening materials are the second component that influences students’ listening comprehension. The largest challenge that students face is the speed of the listening text. It was challenging for learners to follow along with the spoken text since it was delivered at a fast pace. According to Maulidiyah [7] and Jyori [9], learners undoubtedly have certain challenges when it comes to listening comprehension because they are unable to regulate the speaker’s speech rate. When the listening lesson moves too quickly, students find it difficult to listen to the essential ideas and keywords. The data behind is disregarded in order to process the prior data. Students are more likely to become confused and stop digesting the spoken material when they are unable to hear the words. This finding is in line with Hardiyanto’s observation [8] that when listening at a rapid pace, children tend to skip words or sentences, which confuses. Students were consequently unable to follow along with the content from the listening session. This can be explained by the possibility that they do not practice listening for long periods

of time each day and don’t get many chances to communicate with native English speakers.

Table 4: Linguistic factors

Descriptive statistics					
	N	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<i>Linguistic factors</i>	60	1.40	4.80	3.78	0.65
I find the pronunciation familiar, but cannot recognize the words.	60	1.00	5.00	3.78	1.05
I lack vocabulary, so it is hard to keep up with the spoken text.	60	1.00	5.00	3.85	1.03
I have difficulty guessing the meaning of words because one word has many meanings.	60	1.00	5.00	3.83	0.92
I find it difficult to understand listening texts that have difficult grammatical structures.	60	1.00	5.00	3.25	0.93
I find it difficult to understand spoken text in which there are many unfamiliar words (slang, idioms, jargon).	60	1.00	5.00	4.21	0.88
Valid N (listwise)	60				

The five items’ total average score is ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 0.65$), according to descriptive statistics (Table 4). The data demonstrated that linguistic issues hampered the participants’ ability to understand what they were listening.

First of all, learners find it challenging to comprehend spoken text when they come across strange words like idioms, slang, jargon, etc. ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 0.88$). The most worrying problem in linguistics is this one. Due to their limited vocabulary ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 1.03$), a single word might have multiple meanings ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.92$), and students cannot recognize the word even though the word is pronounced familiarly ($M = 3.78$, $SD = 1.05$). Learners struggle to keep up with the listening. Slang, jargon, and idioms have unique meanings, and if students have not studied them before, they can easily get confused. Ultimately, the issue related to grammar has the least impact on how well people can listen to and comprehend English. In other words, students find it challenging to understand the listening lesson due to its intricate grammatical structure ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.93$).

The linguistic factor is the third element that influences students’ listening comprehension. According to Trismasari [12], the majority of students believed that message content with strange words is the hardest for them to understand when they are listening. Participants reported that they had trouble understanding

spoken text because of the unfamiliar words. Students find it challenging to follow an oral text with an excessive number of strange words. Maulidiayah [7] affirmed that when communication is jam-packed with idioms and jargon, it becomes challenging for students to listen. Idioms and jargon have completely different meanings from ordinary words or sentences. Students find it challenging to comprehend the meaning as a result. Likewise, Diora et al. [13] thought that learners struggle with idioms, jargon, and unfamiliar words when it comes to listening comprehension. In addition, learners’ ability to anticipate and recognize information depends on context, yet their inability to understand unfamiliar words interferes with their ability to absorb information. This is in line with the research by Hardiyanto et al. [8], which found that participants were unable to comprehend the context of the spoken text due to unfamiliar words. On the other hand, Jyoti’s study [9] discovered that the most prevalent issue with learners’ word recognition was their pronunciation. Although the words have the same pronunciation, their meanings are quite different.

SD = 1.12). They become demotivated when they are unable to establish a reasonable listening strategy (M = 3.75, SD = 1.05) and listen to lengthy spoken texts (M = 3.71, SD = 1.18). The final point is that learners become disinterested in listening when they are taught an uninteresting listening lesson. It appears that learners’ listening comprehension is unaffected by tedious listening topics (M = 3.56, SD = 1.19).

The psychological component is the last influence on listening comprehension. It appears that listeners’ anxiety stands in the way of expressing themselves to the fullest. With fear and anxiety, listeners’ capacity to listen is decreased, according to Thai et al. [5]. When they do not understand the listening material, students often fear making mistakes. Similarly, difficulties in interpreting spoken text result in anxiety and nervousness [5, 7, 9]. Additionally, it is rare for learners to voice their own thoughts. They worry that providing an incorrect response is totally conceivable if they are unable to understand the listening lesson [3].

Table 5: Psychological factors

	Descriptive statistics				
	N	Min	Max	Mean	S.D
<i>Psychological factors</i>	60	1.00	5.00	3.75	0.79
I lose motivation when I can't find the right listening comprehension strategy.	60	1.00	5.00	3.73	1.05
I am afraid when I hear a listening audio with a strange topic.	60	1.00	5.00	3.75	1.12
I feel anxious when I cannot understand the meaning of the spoken text.	60	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.99
I lose interest when listening to a long audio.	60	1.00	5.00	3.71	1.18
I lose interest when listening to an audio with a boring topic.	60	1.00	5.00	3.56	1.19
Valid N (listwise)	60				

The results in Table 5 demonstrated that the five items related to psychological aspects (M = 3.75, SD = 0.79) affect students’ listening comprehension. The first object is the most interesting item in psychological factors. This is because when they are unable to listen to the spoken text, students become nervous (M = 4.00, SD = 0.99). Secondly, students get afraid when they are listening to a strange topic (M = 3.75,

B. Student’s suggestions to improve listening comprehension

Based on the focus group interviews, several key recommendations emerged to help students overcome listening challenges. These suggestions are categorized into three aspects, including institutional improvements, instructional strategies, and autonomous learning practices.

To address issues related to the physical environment, participants emphasized the need for better infrastructure. Specifically, Participant 1 suggested, ‘The school can invest in soundproof rooms... which will prevent a lot of noise from coming in from outside’ [15]. Participant 5 also highlighted the impact of the environment on focus, ‘My friend is often distracted. When he is doing a listening lesson, if there is any noise, he will immediately pay attention’ [16]. Regarding seating arrangements, Participant 6 commented, ‘My friend is quite big, so he often sits at the last table. So when he listens to the spoken text, he can’t hear clearly’ [17], noting that this difficulty

is often due to a combination of distance and speaker equipment. Furthermore, regarding audio quality, Participant 2 commented, ‘I hope that teachers can send listening lessons to the Zalo group... Students will use their own devices, such as laptops or phones, to listen’ [18].

Students emphasized the value of pedagogical scaffolding and a supportive environment in relation to classroom learning. Participant 3 remarked, ‘Teachers should let students listen to the listening lesson a few times. But once is too difficult to help reduce listening-induced anxiety’ [19]. Similarly, Participant 6 suggested, ‘Teachers ... can let students listen a few times if the listening lessons are too difficult’ and pointed out that many recordings ‘lack pauses’ [20], making it hard to take notes in time. Additionally, Participant 4 stated, ‘Teachers can create a comfortable learning environment for students’ [18], while Participant 5 recommended, ‘Teachers can regularly let students listen to listening lessons from non-native speakers, like Indian voices’ [16].

Students stressed the need for independent study and exposure to real content outside of scheduled classes. Participant 1 noted, ‘When you have free time at home, you can practice listening to the listening lessons to get used to the speaking speed’ [15]. To improve vocabulary and interest, Participant 3 suggested, ‘watching movies. Find movies you love and enjoy’ [17]. Participant 6 added that students should ‘watch movies or programs by native speakers’ [20], mentioning specific resources like ‘fashion shows on YouTube’ [20] where learners can hear native speakers review products. Participant 5 shared, ‘I often watch American and English animated movies to relieve stress and also have the opportunity to learn English’ [16]. Furthermore, Participant 4 commented, ‘the dictation method is quite useful for improving vocabulary’ [21], as it helps learners hear the details of the ideas in the listening lesson.

In conclusion, to help EFL students enhance their listening skills and mitigate the effects of internal and external barriers, a mix of modern infrastructure, targeted instructor support, and

regular independent practice is required.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study shows that a mix of external and internal factors influences undergraduate EFL students’ listening comprehension. External barriers mainly come from the listening materials. These include fast speech, unfamiliar topics, no strategic pauses, and different accents. Environmental issues, like background noise and poor audio quality, also play a role. Internally, students’ skills are often held back by gaps in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Emotional factors, such as anxiety and lack of motivation, add to the problem. These results highlight the need for a complete approach to improving listening instruction that covers both skills and emotional aspects.

To improve their listening skills, students should focus on independent learning and consistent exposure to the target language. Engaging with real digital media, like YouTube or TED Talks, helps learners pursue interests that keep them motivated. Moreover, students should take part in international exchange programs, such as the yearly collaboration between schools and colleges. These programs offer great chances for direct communication with native speakers, allowing students to assess their comprehension skills in real-life situations. Additionally, using active methods like dictation and reading English news can strengthen their vocabulary and pronunciation.

Instructors are key to reducing student anxiety and creating a supportive classroom. Teaching strategies like introducing key vocabulary and providing background information before listening tasks help students better understand auditory information. To boost engagement, teachers can add interactive elements such as educational games or reward systems to their classes. Ensuring clear audio quality and allowing two to three repetitions of listening exercises can also lessen the workload on students. By recognizing these challenges, educators can implement more customized and effective teaching methods.

Despite these valuable insights, this study has several limitations, including its 10-week duration and its focus on English majors at one university in the south of Vietnam. Therefore, the findings may not apply to students in other fields or different institutions. Future research should include non-English majors and look into the long-term effects of the recommended interventions to give a fuller picture of how listening comprehension develops.

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