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A MINOR STUDY ON MAIN DIFFICULTIES

IN LEARNING LISTENING SKILLS PERCEIVED

BY FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS OF FACULTY OF ENGLISH

LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION, ULIS, VNU

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KHOÁ LUẬN TỐT NGHIỆP

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ABSTRACT

Listening comprehension plays a significant role in daily communication and in educational process. In spite of its importance, the state of teaching and learning listening has long been ignored, especially in rural areas in Vietnam. A large number of students, who come from countryside, suffer a serious disturbance in learning listening when entering university. The present study attempts to investigate the listening problems perceived by first-year students of FELTE, ULIS, VNU. To address the research problems, the paper used questionnaire and semi-structured interview as the main research instruments to collect data. Brief descriptions of participants as well as the data collection methods also were provided. The results of the study reveal that the majority of listening comprehension difficulties pertaining to four main categories: the speakers, the listeners, the materials, and the physical setting. In accordance with exploring the hindrances, some learning strategies employed by freshmen are introduced as well. Based on the findings of the study, some pedagogical implications are proposed for teachers and students in their teaching and learning listening skill.

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Abbreviations

ESL: English as a Second Language

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FELTE: Faculty of English Language Teacher Education

L2: Second Language

S1: Student 1

S2: Student 2

ULIS: University of Languages and International Studies

VNU: Vietnam National University

PART I. INTRODUCTION

1.   Rationale of the study

Listening is the most frequently used skill in daily life communication (Morley, 1999; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Mendelsohn (1994) sees that listening takes up forty-five to fifty percent of the total time in communication. Therefore, it is undeniable that listening is essential both to communicate and to learn a foreign language.

Obviously, listening skill is extremely important in acquiring a language because it provides language input. According to Krashen et al (1984, as cited in Hamouda, A., 2012), only when students absorb enough the comprehensible input, does the acquisition happen. Rost (1994, as cited in Hamouda, A., 2012) also claims that listening plays a vital role in learning language in particular and in communication in general because it provides input for learners. In addition, Krashen believes that without understanding the linguistic input, the students cannot acquire any level of language. Thus, listening is a fundamental language skill, and as such, it merits the top priority among the four skill areas for language students. Listening, therefore, is regarded crucial to not only a receptive skill but also the development of spoken language proficiency.

Furthermore, English has been widely used as a major language in daily life and in many education levels all over the world, both native and non-native English speaking countries. Listening comprehension is becoming more and more important in acquiring a new language as well as knowledge displayed in lectures and in media. Especially, it is the vital skill for most of the English as second language learners (ESL).

In spite of its importance in learning English listening, the state of teaching and learning listening skill has long been ignored and gives little consideration. What is

more, the Vietnamese education system focuses more on coaching exams with much attention to grammar, reading and vocabulary. Therefore, listening is included in course books in many educational levels; however, it somehow is neglected by the teachers during the lessons. As a result, many Vietnamese students, even those who get high marks in grammatical tests, cannot communicate successfully with the foreigners in daily conversations. According to Nguyen (2008), the inability to comprehend what the native speakers say because of the failure at listening comprehension is the most severe reason.

In addition, in Vietnam, countryside students have no exposure to English language apart from that they receive in the classroom. Students' fundamental means of listening English come from the teacher's voice. Furthermore, the low quality of cassettes has a detectable effect on the process of practicing and testing listening, and especially in the countryside, where the cassette players are either poor quality or run off batteries. The students have the difficulties in listening because of the low-standard sound. For those reasons, most of the students in rural and mountainous areas, suffer a terrible shock when learning to listen in the university. In spite of the diversity of literature in this field, little attention to the feasible solutions and practical purposes is paid. Moreover, in University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS), Vietnam National University (VNU), few research provide detailed description of first-year students issues in learning listening. With the purpose of helping students to enhance their listening skills, this study is conducted to raise the perception of the importance of listening in learning English as well as their listening difficulties. Additionally, this thesis provides the valuable insights and pedagogical implications for both teachers and students.

2.　　　Aims of the study

The study aims at:

- Investigating the difficulties and the causes in learning listening skills perceived by Faculty of English Language Teacher Education (FELTE) first year mainstream students at University of Languages and International Studies (ULIS).
- Presenting some solutions that the students apply to improve their (self-) study of Listening Skills.

3. Objectives of the study and research questions

As far as the researcher knows, listening is the most difficult skill for first year students, especially for those who come from the countryside and remote areas. Listening comprehension is somewhat a terrible nightmare for them. This study is undertaken with the hope of improving the listening ability and providing some insights into how the students perceived about the usefulness of listening strategies. The research seeks the answers for the following questions:

1. *What are some main listening difficulties perceived by FELTE first year mainstream students?*
2. *What are the listening strategies applied by the students?*

4. Significance of the study

The study mainly aims at pointing out the causes of difficulties in learning listening of by FELTE freshmen. Additionally, the researcher also investigates the learning strategies applied by first-year students in learning listening. As a result, once having been completed, the study is expected to bring considerable benefits to both teachers and students. Pedagogically, the findings and suggestions of this study are believed to enhance the teaching and listening process of listening to beginning-level Vietnamese college students in general and ULIS first -year students in particular.

The results of this study may be a good help for the students themselves and other people who are interested in this field. Furthermore, the findings of this study also provide comments for listening material developers as well.

More importantly, the research findings would raise the teachers' awareness of the students' difficulty, thereby guiding them in reconstructing their program of teaching to suit their students' needs.

5. Scope of the study

Within the framework of this study, the researcher primarily puts the emphasis on two things. Firstly, this study focuses on finding the possible causes perceived by first year students in the FELTE at ULIS. Secondly, the participants of this study are the freshmen in the FELTE at ULIS who have just experienced a semester of learning listening at the university.

In terms of participants, this research primarily puts the emphasis on investigating first-year students in EFL because they have just passed the entrance exam to university; they have not learnt some strategies to improve their listening skills.

Apart from clarification of the problems, the researcher desires to suggest some feasible solutions for the students to achieve better result in learning listening. Therefore, proper teaching methods can be adopted to help them overcome the difficulties.

6. Methods of the study

The research was undertaken as a combined study of both qualitative and quantitative methods, that is, to take advantages of **semi-structured interviews** and **survey questionnaire** as main research tools to collect data.

The researcher chooses the first year main stream students for the study because they have just entered the university; so that they lack many experiences. In addition, they face various kinds of problems that higher-level students do not. Digging in deep to their problems is the first step to help them improve their listening skills as well as their other language skills. The researcher chooses participants randomly from first-year main stream students (QH2012) to avoid biased results.

Beyond the two surveys, further information has been collected from formal and informal conversations with first-year students and teachers in FELTE at ULIS.

7.   Overview of the rest of the study

The research consists of three parts. Apart from part I (Introduction) introduced above, it includes two other parts as follows:

Part II: Development: this part comprises of three chapters. Chapter one is literature review with the investigation of prior literature to clarify some major terms in the study. In chapter two (Methodology), the methods and the process to collect data are presented in this chapter. The last chapter is Findings and discussion, the collected data in the previous part is processed to answer the research questions.

Part III: In this part, the researcher summarizes all the findings revealed, draws to conclusions, and suggests some contributions of the study.

PART II. DEVELOPMENT

Chapter 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

Following the rationale and the research questions presented in the previous part, a review of the related studies in this field is introduced in this chapter. The focuses of this part are on the definition of listening skills, the importance of listening in acquiring of a foreign language, and the difficulties when learning listening, which are considered as the theoretical background for the research.

Theoretical background for the research is taken from the works of Underwood (1989), Mendelsohn (1994), Buck (2001), Rost (1994), Vandergriff (1997), Yagang (1993), Ur (1984), Anderson and Lynch (1988), Brown & Yule (1983), Butt(2010) etc.

1.1 Definition of listening and listening comprehension

In language teaching, "listening skills" means listening and understanding skills or listening comprehension skills. This is also the sense of listening used in this thesis, where listening is meant trying to understand the oral messages people are conveying.

There are a large number of definitions of listening proposed by different scholars. According to Underwood (1989), listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear. Meanwhile, Mendelsohn (1994) defines listening as the ability to understand the spoken language of native speakers.

Superficially, listening appears to be a passive skill, but in fact, it is always an active process. Listening is not just the process of receiving the information from the speakers, the students do not only listen to it but they are also able to process it, interpret it, understand it, evaluate it and eventually respond to it effectively (Underwood, 1989). It means that the after perceiving the oral information, the students must be able to process it in their brains. They can analyze the illocutionary force of the utterances and after that make the response. Moreover, Buck (2001) states

that "listening comprehension is an active process of constructing meaning and this is done by applying knowledge to the incoming sound". Sharing the same ideas with Buck, Rost (2002) sees listening as a process of receiving the information from the speakers, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speakers and responding, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy.

In conclusion, from all above definitions, we perceive that listening is not just hearing, but it is an "*active and dynamic process*" which contains various kinds of activities such as recognizing the messages from the speakers, remembering and making inference based on them.

1.2   The importance of listening skills in learning

Listening is important in social communication, academic success and language acquisition. Needless to say, listening effectively is the sufficient condition for the students to take part in oral communication. The communicating process will break down when the listeners fail to understand what the speakers say (Underwood, 1989). Furthermore, being able to listen to English well, the students have a good chance to approach the broad knowledge in the outside world. Noticeably, listening is the basic step to get the input in learning a language.

In any language classroom, listening skill plays a significant role in the development of other language skills. Vandergriff (1997) claims that listening internalizes not only the rules of language skills but also facilitates the emergence of other skills. To be more specific, listening helps the students to pronounce exactly and recognize the spoken form of words. When learning a new word, students have to listen to it several times before identifying it. It is said that listening provides the comprehensive supplier for understanding and acquiring a new language. Precisely, without receiving the necessary language input at the right level, the learning process

cannot take place. Several studies prove that the aural input plays such a vital role in founding all aspects of language and cognitive development. Krashen (1985) believes that understanding linguistic information is the key to acquire language. What is more, the more the students listen, the more vocabulary, proficiency and the better language usage they have (Barker, 1971). These claims are supported by Stevenson (2010). He emphasizes the significance of listening for L2 learners, especially ESL learners. In his study, he pinpoints that:

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

In conclusion, listening plays such an essential role in L2 acquisition. this skill is not only a tool to acquire other sources of knowledge but also provides L2 learners with the most important patterns of language.

1.3 Difficulties in learning English listening as discussed in previous studies

It is taken for granted that people can listen in the mother tongue with little or no effort. However, learning to listen in the second language is more difficult because it does not only require the ability of the listeners, but also is affected by the speakers, the physical factors, the content of the listening text and the physical setting in the classroom.

Many English students will sooner or later find themselves in real life situations where they need to listen to English for a range of purposes. In these cases, many problems arise.

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1.3.1   Difficulties from the speakers

- The accents

Firstly, many foreign language learners are surprised and dismayed when listening to someone else but not their teachers because they are used to their teacher's **accents**. Moreover, understanding the spoken form of language requires the adaptation of the idiosyncrasies of a particular speaker (Underwood, 1989). Ikeno and Hansen (cited in Bloomfield et al., 2010) find that unfamiliar accents lead to lower accuracy. Accented speech has been found to affect both the extent to which listeners successfully realize a speaker's message and the effort involved as listeners identify particular words in the message (Floccia et al., 2009). To some extent, in academic courses, the students are quite familiar with the native speakers like American or English; however, in reality, they can listen to the speakers from non-native English speaking countries as well. Consequently, they cannot catch the words or convey the messages of the conversations and the broken down communication is the outcome.

- **The speed of the speakers**

Secondly, **the speed of the speakers** also hinders the learners in their effort of learning English. Because the students cannot sort them out when listening before they disappear. It is not the same as remaining reading text on the page for them to retrieve whenever they want. Sometimes, while they are working with this part, they miss the next part. Most of the foreign language students perceive that native speakers speak too fast and that makes it difficult for them to follow (Brown & Yule, 1983). Similarly, Butt (2010) has the same ideas in negative impacts of the native speakers to listening comprehension. This coincides with the results of the studies done by Flowerdew and Miller (1992) who has reported that their subject unanimously rated speed of delivery as one of the greatest obstacles to understanding. The students can play recorded materials again and again until getting the information.

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- **Using slang and colloquial words**

Colloquial language is a special challenge. If listening materials are made up of everyday conversation, they may contain a lot of colloquial words and expressions, such as *stuff* for *material*, *guy* for *man*, etc., as well as slang. Students who have been exposed mainly to formal or bookish English may not be familiar with these expressions. Brown (1992) points out that ESL learners who have been exposed to standard written English and "textbook" language sometimes find it surprising and difficult to deal with colloquial language.

- **Hesitations and pauses:**

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

1.3.2   Difficulties from the content

- **The density of information**

It should be taken into account that density information is one of the difficult for the students, especially the beginners. The dense passage is a long one (Rost, 2006) with the great amount of information included. Again, greater information density is believed to make higher cognitive demands of L2 listeners, which may increase the effort involved in listening comprehension (Gilmore, 2004).

- **The complex text**

In some cases, the organization of the text is rather complex. Cervantes and Gainer (1992) found that listeners hearing a syntactically simplified version of a lecture scored significantly higher on a recall test than did listeners hearing a more complex version of the lecture. Therefore, if the students do not have ability to draw a clear outline of this text, they also fail to catch the information effectively.

- **The reduced form, elision and assimilation**

In articulating clauses, the speakers desire to express the meanings effectively. Hence, the words that play a less crucial role in the message may be slurred or dropped, and other words may be more prominent (Brown, 1977). According to Madsen and Bowen (1978), spoken English is in particular characterized by three features of sandhi-variation: contraction (e.g., *gonna, wanna, hasta*), reduction (e.g., "*could*" /kʊd/ is reduced to /kəd/ in a sentence like *we could go to the park this afternoon*), and assimilation (e.g., */hieɪtʃərləntʃ/* for "He ate your lunch").

Johana (2005) pinpoints that accommodatory phonological processes affect precisely the points at which the listener needs unambiguous information—namely word beginnings and endings. To be more specific, students may have some troubles in materials such as assimilation, elision or linking word. Liaison (the linking of words in the speech when the second word begins with a vowel, e.g., an orange) and elision (leaving out a sound or sounds, e.g., suppose may be pronounced in rapid speech) are common phenomena that make it difficult for students to distinguish or recognize individual words in the stream of speech. They are used to seeing words written as discrete entities in their textbooks.

- **The intonation and stress**

One of the outstanding features of English is stress and intonation. The purpose of stress is to highlight content words to convey the meaning. Students somehow cannot distinguish between the content and function words. Additionally, they do not know the fact that words in spoken continuous speech are often not given the same stress as they are said in isolation (Underwood, 1989). As a result, they cannot hear the word that they already know. Also, foreign students sometimes fail to recognize the grammar points in listening because of the stress.

- **The noise and redundancy**

When listening, the listeners often have to cope with the amount of noise. Some words are may be drowned by outside interference, such as the surrounding sounds. The foreign language learners must put more effort to grasp the meaning among these noises. Sometimes, they cannot get the point because of the interruption of noise. Besides, redundant utterances may take the form of repetitions, false starts, re-phrasings, self-corrections, elaborations, tautologies, and apparently meaningless additions such as "I mean" or "you know" (Ur, 1984). This redundancy is a natural feature of speech and may be either a help or a hindrance, depending on the students' levels. It may make it more difficult for beginners to understand what the speaker is saying; on the other hand, it may give advanced students more time to "tune in" to the speaker's voice and speech style.

- **Discourse markers**

Apart from the above difficulties, failure to recognize signal words of the speakers is also an obstacle to the learners. The speakers use the discourse makers to indicate that they are moving the ideas, giving examples, or repeating the previous points (Underwood, 1989). Being unable to listen to these markers will prevent the learners from following the continuous stream of the speech.

1.3.3   *Difficulties from learners*
- **Lack of vocabulary and background knowledge**

Lack of socio-cultural, factual, and contextual knowledge of the target language can pose an obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express its culture (Anderson & Lynch, 1988).Knowledge of the world help is used to help understand the messages basing on some key words. To put it in another way, the more broadened knowledge you have, the easier you can catch the point. If the students listen to an unfamiliar topic, they will be panic and confused; consequently, they may fail to listen.

Other than the shortage of background knowledge, the limitation of vocabulary also prevents students from listening comprehensively. Yagang (1993) suggests that the limited vocabulary of collocations and slangs prevents the students from guessing and predicting the content in general and the missing words and phrases in particular.

- **Incorrect pronunciation:**

It is obvious that good pronunciation contributes significantly in listening skill. It could help students to recognize and write down the correct form of words. Forming a habit of checking the vocabulary is one of the ways to improve pronunciation. Gilakjani (2012) provides empirical evidence that learners with good English pronunciation are likely understood even if they make errors in other areas; whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not even if their grammar is perfect.

- **Physical factors**

It is believed that in a long comprehension exercise, a learner's grasp of the content is much better at the beginning and gets progressively worse as he/she goes on. Due to the psychological phenomenon, at the end of the lesson the students often run out of energy and enthusiasm for studying. Yagang (1993) states that listening is not a simple process; in contrast, it is a complex psychological one. It means that when a student feels anxious or nervous, he or she cannot concentrate. More importantly, the classroom atmosphere and surrounding environment also can distract them from their listening. For instance, the listeners cannot pay attention to the listening if the others are talking or there are noises in the tape recording.

1.3.4   Difficulties from physical setting
- **Poor quality of the equipment and facilities**

Unclear sounds resulting from poor-quality equipment can interfere with the listener's comprehension. In addition, in a crowded classroom, the students who sit at the end of the classroom may not listen to the lessons clearly. According to Chetchumlong (1987), the scarcity of opportunities to listen to variety of spoken texts

with the aid of good equipments and learn English with native speakers, especially in rural areas, contributes to listening performance. Moreover, large classroom, noises surrounding and crowded class also have negative impact on listening.

- **Using audio**

Moreover, in listening lessons, the students often practice with audio recording. Therefore, they cannot guess what the speakers are saying without watching. On the other hand, according to Hemei (1997, cited in Çakir, 2006), video is a rich and valuable resource; and it it well-liked by both students and teachers. Obviously, video makes meaning clearer by illustrating relationships in a way that is not possible with words, which proves a well-known saying that a picture is worth thousand words. This is in the line with Yagang (1994) and Harmer (2001) that not seeing the speaker's gesture and facial expressions makes it more difficult for the listener to understand the speaker's meaning.

1.4 Chapter summary:

This chapter examines the prior literature related to listening difficulties. With a description of a huge amount of academic study, the researcher hopes that she has gained enough relevant knowledge for her own study. However, it can be seen that most literature is written in the context of foreign countries that somehow is not appropriate for Vietnamese students. Therefore, with the own observation and detailed explanation presented in the following chapters, the researcher hopes to compensate for the above limitation.

Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1   Population and participant's selection methods

2.1.1   Population

This study is carried out in the English department at ULIS, VNU to explore the difficulties in learning listening skill. The main population of this research is first year students who have learnt listening as a main subject at university. The research is limited to the first year mainstream students at FELTE, ULIS because of the following reasons. First, such freshmen have reached a certain level of English after graduating from the high school. To some extent, they have passed the entrance exam to university and experienced at least one semester of learning English as a major. Besides, they get accustomed to listening skill as a separate subject at university, unlike what they have learnt in the high school. More precisely, a totally different way of learning English is provided. In the high school, the students focused the majority of their time on grammar but ignored other skills. As a result, in the new learning approach, it will be a significant obstacle. Moreover, they have got opportunity to practice listening skill through doing exercises and assignments.   In conclusion, figuring out and dealing with these problems in their first steps of acquiring English are extremely urgent.

In addition, the first year students are categorized into three groups according to their majors and their forms of training. In terms of their majors, they are classified into three groups: teacher training students, translation group, and double-majors. Regarding their forms of training, they are also divided into three groups: fast-track, mainstream and ethnic minority group. Base on the researcher's information, the syllabuses are different from teacher training students, translation group to double degree group. Therefore, within the scope of the study, the translation group, double-majors, fast-track and ethnic minority group are excluded. The researcher just hopes to

investigate the mainstream teacher training freshmen from QH.12. F.1.E3 to QH.12.F.1.E9.

The study was conducted with the participation of 150 first-year students from six classes at FELTE, ULIS, VNU to answer both of the research questions. They come from different areas around Vietnam with various levels in listening skills. Afterwards, the collected results are processed by quantitative analysis method to illustrate the survey findings.

2.1.2 Sampling methods

As mentioned above, the study involved the participation of 150 students from five classes. The researchers would like to apply convenience sampling strategy. The researcher selected randomly 25 students from six classes in FELTE, ULIS, VNU. The more details are presented in the table below:

Table 1: Participants in the study

Class	Number of participants
12E3	25
12E4	25
12E5	25
12E6	25
12E7	25
12E8	25

Moreover, some background information of the participants is provided in the following table to support for the data analysis:

Table 2: Participants' hometowns

		Number of participants
Hometowns	City	48
	Countryside	72
	Mountainous areas	30

The participants account for approximately 75 % of the whole population that the researchers hope to be large enough to make up for the limitation of the convenience sampling procedure employed.

2.2   Data collection methods

2.2.1   Survey questionnaires

2.2.1.1   Justification of using questionnaires

As mentioned in the previous section, the questionnaires are chosen as a data collection method for the study. On making such decision, the researcher makes carefully consideration between the advantages and disadvantages of this kind of tools. The popularity of using questionnaire in research is because of the ease of their construction, the extreme versatility, and the capacity of gathering a large amount of information quickly. In addition to the time benefits, the questionnaires are also attracted by researcher efforts and financial resources. With regard to the time efficiency, Dornyei (2003) claims that questionnaire can be used "to collect a huge amount of information in less than an hour" (p.9). Furthermore, with the support of the modern computer software, the time and the expense to processing data could be

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minimized. Therefore, this tool is the most suitable collection method in the researcher's point of view.

However, questionnaires have some limitations and sometimes they lead to the unrealizable and invalid data by designing an ill-constructed one. The drawbacks of this method comprise the simplicity and superficiality (Moser & Kalton, 1971), the unreliable and unmotivated respondents (Hopkins, Stanley, & Hopkins. 1990), social desirability bias (Oppenheim, 1992), and the halo effect. Therefore, the questionnaires have been carefully designed to minimize these weaknesses.

2.2.1.2 *Description of survey questionnaire*s

A self-reporting questionnaire (see Appendix) was developed to collect the relevant data about the listening difficulties as well as the solutions. The questionnaire contains 42 question items. In more detail, questions # 1, # 2 and # 3 are designed to investigate the students' general perception about learning listening and their ability. 28 question items (questions # 4 to 31) are written in the form of numerical rating skill from one to five. This type of close-ended questions is easier and faster for the researcher to analyze the results.

Moreover, 28 items are aimed at examining how frequently freshmen encounter listening difficulties listed out in the questionnaires. The levels of frequency are ranked from 1-5, from the least frequency to the most frequency. In addition, the researcher would like to investigate the level of difficulty of these obstacles. Also, another scale of 1-5 is used to measure how difficult they are. To be more specific, from the question #33 to question #42 in part B, the same two scales from 1 to 5 and from one to three, which assess the frequency of use and usefulness of learning listening strategies, are also used.

In general, it can be said that the questionnaires could help the researchers to collect data for answering the research questions. Only when administered to the

participants successfully, however, could these questionnaires provide the researcher with relevant information.

<p style="text-align:center">2.2.1.3 *Procedure of delivering the questionnaire*s</p>

Step 1: Designing the questionnaire

In this step, the questionnaire was designed for the participants. After considering the theory of listening and the difficulties in learning skills in accordance with the real practice of this skill of the freshmen in the first semester, the researcher came to the conclusion that there were four broad problems. They came from the speakers, the listeners, the materials, and the physical setting. Additionally, the researcher desired to know to what extent the students perceive the solutions for these problems.

Step 2: Piloting

To find out which areas of the questionnaire are ambiguous and should be corrected or improved the questionnaire were delivered to 3-4 respondents. Afterwards, when they went through all the items, the researcher asked them for some comments and suggestions. Finally, the adaptation was made.

Step 3: Administering the questionnaire

The researcher had a direct interaction with the respondents and delivered 150 survey questionnaires for 6 classes. Before asking the students to do the survey, the researcher briefly explained the format, the length and told them that their questions would be thoroughly answered to clarify any misunderstanding about the survey questions while completing the items. Besides, the researcher used oral Vietnamese instructions and explanations to help respondents avoid any misunderstanding and ambiguity.

2.2.2 Semi- structured interviews

2.2.2.1   *Justification of using interview*

As mentioned above the disadvantages of using questionnaires, the researcher overcomes these drawbacks by interview method. According to Thanajaro (2000), qualitative interview helps the researcher to gather more in-depth insights on participants' attitudes, thoughts and actions. The interview is a flexible tool of data collection, which involves multi-sensory channels from verbal and non-verbal. This method is useful to obtain detailed information about personal feelings, perceptions, and opinions. By providing opportunities for the learners to report on their own words, the insight understanding and attitude might be gained. In addition, it can provide the high response rate, high credibility and face validity. It is useful for the researcher to avoid the ambiguity and misunderstanding. On the contrary, conducting an interview can be influenced by the time-consuming and the expense. In the more detail, the researcher needs more time to carry out the step-by-step from setting up the environment, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing and then reporting the results. Consequently, to eliminate the drawbacks of this method, the interview questions and setting should be well-prepared beforehand.

Time for each interview lasted approximately 20-25 minutes and all interviews were audio-taped. Also, notes were used in order to record key pieces of information.

The interviews were conducted with two first-year students. The background information of participants is presented as follows:

S1 is now a first-year student in a class at FELTE, ULIS, VNU. In the first semester of academic year 2012 – 2013, she does not get a good result in final test of listening skill. She comes from a countryside area in which the importance of teaching and learning listening skill has been ignored.

S2 is now also a first-year mainstream student at FELTE, ULIS, VNU. In the first semester of this school year, she does a good job in learning listening skill with

considerably high marks. She shares the same background knowledge with A; however, they have completely different result in learning listening skill.

The interview transcripts are enclosed in the Appendix.

2.2.2.2   Description of the interview

A semi-structured interview question list is designed to get insight into the listening strategies applied by the participants. The interview comprises 7 question items that are created to study the strategies applied by first-year students in learning listening. Because this is a semi-structured interview, the researcher could add or omit some items to achieve the purpose.

2.2.2.3   Procedure of interviewing

Preparing the interview questions:

After delivering and collecting the questionnaires, the researcher began to design interview questions to obtain in-depth information taken in the previous method. The interview questions were constructed based on the survey questionnaires.

Conducting the interviews:

To be more specific, the researcher used Vietnamese to interview to avoid misunderstanding and increase the accuracy of the collected information. Moreover, the interviews were mainly conducted outside the classroom to give the interviewees a great deal of comfort and flexibility.

However, basing on the responses in survey questionnaire and the result from the final exam of the students, the researcher would ask two participants some question items in the question list to get deep information but not all the list. Specifically, the case study was conducted with the participant of a high score and a low score students.

2.3   Data analysis

Statistical analysis was performed to render specific statistics. These numbers were then put in charts or graphs for better illustration and explanation, making the study more concise and scientific.

<u>Step 1: Cleaning the data</u>

The data transcription was checked carefully and the incorrect or incomplete ones are eleminated to make the collected data reliable enough. After delivering and collecting 150 questionnaires, and then the researcher left out 10 incomplete one.

<u>Step 2: Classifying the data</u>:

The researcher classified the primary data according to the research questions.

Step 3: Deciding variables: Decide variables your data set that can be analyzed to answer the research objective

Step 4: Doing the analysis: Decide the appropriate statistcal analysis techniques . Then, produce descriptive statistics(means, modes, ranges, stardard deviations, etc.)

Step 5: Making table: Make graphics/tables to show the relationships for comparisons and contrasts

Step 6: Interpreting the results and draw conclusions: Relate the results back to the research question. In other words, answer the research questions.

Besides, the researcher realizes that content analysis is helpful when the researcher analyzes data from the interview. This method gains detailed and in-depth data about the interviewees' perception. As the answers we expect are not in numerical

forms, it is almost impossible to put these types of information into charts and graphs. In addition, to gain the reliability and accuracy of the interviews, the research often quotes the interviewees' ideas to support the points.

2.4   Summary:

In this chapter, the research methodology employed to conduct the research was discussed. Firstly, the selection of sample, sampling methods, justification, and description of two data instruments were presented. Secondly, the elaboration on use of survey questionnaire and procedures of data collection are also reported. Finally, a simple data analysis process was described to be better justify the finding presented in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

In this chapter, the researcher is going to discuss the data gained from the employed data instrument, namely survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview which offers answer two research questions.

3.1   Research question 1: *What are some main listening difficulties perceived by FELTE first year mainstream students?*

As mentioned in chapter 1 – Literature review, three first questions are aimed at finding out the general perception of freshmen about listening difficulties and their ability in learning listening. The general perception of learning listening is presented in the following table:

Table 3: Students' general perception of listening skill.

Question items	Mean	Standard deviation
# 1: The most difficult skill	1.50	0.96
# 2: The level of difficulty in listening.	3.80	0.69
# 3: The student listening ability	2.67	0.66

In the first question item, the students were asked to rate the level of difficulty of listening skill in comparison with three other skills. The statistic shows that question item # 1 receives mean of 1.5. To be more specific, listening is considered as the most difficult skill in learning English. 72.5 % of asked students remarked that listening is a challenging skill for them. In addition to that a small number of learners said speaking and writing, with the percentage of 15% and 10 % respectively, are obstacles in acquiring English. As a result, the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning this skill are not really as good and high as expected.

Besides, 90% of the students rated themselves as "average" and "bad" in listening proficiency. Only 5% of the students thought their listening skill is good; whereas, 5% of them thought that their listening performance is very bad. Noticeably, no one evaluated that their listening skill is excellent or very good.

Table 4: Student's self-rating to listening proficiency

	Very bad	**Bad**	**Average**	**Good**	**Excellent**
Students' listening ability	5 %	27.5	62.5 %	5 %	0 %

This might be caused by their previous failures or unhappy experiences in dealing with English because they had not received sufficient training in the first place.

Factors causing students listening comprehension problems are categorized into different sources including problems related to the learner themselves, the speakers, the listening materials, and the physical setting. The collected data will be analyzed in detail below:

3.1.1 Listening problems from the speakers:

Table 5: Listening problems from the speakers

Listening problems	Frequency		Levels of difficulty	
	Mean	St.D	Mean	St.D
4. The fast speed	3.05	0.96	3.75	0.78
5. The strange accent	2.70	1.09	3.50	0.93
6. The number of the speakers	3.10	0.98	3.32	0.89
7. Ending sounds	3.67	0.99	3.72	0.99
8. Reduced forms (elision and assimilation)	3.47	0.93	3.97	0.89
9. Intonation and stress	3.42	1.33	3.30	1.11

10. Signal words	3.55	1.01	2.80	1.28
11. Using colloquial words and slangs	2.67	1.18	3.57	1.28
12. Noise and redundancy	2.95	1.04	3.30	0.99

The most dominant feature of the table is that ending sounds are the most frequently-encountered by the student in listening comprehension with the highest mean of 3.67, followed by signal words with the second highest mean of 3.55. Also, signal words is a vital part in any kinds of recording; thus, catching them frequently is unavoidable .Moreover, as can be seen from the table, reduced forms also have the lowest standard deviation of 0.93, that is, the student have the most homogenous frequency of experiencing this problem.

In terms of signal words, Gilakjani (2011) claims that signal words can be missed especially by less proficient listeners. The participants, as described in the previous area, is less experienced in learning listening, often fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another, giving an example, or repeating a point.

As shown in the table, using colloquial words and slangs are the least frequently-faced problems with the lowest mean of 2.67. It could be easy to understand because the listening materials used often are in academic language. Thus, the students did not catch them regularly.

Regarding the level of difficulty according to the students' point of view, both reduced forms and fast speed receive the highest means of 3.97 and 3.75 respectively. With the mean of 2.8, signal words, in contrast, are the lowest –evaluated in terms of difficulty. However, this item also has a fairly high standard deviation of 1.28. There is an enormous variation in the participants' evaluation of the level of di fficulty of signal words. In spite of the second highest mean of 3.75, the item, the fast speed, received the lowest standard deviation of 0.78. Obviously, the students have the most similar

evaluation about the problems caused by the fast speed. To be more specific, the statistic is displayed in the following table:

Table 6: The fast speed and reduced forms

The levels of difficulty	1	2	3	4	5
The fast speed	0%	7.5%	22.5 %	57.5 %	12.5 %
The reduced forms	0%	5%	25%	37.5%	32.5 %

This result coincides with Flowerdew and Miller (1992). They report that speed of delivery is the greatest obstacle to the students. Moreover, Lin (2000) and Bloomfield (2011) also find that major difficulties include inability to keep up with the speaker's rapid delivery speed, unable to apply effective listening strategies to facilitate comprehension, and lack of concentration.

When it comes to the ending sounds, with the third highest mean of 3.7, this is, the respondents believe that ending sounds are one of the most challenging factors in acquiring the coming information. This could be due to their pronunciation which has not been really good. Specifically, ending sounds, for example /t/, /s/, /z/, /k/, etc, are not paid much attention to when they speak English. As a result, the listeners forget them unintentionally while listening. Ur (1984) also declares that if a word is pronounced differently from the way it was said when it was learnt, the listener may not recognize it as the same word, or may even miss its existence completely.

3.1.2 Listening problems from the learners:

As mentioned in the literature chapter, the researcher would like to classify the listening problems into four categories as perceived by the participants. The students themselves also influence their listening ability. The details are presented in the following table:

Table 7: Listening problems from the listeners.

Listening problems	Frequency		Level of difficulty	
	Mean	St.D	Mean	St.D
13. Lack of vocabulary	3.30	1.09	3.62	0.99
14. Lack of social and background knowledge	3.27	0.96	3.68	0.86
15. Psychological/ physical factors (stress, worry, tiredness, etc)	3.42	1.08	3.40	0.95
16. Inability to concentrate	2.97	0.86	3.30	1.00
17. Inability to predict about the content	3.35	1.12	3.10	1.06
18. Bad / incorrect pronunciation	3.52	1.15	3.45	1.01
19. Ineffective listening habits (try to understand every single words)	3.32	1.07	3.35	1.12

The summarized statistics for each item from the table illustrate the potential problems from the learners themselves. As regards frequency, item 18 received both the highest mean of 3.52 and the standard deviation of 1.15. It can be deduced from these figures that bad or incorrect pronunciation are experienced or perceived by students most of the time they listen. However, their responses are not moderately consistent. It maybe because many students have a good pronunciation, in contrast, many of them do not. In term of levels of difficulty, nevertheless, this factor is ranked number three. It can be figured out that correct pronunciation has considerable influence on students listening performances. In the second place of frequency, with the mean of 3.42, some problems from psychological factors such as stress of homework, assignment or daily life, worry about the examination, or tiredness can affect the listening effectiveness. Psychological factors refer to those non-mental factors not directly involving cognitive processes, such as students' interests, attention,

learning emotions, attitudes, and willpower. Although these non-mental factors are directly influential in the students learning processes, they play a part in promoting and controlling learning effectiveness. Also, it can be noted that inability to concentrate when listening, receiving both the lowest mean of only 2.97 and standard deviation of 0.86, does not contribute much to the listening comprehension. It can be concluded that the participants homogenously do not encounter this factor regularly.

Regarding the levels of difficulty, lack of social and background knowledge is ranked in the first place, with the highest mean of 3.68. Deductively, the respondents considered social and background knowledge as a key to catch and understand the coming information. Specifically, they believed that with a profound knowledge in other areas such as economics, cultures, and society, it can be easy to guess the information. This item, on the other hand, had the low standard deviation of 0.86. This refers that the respondents have consistently viewpoint of the importance of background knowledge. The finding is consistent with the declaration of Nuttall (1996) that problems would arise when there is a mismatch between what they are listening to with the previous experience of the learners. In accordance with Hasan's suggestion (2000), the students' ability to associate newly heard information with prior knowledge is a powerful and frequently-used to predict the meaning of the listening passage.

Furthermore, with the mean a little less than social and background understanding of 3.62, lack of vocabulary is one of the most difficult factor in learning listening. Even though the students have correct pronunciation and wide background knowledge, it will be a problem if they do not know the meaning of these listening words. This data also supports Underwood's theory (1989) that limited vocabulary is a big obstacle to most students in listening comprehension.

On the other hand, the rest of factors coming from listeners; for example, psychological factors, inability to concentrate, ineffective listening habits, etc. receive

nearly the same mean. Indeed, the perception of difficulty of these problems is in the range from average to difficult.

3.1.3 Listening problems from the materials:

In addition to the problems coming from the speakers and the listeners, the potential problems also emerge from the material used for listening. The frequency and the levels of difficulty perceived by the students are presented briefly in the table as follows:

Table 8: Problems from the materials

Listening problems	Frequency		Levels of difficulty	
	Mean	St.D	Mean	St.D
20. Many unfamiliar words, jargons and idioms	3.22	1.10	3.52	0.98
21. Complex grammatical structures	3.12	0.97	3.60	1.08
22. Different types of recording (monologue, dialogue)	3.17	0.90	3.35	1.07
23. The long listening	3.17	0.75	3.22	1.03
24. Unfamiliar topics	3.42	1.01	3.60	0.99
25. Too much information in the recording	3.32	0.99	3.42	1.17

As can be seen in the table, the item 24 and item 25 receive the highest means with fairly low standard deviations in term of frequency. Unfamiliar topics and too much information in a recording are obstacles for the students to catch the needed information. Both these problems are frequently-encountered by the participants in learning listening. When listening to an unfamiliar topic, the students will not have enough vocabulary or background understanding and they will face some

psychological problems, which could contribute to the bad result in listening performance. Moreover, too much information in the recording, with the mean of 3.32, is ranked number two in order of frequency. It can be explained that the students often listen to the dense information recorded text.

In regard to the level of difficulty as perceived by the students, with the highest mean of 3.6, both complex grammatical structures and unfamiliar topics are evaluated as the most challenging factors in learning to listen. In contrast, among some features of materials, the long listening is the least difficult one. However, the students have the least similar evaluation about the difficulty of listening materials that contain many terminologies, jargons or idioms, with the standard deviation of 0.98.

Although Ur's assertion (1984) justified that the difficult in listening comprehension is partly due to the length of the listening text, the majority of the students responded that a long spoken text has less interference with their listening comprehension.

From the above result, therefore, it seems reasonable to generalize that recording with containing unfamiliar topics, difficult grammatical structures, and many jargons or idioms, hinder the listening comprehension of a large number of students.

3.1.4 Listening problems from the physical setting:

Table 9: Listening problems from the physical setting

Listening problems	Frequency		Level of difficulty	
	Mean	St.D	Mean	St.D
26. Poor quality equipment and facilities	3.48	1.11	3.70	0.88
27. Using audio tapes (not video)	3.20	1.24	3.25	1.03
28. Background noises	3.13	1.18	3.08	1.27

29. The large classroom	3.00	1.28	3.50	1.01
30. The crowded classes	3.03	1.33	3.03	1.16
31. Sitting at the back of the classroom	2.88	1.41	3.43	1.15

The table shows the statistics of listening problems from physical setting. What is worth noticing here is that the frequency of poor quality equipment and facilities receives the highest mean of 3.48, on the contrary, with the least standard deviation of 1.11. This means that the quality of cassette players, the recorded tapes, or the equipment in the classroom affect the students performance in listening. In addition, the students have the most similar idea about the influence of class setting on learning listening.

The least frequently influencing problem is sitting at the back of the classroom with a small mean of 2.88. It can be drawn that the sitting position in the classroom has a modest impact on getting information process.

Nevertheless, not well-equipped classrooms also have a largest mean of 3.7 and the smallest standard deviation of 0.88, which means that the good equipment contributes much to the effectiveness of listening. Besides, the students have the same viewpoint in this problem.

3.2 Research question 2: *What are the listening strategies applied by the students?*

The second question is aimed at investigating the listening strategies employed by the participants. As mentioned in Methodology chapter, the researcher would analyze the data collected from survey questionnaires as well as the interviews to get detailed information. As discussed in the Methodology above, the interviews were carried out with two volunteer students to add more evidence to listening comprehension problems and some solutions for them. These interviews were semi-structured base on the collected data from the survey questionnaire. Compared to the

questionnaire, during the interview, the interviewees were given more freedom to express their ideas fully and comfortably. These discussions also were recorded for data analysis. With the attempt to encourage the interviewees to express their opinions as possible as they can, both the interviewer and interviewees used Vietnamese for asking and giving information. The questions, some key comments and quotes were summarized and displayed as follows.

Table 10: Listening strategies

Learning listening strategies	Frequency		Usefulness	
	Mean	St.D	Mean	St.D
32. Practicing listening everyday	3.00	1.05	2.70	0.60
33. Listening to different accents	2.88	1.00	2.28	0.69
34. Making prediction about what the speakers are talking about	3.36	0.84	2.38	0.59
35. Taking notes of the main ideas and key words	3.05	1.00	2.43	0.64
36. Underlining key words before listening	3.85	0.99	2.46	0.72
37. Broadening vocabulary by reading newspapers and books	3.44	1.14	2.56	0.64
38. Skipping the missing points	3.36	1.16	2.15	0.71
39. Listening to different topics	3.74	0.96	2.46	0.68
40. Improving pronunciation	3.61	1.11	2.46	0.68
41. Listening to different kinds of inputs (songs, TV series, films, lectures, etc)	3.90	1.09	2.67	0.62

The findings of survey questionnaire reveal that the majority of the above strategies are applied by the students in their learning. The

In terms of usefulness, with the highest mean of 2.7, the students believed that **listening to English daily** could bring them an enormous benefit. The necessary thing to realize is that there are not many differences in the participants' opinion about the usefulness of daily listening. Haynes (2005) shares the same idea that the first stage of language acquisition is a silent period. Therefore, by listening to English every day, the learners can acquire English like their mother tongue. When being asked about the amount of time students spend on listening at home, S1 says that she does not spend much time practicing listening at home. This is in the line with the results of questionnaires with the low mean of frequency of 3.0. In fact, not a large number of students have daily listening practice. Moreover, S1 also adds that most of the time she listens to English at home is to do her homework. Sometimes, she listens to English songs or watches some films with Vietnamese subtitles. Additionally, she claims that "*listening to English is quite boring and difficult; I find learning reading and speaking more interesting*".

Not surprisingly, S2 practices listening English every day. She says that "*whenever I have free time, I'll listen to English. I often listen to English songs, TV or radio news, or English exercises in some teachers' suggested websites* ". Interestingly, she reports that sometimes she listens unintentionally; for example, "*I play the media player and listen to some English. I do not need to do the exercises but just listen to relax*". She believes that listening to English in any kinds every day, which acquaints the listeners with English, is a good way to improve listening skill.

From the collected data, it is interesting to note that daily practicing English can bring the learners an enormous benefit. Similar to the process of learning mother tongue, the baby begins with listening and imitating.

It is reported that **listening to the varieties of inputs**, for example, songs, news reports, films or lectures, is the most frequently-used method, with a large mean of 3.9. This situation could be due to the fact that with the development of Internet, the listeners can access to any kinds of inputs. To be more specific, the students can listen to English songs, watch English films with or without subtitles, or they even can listen to BBC news. For this question, "*I just use textbook as the main source of listening*", S1 replies. Occasionally, she listens to the VOA news or some movies to do her assignments. On the other hand, S2 provides a great number of listening materials such as "*BBC news, CNN student news, ABC radio or esl-lab.com*". She also suggests that listening to different sources can make it more exciting because "*you can listen to various kinds of topics and accents.*"

It can be seen from the table that students do not pay much attention to diversify the speakers' accent in their listening. This is by the reason of the primarily used materials in listening are academic. In consideration of topic for listening, students consistently agree that listening to different topics contribute much to their listening result. While the topics S1 often listens are in the textbooks such as education, entertainment, or sports, S2 also listens to some economic news, TV shows, some kinds of sport reports, or environmental documents. S2 finds that listening to different kinds of topics brings her considerab benefits. That is, she would have a chance to acquaint with some strange accents that are not standard like British or American accents. Additionally, her vocabulary also can be enriched in many fields. She emphasizes that this method can help listeners avoid shock when catching unfamiliar topics.

It can be concluded that to deal with strange accents or unfamiliar topics, the learners should listen to different sources. This strategy will help the students to avoid shock or stress.

Also, the table shows that the students spend more time on improving their pronunciation to get the exact words in listening. When being asked about the pronunciation, S1 evaluates that it is incorrect. She often pronounces new words wrongly that causes difficulties in listening English. "*I always feel confused when catching a new word and when catching a strange pronunciation I cannot figure out its written form*". In contrast, S2 is positively confident of her pronunciation because "*whenever I catch a new word, I look up the Cambridge dictionary for the correct pronunciation, which makes a good habit*".

In Vandergift's (1999) point of view, students often encounter the difficulties listening for accurate meaning and learning to produce the correct sounds at the same time. Therefore, getting familiar with using English dictionary to look into both meanings and pronunciation of words is better.

Besides, the participants also have higher frequency on the strategies of underlining key words. With the standard deviation of 0.99, the respondents have fairly consistent answers. In contrast, making prediction about what the speakers are going to say get the least standard deviation of 0.59, that is, the majority of the participants share the same idea that it is not really the most effective technique. However, to avoid anxiety and know in advance what is going to be said, who is speaking and what the subject is going to be about, the students should spend time for figuring out the content or important words. Jones and Kimborough (1987) also suggest some preliminary discussions in which the students can talk together about the topic.

In reference to note-taking skill, the participants do under evaluate the important role of this strategy with the mean of usefulness of 2.43. Taking notes as much as possible is one of the methods that S2 applies. On the contrary, student S1 affirms that she just listens to answer the questions without writing down anything. Therefore, she sometimes forgets what she has just listened.

Obviously, the significance of note-taking has been acknowledged widely in a variety of related literature. Kiewra (1989) indicates that the notes taken serve as "an external repository of information" that permit later revision and review for accomplishing specific tasks. Besides, note-taking raises learners' attention to the sound input and engaged their cognitive process of coding, integrating, synthesizing, and transforming aurally received input into a personally meaning form. Liu (2001) is also in the line with Kiewra (1989) when conducting a research on Chinese EFL students. This study proved the correlation between note-taking and reviewing notes as well as their positive effects on the level of comprehending what they catch and apply such information and knowledge for follow-up related tasks.

In respect to question number 5**" *What do you do when missing one piece of information in listening? (You ask your friends, you stop listening or skip that point and continue to listen,…",* **S1 responds: "*Well, actually, when listening I often miss some points, especially with a long recording. Sometimes, I skip them and continue to listen, but sometimes, I get tired of skipping nearly all the important points*", S1 says. S2 has the consistent answer for this question. She reports that her teachers advise her to skip the missing information to keep in touch with the coming next. Moreover, many English learners try to catch all the words in the recording without distinguish between the main ideas and the supporting one. This supports the claims of Butt (2010) who thinks that some foreign language learners try to understand every single word of incoming speech, but actually, doing so is unnecessary and impossible.

Regarding to the way to broaden vocabulary, S1 states that she loves reading, especially English short stories. Eventually, she reads newspapers for updating news and gets some new structures. Nevertheless, S2 responds that she does not like reading; she widens her vocabulary by watching movies with English subtitles. When familiarizing with the written form of a word, the listeners can catch the sound easier.

3.3 Chapter summary:

In a nutshell, this chapter has answered two research questions by using the data collected in the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview by clear illustration with tables and figures and the meticulous discussion of the findings. Specifically, there are several problems in listening comprehension pertaining to the speakers, the learners, the listening materials, and the physical setting. To deal with the difficulties, different strategies are applied by the students.

PART III.CONCLUSION

1. Summary of major findings

With the aims to answer the two research questions raised at the beginning of the study, the data collected from survey questionnaire and semi-structured interview were analyzed to draw conclusion. The major findings are summarized as follows:

1.1 The difficulties perceived by students

The paper has explored students' perception of listening difficulties of studying listening English comprehension. Regarding the factors pertaining to the speakers, the speech rate and reduced forms emerged as the biggest difficulties of first-year students. However, ending sounds and signal words are claimed as the most frequently-encountered problems in learning listening. Among the factors related to the learners, students report that psychological causes and incorrect pronunciation are commonly faced problems. When it comes to the levels of difficulty, they have consistently similar idea that lack of background knowledge and limited vocabulary are the biggest obstacles to the listeners. With regard of the materials, unfamiliar topics and dense information in the recording are considered as the most common hindrance in listening. Also, strange topics and complex grammatical structures are justified as the major restriction to the students. Finally, the sitting position in the class does not regularly affect students' message conveying; whereas, classroom facilities contribute much to the students' performance in learning to listen.

1.2 The strategies applied by students

Semi-structured interview collected some suggestions of students to overcome their possible difficulties as follow:

Firstly, to deal with unusual fields and strange accents, students listen to variety kinds of topics in several sources. This is also a chance for the students to make acquaintance with some non-standard accents such as Indian or French. Moreover, students' vocabulary could be enlarged by reading newspapers, English books, watching films, and listening to several themes. Secondly, students claim that checking

the pronunciation in English dictionary whenever catching a new word is an effective way to avoid incorrect one. Watching English movies or listening to the news in English also give a big help in improving pronunciation. More importantly, practicing listening every day both intentionally and unintentionally is considered as a natural way to acquire English. Finally, skipping the missing points as well as taking note as much as possible benefit students in keeping up with what the speakers say.

2. Pedagogical implications from the findings

Based on the findings, Literature and participants' interviewed answers, the researcher proposes some suggestion for teachers, students for the difficulties in studying listening skill.

2.1 Implication for the teachers

First and foremost, the teachers should raise students' awareness of the importance of listening in learning L2. Specifically, teachers are the one who decide the topics, the activities in classroom; therefore, they could provide students with supplementary exercises from other sources to practice. Moreover, they could suggest some useful websites to improve listening skill.

Secondly, to reduce the negative impacts of inaccurate pronunciation, the teachers should correct the students' pronunciation whenever they make mistakes. Also, integrating pronunciation in teaching speaking, reading or writing is considered an effective way of master this aspect of language.

Thirdly, pre-teach vocabulary, guiding students to underline key words and guess the meanings of new words can help the students to familiarize with the topic, activate prior knowledge as well as develop the confidence of students.

Last but certainly not least, raising the students' awareness of the benefits of taking notes in general and the advantages of its strategies in particular may be useful in this respect. Moreover, giving students instructions in taking note using specific strategy is very critical.

2.2 Implications for the students

Noticeably, to get a positive result in listening skill, the students should have a high degree of autonomy in approaching this skill. This means that students should set a plan of practicing listening at home. Widening vocabulary is extremely important as the limited poses difficulties to most of students. Hence, reading English newspapers, magazines and watching English teaching programs on television are learning strategies of some students. More efficiently, many students can have a habit of checking new words in English dictionary from the beginning of their learning process. It is advisable that guessing new words, underlining key words beforehand and taking note the main ideas could help students keep up with the speed of the speakers.

3. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further studies

In spite of the researcher's effort and enthusiastic support of supervisor, this paper still has got some shortcomings. Firstly, because of the limited time, some other books, documents, research, which related to this study, could not be covered. Secondly, the number of participants in the interview is small, which somehow does not generalize to the whole population.

Therefore, for further studies, the researcher suggests interviewing more students with different background and achievement in order to get more listening techniques. Moreover, the study could be conducted by observing some listening lessons as well as interviewing some teachers to get deeper look into the listening difficulties and strategies.

4. Chapter summary:

In summary, this chapter has once again summarized the findings of the research questions, figured out the limitation of the paper, some implications, as well as suggestions for further studies.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Questionnaire

A SMALL STUDY ON MAIN DIFFICULTIES IN LEARNING LISTENING SKILLS AND POSIBLE SOLUTIONS PERCEIVED BY FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS IN FELTE, ULIS, VNU.

I am Nguyen Thi Thu Thao from 09.E5. I am doing research on the main difficulties in learning listening skills perceived by first-year students of Faculty of English Language Teacher Education at ULIS, VNU. I would like to ask for your help with the questionnaire to collect the relevant data for my study. There is no right or wrong answers. All the questions are in the form of close-ended rating scales that we hope will not take much of your time and effort to accomplish. The information will surely be kept confidential to avoid disturbing your privacy. Thank you in advance.

Your name/nickname:…………………………………Group:……………………………

Your hometown (please write the name of your hometown):………………………………….

Is it a ………………………………….? (please circle one answer)

   A. City/ town   B. Rural area   C. Mountainous area

Part A: What are the difficulties in learning listening?

1. **Which of these skills do you find the most difficult?**
   A. Listening   B. Speaking   C. Reading   D. Writing

2. Please circle a number from the 1 to 5 that indicates your perception of the difficulty level of listening skills after one year studying at the university according to the scale below:

1	2	3	4	5
Very Easy	Easy	Average	Difficult	Very difficult

3. Please circle a number from the 1 to 5 that best describes your ability of listening skills:

1	2	3	4	5
Very bad	Bad	Average	Good	Excellent

The table below includes some problems in your learning listening. Please CIRLE a number (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that describes how frequently you encounter them and then CIRLE how difficult they are in learning to listen.

Frequency				
Rarely or never	Occasionally	Sometimes (50% of the time)	Frequently	Almost all the time
1	2	3	4	5
Levels of difficulty				
Very easy	Easy	Average	Difficult	Very difficult

For example:
Frequency

                       Least < - > Most

Level of
difficulty

Least < - >
Most

1 2 3 4 5   1 2 3 4 5

Listening problems		Frequency					Difficulty Level				
		Least < - > Most					**Least < - > Most**				
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
A. From the speakers	4. The fast speed	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	5. The strange accents (e.g: Indian or French accents)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	6. The number of the speakers (more than 2 speakers)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	7. Ending sounds (/e, es, ed,k,t/ ,…)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	8. Reduced forms (*elision and assimilation*)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	9. Intonation and stress	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	10. Signal words (however, although, firstly, secondly,…)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	11. Using colloquial words and	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	12. Noise and redundancy	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
B. From the learners	13. Lack of vocabulary	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	14. Lack of social and background knowledge	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	15. Psychological/ physical factors (stress, worry, tiredness,…)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	16. Inability to concentrate	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	17. Bad/ incorrect pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	18. Inability to predict about the content	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	19. Ineffective listening habits (e.g. try to understand every single words)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
C. From the materials	20. Many unfamiliar words, jargons and idioms	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	21. Complex grammatical structures	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	22. Different types of the recording	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

(monologue, dialogue,…)

23. The long listening	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
24. Unfamiliar topics	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
25. Too much information in the	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5

		Frequency					Usefulness				
D. From the physical setting	recording 26. Poor quality equipment and facilities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	27. Using audio tapes (not video)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	28. Background noises	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	29. The large classroom	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	30. The crowded classes	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	31. Sitting at the back of the class	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
	32. Others : (please specify)………………………. ………………………… …………………………….										

Part B. What are the possible solutions for listening problems?

The table below describes the strategies in learning listening strategies perceived by students to deal with listening difficulties. Please CIRCLE the number that describes how frequently you use them and how usefulness they are.

Frequency

Rarely or never	Occasionally	Sometimes	Frequently	Almost all
1		(50% of the time)		the time
	2	3	4	5

Usefulness

Totally useless	A little useful	Quite useful
1	2	3

Learning strategies	**Frequency** **Least < - > Most**					**Usefulness** **Least < - > Most**		
33. Practicing listening everyday	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
34. Listening to different accents	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
35. Making prediction about what the speakers will talk about	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3

36. Taking notes of the main ideas and key words	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
37. Underlining key words before listening	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
38. Broadening vocabulary by reading newspapers and books	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
39. Skipping the missing points	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
40. Listening to different topics	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
41. Improving pronunciation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3
42. Listening to different kinds of inputs (songs, TV series, films, lectures,…)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3

Appendix 2

Guideline questions for interview

1. How much time do you spend on your listening per day (at home)?
2. What sources of listening materials do you often use for the practice of listening English? (textbook, VOA, BBC news, …)
3. What kinds of topic do you often listen? (economics, environment, education or sport, etc.?)
4. What do you do to enrich your vocabulary? (reading newspapers, reading books or English stories)
5. To what extent, are you pleased with your pronunciation? What do you do to improve it?
6. When you listen, what do you often do? (Listen and answer the questions given, take notes as much as possible? or else? (please specify))
7. What do you often do when you miss one piece of information in listening? (for example: asking your friends, stopping listening or skipping that point and continuing to listen?)

Appendix 3

Transcription of the interview with S1

Interviewer: I

Interviewee: S1

I	How much time do you spend on your listening per day (at home)?
S1	*Well, I do not often listen to English at home. Sometimes, I just listen to complete my homework or assignments. I think listening to English is quite boring and difficult; I find learning reading and speaking much more interesting.*
I	What sources of listening materials do you often use for the practice of listening English? (textbook, VOA, BBC news, …)
S1	*I just use textbooks as the main source of listening. Besides, I rarely listen to VOA news or English movies for my assignments.*
I	What kinds of topic do you often listen? (Economics, environment, education or sport, etc.?)
S1	*Because I do not listen regularly; therefore, the topics I often listen are in the textbooks such as education, entertainment or something like that. Sometimes there are dialogs about different topics such as economy. I don't know any of the words related to economy.*
I	What do you do to enrich your vocabulary? (reading newspapers, reading books or English stories, listening to English news or watching movies,…)
S1	*Because I love reading, especially English short stories. They provide many new vocabulary and structures. But I do not like newspapers.*
I	To what extent, are you pleased with your pronunciation?
S1	*Oh, actually, my pronunciation is not good. I always pronounce new words*

	wrongly. I always feel confused when catching a new word and when catching a strange pronunciation I cannot figure out its written form
I	What do you do to improve that? (do you look up the dictionary?)
S1	*No. Sometimes my teachers or my friends help me to correct it.*
I	When you listen, what do you often do? (Listen and answer the questions given, take notes as much as possible? or else? (please specify)
S1	*Just listen to answer the questions. And sometimes I forget what I have just listened before.*
I	What do you often do when you miss one piece of information in listening? (for example: asking your friends, stopping listening or skipping that point and continuing to listen?)
S1	*Well, actually, when listening I often miss some points, especially with a long recording. Sometimes, I skip them and continue to listen, but sometimes, I get tired of skipping nearly all the important points.*

Appendix 4

Transcription of the interview with S2

Interviewer: I

Interviewee: S2

I	How much time do you spend on your listening per day (at home)?
S2	*It's about more than 1hour per day. Whenever I have free time, I'll listen to English. I often listen to English songs, TV or radio news, or English exercises in some teachers' suggested websites. I play the media player and listen to some English. I do not need to do the exercises but just listen to relax.*
I	What sources of listening materials do you often use for the practice of listening English? (textbook, VOA, BBC news, …)
S2	*BBC news, CNN student news, ABC radio or esl-lab.com. By this way, I can listen to various kinds of topics and accents.*
I	What kinds of topic do you often listen? (Economics, environment, education or sport, etc.?)
S2	*Besides listening to do exercises in textbooks, I also listen to some economic news, some kinds of sport reports, or environmental documents. Actually, they are more interesting than textbooks*
I	What do you do to enrich your vocabulary? (reading newspapers, reading books or English stories, listening to English news or watching movies,…)
S2	*I watch English movies with English subtitles*
I	To what extent, are you pleased with your pronunciation?
S2	*It's quite good.*

I	What do you do when catching a new word?
S2	*Whenever I catch a new word, I look up the Cambridge dictionary for the correct pronunciation, which makes a good habit*
I	When you listen, what do you often do? (Listen and answer the questions given, take notes as much as possible? or else? (please specify)
S2	*Taking note the main ideas and some supporting ideas.*
I	What do you often do when you miss one piece of information in listening? (for example: asking your friends, stopping listening or skipping that point and continuing to listen?)
S2	*I don't mind about this, forget them and continue to listen because I can come back to them the second time.*