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Difficulties in Listening of English-Majored Sophomores at Tay Do University in Vietnam

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Abstract: Listening skill plays an important role in studying a foreign language, especially English. However, students face a lot of difficulties in English listening. The research was carried out to find the problems that the sophomores encounter in English listening. The participants of this research were seventy-five English majored sophomores of English classes, course 14 at Tay Do University. Questionnaire and paper interview were delivered to collect problems. This was a quantitative and qualitative research. The results of the study showed that vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge and psychological factors were the major listening comprehension difficulties. Basing on these difficulties, English learners can find out suitable learning ways to improve their listening skill. The results of this study may also be useful for those who are interested in this field.

Keywords: *Difficulties in listening, English majored sophomores, Tay Do University.*

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Introduction

In the modern society, English language plays a vital role in the world. English is considered as an international language. People use English in many fields such as business, education, society, politic, technology, economy, tourism, medicine and even sport. Vietnam is developing and integrating with the global economy; therefore, English is used widely. It is a means for communication and makes relationship with other countries more easily than ever before. It is an important language that connects people together without any barriers. As a global language of business, more and more multinational companies are currently headhunting employees with a strong perception of the English language. Candidates possessing English proficiency have a greater advantage compared with others. As a result, mastering English gives people many greater opportunities of career advancement and success in life.

According to Vandergrift (1997), listening skill requires hypothesizing, prediction, generalizing, revising and checking for the listening inputs. Students have to prepare carefully before listening. Most of students face some problems in listening because they cannot understand what the speaker says. English learners need to pay attention when learning listening and attempt to comprehend the content. The learners shall concern to the related factors to improve their skill. Unlike reading, while the readers can go back to the text any time they want, the listeners have no chance of going back to the part they may pass. Hence, learners demand to improve listening skill and it is un-denied about the important of listening.

Moreover, English learners have crucial problems in listening because universities pay attention to grammar, and vocabulary. Listening and speaking skills are not significant parts of books and teachers do not consider these skills in their classes Hamouda (2013). In the listening tasks students have to listen different topics and these topics are hard. Obviously, many students feel anxious and nervous before listening. This leads to limit understanding and ineffectiveness. Most of students feel unconfident when communicating with foreigners, especially their teachers. Even though they cannot get what foreigners say, they do not dare to ask them to repeat, because they are worried to say something incorrect. Because of this reason, the study was conducted. It is expected that this research would provide an overview of challenges in listening comprehension process so that both teachers and students can find out suitable and effective solutions.

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Research Aims

The study was conducted with a view to find out the difficulties that English majored sophomores faced in listening comprehension so that students can recognize their own obstacles in learning listening and find out appropriate ways to listen in English effectively.

Research Questions

The research was conducted to answer these following questions:

1. Do English majored sophomores at Tay Do University have problems in listening comprehension?
2. What are difficulties that English majored sophomores at Tay Do University face in listening comprehension?

Significance of the Study

The research showed that listening skill was very important in communication and it was indispensable skill in life. Moreover, this study was investigated to help students identify their difficulties. From this, students could find out suitable methods to enhance their skill and their scores as well. Finally, it is hoped that the survey will be a beneficial reference for teachers of listening to get more insights into students' problems and making suitable adjustments in teaching them.

Literature Review

Definitions of Listening

Listening is the key to success in communication, not having good listening skill is easily misunderstood to spoil the communication and the senders of the message can easily become frustrated. In addition, listening skill is very important, without listening skills, no communication can be achieved Cross (1998). We can see that listening is one of important skills of human. Listening has been defined by many researchers in the field with different perspectives.

Initially, according to Underwood (1989), listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. Hearing and listening are two activities involving the use of ear but they are different. The hearing helps to receive the sound waves and noise by ears. It is the power of perceiving sounds. In contrast, listening is hearing one sound, the listeners must pay attention to and try to get what the speakers say. Likewise, listening is the process of receiving, making meaning from, and answering to spoken and/or nonverbal message Purdy and Borisoff (1996).

Nevertheless, the process of listening is not easy. It has many great challenges that need to be surmounted. Goss (1982) suggested that, listening as a process of understanding what is heard and organizing it into lexical elements to which meaning can be allocated. When listening, students use ears to receive individual sounds and use brain to convert these into messages that mean something. According to Postovsky (1975), listening differs in meaning from sound discrimination to aural comprehension. In addition, listening involves auditory discrimination, aural grammar, selecting information, remembering it, and connecting it to the process between sound and form of meaning Morley (1972).

Furthermore, Allen and Corder (1974) informed that listening as an active process requiring the same skills of prediction, hypothesizing, checking, revising, and generalizing that writing and reading demand. Listening demands concentration and attention. It is a skill that some people require to work harder than others. People who have difficulty in concentration are often poor listeners. Additionally, listening not only helps students understand what speakers are saying, but also helps them know how to pronounce word rightly, how to use intonation, and how to order the word stress. On the other hand, listening skill has a vital role in developing foreign language competence. Listening is the essential skill in learning language journey, learners will not study communication effectively without listening skill. In fact, more and more students are spending their time in listening, over fifty percent of student's time is used to communicate.

In nutshell, there are numerous definitions by many linguists, but they share the same opinions that listening is the process of receiving and interpreting information. Students can realize clearly the important of listening in learning English and daily life as well. It is significant in person lives, daily activities, career opportunities and employment environment.

Definitions of Listening Comprehension

There are different definitions of the term "*listening comprehension*". Listening comprehension is the progression of understanding the spoken language. According to Hamouda (2013), listening comprehension stands for the understanding of what the receivers have listened and it is the ability of people to repeat the text even they can imitate the sound without real comprehension. O'Malley et al. (1989) suggested a helpful and more extensive definition that listening comprehension is an active process in which the listeners form meaning through using cues from contextual

information and from existing knowledge, while relying upon numerous strategic resources to perform the task requirement.

Also, Rost (2002) described listening comprehension as an interactive process in which listeners are involved in constructing meaning. Listeners understand the listening input through sound discrimination, previous knowledge, grammatical structures and both of other linguistic or non-linguistic tools.

In brief, listening comprehension is an essential skill for communication. In order to become a good communication person, the first goal is to master listening skill.

The Importance of Listening

In the real life, listening has a strong impact on many fields. In order words, it plays a crucial role which can determine the success or failure in aspects of life as communication, teaching, tourism, economy, etc. We cannot deny the fact that listening comprehension is vital not only in daily life aspects but also in language learning. In fact, it has become the popular language in the world and listening comprehension has been considered one of the most important subjects. Moreover, in academic contexts, it is crucial for people to sustain communication effectively.

Firstly, listening plays an important role in communication, Mendelsohn (1994) the total time spent on communicating, listening takes up 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, about 9%. This showed that, listening takes a half of time in communication. Moreover, that is a main factor, without listening, communication cannot operate effectively.

Secondly, listening skill is an indispensable skill in learning language that learners cannot ignore. If students are not ability to listen, they will misunderstand in communication. As human beings, we seek to interact on a daily basis with each other. This interaction, consists of the two key elements of speaking and listening. Speaking is only half of the communication process needed for interpersonal effectiveness. The other half is listening and understanding what others communicate to us. That means listening skill determines the success of effective communication.

Lastly, listening skill is one of the most important aspects of communication process. It helps to understand the other person's message. Effective listening skills create positive workplace relationships which influence opinions and responsiveness to one another. Rost (1994) pointed out that listening is vital in language classroom because it provides input for learners. Without understanding input at right level, any learning simply cannot begin. Listening is thus fundamental to speaking. In fact, successful listening brings the enough information required to listeners to keep up with the speakers' messages.

Common Difficulties in Learning Listening Comprehension

It is not easy to be a good language learner in four basic skills in English, especially listening skill. The English majored sophomores at Tay Do University have faced many obstacles. In this research, some common difficulties that sophomores meet in listening skill are mentioned as vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge and psychological factors.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the knowledge areas, it plays a great role for learners in acquiring a language. Hence, vocabulary is the most important factor effecting learners' listening ability. Thornbury (2002) said that without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. In fact, when learners listen to a conversation, they cannot understand what the speakers say if they do not have vocabulary. Listening comprehension is the ability to recognize another through sense, aural organs and allocated a meaning to the message to understand it, Azmi et al. (2014). It is hard to catch the meaning of sentence when lacking vocabulary. In listening comprehension process, learners may encounter many difficulties, such as word choice, linking words, and specialized terminology vocabulary.

First, learners must know the meaning of words that make them have a positive impact on their listening comprehension ability. The lack of needed vocabulary is the most common cause of students' inability to say what they want to say during communication activities, Chastain (1988). In other word, a word does not merely have a meaning; it probably has many different meanings in different contexts. Learners are often confused about choosing suitable words in certain context. Overall, learners meet difficulty in identifying a word.

Secondly, in learning listening skill, lack of vocabulary knowledge is a huge obstacle. Learners do not use the words they learn regularly, so they can forget those words. This causes the big problem that they cannot recognize the words they have learned before in a listening text. In other situations, learners knew the words before, but to make an influence sentence the speakers often link the final consonant with the first vowel of next word that makes students cannot identify the word in the listening process. Most of learners agree that they are not able to know the linking words because they do not have a high vocabulary knowledge.

Lastly, sometimes learners make mistakes when listening text has much specialized terminology vocabulary. Specialized terminology vocabulary is some words specialized for particular areas. If learners do not have rich and plentiful vocabulary, they will be confused when listening. In reality, the speakers may use synonyms, antonyms to explain the word. Underwood (1989) pointed that, for students listening to a foreign language, it is certain that they cannot know all words in the speech like mother tongue. Therefore, when they hear an unknown word which can be like a suddenly dropped barrier, they may stop and think about the meaning of word. With this reason, a good listener is a person who can understand total of the listening text.

In short, vocabulary is considered as the fundamental factor of learning English, especially in listening skill. Thus, having a sufficient vocabulary is an advantage for those who want to become the good listeners.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation plays a critical role for learners who want to master in both listening and speaking. Moreover, if learners are good at pronouncing words, they will be proficient in listening. Pronunciation is significant as it is a section of successful oral production or communicative competence Hismanoglu (2006). In fact, listening skill is important in foreign language communication; however, pronunciation is also a meaning element of listening. For beginners, the most important listening skill is discriminative in English pronunciation. Moreover, if pronunciation is not fine, it can lead to misunderstanding. Besides, learners cannot recognize the familiar words because they have mispronunciation. If the listeners learn to pronounce the sound accurately himself, it will be much easier for him to hear them correctly when being said by someone else Ur (1984). The listeners need to acquire the crucial skill of identifying the main information. Therefore, mispronunciation will difficult to communicate with others. When students learn how to pronounce an English word, their mother tongue sometimes effects on their pronunciation.

In addition, pronunciation involves in accent and intonation. According to Yagang (1994), listeners have tendency to get familiar with the accents which they mostly listen. If listeners are exposed to standard British or American, they will be faced problems in understanding other accents. All of us know that many countries speak English, such as British English, American English, Australian English, Japanese English and so on. Therefore, learners find it hard to distinguish which words the speakers are mentioning when listening to a new accent for the first time. Buck (2001) indicated that when listeners hear an unfamiliar accent, such as Indian English for the first time after studying only American English, they will encounter essential difficulties in listening. That causes students confused in learning English listening. Munro and Derwing (1995) stated that too many accented speeches can lead to an important reduction in comprehension. Also 66% of listeners referred speakers' accents as one of the most important factors that impact on listening comprehension Goh (1999). Unfamiliar accents of both native and non-native can cause serious problems in listening comprehension. This will interrupt the whole listening comprehension process and at the same time an unfamiliar accent makes comprehension impossible for listeners.

Moreover, intonation is not less important than pronunciation and accent. Intonation is the rhythm how one's voice rises and falls at a certain point of the sentence. Intonation in English might also convey a speaker's involvement in a conversation as well as a desire to take turn of talk or leave the conversation. Intonation is a significant feature in English, Brazil et al. (1980). In communication, when the speakers have different intonations, the listeners will confuse because different intonations make a same sentence have various meaning. In addition, if there is a misunderstanding in conversation, the reason lies often in difference of stress and intonation sufficiently large to spoil comprehension Boyle (1984). It is not surprised that if the speakers change their intonation, the listeners often misunderstand the meaning of the sentence. Therefore, learners should learn how to control their intonation correctly to avoid misunderstanding.

Overall, it is undoubted that the pronunciation is a main key leading to the success of listening skills. Therefore, learners should practice pronunciation and be aware of the different sounds and features to achieve accuracy in listening comprehension.

Background Knowledge

Besides some difficulties about vocabulary and pronunciation, learners also meet difficulty in lack of background knowledge. Background knowledge is the main element to have a good listening skill. Learners will not hear well if they get unfamiliar topic. Background knowledge consists of many aspects in real life such as culture, society, economy, and so on. Therefore, background knowledge plays a significant role in language learning as well as listening.

Background knowledge is essential to listen well. When studying in class, learners are accustomed to the topics related to academic fields. Indeed, background knowledge includes many fields, such as business report, technology, science that they can be found easily in the listening materials. It is obliged that they have variety knowledge on these fields to apply to the listening text. In contrast, when getting the listen text including unfamiliar topics, most of them seem to be confused to understand what they hear because of some new words. For instance, when learners face some topics about society problems, such as drug, gambling, tobacco, and prostitution. They cannot identify the new words. On the other hand, vocabulary about economics is also unfamiliar with them while listening. Certainly, understanding all the

messages of listening text is a big problem. This problem makes learners feel bored and discouraged. Obviously, if students are familiar with the context, they will be easy to interpret the whole meaning of listening text.

In addition, nonverbal clues such as facial expression, nods, gestures or tone or voice can also be easily misinterpreted by listeners from different cultures. However, to be acquainted with the strange topics, learners should use diverse materials in many fields of social life to listen. Since familiarity with the text makes listening easier for the listeners as he is able to relate to his own background knowledge Gebhard (2000).

Moreover, lack of background knowledge is an obstacle during the learning process. Anderson and Lynch (2000) mentioned that, lack of social-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language can also present an obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express culture. And the marriage between language and culture is indivisible, according to Brownell (1990). In fact, background knowledge includes knowledge of the target culture, knowledge of current affairs, arts, politics and literature. Culture provides land for language to develop and in contrast, language operates to serve the culture. For this reason, it is necessary for learners to have knowledge of culture background of language that they are learning.

Consequently, background knowledge is very important in learning listening. Learners should have wide knowledge of many topics, fields, and life experience to become the good listeners. Moreover, learners could find out the cultures of English-speaking countries to access knowledge.

Psychological Factors

When talking about psychological factors, lack of concentration is indispensable, affecting the whole of listening process. It can be difficult for learners to concentrate in a foreign language. In listening comprehension, even shortest break in attention can impact seriously comprehension. Conversation makes them easier because they can find the interest in the passage. However, a few learners feel listening is tiring; it demands an enormous amount of effort to follow the meaning. It is defined that when a person feels tired or stressful, he or she will not concentrate. That leads listeners' ability to listen is reduced and the listening process is ineffective. Learning listening a foreign language is not an easy process. It requires learners to pay much attention.

Environment also has an important role in listening. Environmental factors, such as noise, and temperature can cause learners to focus on their attention. In listening class, when learners are listening to a talk or a lecture, but they cannot listen well because of the noise outside. Noise as a whirring of fan, a whisper of beside friends can interfere to the listening process. Moreover, temperature also affects to listening. If a room is very dark, listeners will be sleepy, just as the too warm or cool room can enhance the awareness of learners' physical. In general, environment has an influence to learners. Besides, many people in the listening class make learners dis-concentrate. They do not listen well in crowded places.

One of the aspects of psychological is anxiety. It is an important factor in listening process. Many learners have difficulty because of their anxiety.

According to Wheelless (1974), the fear of misinterpreting, inadequately processing, and/or not being able to adjust psychologically to messages sent by others. Learners cannot neglect the existence of being afraid and have a great tension when they think of a foreign language. Moreover, anxiety makes up nervous and afraid; thus, makes to poor performance. The feelings of fear and nervousness are closely connected to the cognitive side of anxiety, which is worry. Worry wastes energy that should be used for memory and processing on a type of thinking which in no way facilitates the task at hand Eysenck (1979). Sometimes, learners forget what they hear because of nervousness.

Besides, anxiety is quite possibly the effective factor that most pervasively obstructs the learning process. It is associated with the negative feelings, such as uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, and tension. In listening class, learners are received a task; they do not have the knowledge about the topic that makes them anxiety. In some situations, they prepare material listening; however, teachers give learners a new topic and the information is not relevant with the previous prepared.

In addition, in most of literature on language learning anxiety, students have reported that listening in the foreign language produces the most anxiety Young (1990). In reality, anxiety occurs when learners feel to face with a task that is too difficult or unfamiliar. This kind of psychology creates a challenge to learners' listening ability. As a result, they tend to become worried if they fail to understand a particular word, and they will be discouraged by the failure.

To sum up, concentration and anxiety can be considered as obstacles in learners' psychology. They are the drawback of almost learners in learning listening English.

Previous Studies

In the process of English proficiency, students are affected by many obstacles, especially in learning listening English. The previous studies below will be a good evidence for the affirmation.

The first one that should be mentioned is the research, “Difficulties in English listening of majored sophomores at Tay Do University” by Nguyen (2017) with the purpose of helping these students recognize clearly their problems in English listening. The participants are English majored sophomore bachelor course 10 (2015 – 2019) at Tay Do University. In study process, questionnaire is used as a main instrument. The result of the research showed that students had difficulties in pronunciation, background knowledge, and psychological factors.

Similarly, Bui (2019) conducted, “A study on second-year English majored students’ difficulties in listening comprehension at HPU”. This study was conducted with thirty of the second-year English majored students at Hai Phong Private University with the aim of investigating their English listening problems and listening proficiency. Questionnaire and interview were used as tools to collect data. The result of the study revealed that the main reason caused listening problems were lack of practicing listening skills and lack of exposure to different kinds of listening materials. This study would be helpful for the material developer to design effective listening materials for university students.

Another the research was done by Trinh (2020), “A study on the difficulties in English listening skill for the second-year students in English faculty at Thuong Mai University and some suggested solutions”. This study was conducted to investigate the difficulties in listening encountered by sophomores of Thuong Mai University. This study was based on quantitative, qualitative methods. The questionnaire was used to distribute 100 students in K54N classes to collect data. From the results, there were conclusions drawn about students’ attitudes and subjective and objective difficulties in English listening skills. The researcher also made suggestions and recommendations to help students solve the problems.

The research “A Study of English Listening Problems and Listening Proficiency of Business at Bangkok University” conducted by Anadapong (2011). The aim is investigating English listening problem and listening proficiency of thirty students. Questionnaire, IELTS test, and Interview were used to collect data. The result revealed that main reason caused listening problem is the listening text. However, the factors that mostly caused listening problems were lack of practicing listening skill and lack of exposure to different kinds of listening materials.

Also, Yousif (2006) mentioned in the research entitled “Listening Comprehension Difficulties as Perceived.” The study investigated lecture comprehension problems of 50 first year students majoring in English at Almajmah College of Education. Data was collected by means of a short open-ended questionnaire and interview. The analysis provides an index of linguistic, conceptual, discourse, acoustic, environmental and psychological variables that hinder effective comprehension. The results discussed several obstacles that impact comprehension. These are divided into three main areas: listener factors, speaker factors and text factors.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to answer the research questions stated in chapter one, English majored sophomores at Tay Do University were chosen as participants. They would answer questionnaires and interview paper so as to investigate their problems in listening comprehension. The collected information would be analyzed to show the research aims. The study was a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were 75 sophomores from English majored sophomores 14 classes, course (2019 – 2023) at Tay Do University. They were 15 males and 60 females from 19 to 22 years old. They came from different areas, both rural and urban. They spoke Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English as foreign language. All of them were sophomores; they were considered as at equal level. All of them had learnt English listening skills at Tay Do University for two years, so it was confirmed that they encountered lots of difficulties with learning listening.

Instruments

The study was designed as a descriptive study, using a mixed-methods approach. Questionnaire and interview paper were two helpful instruments to figure out students’ problems in listening comprehension. First, they were designed based on theory and previous studies of difficulties in English listening. Next, they were given to 5 lectures teaching English listening and speaking to get advice for improving both the content and the format. Then, questionnaire was given to 75 sophomores. It was done in about 30 minutes in class with a clear and careful explanation to make sure that students understood what they were doing. After finishing the questionnaire, the interview paper was delivered to 10 sophomores. The papers were got back within three days that gave the participants time to do well all three questions.

Questionnaire

In the study, the questionnaire comprised 10 questions and 26 statements in total and was divided into two part described as follow.

Part 1 consisted of the first 10 questions (from number 1 to 10) which investigated the students' background, students' attitude toward the importance of listening comprehension, students' self-evaluation on their listening ability, the number of students' having difficulties in listening. In this part, students were required to choose the answer that best suits their opinion.

In part 2, there were 22 statements (from number 11 to 32) designed in form of the five-degree Likert-type (strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree and strongly disagree). They are statements involve in difficulties in listening listed in the following table:

Table 1: The Gist of Questionnaire

Statements	Summary of the statement
a. From 1 to 10	Students' background
b. From 11 to 14	Vocabulary
c. From 15 to 19	Pronunciation
d. From 20 to 24	Background knowledge
e. From 25 to 32	Psychological factors

Interview

In order to make the study more specific and objective, the interview paper was delivered to 10 sophomores who were randomly selected in 75 sophomores at Tay Do University. It included 3 questions which mentioned difficulties in learning listening skill.

Data analysis

After the data were collected, the following procedures were used to analyze.

As for the questionnaire data analysis, to explore the participants' awareness on the difficulties in learning English listening, the five-degree likert-type scale was transferred into five values such as strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree and strongly disagree. Then, the data would be collected and calculate to find out the results.

Data of the interviews were analyzed under the utilization of qualitative methods. Interview paper was translated by Vietnamese to avoid the misunderstanding of participants. After, the process of delivering was conducted to collect the information.

Results

This part showed the findings of the whole research. The findings were described for analyzing the collected data from 75 English majored sophomores. The results included two sections which were report from the questionnaire and the interview paper.

Results from Questionnaires

From the questionnaire, the research gathered variety of valuable information from participants which were divided into two parts, students' background and common difficulties in listening comprehension skill.

Students' Background

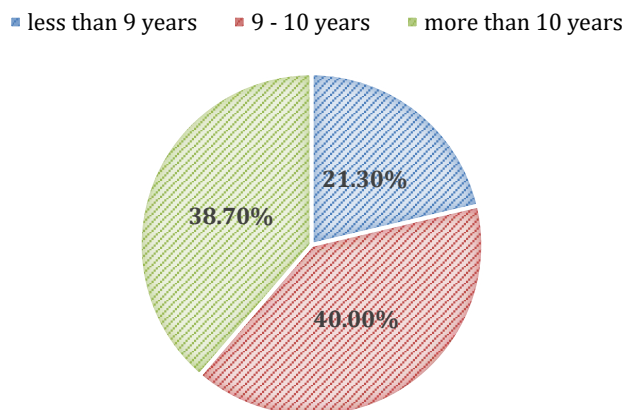


Figure 1. Students' Years of Learning English

It can be seen in figure 1, students have started learning English since they were young. Basing on the statistics, the researcher found that almost students have learnt English for 9 - 10 years were 40% - the highest percentage. It meant that they have learnt English since they were in grade six and they had seven years studying English before entering the university. However, the percentage of the students starting learning English since grade 1st or 2nd (about more than 10 years) was just 38.7%. Finally, the lowest one was the percentage of the learning years of the students who have studied for less than nine years were 21.3%. In addition, it could not be denied that in the past, students had to study many compulsory subjects along with learning English. It caused many problems in learning English because the time they spent for practicing it was restricted.

The Most Difficult Skill in Learning English

In the process of learning English, if students want to be good at English, they need to practice many skills together effectively. This figure below answered the question "Which skill is the most difficult?".

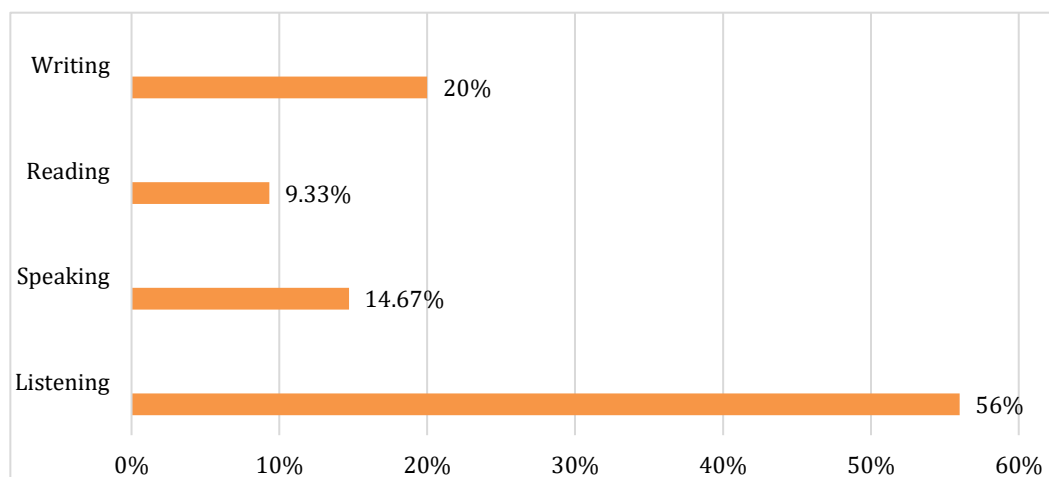


Figure 2. The Most Difficult Skill in Learning English

Referring to figure 2, almost students thought listening was the most difficult skill, with more half students choosing. It was simple to say that reading was easy to students, only 9.33% of the total. In the other hand, writing was also a difficult skill after listening. Besides, some students got difficulty in speaking with 14.67%. To sum up, listening is one of the most difficult skills, students must spend lots of time to practice and improve this skill.

Students' Attitude Toward the Importance of Listening Comprehension Skill

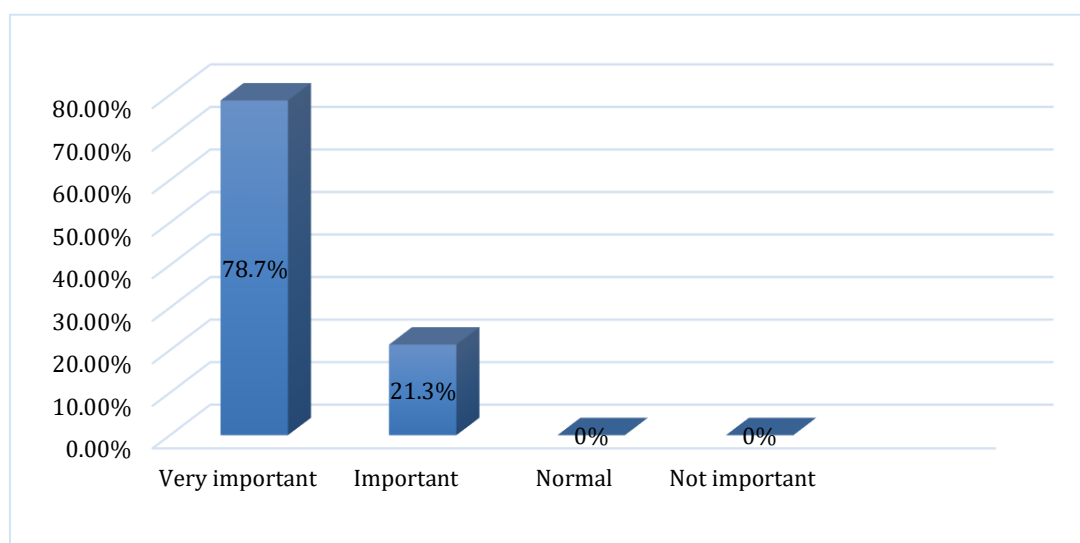


Figure 3. The Importance of Listening Comprehension Skill

According to the figure 3, all of students stated that listening skill was very important with 78.7% of the total. And the percentage of the importance of listening comprehension that students chose important is 21.3%. No-one chose normal and not important. Actually, English has become an international language and it is a useful tool for many aspects of

daily life. Therefore, learning English listening is very important for students who are majored English, they want to have a good job related to English in the future.

Students' Self-Evaluation on Their Listening Ability

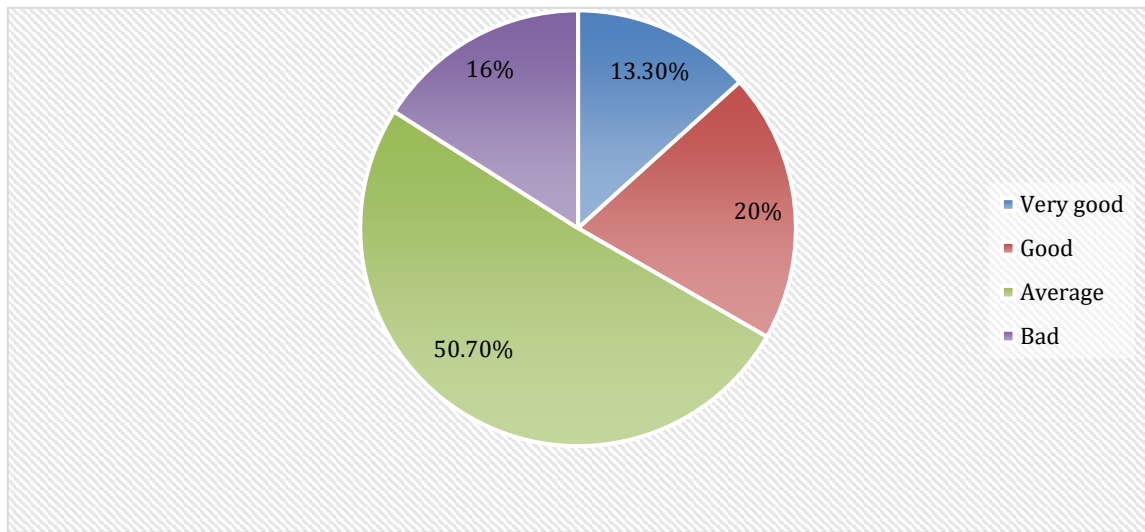


Figure 4. Students' Self-Evaluation on Their Listening Ability

When being asked "How do you evaluate your listening skill?", the results showed that the listening ability of 50.7% of the participants was average. Besides, there were 16% respondents said they were bad at listening. That means they could not receive information from speakers. However, there were some students good at listening; particularly, there were 20% students good and 13.3% very good at listening. From the statistics, this was reliable that English majored sophomores had many problems in listening subject.

The Frequency of Making Mistakes

To make the above implication clearer and know more about students' listening ability, the figure below will show that.

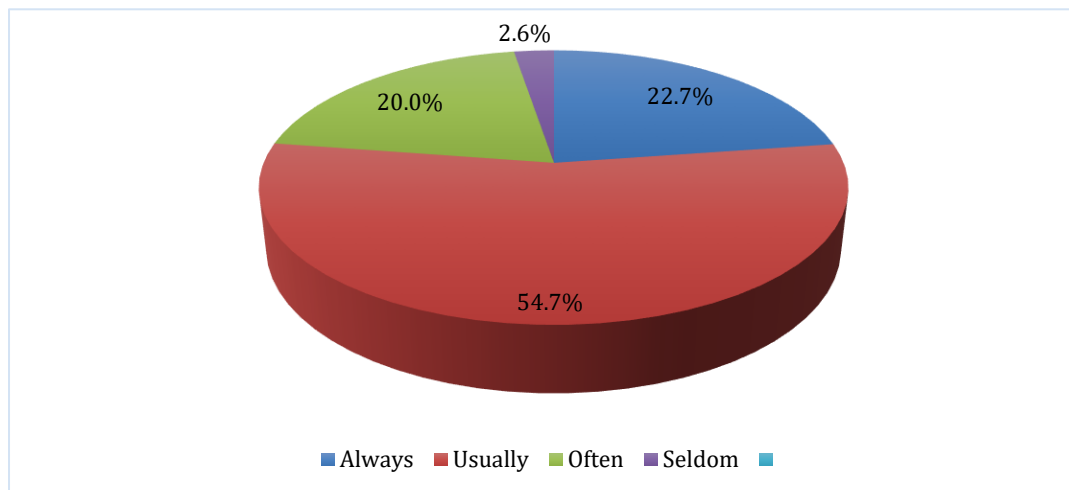


Figure 5. The Number of Students Having Difficulties in English Listening

According to figure 5, almost students had difficulties in listening English with other different rates. There were 54.7% students who answered that they usually encountered problems in listening. Besides, there were 22.7% students who always had difficulties. Moreover, students were often in trouble with 20%. Apart from these students, there were 2.6% students who answered they seldom had difficulties.

The Common Difficulties of Sophomores When Learning English Listening

In order to know more about the difficulties students faced in listening, these difficulties will be presented in following parts.

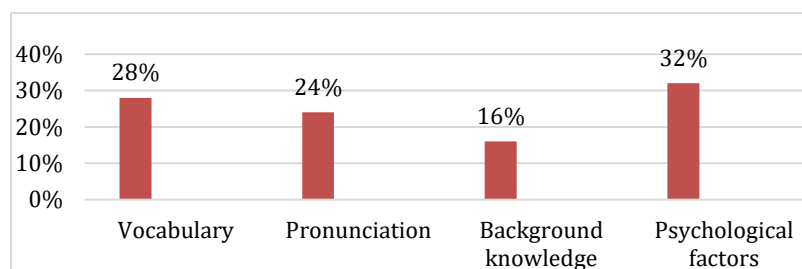


Figure 6. Difficulties in Listening Comprehension

It was surprised that psychological factors were the highest percentage, it accounted for 32% of the total. That meant psychological factors played an important role in listening. If students were nervous, listening process would be affected. Besides, many words had various meaning – polysemous words, they could not choose the appropriate word to complete the answer. Thus, vocabulary was not less important difficulty with 28% of the total. Moreover, even if there were familiar words, students could not recognize because of mispronunciation. They also made mistakes in pronunciation which was 24%. Lastly, students were usually confused, when they got the unfamiliar topics. Background knowledge comprised 16%.

Vocabulary

Vocabulary was the most important factor effecting learners' listening ability. It was hard to catch the meaning of sentence when lacking vocabulary. Learners might encounter many difficulties such as word choice, linking words, and specialized terminology vocabulary in listening comprehension process. These would be presented in the following figure.

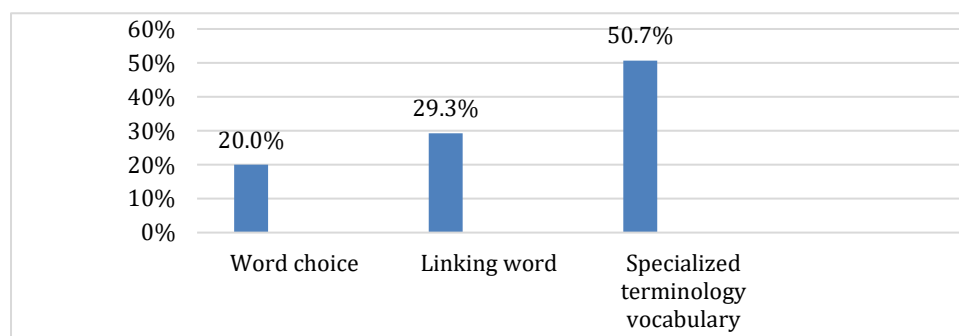


Figure 7. Difficulties in Vocabulary

It can be seen in figure 6, vocabulary comprised 28% of the difficulties in listening. Looking at the figure 7, specialized terminology vocabulary was a top choice of students who had difficulties in vocabulary. The percentage of specialized terminology vocabulary was up 50.7%. This showed that students seriously lacked vocabulary in term of specialized terminology. Besides, students were in trouble about word choice and linking word about 20% and 29.3%. Obviously, through this figure, students had difficulty. The table data below would show clearly.

Table 2. Difficulties in Vocabulary

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11. Lacking vocabulary knowledge is one of your barriers in listening.	49.34%	44%	4%	1.33%	1.33%
12. Your vocabulary is not sufficient to understand what speakers say.	29.3%	44%	22.7%	4%	0%
13. Many words are linked together, you cannot recognize in listening process.	40%	44%	14.67%	0%	1.33%
14. You cannot listen well because of lacking vocabulary about specialized terminology.	36%	48%	12%	0%	4%

According to the table 2, students agreed that “Lacking vocabulary knowledge is one of your barriers in listening.” There were 44% and 49.34% agreed and strongly agreed. Besides, there were two students did not admit.

With the statement 12, “Your vocabulary is not sufficient to understand what speakers say.” students agree was 44%. In addition, accounting for 22.7% students had no idea.

Moreover, with the statement 13, “Many words are linked together, you cannot recognize in listening process.” students agreed was 84% (44% strongly agreed and 40% agreed). There were 1.33% students who had opposite thinking.

The last one, students who agreed with the statement 14, “You cannot listen well because of lacking vocabulary about specialized terminology.” were 84% (36% strongly agreed and 48% agreed). There were 4% students who strongly disagreed.

To sum up, sophomores faced difficulty in vocabulary which counted from 73% to 93%, such as words choice, linking words, and specialized terminology vocabulary.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation was an important key to have a good listening. However, students often faced difficulties in pronunciation when listening.

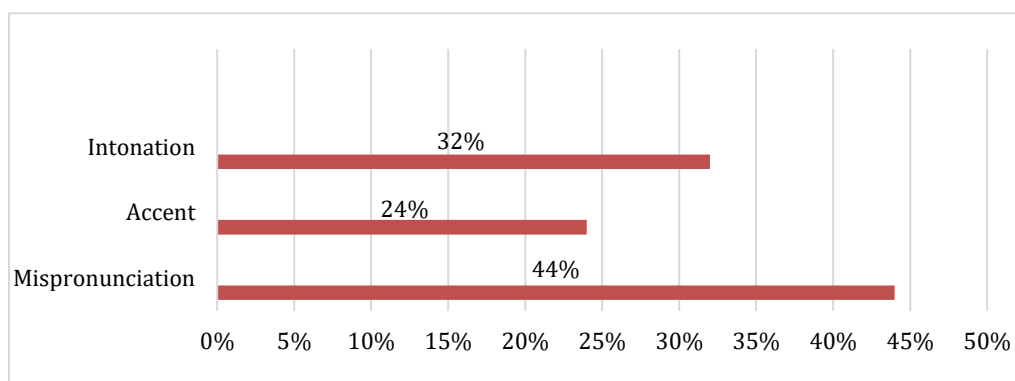


Figure 8: Difficulties in Pronunciation

It can be seen from figure 6, pronunciation accounted 24% of the difficulties in listening comprehension. There were some mistakes in pronunciation such as mispronunciation, accent and intonation. Mispronunciation was 44% - the highest percentage mistake, intonation was 32% and accent was 24% - the lowest percentage mistake. The table below would present clearly.

Table 3. Difficulties in Pronunciation

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15. Pronunciation is one of the important elements influencing your listening skills.	46.7%	42.7%	8%	2,6%	0%
16. You cannot recognize the familiar words because you have mispronunciation of those words.	22.7%	53.3%	14.67%	8%	1.33%
17. Unfamiliar accents both native and non-native speakers make you encounter difficulty.	29.3%	44%	18.7%	6.67%	1.33%
18. Different intonations make the same sentence have various meanings.	16%	62.7%	18.7%	2.6%	0%
19. You often misunderstand the meaning of one sentence if the speaker changes his intonation.	17.3%	48%	28%	6.7%	0%

From the data in table 3, students who agreed with the statement 15, “Pronunciation is one of the important elements influencing your listening skill.” were 89.4%. Some respondents had no idea with this statement, the percentage was 8%.

Besides, up to 76% (with 22.7% strongly agreed and 53.3% agreed) students agreed with the statement 16 that they cannot recognize the familiar words because they mispronounce the words. Moreover, 9.33% students thought that they can recognize the familiar words because they remember pronunciation of those words.

Additionally, students who agreed with the statement 17, “Unfamiliar accents both native and non-native speakers make you encounter difficulty.” were 44% and 29.3% strongly agreed. There were 8% students did not encounter because of the unfamiliar accents both native and non-native.

Furthermore, with the statement 18, “Different intonations make the same sentence have various meanings.” 78.7% students admitted, and comprising 18.7% students did not give idea.

The last one was statement 19, “You often misunderstand the meaning of one sentence if the speaker changes his intonation.” which accounted for 65.3% students agreed. Besides, up to 28% students did not give idea with this statement.

In summary, pronunciation is the most important factor in listening. Students should practice how to pronounce words correctly and get familiar with kinds of accent and intonation.

Background Knowledge

Sometimes, students had difficulties in listening because of lacking background knowledge. The chart below would show some difficulties in background knowledge.

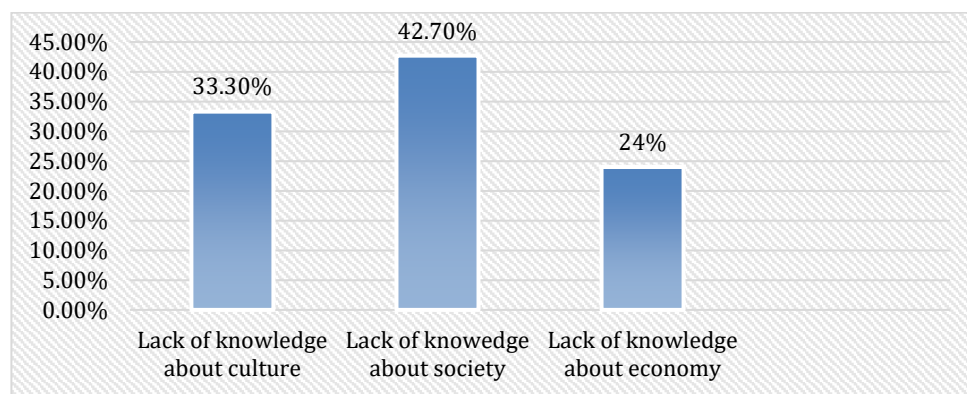


Figure 9. Difficulties in Background Knowledge

According to figure 6, background knowledge accounted for 16% - just a little of the difficulties in listening. The data from figure 9 showed that students often had obstacles in background knowledge about society up 42.7%. Besides, the knowledge about culture and economy were 33.3% and 24%. The table below would indicate that.

Table 4. Difficulties in Background Knowledge

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
20. With poor background knowledge, you cannot understand the main content of listening text.	30.7%	42.7%	13.3%	13.3%	0%
21. You usually translate what you hear into Vietnamese because of lacking the knowledge of background.	22.7%	46.7%	25.4%	2.6%	2.6%
22. You may misinterpret what the speakers say if you do not deeply find out their culture.	34.66%	49.34%	12%	9%	0%
23. Some vocabularies about society issues are strange for you.	24%	49.34%	20%	5,3%	1.33%
24. Some vocabularies about economic development bring a challenge to you.	24%	64%	10.67%	0%	1.33%

It can be seen from the table 4, students agreeing with the statement 20, “With poor background knowledge, you cannot understand the main content of listening text.” were 73.4% (with 42.7% agreed and 30.7% strongly agreed). There were 13.3% disagreed with the statement.

Next, with the statement 21, “You usually translate what you hear into Vietnamese because of lacking the knowledge of background.”, there were 46.7% agreed and 22.7% strongly agreed that students answered. There were up to 25.7% students who did not give idea.

Then, students who agreed with the statement 22, “You may misinterpret what the speakers say if you do not deeply find out their culture.” were 84%. The percentage of disagreed were 9%.

Furthermore, in the statement 23, "Some vocabularies about society issues are strange for you." the number of students agree were 73.33%. However, some students gave opposite thinking, particularly, 6.63% students (with 5.3% disagreed and 1.33% strongly disagreed).

In addition, the last statement, "Some vocabularies about economic development bring a challenge to you." had 88% including 24% strongly agreed and 64% agreed with it. On the other hand, the percentage of students who had no idea with 10.67%.

Consequently, students had difficulties counted from 73% to 88% including lacking background knowledge about culture, society and economy.

To sum up, three main reasons made it difficult for students' listening ability are vocabulary, pronunciation and background knowledge. Thus, to improve students' listening ability, they should practice listening skill more and more.

Psychological Factors

It can be seen from the figure 6, psychological factors comprised 32% - the highest percentage of difficulties in listening. Along with the difficulties belonging to vocabulary, pronunciation and background knowledge, psychological factors were also the elements that blocked students' listening ability. This below figure would show the results of the survey about psychological factors of students in learning listening comprehension.

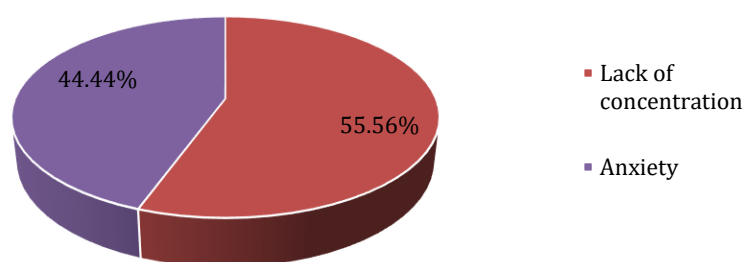


Figure 10: Difficulties in Psychological Factors

Looking at the figure 10, lack of concentration was an important factor which affected listening with 55.56% students. This proved that students did not pay attention in class. Besides, students' anxiety made them difficult; particularly, anxiety comprised 44.44%. These difficulties would be represented below.

Lack of Concentration

Table 5. Difficulties in Lacking of Concentration

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
25. Lack of concentration is a psychological barrier in learning listening.	28%	46.7%	17.27%	6.7%	1.33%
26. It is difficult for you to concentrate on a foreign language.	18.7%	30.7%	36%	12%	2.6%
27. You do not have good environment that affect your concentrate in listening.	18.7%	29.3%	37.33%	10.67%	4%
28. You cannot concentrate on listening in class and crowded place.	16%	40%	32%	5.3%	6.7%

Referring to the table 5, lack of concentration was a common problem that restricted students' listening ability (statement 25). Therefore, over 70% of them (28% strongly agreed and 46.7% agreed) answered.

Next, 49.4% students thought "It is difficult for you to concentrate on a foreign language." Only 8.03% (including 6.7% disagreed and 1.33% strongly disagreed) students gave opposite thinking.

No having good environment made students difficult in listening (statement 27); particularly, 18.7% strongly agreed and 29.3% agreed. In contrast, some students showed different ideas.

Additionally, over 50% students of them (16% strongly agreed and 40 % agreed) admitted that they had no concentration in crowded (statement 28). On the other hand, some students thought against with 12% disagreed.

Generally, students had problems counted from 48% to 74% because of lacking concentration. They should pay attention in listening class to listen better.

Anxiety

Anxiety was one of psychological factors that affected students' listening ability. Let's see table 6.

Table 6: Difficulties in Anxiety

Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
29. Anxiety can be considered as an obstacle in listening.	30.7%	46.7%	16%	6.7%	0%
30. Anxiety makes you nervous and afraid and thus contributes to poor performance.	22.7%	58.7%	13.3%	5.3%	0%
31. Sometimes, you forget what you hear because of nervousness.	24%	42.7%	26.6%	6.7%	0%
32. You feel worried when doing unfamiliar task.	20%	50.7%	25.3%	4%	0%

According to the data, it was clear that no one chose the column of strongly disagree", so the percentage was zero. Students stated that they faced problems because their anxiety (statement 29). In this statement, over 75% of them (including 30.7% strongly agreed and 46.7% agreed) admitted.

Next, in the statement 30, "Anxiety makes you nervous and afraid and thus contributes to poor performance." more than 80% of them chose (with 22.7% strongly agreed and 58.7% agreed). In contrast, some students thought anxiety did not make them nervous and afraid with 5.3%.

In addition, students sometimes forgot what they heard because of nervousness (statement 31); particularly, up to 66.7% students chose agree. Specially, 26.6% students had the neutral option.

Actually, students admitted that they worried when doing unfamiliar tasks (statement 32) comprised 70.7% (20% strongly agreed and 50.7% agreed). Besides, a few students thought they could do unfamiliar tasks accounting for 4%.

To sum up, basing on analyzed data, students felt anxiety in listening counted from 66% to 81%.

Results from Interviews

As mentioned in chapter 3, another instrument was also useful for bringing a reliable research. After analyzing the interviews of ten English majored sophomores carefully, the final results were similar with the results of the questionnaires.

First of all, when being asked, "Does listening in English challenge you?" there were 9/10 interviewees admitted that they were challenged by listening. Besides, they also added that, they encountered many difficulties in this subject. The vocabulary knowledge was not enough to understand what other people say. Additionally, the accents and intonations of different speakers made them unfamiliar.

In contrast, one student said that listening did not challenge him, he added, "*Listening was easier than other skills (speaking, reading and writing)*". He thought writing was the most difficult. However, listening seemed to be a challenge for the students. Comparing with other skills, it was the skill that many students believed to be the most difficult because of the different accents and intonations, linking words, final sounds, background knowledge, etc. Secondly, for the next question, "What difficulties do you often encounter in learning listening?", the results of the interviews in accord with the responds of questionnaires. All of students (10/10) had some difficulties in listening including vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge. Besides, "*Some psychological factors as noise outside the door, my concentration and my anxiety also made me had difficulties.*" expressed by one student. It could be said that during listening process, these above factors greatly affected students. They would not hear without vocabulary, they would not distinguish words when the speakers had many different accents and intonations. Furthermore, they will confuse when doing unfamiliar topics such as culture, society and economy.

Lastly, the last question, "Some above difficulties, what is the most difficult?", there were different ideas in this question. There were 3/10 students who answered vocabulary was the most difficult. "*Lack of vocabulary, I cannot understand the main content of the lecture or conversation*" or "*many words in listening text I do not know, I could not recognize those words in listening text because they linked together when speakers say.*" said by two students. Next, there were 3/10 students who chose pronunciation was the most difficult. They often could not understand what speakers said. One student said "*the accents of speakers unfamiliar with speakers whose he was learned*". In addition, they usually forgot how the words pronounced, this led them misunderstand among words. Not only pronunciation and vocabulary were the most difficult, but also background knowledge. There were 2/10 respondents who had difficulty about background knowledge. Actually, without background knowledge, students could not guess the content of topic that they prepared to listen. And the rest two students who were difficulty with psychological factors. They showed that they did not catch up the voice of the speakers, if the speakers spoke too fast, they could not hear. Besides, "*I lost my concentration because of the noise outside*" or "*before doing listening I'm very nervous.*" talked by interviewees.

Generally, after analyzing the interviews, students had some problems in listening. It was the fact that listening was an uneasy skill, it required learners spend time to practice and improve.

Discussion

Thanks to the survey about the students' opinion in learning English, the researcher could evaluate their real thinking about learning English and listening. It can be said that learning English was very important in their thought. Regarding students' evaluation about their own listening skill, most of students rated that their listening skills were average. After analyzing the survey of the questionnaires and the paper interview, it was clear that students faced various problem in learning listening comprehension which mostly some aspects of language (vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge) and some psychological factors (lack of concentration and anxiety). The researcher would like discuss them one by one to understand on such problems.

Firstly, lacking vocabulary was one of barriers in listening ability. Students' vocabulary was not enough to understand what speaker said. This confirms previous findings of Wilkins (1993) who shared in a study that vocabulary was very important because without words we cannot speak at all, leading without listening. The speakers often linked the final sound with the first sound to make a smooth sentence, it was hard for students to interpret the words. On the other hand, students lacked specialized terminology vocabulary. Therefore, when doing listening test, they could not listen well.

Secondly, pronunciation was the second factor important influencing listening process. Students had difficulty to find out what the speakers said or recognized the familiar words because they forgot how to pronounce those words. Besides, it was not easy to realize the listening texts because of the diverse accents. This related to previous study of Munro and Derwing (1995) who stated that, *"Too many accented speeches can lead to an important reduction in comprehension."* One more problem in term of aspects of language was intonation of speakers. Students could not get the message conveyed in speech because of the effect of intonation on the meaning of sentence.

Thirdly, it was realized that students' ability was also affected by background knowledge. If students did not have prior background about some fields, they could not understand the whole message of topic. Some vocabulary about culture, society or economy of countries was strange for students. Lacking of background knowledge made it difficult for them to express what they wanted to say. Thus, having previous background knowledge will help students much in listening. This was consistent with previous results of Anderson and Lynch (2000).

Lastly, psychological factors were the highest gap that students must to overcome. They were not successful if they were always nervous or worried. They had to get familiar with environment condition as noise, bad material, etc. Because sometimes, they could not listen smoothly. Besides, it would be easier to listen speakers who had a low speech rate. Furthermore, a long speech made students feel nervous, they could not concentrate affecting their performance. The psychological factors played a negative role in listening comprehension such as anxiety, frustration whether they could understand the listening text or not.

To sum up, the research was found out some difficulties of sophomores. It was expected that students find out some solutions to self-study and get higher mark in their listening subject.

Conclusions

Nowadays, English is very popular in our life. It is a tool to communicate with others. As a matter of research, listening skill is important not only learning foreign language but also daily communication. However, being one of student majoring in English, I can clearly understand the problems that students encounter in learning listening. This research is conducted so as to find out the difficulties students are facing and help them solve problems and find better methods of learning.

The results from analysis of the questionnaires and paper interview showed that students faced various kinds of difficulties in listening comprehension such as: vocabulary (new word, linking words and specialized terminology), pronunciation (mispronunciation, accent and intonation), background knowledge (lack of knowledge about culture, society and economy) and psychological factors (lack of concentration and anxiety). It is helpful to recognize some problems. Students have to make a lot of efforts to overcome their difficulties. They should self-study and practice listening more to increase their skill.

To sum up, investigating the difficulties in studying English listening is the useful method to help English majored sophomore learn listening effectively. From these mentioned difficulties, students can offer appropriate solution for their improvement.

Recommendations

This research is considered as the premise for upcoming research. Based on the research results, other researchers can be able to do more in-depth research on the difficulties encountered by sophomores in listening. Hopefully, in the future, other researchers have more time to do all of aspects of listening. Researches should be done widely both

English majored and English non-majored. From there, teachers can find out appropriate teaching methods and listening becomes more interesting to students.

Limitations

This study only focused on vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge and psychological factors. In addition, there were two instruments, but it was not enough to increase the high reliability. In the further research, it is necessary to have other difficulties in listening and more than two instruments.

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