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GRADUATION PAPER

***EFFECTS OF LISTENING CONTENT ON  
STUDENTS' LISTENING COMPREHENSION  
AS PERCEIVED BY FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS  
AT UET, VNU***

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## **ABSTRACT**

Listening plays a significant role in daily communication as well as educational process. In spite of its importance, listening has long been neglected by many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. However, in recent years there has been an up-trend

focus on listening ability because of its considerable importance in language learning and teaching. Listening comprehension is undoubtedly a struggling task for EFL learners because it has to cope with not only distinctive phonological features such as accents, stress and intonation but also cultural background knowledge. In other words, many factors are attributed to set barriers to EFL learners' listening comprehension, among which listening content is considered significant. The study investigates the current situation of dealing with the content of listening text among first-year students at University of Engineering and Technology (UET), Vietnam National University (VNU). In detail, the researcher tries to find to what extents and why listening content impacts EFL students' listening comprehension. The informants comprises 59 first-year students who are not specialized in English from two separate classes at UET, VNU and their two teachers of English. The data were collected from questionnaire for the students and interviews of the lecturers. The results shows great influence of listening content on students' comprehending. It also reveals a bitter fact about strategies students adapt to deal with the challenges listening content putting on them. Findings based on the review of the literature along with analysis of the data are of great significance and can be advantageous to improve EFL learners' English listening comprehension skill by easing the impacts of the content of listening text.

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## LIST OF ABRIVIATIONS

*UET: University of Engineering and Technology*

*VNU: Vietnam National University*

*EFL: English as a Foreign Language*

# PART I

## INTRODUCTION

*In this chapter, some brief information about the paper is provided. Five main points presented are (1) statement of the problem & rationale for the study, (2) aims & objectives of the study, (3) significance of the study, (4) scope of the study, (5) organization of the paper.*

### **1. Statement of the problem and rationale for the study**

One of the final goals in learning a language is to communicate in that targeted language. Simply speaking, successful communication is a two-way interacting process. In other words, a communicating circle only finishes when the messages conveyed are sent and understood. Therefore, listening is considered a key skill in communicating. Feyten (1991) as cited in Vasiljevic (2010) claimed that listening accounts more than 45% of communicating time. To be more specific, nearly half of our time for communication is spent listening.

Besides the role of listening in communication, that in learning a language in general, English in particular is inevitable. According to Vasiljevic (2010), listening is considered one of the most important language skills because listening acts as an effective alternative skill to speaking which is paid much concern by both EFL learners and teachers. As mentioned, most of the learning time is also spent listening. Conaway (1982) and Huang (2005) asserted that listening is the most frequently used language skill in the classroom and plays a more important role in one's academic success than reading skill or academic aptitude. Muniandy (2012) affirmed that listening and speaking strategies were mostly used in the learning process compared to other strategies as

reported by intermediate and upper-intermediate students. Moreover, “without actually having been taught to listen, a student may be able to express himself orally, but he will never be able to communicate with speakers of English if he is unable to understand what is said to him.”

In spite of its importance, listening has long been neglected by many EFL learners as well as teachers. Consequently, it is often regarded as the most difficult skill to EFL learners. Galvin, Prescott & Huseman (1992), as cited in Muniandy, figured out from their survey that listening skills are the least developed even though listening is the most frequently used communication channel. Adding to the fact that listening is reported as the most challenging skill to learn, it is said to be the least researched of the four language skills (Vandergrift 2007, 2004). Listening is considered challenging to EFL learners because it is influenced by many elements. This issue was investigated by some researchers and most of them agreed that listening comprehension was under influence of four major factors: the listening text, the speakers, the listeners and the physical settings. However, they just listed out the affecting factors without specific analysis or paying attention to the phonologic features relating to the speakers such as accent, stress, intonation, etc. On the other hand, the influence of listening texts was not investigated enough. To fill in the gap, this paper focuses on one of the factors that sets significant obstacles to students’ listening comprehension: listening content. To make it more practical, the research was carried out among first-year students at UET, VNU.

The researcher decided to work on this population because of the following reasons. First and foremost, it is a recognizable fact that listening skill is least concerned by high-school teachers and students. Consequently, most university students have difficulties in listening comprehension. Secondly, first-year students were chosen as the population of this study since they are now free from the Entrance Exam pressure and

approach to a new learning style at university, thus guiding them to listen effectively from this early stage is advisable.

## **2. Aims and objectives**

This study aims at investigating effects of the content of listening texts on EFL learners' listening comprehension. In detail, its main purpose is to identify the extent to what listening content affects students' comprehending in listening as perceived by first-year students at UET, VNU. In addition, the reasons why listening content set barriers to students' comprehension was also exploited. A secondary aim of the paper is to come up with some suggestions to improve the situation. The findings from this present study are expected to be useful for both the students and the teachers of English. To achieve those goals, the research tries to answer the following questions:

- *To what extents does content of listening texts affect students' listening comprehension as perceived by first-year students at UET, VNU?*
- *Why does content of listening texts affect students' listening comprehension as perceived by first-year students at UET, VNU?*

## **3. Significance of the study**

With this study, the researcher expected to gain insights into the extents to which the content of listening texts affects first-year students' listening comprehension. At the same time, the major factors that led to these impacts were addressed. Some suggestions for improvement perceived by both teacher and student participants were also indicated.

Once completed, the research would serve as reference for both teachers and students who wish to lessen the impact of listening content. Moreover, the findings are

primary resource for later researchers in designing programs or courses of treatment to improve the situation on a larger and more practical scale.

#### **4. Scope of the study**

Participants of the study were 59 first-year students from two credit English classes at UET, VNU. This sample is hopefully well-represented the population because it counted for a half of the population. Furthermore, the two teachers in charge of these students also are informants of this paper.

The study focused on the effect of the listening texts of listening comprehension. To be more specific, the study investigated the extents to which listening content impacts students' comprehending. Thanks to the data collected, the influences of listening content were addressed. In addition, this research also targeted on the reasons why the samples' listening comprehension was under impact of the listening texts.

#### **5. Organization**

Overall, there are three parts in the research paper:

*Part I: Introduction:* This part deals with the rationale, aims, participants, the scope, and the structure of the research. Information about the context of the study is also included.

## *Part II: Development*

*Chapter 1: Literature Review:* This part provides the definitions of key concepts in the research. The theoretical framework, which is about the reasons why listening content affects students' listening comprehension is also put in this section.

*Chapter 2: Methodology:* This part gives information about the design of the research, which is qualitative and quantitative, the data collection instrument and the data analysis methods.

*Chapter 3: Results and discussion:* This part presents, analyzes, and discusses the findings obtained from the interview and the questionnaires. Also, some implications are made based on the findings.

*Part III: Conclusion:* This part summarizes the main points discussed in this research. It also mentions briefly the limitations of the study and includes any recommendations or suggestions for further studies.

## **PART II: DEVELOPMENT**

### **CHAPTER 1**

#### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

##### **1.1. Listening comprehension**

###### **1.1.1. Listening vs. hearing**

To understand what listening really is, many researchers find it necessary to distinguish listening from hearing. Hearing is simply defined as the ability of the auditory system to sense sound in the surrounding. It means that if one is not hearing-impaired, hearing automatically occurs. On the contrary, listening is a conscious activity to interpret the sounds to construct meaning from what is conveyed by the speaker. Accordingly, hearing can be considered as the physical pre-stage of listening which requires more mental activities.

Helgesen & Brown (2007) and Horowitz (2012) agree that it is how much attention one is paying to something that decide whether he is listening or just hearing. For example, you are cooking in the kitchen and the TV is on in the background. If your purpose of doing so is to fill up the silence, then you are hearing a series of sound from the TV. On the other hand, if you find some information interesting, then you have been listening.

### **1.1.2. Definition of listening comprehension**

Listening as comprehension is a traditional way of investigating the nature of listening (Richards n.d). Listening comprehension is a key concept defined by many previous researchers.

The four language skills are traditionally divided into receptive and productive skills. Rhodes (2012) states you apply receptive skills when “you receive the language and decode the meaning to understand the message”. On the other hand, productive skills are employed when the language acquired is used to produce a message. Accordingly, speaking and writing are considered productive skills while reading and listening are addressed as receptive skills (Rhodes 2012 & Saricoban 1999). As a result, listening comprehension used to be seen as a passive activity. “It is, on the contrary, an active process in which the listener must discriminate among sounds, understand words and grammar, interpret intonation and other prosodic clues and retain information gathered long enough to interpret it in the context or setting in which the exchange takes place” (Hilden 2004). Agreeing with Hilden, Jolongo (1995) states, “it is a common misconception that listeners are passive receivers of information and listening process is practically automatic.” According to her, the reception and processing incoming data - all verbal and non-verbal signals a speaker is sending, involve in the listening process.

Listening has also been defined in a large volume of other studies. On discussing “what is successful listening?”, Anderson and Lynch (1988) claim that understanding does not happen only from what a speaker says, but by the listener’s crucial role in activating various types of knowledge and applying the schema – what he knows, to what he hears and trying to understand what the speaker means. Listening is flowerily defined by Horowitz (2012) as following, “Listening is a skill that we’re in danger of losing in a world of digital distraction and information overload.” By stating that, he may mean listening is a complex process in which listeners have to gather, store and interpreting a lot of data. Underwood (1989) gives a definition of listening based on the difference between listening and hearing that, “the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear”. Saricoban (1999) and Mendelsohn (cited in Gilakjani & Ahmadi 2011) simplify the definition of listening that listening is the ability of listeners to identify and understand what is uttered by speakers. Besides this general view, many other researchers specify the definition of listening by describing its process. According to Rost (cited in Gilakjani & Ahmadi 2011), listening process involves receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy. O’Malley, Chamot, and Kupper (1989) offer an extensive definition that “Listening comprehension is viewed theoretically as an active process in which individuals focus on selected aspects of aural input, construct meaning from passages, and relate what they hear to existing knowledge.” To say, listening comprehension is an active and conscious process in which the meaning is constructed from contextual cues and existing knowledge. Howatt & Dakin (cited in Saricoban 1999) depict the listening activity as understanding a speaker's accent or pronunciation, his grammar and his vocabulary, and grasping his meaning.

To sum up, the author of this study saw listening comprehension as it is widely admitted, that listening comprehension is not merely the process of receiving of audible

symbols, but a complex interactive process which requires a series of phases from physically receiving the message to mental processing and decoding the intended meaning.

## **1.2. Process of listening comprehension**

Listening comprehension is no doubt a very complex process. To measure that process, it is advisable to figure out how it works.

### **1.2.1. Modes of language process**

It is obvious that both linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge work simultaneously in the process of language comprehension in general and listening comprehension in particular. Among the most important types of linguistic knowledge involving this listening are phonology, lexis, syntax, semantics and discourse structure. Non-linguistic knowledge used is that about the topic, the context and the general knowledge about the world (Buck n.d). There has been much debate about how this knowledge is applied to the incoming sound, however, the two most subscribed views are bottom-up process and top-down process.

- *Bottom-up process*

Bottom-up processing is evoked by the new incoming data. In this process, the sounds are decoded from the smallest meaningful units to complete texts: from phonemes, words, phrases, and utterances to complete, meaningful text. That is to say, meaning is arrived at as the last step in the process. Employing bottom-up listening process, the listener makes use of —his knowledge of words, syntax, and grammar to work on form || in the bottom-

up processing (Rubin 1994). In other words, this process is closely associated with the listener's linguistic knowledge.

- *Top-down process*

“Top-down processing is explained as employing background knowledge in comprehending the meaning of a message” (Gilakjani & Ahmadi 2011). In this process, the listeners apply prior knowledge of the context and situation within which the listening occurs to understand what they hear. It is realized that if the incoming information the listeners hear is unfamiliar to them, it cannot evoke their schemata and they can only depend heavily on their linguistic knowledge.

### **1.2.2. Processes of comprehension in listening**

The process of language comprehension, in general and listening comprehension, in particular is so complicated that it has raised several views. Rost (cited in Gilakjani & Ahmadi 2011) defines listening comprehension by describing its process which involves receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing meaning, negotiating meaning with the speaker and responding, and creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy.

According to Brown (1994), there are eight processes involving in listening comprehension as following:

- Processing “raw speech”

In this initial phase, hearers receive “raw speech” and carve an “image” of it in short term memory. This image is comprised of several components of an utterance such as phrases, clauses, cohesive makers, intonation and stress.

- Determining type of speech

The listeners determine whether the speech is a conversation or a monologue, a radio broadcast or a story, etc.

- Inferring speakers’ objectives

The listeners infer the aims of the speakers whether to offer, to promise, to persuade, to deny, to invite or to apologize, etc. in this stage, the listeners consider the type of speech, the context and content of the utterances.

- Recalling background information

In order to bring a plausible interpretation to the message, the listener use experiences and prior knowledge relating to the context and subject of the listening passage.

- Assigning literal meaning

In this phase, the listeners process the message semantically.

- Assigning intended meaning

It is quite common that literal meaning and intended meaning do not match, therefore, EFL learners should learn to go beneath the surface of the language to interpret appropriately.

- Retaining information in short or long-term

The listeners decide to store the information in short or long term memory.

- Deleting form of original message.

In this very last stage, the listeners erase the original form in which the message was perceived. The speech constituents are quickly forgotten or pruned.

### **1.3. Schema theory in listening comprehension**

Studies that looked at the effect of prior information on listening comprehension yielded somewhat different results. The data from Makham and Latham (cited in Aidinlou, Nasab & Motlagh 2012)'s paper reveals that religious background has an impact in listening comprehension. Subjects of the study recalled more information for the passage related to their own religion. The findings corroborate evidence for the role of prior information in listening comprehension of religious texts. According to Elkhafaifi (2005), "the prior knowledge that a L2 listener brings to the task of comprehending the listening passage is a vital element in interpreting the material." Chiang and Dunkel (cited in Elkhafaifi 2005) had an experiment with Chinese EFL students in which the subjects' comprehension of two lectures was measured by a multiple-choice test with

both passage dependent and passage independent items. The subjects scored higher on the familiar topic lecture than on the unfamiliar topic one. They concluded that the interaction between prior knowledge and test type might show that passage-independent items had provided a measure of background knowledge, but its effect on comprehension of information from the passage remained inconsiderable.

Like the preceding studies, many others also show that background information is a decisive factor that affects the listening performance of learners. This trend was theorized into the Schema theory. According to the Schema theory, the nature of the listening is a communicative process, in which the listener's previous knowledge takes effort with the heard content interactively.

According to Hu (2012), “there are basically three areas of schema that played a part in the act of listening comprehension, which are linguistic schemata, formal schemata, and content schemata.”

- Linguistic schema indicates the knowledge of vocabulary, phoneme and grammar, etc, which play a basic role in a comprehensive understanding of the text.
- Formal schema refers to the knowledge of organizational forms and rhetorical structures of a discourse.
- Content schema deals with such knowledge as systems of factual knowledge, values and cultural conventions. Language is not only the simple combination of vocabulary, grammar points and sentence structures, but also the bearer of different levels of the culture.

Bartlett (as cited in Hu 2012) proposed his schema theory as: “The role of background knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized as schema theory.”

#### **1.4. Theoretical framework: Common factors that affect EFL learners’ listening comprehension**

Among several aspects of listening comprehension, Underwood (1989) states the major listening problems as follow: (1) lack of control over the speed at which speakers speak, (2) not being able to get things repeated, (3) the listener's limited vocabulary, (4) failure to recognize the "signals," (5) problems of interpretation, (6) inability to concentrate, and (7) established learning habits. These factors significantly impact students’ listening comprehension, however, there are still other factors that affect the process. Samuels (1984) further figures out another factor that “hinders” the students listening skill which is the differences between learners’ mother-tongue and the target language. The differences the author mentioned are pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. These factors challenge the listener's processing, which interfere with comprehension in various ways. Underwood and Samuels do address some popular factors affecting listening comprehension, however, they do not mention factors relating to listening texts which remarkably impact students’ listening comprehension.

There are many other researchers who investigated factors that affect foreign language listening comprehension. According to Bloomfield et al. (2010), there are three major factors affecting second language listening comprehension in general and listening testing in particular: characteristics of the listener, characteristics of the passage and characteristics of the testing condition. Rubin (1994) mentions text characteristics, interlocutor characteristics, task characteristics, listener characteristics, and process

characteristics as five groups of factors that affect listening comprehension. The author addresses each factor in detail, however, he even mentions some factors relating to listeners' auditory system which are very hard to investigate, especially in such a minor paper like this one. On the other hand, Yagang (1993) provides a much simpler view which has been subscribed by many studies on the issue. He attributes the difficulties of listening comprehension to four sources: the message, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting.

To conclude, there are various factors that affect students' comprehension while listening. Depending on certain features, the ways to categorize these factors are varied among the researchers. Based on Yagang' work, the researcher of this paper categorizes the factors affecting learners' listening skill into four main groups, namely: (1) listening texts, (2) the speakers, (3) the listeners, (4) physical settings. As this current paper aims at *Effects of listening content listening comprehension as perceived by first-year students at UET, VNU*, features of the listening passage are described in details while those of the speakers, the listeners and physical settings are briefly listed.

### **Listening texts**

The first problem that may prevent students from listening successfully is the listening text itself. To be more specific, students usually have to encounter with the content, genre of the recording, colloquial and grammar.

- Content

One of the most obvious problems that many EFL learners have to face when listening is the lack of background knowledge on the topics discussed. Lack of socio-cultural, factual and contextual knowledge of the target language can present an obstacle to

comprehension as any area of life can become a listening material, from a stories, an advertisement to a street gossip or even an argument. In other words, familiarity with the topic makes listening easier for the listener as he is able to relate to his own background knowledge (Othman & Vanathas n.d). In conclusion, the content or the topic of the listening texts does have influence on students' listening comprehension.

- Text type

“Text type has been noted as a factor affecting listening comprehension” (Rubin 1994). Shohamy and Inbar (as cited in Rubin 1994) conducted an investigation among 12<sup>th</sup> grade Israeli students considering the relative comprehensibility of three text types: a news monologue, a lecture monologue and a consultative dialogue. The research reported the three genres in a hierarchical order of difficulty: news as the most difficult, followed by the lecture and the dialogue. Besides, in a paper of Mehmet & Berrin (2012) of which subjects are 130 students in the preparatory English classes of Gaziantep University, text type is considered a variable of listening comprehension anxiety. They conclude that “the authenticity of the listening text leads to more listening anxiety”. To generalize, their finding indicates that text type also has effect on listening comprehension.

- Colloquial

There is an increasing argument on the need to teach comprehension of spoken language. As a result, listening materials used in EFL contexts are more authentic than ever before. If a listening material is made up of everyday conversations, it may comprise a great deal of colloquial expressions such as proverbs, idioms, slangs and so on. These types of language are usually tough with EFL students who are mainly familiar with formal or “bookish” English.

- Grammar

In spoken language, people tend to use ungrammatical sentences. Some elements of a sentence can be omitted while something redundant is added. There is no doubt that grammar is also a factor affecting listening comprehension.

### **The speakers**

Apart from features of the listening texts, characteristics of the speakers also set several obstacles to EFL learners' comprehension. The most addressed factors referring to the speakers are accent, speech rate, pronunciation with liaison (the linking of sound when the former word ends with a consonant and the following one starts with a vowel) and elision (leaving out a sound or sounds) phenomenon. In addition, prosodic elements such as speakers' stress, rhythm and intonation are also considered obstacles to EFL learners' listening comprehension.

### **The listeners**

Listener characteristics appear to have considerable impact on listening comprehension. Rubin (1994) lists several characteristics affecting listening comprehension: language proficiency level, memory, age, gender, learning disability in L1 and background knowledge as well as aptitude, processing skills, background biases, motivation and confidence level. However, only some of these factors have been subject to research. Among them, two most studied are learner's background knowledge and psychological issues.

### **Physical settings**

Physical setting is also a problem in teaching and learning listening, especially in Vietnam. The number of students in a class, the size of the classrooms as well as the quality of such equipment a tapes, record players or loud speakers are the most common problems that may affect students' comprehending in listening.

### **1.5. Research material: Pre-intermediate “New English File”**

Pre-intermediate “New English File” is used as the course book for first-year students at UET. However, because the university follows the credit system, some second-year learners who failed in the previous semester also deal with this book once again. The four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated.

There are nine files in this textbook. Each file consists of 4 parts: A, B, C and D. These parts mention different topics and deal with three main issues which are grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. These language features are conveyed through pretty communicative ways.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

*In this chapter, the methods employed to carry out the study are clarified. They are presented in six main points, which are (1) sampling method, (2) data collection method, (3) data collection instrument, (4) data collection procedure, (5) data analysis method, (6) data analysis instrument. Information about the setting of the study, in terms of participants and materials for the study, is also included.*

#### **2.1. The setting of the study**

- **Student-participants**

The research was conducted at University of Engineering and Technology (UET), VNU. 59 students who are at pre-intermediate level participated in the research. As the university adapts the international credit modal, students in two credit classes are not from the same majors, classes or at the same ages. In the case of this paper, there are five second-year students and 54 first-year ones in the targeted class. All of the students gave their consent to the research.

At UET, the core textbook of English is New English File. In this semester, the participants of the research are expected to deal with the pre-intermediate one. The course book focuses on three main aspects: grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. On

delivering these issues, the four skills, listening, speaking, reading and writing, are integrated. However, in most files, there is a particular part for listening, which indicates that listening is pretty appreciated in this course.

Most of the student-informants are freshmen so they have not got used to English learning style at university which requires much activeness, especially in listening skill. The participants reported that they had been rarely taught listening skill at high school. The most common reason given was that English was not their focus then because in the entrance exam to UET, they all took A major including Math, Physics and Chemistry. As a result, they find it very challenging to learn English in general and listening skill in particular. Many factors may affect their listening comprehension. Among them is the listening text itself. The content, colloquial, grammar may set obstacle to their listening skill. Therefore, it is worth conducting a study on the issue among this group of students.

- **Teacher-participants**

The two teachers who are in charge of the classes was the second informants of this research. They are out opened teachers with many years of teaching experiences and impressive style of teaching. Up to then, they have had eight weeks, accounting for a half of the semester, working with these students. That period of time is not very long, but with their experiences, it is enough for them to identify certain difficulties faced by the students in listening comprehension. They were another informative source of data for the researcher.

## **2.2. Sampling strategy**

The sampling strategies employed in this study were simple random. The simple random sampling method assures each member of the population an equal and independent chance of being selected. Simple random was chosen because of its simplicity of the process and its compatibility. The simple random method helped the researcher reach one of the goals of the study, which is to make conclusions pertaining to the population obtained from a sampling group's results. Due to the representativeness of a sample in simple random sampling, it is reasonable to make generalizations from the results of the sample back to the population.

## **2.3. Data collection**

### **2.3.1. Data collection method**

The methods employed were survey and interview. Accordingly, two instruments applied are questionnaire, semi-structured interview. These two methods of collecting data were selected because of their outstanding strengths. Survey allows collection of data from a large group so it was applied to student-informants. Besides, this method brings convenience for both researchers and their participants. For the researchers, it is often easier to synthesize and analyze the data collected from survey than other methods such as interview and observation. Furthermore, participants, especially some shy ones, seem to be more willing to do a survey as they do not have to face directly with the authors and there is no one judging their answers right then. On the other hand, interview was used to obtain data from teacher-participant. This method helped the author of this paper not only collect targeted data but also come up with some unexpected interesting information.

### **2.3.2. Data collection instrument**

### 2.3.2.1. Questionnaire

Questionnaire seems to be the most widely used data collecting instrument. Brown (2001) defines questionnaires as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they were reacted either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers”.

Questionnaire was chosen to collect data because of its suitability and convenience. According to Makey & Gass (2005) in *Second Language Research: Methodology and Design*, questionnaire was “one of the most common methods of collecting data on attitudes and opinions from a large group of participants”, and it allows researchers to gather self-reported information from the samples. In this research, questionnaire was used as one of the data collection methods as it allowed the researchers to collect the information about students’ self-evaluation and feedback on how the content of a listening text affect their listening comprehension. Moreover, the responses were gathered in a standardized way, so they were hopefully objective enough. Last but not least, questionnaire is often advisable for a large number of informants, in this case, 59 students. In other words, a huge amount of necessary information could be collected in a short time. Thanks to this method, fairly straightforward information from the samples could be collected

In spite of those virtues, questionnaire also has some limitations. Firstly, when using the questionnaire, researchers may have to deal with unreliable or unmotivated respondents. Secondly, when using questionnaire, researchers have little control. There is no control over leaving the answer blank. Sometimes students may not be willing to answer the questions, so they left it blank. Being aware of those downsides of this instrument, the author of this paper tried to give careful instruction to the samples anywhere they were confused.

### ***Questionnaire design***

Based on the reviewed literature, the questionnaire was designed with the aim of finding out the effects of listening content on listening comprehension faced by first-year students at UET, as well as the major factors leading to that situation. After being completed, the first draft of the questionnaire was piloted among 5 students, who are freshmen at UET, but not the research's samples. The results from the pilot process helped the researcher to refine the questionnaire, especially, more suggested reasons for the effects in listening comprehension could be found.

Because the samples were 59 first-year students at UET, whose major was engineering and technology, the questionnaire was designed in English and then translated into Vietnamese so that it was more convenient for the respondents. In addition, both closed and open-ended questions were used. The closed questions made it easier for the researcher to analyze the data while the open-ended questions gave respondents freedom to express their own ideas. As a result, the information collected was various.

The detailed description of the questionnaire is followed:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Item number</b>
The importance of listening skill in learning a foreign language	1
Reasons why most students find listening difficult	2 => 4
Effects of listening content on students' listening comprehension	6 => 8, 10, 11
Reasons why listening content impacts students' listening	5, 9

comprehension	
Suggestions for improvements	12

*Table 2.1: Classification of the items in the questionnaire*

Fourteen questions supporting the research aim were included in the questionnaire. The first question helped to find out the respondents' perception on the importance of listening skill in learning a foreign language. From question two to four, the frequency of learning and practicing listening among the students were interested. Generally, the data from these questions might indicate some reasons why most EFL learners find listening difficult. Besides, effects of the content of listening texts on students' listening comprehension, which is one of the most important parts supporting the research result, were investigated in 5 questions: 6, 7, 8, 10, 11. In addition, question 5 and 11 aimed at exploring the reasons why listening content impact students' listening comprehension. Last but not least, the students' answers for questions 12 provided the author as well as teachers in general some suggestions to "loosen" the negative effect of the content on listening.

### **2.3.2.2. Semi-structured interview**

According to Case (1990), semi-structured interview is the interview "conducted with a fairly open framework which allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication". Similarly, Mason (2012) defines semi-structured interview as the interview with flexible and fluid structure. Standardized questions are not included in this instrument. Therefore, it brings great flexibility and convenience.

By this instrument, the frequency of listening lessons given in class, the factors affecting students' comprehension in listening and the reasons for those impacts as perceived by the teacher were discovered. The semi-structured interview allows more extensive and authentic responses, thus the researcher was able to be flexible in changing the questions or asking questions back. She based on the interviewee's response to ask further related questions to gain insight into the issue. The interview section was recorded which was useful for the researcher in deciding the trustworthiness of the answers.

Semi-structured interview questions were constructed based on the research questions so all the questions focused on effects of listening content on students' comprehension and reasons for those influences. Apart from these indicators, there were some other questions to elicit teacher's feedback on students' strategies when facing with unfamiliar topics and her suggestions for improvements which would benefit not only teachers but also students. The list of interview questions are clarified below:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Item number</b>
The importance of listening skill in learning a foreign language	1, 2
Effects of listening content on students' listening comprehension	3, 6
Reasons why listening content impacts students' listening comprehension	4, 5, 7
Suggestions for improvements	8, 9

*Table 2.2: Classification of interview questions*

#### **2.4. Data collection procedure**

## **Data from Questionnaire**

### *Step 1: Organize in advance and agree access to our respondents*

In this step, the researcher made contact with the teacher first. During the discussion, the topic as well as the significance of the research and the reason why the researcher needed her support were indicated. After getting the agreement of the teachers, the researcher met the students after their class, clarified her attendance and asked for their permission and support.

### *Step 2: Collect the data*

Questionnaires were copied and delivered to the respondents. Instructions to the ways of completing the questionnaire, explanation to the difficulties and encouragement were provided accordingly.

### *Step 3: Evaluate the data collection process*

## **Data from Interview**

### *Step 1: Contact*

Firstly, the researcher contacted the teacher to make an appointment for an interview. Time and place were made the most convenient for both interviewees and interviewer.

### *Step 2: Interview*

This most important step was recorded. During the interview, beside verbal data, researcher paid much attention to the non-verbal behaviors of the interviewee to get the most reliable answers. In addition to recording the interview, she also jotted down any information that she considered important.

### *Step 3: Get data*

In this phase, the researcher listened to the recording, transcribed it and combined with what had been noted down to get the data.

## **2.5. Data analysis method**

Analysis means establishing what the findings are and how they answer the research questions. In this stage, analysis methods were used to discover the findings.

### **Quantitative Analysis Strategies – for Questionnaire**

The information obtained from the analysis of 59 surveys was expressed in numerical form. In detail, the answers for the questionnaire were put in proposed categories. According to that, the researcher got the results of the effects of listening content on students' comprehension and reasons for those impacts. In other words, the findings from questionnaire were analyzed to answer the two research questions:

- 1. To what extents does content of listening texts affect students' listening comprehension as perceived by first-year students at UET, VNU?*
- 2. Why does content of listening texts affect students' listening comprehension as perceived by first-year students at UET, VNU?*

Besides, the questionnaire was also very useful in eliciting students' suggestions for improvements.

### **Qualitative Analytical Strategies – for Semi-structured Interview**

Qualitative analysis was applied to explore data from interview. Besides dealing with the two research questions, the interview results helped to find out the other important issue which was just partly evoked by the quantitative analysis which is suggestions for improvement. Furthermore, with the purpose of triangulating the findings from the results shown in the survey with the one figured out through interview, qualitative analysis was an effective data analysis method.

## **2.6. Data analysis procedure**

### **Data from Questionnaire**

#### *Step 1: Prepare the data*

The author of this paper checked:

- The completeness of the questionnaire
- The consistence of each question as well as the given answers
- The understandability and validity of the answer

#### *Step 2: Report the statistics by gathering data from:*

- Distribution

- Central tendency: mean, mod, medium
- Dispersion: range, standard deviation

*Step 3: Give visualized collected data by:*

- Bar/ pie charts
- Line graphs

### **Data from Interview**

*Step 1: Transcribing*

The first step was to transcribe all forms of data which could be recorded, captured or note taken, etc during the session of interviewing the teacher-participants.

*Step 2: Coding/ Conceptualizing*

After all the data was transcribed, data that was supposed to be relevant, effective and supportive to answer the research questions would be collected. The aim of this step was to link specific quotes to analytic concepts and categories.

*Step 3: Analyzing*

Once the data became selective, direct and conceptually motivated after the initial coding phase, the researcher chose appropriate methods to analyze the data based on the research

questions and the purposes of the study. In this step, she tried to generalize and theorize the analyzed data into findings and grounded theory.

*Step 4: Conclusion*

Finally, the findings of the research were concluded and reported.

# CHAPTER 3

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

*In this chapter, the results of the research are presented. The information and statistics collected are first visualized, using different kinds of tables and charts. Following each chart or table is detailed explanation of the researcher. After all the results have been presented, the researcher provide the part where the results are discussed.*

### 3.1. Results of the study

#### 3.1.1. Results from questionnaires

In total, the researcher distributed 59 surveys and collected 100% issuing questionnaires. The scheme for data analysis had been decided in advance (refer back to the methodology chapter for more details). After the data was processed, the results are summarized in the following figures.

##### 3.1.1.1. Students' perception on the importance of listening skill

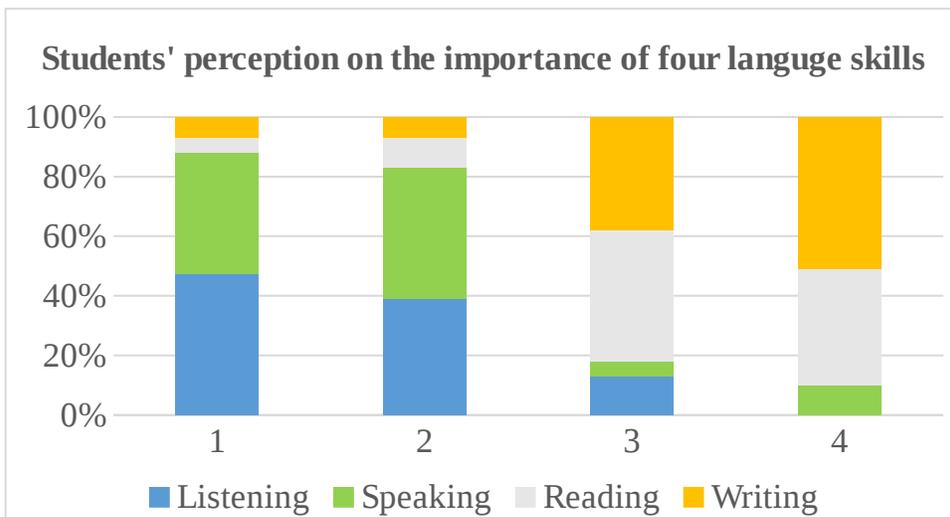
The most important language skill as perceived by the student participants varied among the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. As shown in table 4.1, listening is considered the key skill in foreign language learning by most students: 28 out of 59 responses. Speaking skill is the second runner with 24 subscribers. Reading and writing are the most important skill to 3 and 4 students respectively.

	1	2	3	4
	The most important =====> The least important			
Listening	28	23	8	0

Speaking	24	26	3	6
Reading	3	6	27	23
Writing	4	4	21	30

*Table 3.1: Students' perception of the importance of four language skills*

As presented the bar chart (figure 3.1), about 90% of the students agree that listening and speaking are the most important skills in learning English. This may indicate that the participants really focus on the communicative functions of the target language. Students' perception on the importance of listening skill in particular can also be seen in figure 3.1. The blue blocks represent the importance of listening. Accordingly, more than 80% of the students address listening as the most and second important skill.



In addition, no one thinks listening is the least important one.

*Figure 3.1: Students' perception of the importance of four language skills*

*3.1.1.2. Students' report on the frequency of in-class listening*

The frequency of in-class listening at both high school and university was investigated in the questionnaire.

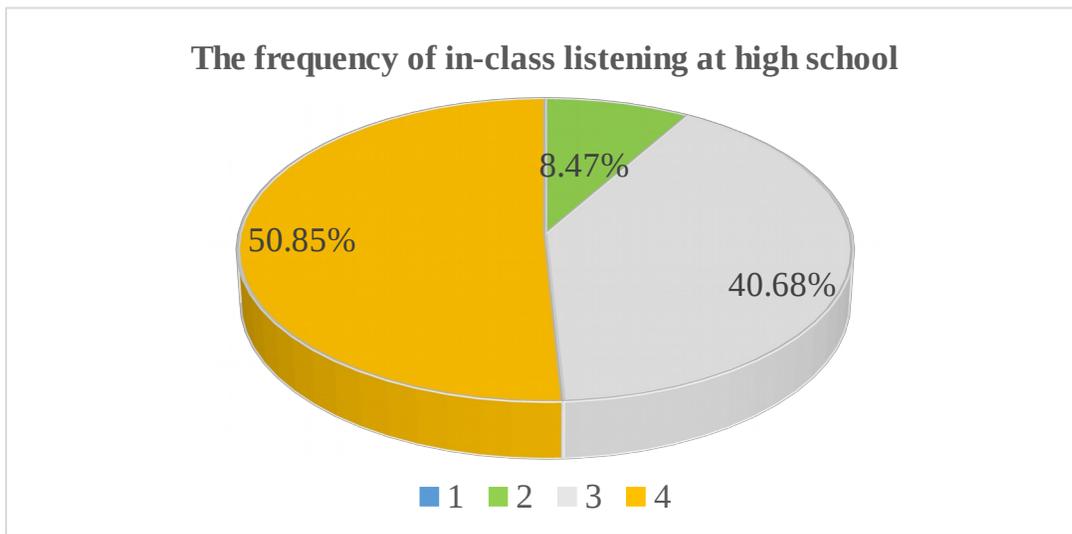
**At high school**

According to students' report in table 3.2, reading and writing were frequently taught at the high school of 56 informants. It means that the students rarely practiced listening and speaking when they were high school students.

	1	2	3	4
	The most frequent =====>			The least frequent
Listening	0	5	24	30
Speaking	3	11	27	18
Reading	25	25	6	3
Writing	31	18	2	8

*Table 3.2: The frequency of in-class focused skills at high school*

As is revealed by the pie chart below (figure 3.2), 92% of the students reported that listening was the least and second least taught at high school. So it can be inferred that listening was dominated by other skills at high school level. The reason for this common tendency is that: if high school students choose Literature, Math and English in the Entrance exam, they will focus on reading and writing. Otherwise, if English is not among the tested subjects for the Entrance Exam, it will not be cared much about.



*Figure 3.2: The frequency of in-class listening at high school*

### **At University of Engineering and Technology**

Students' perception on the in-class focused skills at university is on a contradictory trend to that at high school as mentioned above. Listening and speaking are

reported as the two most focused skills at UET. Among them, 25 out of 59 students agree that listening is taught most frequently at university, which makes up 42% of the responses as illustrated in figure 3.3. Another 39% believes that listening is the second frequent in-class activity. To sum up, listening is regularly taught at UET according to 81% of the participants.

	1	2	3	4	
	The most frequent		=====>	The least frequent	
Listening	25	23	7	4	
Speaking	13	25	13	8	
Reading	10	8	29	12	
Writing	11	3	10	35	

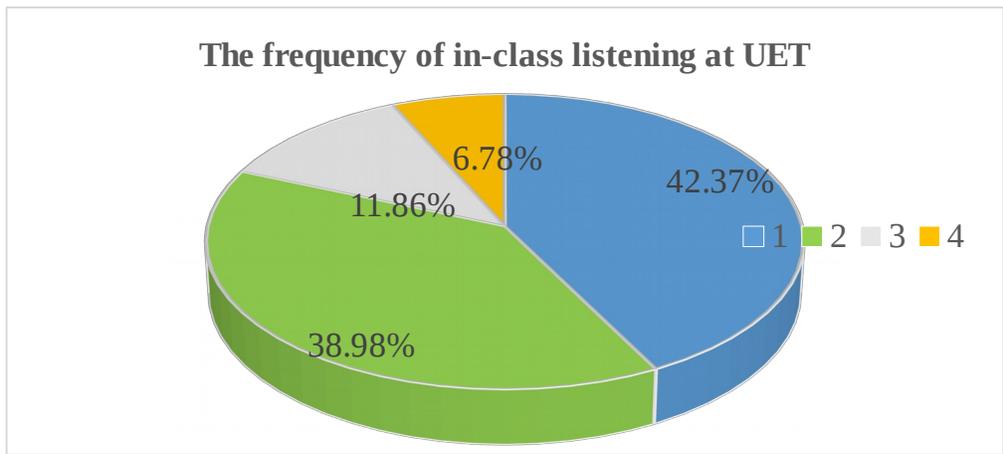


Table 3.3: The

frequency of in-class focused skills at UET

Figure 3.3: The frequency of in-class listening at UET

3.1.1.3. *The impacts of listening content on students' listening comprehension*

**Factors affecting EFL listening comprehension**

As is shown in table 3.4, 22 out of 59 students think that physical settings like the class size, the listening equipment put most impact on their comprehension in listening. Characteristics of listeners such as background knowledge, language competence and psychological condition and characteristics of speakers such as speech rate, different accent, intonation, are blamed for the difficulty in listening by 26 students. On the other hand, only 11 students think the most challenging factor is listening texts.

	1	2	3	4
	Least impact =====>			Most impact
Listening texts	19	18	11	11
Listeners	13	15	17	14
Speakers	9	16	22	12
Physical settings	18	10	9	22

Table 3.4: Factors affecting EFL listening comprehension

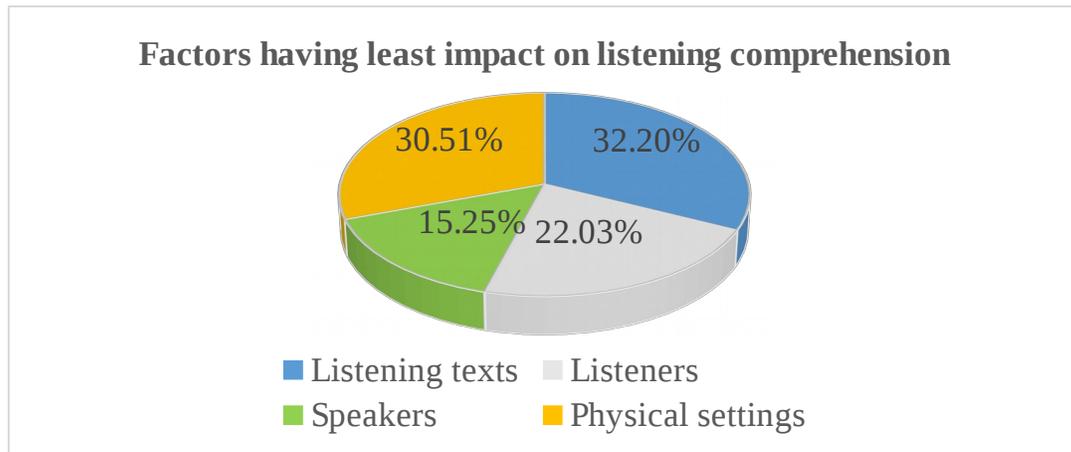
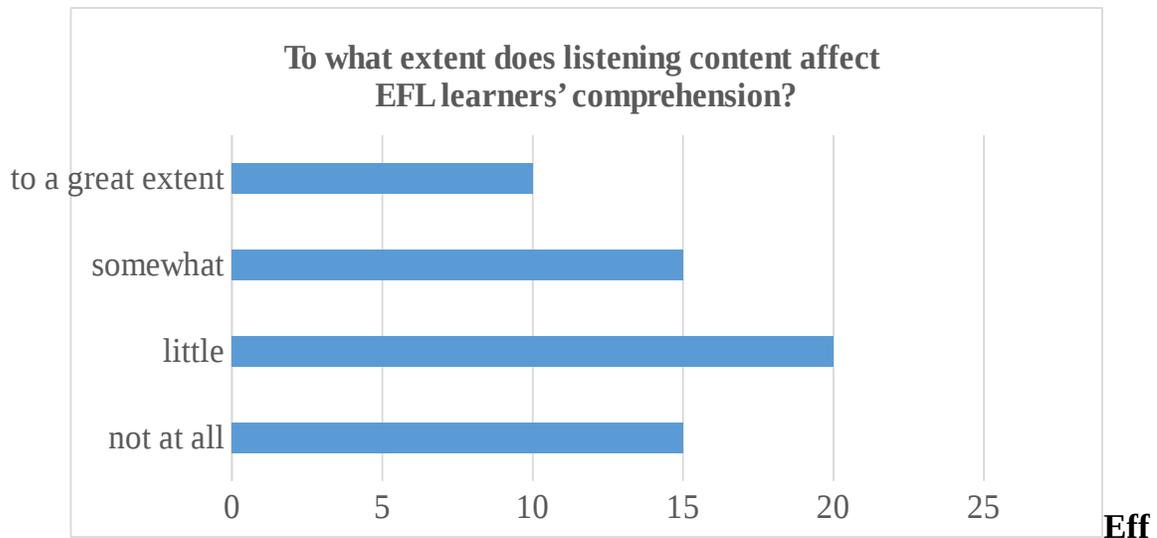


Figure 3.4: Factors having least impact on listening comprehension

Talking about factors having the least impact on listening comprehension, the largest percentage of 32% informants addressed listening texts. For the listeners, the speakers' features and physical settings, the proportions are 22%, 15% and 31% respectively.



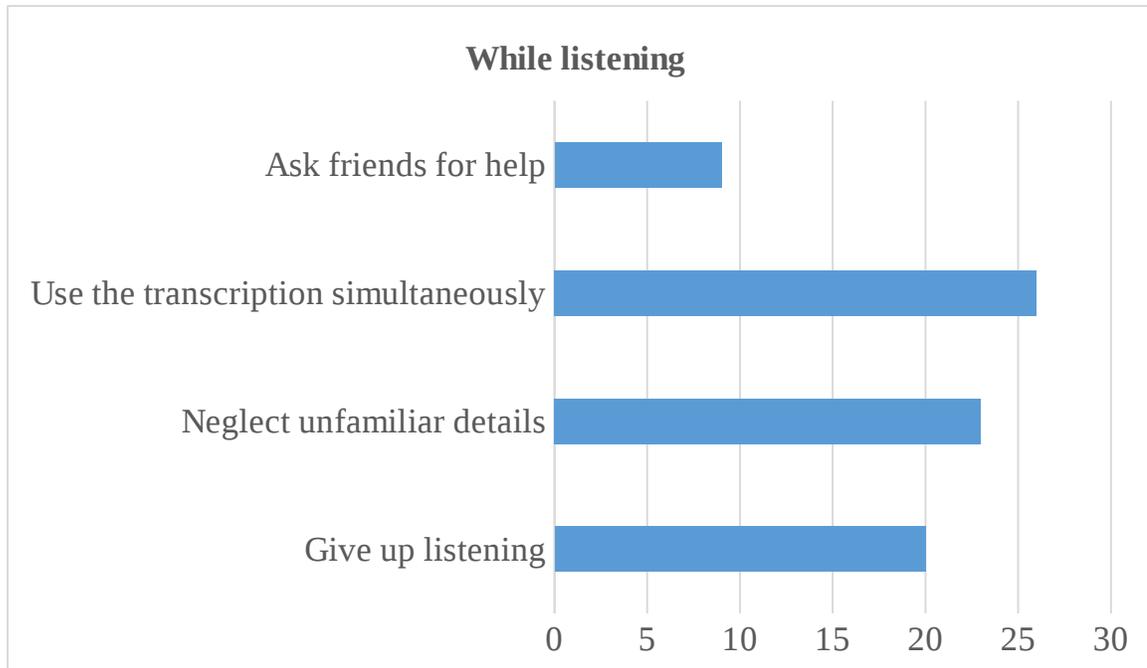
**Effects of listening content on EFL learners' listening comprehension**

*Figure 3.5: Effect of listening content on learners' comprehension*

Figure 3.5 specializes in students' perception on the extent to which listening content affects their comprehension. 15 students stated that listening content do not affect their listening comprehension at all. The content of listening texts has little influence on comprehension competence of 20 students and somehow affects that of 15 students. The 10 participants considering listening content the major factor affecting their listening comprehension reported that listening content greatly influences their listening.

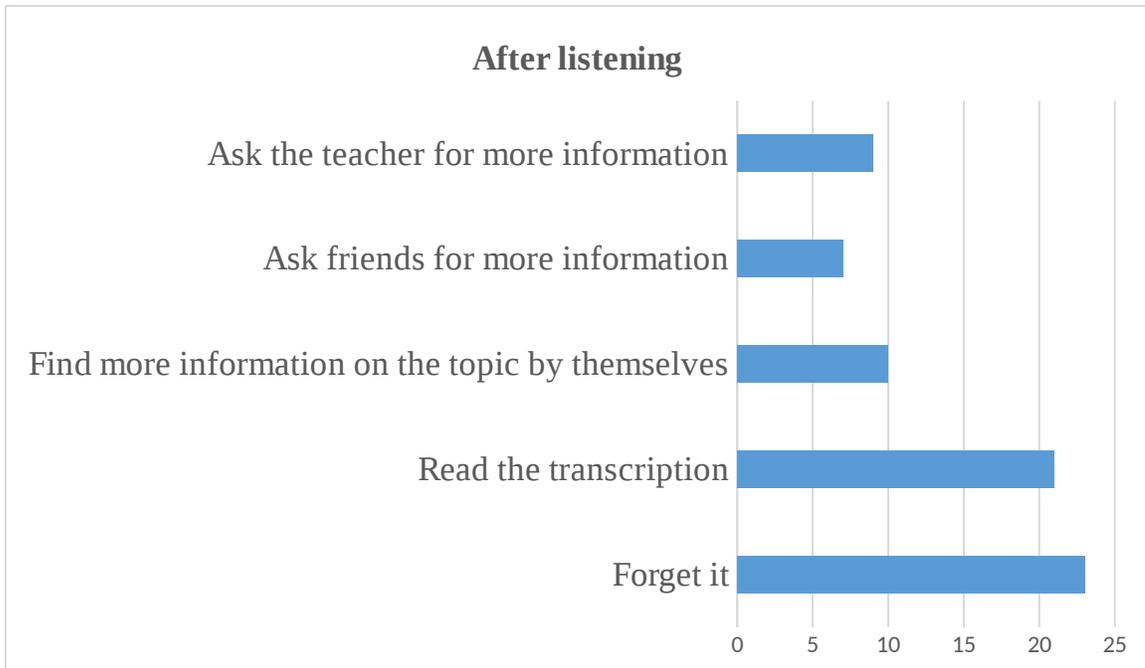
**Students' behavior in dealing with unfamiliar listening content**

Figure 3.6 and 3.7 specify different ways students deal with unfamiliar content while listening and after listening. Investigating their behaviors on facing with the issue helps the researcher find out how listening content affect their comprehension.



*Figure 3.6: Students' behavior in dealing with unfamiliar listening content while listening*

While listening, 20 students accounting for nearly 30% participants admitted that they often gave up listening when they have to work with unfamiliar topics. The others have different strategies as depicted in figure 3.6. Most of those students choose to use the transcription simultaneously. To be more specific, approximately 40% students who do not give up right away read the transcription while listening. Besides, 39% participants neglect unfamiliar details, vocabulary, or structures and try to listen to the rest. On the other hand, only nine students ask for help from classmate while dealing with unknown topics.



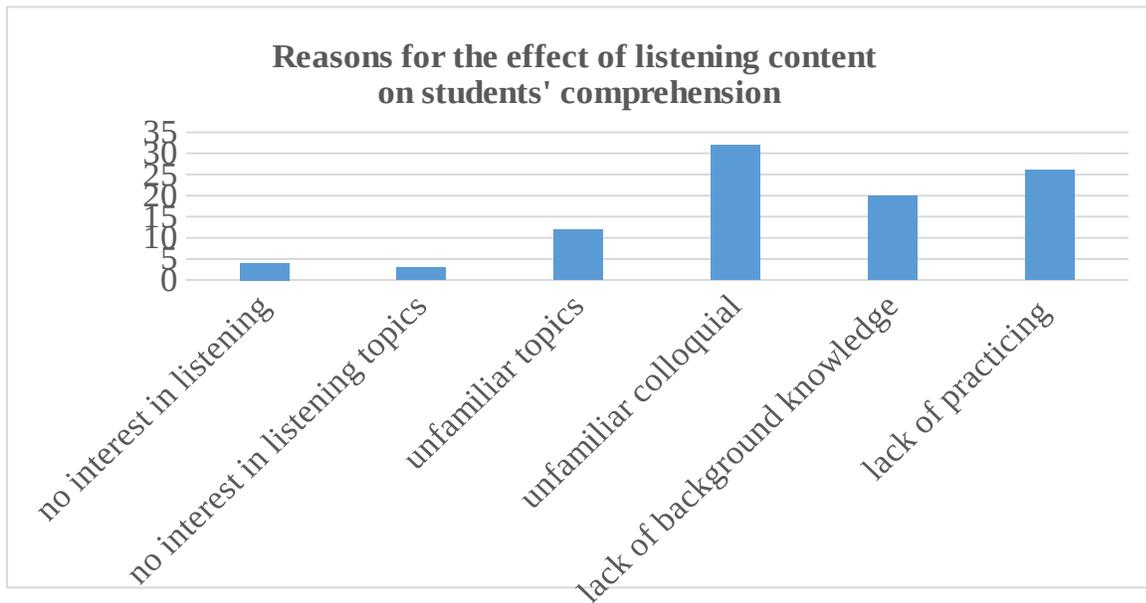
*Figure 3.7: Students' behavior in dealing with unfamiliar listening content after listening*

After listening to strange topics, the participants also have different strategies. 21 students, equal to over 35%, read the transcription after listening to unfamiliar content. 26 participants said they would find more information on the unfamiliar theme after listening to it in class, however, they still had their own ways. While 10 students search more about the topics by themselves, seven ask their friends and nine ask their teacher for further information. Apart from that, a great percentage of nearly 40% of the participants confessed that they did not make effort in studying the topics more.

*3.1.1.4. Reasons for the impacts of listening content on students' listening comprehension*

## Reasons for the impacts of listening content on students' listening comprehension

Figure 3.8 gives information on the reasons why listening content affects students' comprehension. Both objective (unfamiliar topics and colloquial) and subjective (the others) reasons are taken into consideration. As can be seen in the chart, 21 participants blamed unfamiliar colloquial and 10 blamed unfamiliar topics for impacting their listening comprehension. Among the subjective factors, no interest in listening and no interest in the topics were scarcely mentioned. Only three students reported each. The lack of practicing was the most listed subjective reason. 16 students considered this option as one of their reasons. The last reason which was densely chosen by 14 students



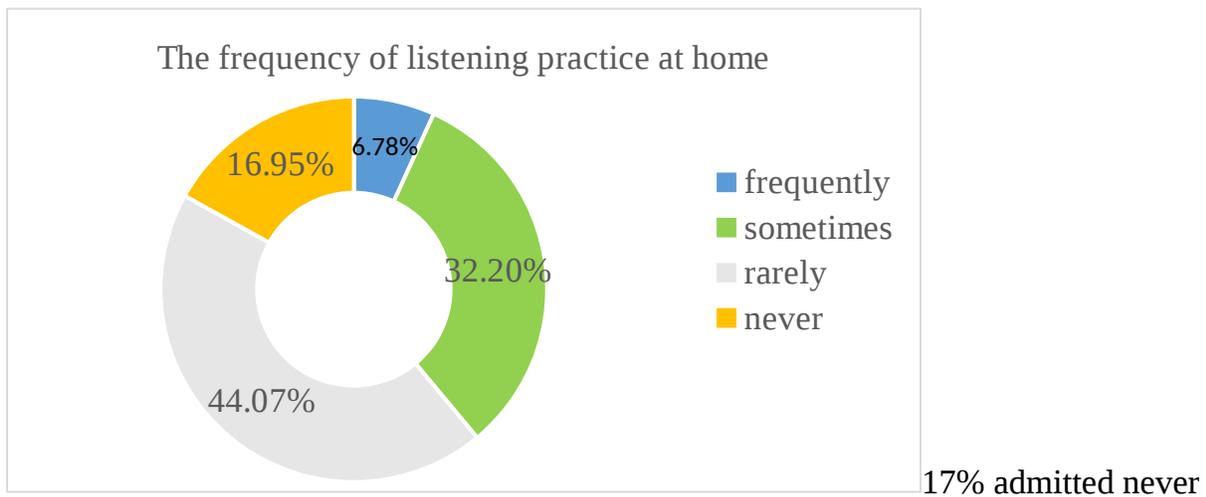
lack of background knowledge.

is the

Figure 3.8: Reasons for the impacts of listening content on students' comprehension

### Students' self-report on practicing listening at home

Figure 3.9 illustrates students' self-report on their listening practice at home, which was mentioned as one of the reasons for the impacts of listening content on students' comprehension. Only two participants reported that they frequently practiced listening at home. Eight students reflected they sometimes listened at home. Besides, 26 students, which is equivalent to 44%, rarely practice listening at home while the other



doing home listening practice.

Figure 3.9: The frequency of listening practice at home

3.1.1.5.

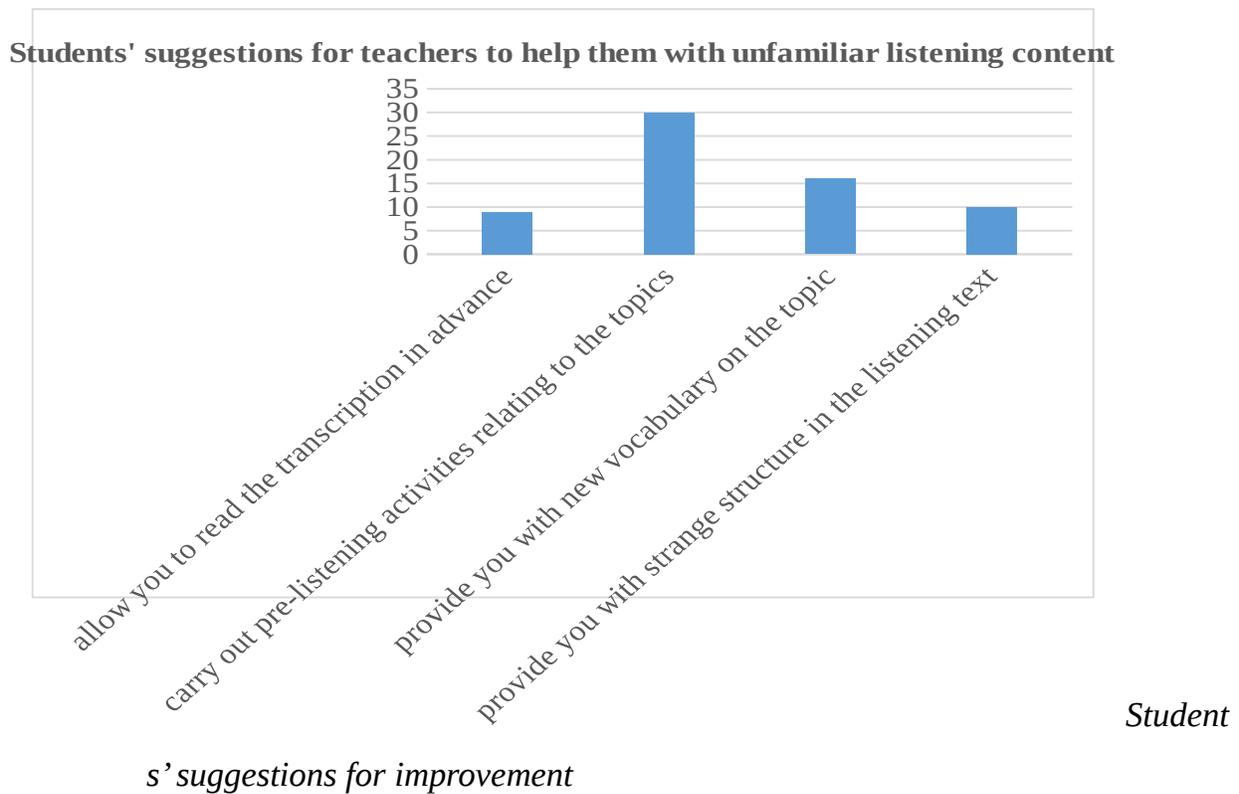


Figure 3.10: Students' suggestions for teachers to help them with unfamiliar listening content

Figure 4.10 shows students' expectations on how teachers can help them deal with unfamiliar listening content. 17 out of 35 students (nearly 50%) expected teachers to carry out pre-listening activities relating to the topics. Providing students with new vocabulary on the topics and strange structure in the listening passage were suggested by ten students each. There were six responses that teachers should let students work with the transcriptions before listening.

### **3.1.2. Results from interview**

#### *3.1.2.1. Teachers' perception on the importance of listening skill*

According to the interviewees, listening, along with speaking are two most important skills in communication especially in foreign language learning. The first teacher (teacher A) further mentioned that listening and speaking were crucial productive skills that closely connected with each other. In addition, the second teacher (teacher B) also advocated that all communicative skills were important in learning a language. The importance of listening was also emphasized by a statement of Ms. A as followed: "the improvement in listening skill reflects the students' overall progress." In other words, once students' listening is improved, their language skills are promisingly better.

#### *3.1.2.2. Teacher's report on frequency of in-class listening*

According to the curriculum, students at UET have two English classes per week and an English class last for three periods (50 minutes per period). Being aware of the importance of listening skill, both of the interviewees claimed that they spent a great deal of in-class section teaching listening. The first teacher estimated spending half of a class in providing her students with listening activities. It means that she often teaches listening skill for 150 minutes a week. However, she further explained that four language skills were not separately presented but integrated in the core textbook used by the student participants. Hence she could flexibly adjust the distribution among listening, speaking, reading and writing skill within a three-period class. Ms. A also added that her students were required to do extra listening exercises at home, however, she doubted whether they

did those practices or not. On the other hand, Ms. B stated that she taught listening skill every session but time for listening was not fixed but based on the number of tasks in the text book as well as their level of difficulty and the students' performance.

### *3.1.2.3. The impacts of listening content on students' listening comprehension*

On expressing her opinion about factors that affect students' listening comprehension, the first interviewee addressed listening texts the first. She clarified that unfamiliar topics and many new words as well as spoken colloquial were major features of listening text that might set obstacles to students' comprehension when listening. Besides, the variety of speakers' accent and students' diffidence were accused of challenging her students' listening comprehension. She further explained "they think that it is impossible for them to listen to the recording even before the recording is played". Similarly, the second teacher also thought that the difficulty of listening texts as the input material brought challenges to her students.

### *3.1.2.4. Reasons for the impacts of listening content on students' listening comprehension*

When being asked about her opinion on why listening content influenced her students' comprehension in listening, the interviewee A seemed to misunderstand the question. She kept answering about the features of listening texts bringing challenges to the students in comprehending listening tasks as mentioned in her previous answer about factors that affect students' listening comprehension. Right then the researcher did clarify the aim of that question and suggested some options. After that the teacher responded in the right track. In her opinion, the major reason was students' lack of background knowledge. She said that most of the students had not been aware of the importance of background information in English learning as well as in their own major at UET,

nevertheless, they were still quite passive in enriching their scaffolding knowledge. This reason was also reported by Ms. B. She believed that the lack of language competence and cultural-social knowledge were the cores of this problem.

The second reason given by the two teachers was that their students lacked listening practice. Although Ms. A did put much focus on in-class listening (50% of a three-period class), it was not enough at all, she asserted. She explained that improving listening skill required a long continuous period, students needed to listen to the targeted language as much as possible to make progress. However, the ugly truth was that many of her students even never practice listening at home, she sadly believed.

Another interesting potential reason why listening content challenges students' comprehension was indirectly arisen when the first interviewee answered about the way her students deal with unfamiliar listening content. The teacher reported that her students just tried to listen and translate word by word. This seems to be not a wise way to cope with strange listening topics, especially for pre-intermediate students. Their listening competence is not good enough to catch every word and interpret it simultaneously. Consequently, they will miss the flow of the listening passage and fail to understand anything. In short, this wrong strategy of comprehension may present an obstacle to students' listening.

#### *3.1.2.5. Teacher's suggestions for improvement*

##### **Suggestions for students**

The two teachers suggested some strategies for students to deal with unfamiliar listening content. Ms. A advised students to "link and relate" the unknown things in the listening text to their common background instead of binding their mind in the listening

material only. The teacher also suggested students to put effort to expand their background knowledge by reading more and more. She stated “the more they read the less unfamiliar to the world they are”. Teacher B also emphasized on the improvement of background, however, she provided other strategies: be prepared for any topic for listening tasks, try to catch the general information, not necessary to pay attention to specific details all the time.

### **Suggestions for teachers**

With her long experience in teaching, the interviewee A provided some ways she applied to help her students deal with strange listening content as following:

- Give them related texts to read
- Ask & guide them to talk about the topic before letting them listen
- Provide critical vocabulary that may affect the students’ listening comprehension.
- Ask them to practice more to recognize the organization structures and signal words more easily

Ms. B did agree with those suggestions, she further recommended that teachers should select listening texts with suitable level of difficulty with the students’ competence. However, she did not mention the role of topics familiarity but pressed on speech rate or “clear voice” which are classified as characteristics of speakers in literature.

## **3.2. Discussion & implications**

This section includes the discussion on the results obtained from the two instruments: questionnaires and teacher interview. These discussions would summarize the findings of the study and thus the answer to the two research questions would be stated thoroughly in this part.

### **3.2.1. The effects of listening content to students' comprehension**

#### **Factors affecting EFL listening comprehension**

Results from the two data collecting instruments show that both teacher and student participants are aware of the importance of listening as well as the factors that might affect the effectiveness of EFL learners' listening comprehension. However, there is still a mismatch between the perceptions on the factors impacting listening comprehension the most of the teacher informants and that of the students. While "listening text" was ranked the biggest obstacle to students' listening comprehension by both teachers, the results from questionnaires reveals that it was reported to have least impact on listening. In details, 32% of the students perceived that listening texts do not put as many challenges on their comprehending as the other three groups of factors: the listeners, the speakers and physical settings. This indicates that many students still look down on the role of the listening texts to the effectiveness of their comprehension. This can be considered one of the reasons that make listening comprehension difficult to EFL learners.

#### **Effects of listening content on EFL learners' listening comprehension**

Among the four features involving listening texts mentioned in the review of literature: content, text types, colloquial and grammar, this discussion aims at the extents to which listening content, the focus of this study, puts on students' comprehending in listening. Although the teachers both responded that the topic familiarity did influence students' listening comprehension, only 10 out of 59 students, accounting for nearly 17%, perceived that the content of listening texts have great effect on student's comprehending. On the other hand, up to 25% of the students think that listening content has no impact on their comprehending at all. This difference between the perception of teacher and students informants indicates that many students have not realized how listening content may influence their comprehension. In other words, they have not been aware of the important role of background knowledge in language learning in general and in listening comprehension task in particular.

### **3.2.2. Reasons for the influences of listening content on students' comprehension**

Several reasons for the impacts of listening content on students' listening comprehension have been unveiled through the results of this study.

First and foremost, it cannot be denied that the lack of scaffolding knowledge makes listening content challenging to EFL learners. Most of the participants of this study addressed this reason, which well matches the "Schema theory".

Secondly, the lack of practicing is also accused of a reason why students find listening comprehension difficult. Listening skill can only be improved if the students make it a habit, thus it is reasonable that if students do not practice, their listening competence hardly makes progress. Even though both teachers reported that they frequently taught listening skill in class, however, it is certainly not enough. In addition, most university students agree that they totally lack listening practice right from their

high school. As a result, self-practice is really important. Nevertheless according to the students' self-report, 61% of the students never or rarely practice listening at home. Those who said they often practice listening at home specified that they only listen to music but other listening genres to enhance their background knowledge.

Thirdly, listening content sets obstacle to students' comprehension because of the students' passive attitude to listening skill in general and dealing with unfamiliar topic in particular. There still are students responding that they have no interest in listening as well as in certain listening topics. Moreover, most of the students do not have adequate awareness of the importance of listening as a communicative skill. Besides, they often apply ineffective strategies to deal with unfamiliar listening content. To be specific, many students have negative attitude to strange topics. They even give up listening right away when they meet unfamiliar content or they put no effort on searching more about the topic after listening. In addition, those who reported to find further information often ask teacher or friends instead of doing by themselves. This means that they do not study actively enough.

Last but not least, another subjective reason making listening content difficult is the students' diffidence. This interesting reason arose from the interview session with Ms. A. She explained that "they think that it is impossible for them to listen to the recording even before the recording is played"

### **3.3. Implication: Suggestions for improvement**

#### **Suggestions for students**

- "Link and relate" the unknown things in the listening text to their common background.
- Be prepared for any topic for listening tasks

- Try to catch the general information

### **Suggestions for teachers**

- Give them related texts to read
- Ask & guide them to talk about the topic before letting them listen
- Provide critical vocabulary that may affect the students' listening comprehension.
- Ask them to practice more to recognize the organization structures and signal words more easily
- Select listening texts with suitable level of difficulty with the students' competence

## **PART III:**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **1. Summary of the findings**

Through the two data collecting instruments and the data analysis methods, this research has successfully answer the targeted research questions.

The first finding is that the students have not realized the importance of listening content on their comprehension in listening. In other words, they have not paid enough attention to enriching their background knowledge.

Four main reasons that answer the second questions are also a significance of this paper. According to the findings of the research, the content of listening texts have effects on EFL students' listening comprehension because of: (1) the lack of background knowledge, (2) the lack of practicing, (3) passive attitude and strategies to learning listening and dealing with unfamiliar content and (4) students' diffidence.

#### **2. Limitations of the study**

Although this study provides an improved understanding of the impacts of listening content on students' comprehension as well as some possible causes and suggestions to the issue, there are two limitations that the researcher wants to acknowledge as follows:

First, despite the thorough investigation of the targeted problem, the researcher had to admit that the scope of the study was quite small. In terms of the subject, there are many factors affecting listening comprehension, but this study just focused on listening content which is one of the components relating to listening texts. Many other factors also set obstacle to comprehending, however, the researcher did not report them as they are not the subject of the study. In terms of participants, the research was carried out among 59 first-year or pre-intermediate students at UET, VNU, who are not majored in English, so it is also quite small to generalize for the population of EFL learners.

Second, due to the limited resources, the analysis about the reasons why listening content has influence on students' comprehension was not very deep. In spite of the researcher's efforts to do the review of literature to find out about the nature of the reasons, she could not find much related literature. The pilot of the questionnaires did not bring in more information for us either.

### **3. Suggestions for further research**

In order to minimize the limitations above, the author of this study comes up with some suggestions as below: Firstly, further research into the reasons for the impact of listening content on students' comprehension is also recommended as this is what this study has not gained detailed information. Secondly, future study can investigate more thoroughly on other factors affecting listening comprehension. Lastly, further studies can be conducted about the situation among second-year, third-year and fourth-year students so that there will be a continuous chain of studies to triangulate and compare the results to see whether the impacts are treated when the students promote into a higher level.

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# APPENDIX 1

## QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Trần Thị Ngọc Mai from ULIS, VNU. I am conducting a graduation paper titled: *Effect of listening content on students' listening comprehension as perceived by first-year students at UET.*

In order to carry out this study, I would be very grateful if you could spend your precious time completing the following questionnaire.

1. **Please rank the following language skills in order of importance in learning English.**

1  4

The most important

The least important

Listening \_\_\_\_\_ Speaking \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Please rank the following language skills in order of the frequency of being taught in English lessons at high school and UET.**

1  4

The most frequent

The least frequent

**High school:**

Listening \_\_\_\_\_ Speaking \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_\_\_

**University:**

Listening \_\_\_\_\_ Speaking \_\_\_\_\_ Reading \_\_\_\_\_ Writing \_\_\_\_\_

**3. How often do you practice listening at home? (Please specify the frequency)**

A. Often \_\_\_\_\_

B. Sometimes \_\_\_\_\_

C. Rarely \_\_\_\_\_

D. Never \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Which of the following listening skills do you find difficult?**

A. listening for gist

- B. listening for detailed information
  - C. listening for specific information
  - D. making inference
  - E. guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words
  - F. Other (please specify)
- 

**5. To what extent do these following factors affect your listening comprehension?**

		
1		4
No impact		to a great extent
The listening text _____	The speakers	_____
The listeners _____	Physical settings	_____

**6. To what extent do these following factors of listening texts affect your listening comprehension?**

		
1		4

No impact

to a great extent

Content \_\_\_\_\_

Text type \_\_\_\_\_

Colloquial \_\_\_\_\_

Grammar \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Do you think the content of a listening text affects your listening comprehension?**

A. Yes

B. No

**8. Why do the content of listening texts impact your listening comprehension?**

A. No interest in listening

B. No interest in the topics

C. Unfamiliar topics

D. Unfamiliar vocabulary

E. Lack of background knowledge

F. Lack of practicing

G. Other (Please specify)

---

**9. How do you deal with an unfamiliar topic while listening?**

- A. Give up listening
  - B. Neglect unfamiliar details & try to understand the rest
  - C. Read the transcription simultaneously
  - D. Ask friends for help
  - E. Other (Please specify)
- 

**10. How do you deal with an unfamiliar topic after listening?**

- A. Forget it
- B. Investigate the transcription
- C. Find more background knowledge on the topic by yourselves
- D. Ask for more information from your friends
- E. Ask for more information from your teacher
- F. Other (Please specify)

---

**11. Please give some suggestions for teachers to help you deal with the unfamiliar listening topic?**

A. Allow you to read the transcription in advance

B. Carry out pre-listening activities relating to the listening topic

C. Provide you with new vocabulary on the topic

D. Provide you with strange structure in the listening text

E. Other (Please specify)

---

**Thank you a lot!**

**APPENDIX 2**

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How often do you teach listening in the pre-intermediate class?
2. Do you think listening skill is important with your pre-intermediate students?  
  
Why?
3. In your opinion, which factor affects your students' listening comprehension the most? (*the listening texts, the speakers, the listeners or the physical settings*)
4. Do you think the listening content affects your student's listening comprehension?
5. In your opinion, why the listening content affects their listening comprehension?  
  
*(factors relating to the students, to the process of teaching and learning listening, ect.)*
6. In your opinion, how does the listening content affect their listening comprehension?
7. In your opinion, how your students often deal with unfamiliar content?
8. How do you often help your students deal with unfamiliar content when listening?
9. Can you suggest your students some ways to deal with unfamiliar content when listening?
10. Can you suggest teachers some ways to teach unfamiliar listening content?

## APPENDIX 3

## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION 1

**Interviewer:** How often do you teach listening in the pre-intermediate class?

**Interviewee A:** 1-2 out of 6 class hours (50 mins/ class hour) – 1.5 class hour in average.

Also, students are required to do listening exercises at home. (To tell the truth, I don't think they do that at home).

**Interviewer:** Do you think listening skill is important with your pre-intermediate students? Why?

**Interviewee A:** Yes. Listening is connected to speaking – a very important productive skill. Also, the improvement in listening skill reflects the students' overall progress.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, which factor affects your students' listening comprehension the most? (*the listening texts, the speakers, the listeners or the physical settings*)

**Interviewee A:** The listening texts (with unfamiliar topics & many new words), the speakers (with various accents). In some other cases, the listeners set the barrier themselves (they think that it's impossible for them to listen to the recording even before the recording is played)

**Interviewer:** So you think the listening content affects your student's listening comprehension?

**Interviewee A:** Definitely.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think the listening content affects their listening comprehension?

**Interviewee A:** Either the topics or the structures or both used in the recoding will bring challenges to the students in comprehending the listening task.

**Interviewer:** So you mean it is because of the topics, structures and spoken colloquial? The listening texts themselves may be a reason. I am afraid that you misunderstand the aim of the question. I want to ask which characteristics of your students make understanding the listening content difficult to them.

**Interviewee A:** Ah I see. I think it is because they lack of background knowledge. I have reminded them more than once to try to enlarge their background but they seem not to be aware of the crucial role of background knowledge in learning English as well as in their

major at UET. The second reasons can be their lack of practicing. We don't have much time in class so home practice is very important. However, to be frank, I don't think they do any listening at home.

**Interviewer:** How your students often deal with unfamiliar content do you think?

**Interviewee A:** They just usually try to catch and translate the every word they hear.

**Interviewer:** Can you suggest your students some ways to deal with unfamiliar content when listening?

**Interviewee A:** Try to link and relate the unknown things to their common background. They also should read more to gain more, the more they read the less unfamiliar to the world they are.

**Interviewer:** How do you help your students deal with unfamiliar content when listening?

**Interviewee A:** There are several ways to instruct unfamiliar listening topics. For example, the most frequent strategy I apply is asking and guiding them to talk about the topic before letting them listen in order to elicit what they have known about the topic. In case they have little knowledge on the theme, I often give them related texts to read. Another way is providing critical vocabulary organization structures and signal words that may affect the students' listening comprehension so that they can listen more easily.

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much!

**Interviewee A:** You are welcome!

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION 2**

**Interviewer:** How often do you teach listening in the pre-intermediate class?

**Interviewee B:** Every teaching session.

**Interviewer:** Do you think listening skill is important with your pre-intermediate students? Why?

**Interviewee B:** Yes, actually I think all communicative skills are important.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, which factor affects your students' listening comprehension the most? (*the listening texts, the speakers, the listeners or the physical settings*)

**Interviewee B:** The difficulty of listening text: input, speed, etc.

**Interviewer:** So you think the listening content affects your student's listening comprehension?

**Interviewee B:** Yes, certainly.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think the listening content affects their listening comprehension?

**Interviewee B:** Sorry, I don't understand this question.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, how does the listening content affect their listening comprehension?

**Interviewee B:** If students know the content already, they will find it easier.

**Interviewer:** How your students often deal with unfamiliar content do you think?

**Interviewee B:** It is part of learning process, they still have to deal with it..

**Interviewer:** Can you suggest your students some ways to deal with unfamiliar content when listening?

**Interviewee B:** Be prepared for any topic for listening tasks, try to catch the general information, not necessary to pay attention to specific details all the time.

**Interviewer:** How do you help your students deal with unfamiliar content when listening?

**Interviewee B:** Select the listening material with suitable speed and clear voice..

**Interviewer:** Thank you very much!

**Interviewee B:** My pleasure!

