

Difficulties faced by English Majors K21 at Foreign Language Department (FLD), Hai Phong University (HPU) while learning listening skills and suggested solutions

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Abstract: Listening skills refer to the ability to understand spoken English effectively. This involves comprehending spoken words, phrases, and sentences in various contexts, accents, and speeds. Developing strong listening skills is crucial for language learners as it plays a vital role in effective communication and language acquisition. However, many English majors at FLD, HPU, particularly fourth-year students, struggle with learning listening skills. To investigate the difficulties that English Majors K21 face, a questionnaire was employed among the students from Class English K21.1. The questionnaire aims to identify the genuine issues related to the poor listening performance of these students. The author offers a few solutions in the conclusion of the investigation that students can benefit from to improve their listening skills.

Keywords: Listening skills, English majors, questionnaire, difficulties, solutions.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, the recharging of education and learning strategies is being connected to numerous universities around the nation. Schools have been changing from the conventional instructing method which is teacher-centered education and learning to a learner-centered one. Hence, students, instead of listening to lecturers and taking notes, ought to prepare the lessons and display them in class. Listening skills play a crucial role in English language learning in Vietnam, as in any other ESL (English as a second language) context. The researcher realized that the fourth-year English Majors at FLD, HPU confronted numerous issues while they performed listening skills. This led the author to conduct this survey to evaluate the current state and to move forward with listening skills for the fourth-year English Majors at HPU. This article aims at answering the two questions:

1. What are the difficulties that the fourth-year English Majors at Haiphong University have when learning listening skills?

2. What are the suggested solutions to the problems?

2. Content

2.1. Review literature on Listening skills

2.1.1. Definitions and characteristics of listening skills

Listening skills in ESL refer to the ability of learners to comprehend spoken English effectively, encompassing the understanding of diverse accents, speech rates, intonation patterns, and contextual

nuances. Proficient listening is crucial for successful communication, participation in conversations, and navigating various linguistic contexts (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Speech rate comprehension in ESL listening pertains to the ability to understand English at various speeds, encompassing both slow and fast speech rates. ESL learners develop adaptability in interpreting spoken language, catering to different conversational contexts (Brown, 2001).

Intonation and stress patterns in ESL listening refer to the recognition of nuances in spoken English, including variations in tone, stress, and rhythm. Understanding these patterns is crucial for deciphering emotional tones, emphasis, and intended meanings in spoken communication (Field, 2008).

Note-taking skills in ESL listening encompass the ability to capture and organize key information during lectures, presentations, or meetings. Effective note-taking supports comprehension and retention of crucial details in various academic and professional settings (Brown, 2001).

Active engagement in ESL listening goes beyond passive reception. It involves focused concentration on the speaker, responsive interaction, and the demonstration of understanding through feedback or relevant questions. Active listening enhances overall communication effectiveness (Richards & Renandya, 2002).

Vocabulary recognition in ESL listening involves

the ability to identify and understand a range of words used in different contexts. This contributes to the expansion of learners' lexical repertoire and enhances their overall language proficiency (Field, 2008).

2.1.2. *The role of teachers and students in teaching and learning listening skills*

The successful development of listening skills in ESL (English as a Second Language) relies on the collaborative efforts of both teachers and students. Each plays a distinct yet interconnected role in creating an effective learning environment. Let's explore the responsibilities and contributions of both teachers and students in the teaching and learning of listening skills in ESL.

a. Teachers' Role:

Curriculum Design and Material Selection:

Teachers are responsible for designing a well-structured curriculum that incorporates various listening activities and materials. Selecting authentic and diverse listening materials, such as podcasts, interviews, and audio recordings, enhances students' exposure to different accents, vocabulary, and speech patterns (Field, 2008).

Modeling Effective Listening Strategies:

Teachers serve as role models by demonstrating effective listening strategies. This includes active listening, note-taking, and using contextual clues to comprehend spoken language. By explicitly modeling these strategies, teachers provide students with valuable examples to emulate (Vandergrift, 2007).

Providing Feedback:

Constructive feedback is crucial for students to identify areas of improvement. Teachers should offer targeted feedback on listening comprehension, pronunciation, and understanding of context. Timely feedback allows students to refine their skills and build confidence (Rost, 2011).

b. Students' Role:

Active Participation:

Students are active participants in the learning process. Engaging in various listening activities, such as group discussions, debates, and presentations, helps students develop critical listening skills and encourages them to apply what they have learned (Rubin, 1995).

Self-Assessment:

Encouraging students to self-assess their listening skills fosters metacognition. Students should reflect on their strengths and weaknesses, set goals, and take responsibility for their learning progress. This self-awareness enhances motivation and autonomy (Goh,

2017).

Utilizing Resources:

Students can leverage technology and multimedia resources to independently practice listening skills outside the classroom. Accessing online platforms, podcasts, and language learning apps provides additional opportunities for exposure to diverse linguistic contexts (Chun, 2006).

2.2. *The Study*

2.2.1. *Description of the collection instrument*

To collect the information for the study, the author used a survey also known as a questionnaire. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed, discussed, and generalized.

2.2.2. *Description of the participants*

Thirty-two fourth-year English Majors from Class K21.1, FLD, HPU took part in the survey. They have learned English for thirteen years but they have put more focus on learning English grammar, reading, and writing skills rather than on listening and speaking. They were asked to take part in this survey to provide information about what hindered them from being good at listening and what skills they were still weak at.

2.3. *Findings and Discussions*

2.3.1. *Difficulties coming from learners*

Students often face several challenges when trying to develop their listening skills. These difficulties can arise from various linguistic, cultural, and cognitive factors. Here are some common challenges faced by fourth-year English Majors in Class K21.1 in the process of learning listening skills:

Accents and Dialects:

Different English accents and dialects can pose a significant challenge for learners. Exposure to a variety of accents, including British, American, Australian, and others, may lead to difficulties in understanding spoken English, especially for those who are not familiar with regional linguistic variations.

Speech Rate and Natural Pace:

Native speakers often use natural speech rates that might be faster than what learners are accustomed to. Rapid speech can make it challenging for learners to process and understand spoken information in real time.

Vocabulary and Idiomatic Expressions:

Unfamiliar vocabulary and idiomatic expressions can create obstacles for learners. Native speakers often use colloquialisms, slang, and culturally specific expressions that may not be covered in traditional language courses.

Lack of Context Clues:

In some listening situations, learners may lack visual or contextual cues that can aid in understanding. This absence of non-verbal cues, gestures, or visual context can make comprehension more challenging.

Complex Sentence Structures:

Spoken English can include complex sentence structures, ellipses, and informal language features that differ from the simplified structures taught in language textbooks. Learners may struggle with parsing such intricate language patterns.

Noise and Distractions:

External factors, such as background noise or distractions, can hinder effective listening. This is especially true in real-world situations where learners need to filter out irrelevant information to focus on the main message.

Lack of Familiarity with Topics:

ESL learners may face difficulties when they encounter topics that are unfamiliar or culturally specific. Lack of background knowledge about a subject can impede comprehension, even if language skills are proficient.

Limited Exposure to Authentic Materials:

Traditional language courses often use scripted and simplified materials, which may not adequately prepare learners for authentic, real-life listening situations. Limited exposure to authentic materials, such as movies, news broadcasts, or native speaker conversations, can hinder progress.

2.3.2. Suggested solutions

Improving listening skills is a gradual process that involves consistent practice and exposure to diverse English accents, speech patterns, and contexts. Here are some suggestions to enhance listening skills for learners:

Listen to Authentic Materials:

Encourage learners to listen to authentic English materials, such as podcasts, radio shows, news broadcasts, and audiobooks. Authentic content provides exposure to real-life language use, varied accents, and different speech rates.

Watch English Movies and TV Shows:

Watching movies and TV shows in English with subtitles can be an enjoyable way to improve listening skills. This helps learners associate spoken words with visual context and understand how language is used in different situations.

Use Language Learning Apps:

Explore language learning apps that focus on listening comprehension. Many apps offer interactive

exercises, dialogues, and pronunciation practice to enhance listening skills. Duolingo, Babbel, and Rosetta Stone are examples of apps that incorporate listening activities.

Engage in Conversations:

Actively participating in conversations with native speakers or fellow learners is invaluable for improving listening skills. This provides exposure to natural conversation patterns, allows for interaction, and helps learners adapt to different speaking styles.

Practice Dictation Exercises:

Dictation exercises involve listening to spoken words or sentences and writing them down. This helps improve both listening and writing skills. You can find dictation exercises online or create your own using audio resources.

Take Advantage of Audiobooks:

Audiobooks are excellent resources for ESL learners. Listening to a book being narrated provides exposure to proper pronunciation, intonation, and pacing. Many classic and contemporary books are available in audio format.

Utilize Online Language Learning Platforms:

Explore online platforms specifically designed for language learning. Websites like BBC Learning English, ESL Lab, and FluentU provide a variety of listening exercises, videos, and interactive content suitable for ESL learners.

Join English Language Meetup Groups:

Joining local or online English language meetup groups allows learners to practice listening in a social setting. These groups often organize language exchange events or casual conversations, providing opportunities for real-life listening practice.

3. Conclusion

From the investigation of the difficulties faced by the English Majors K21.1 at HPU, it can be expressed that there is more than one issue of listening. The researcher saw their biggest problems and suggested some solutions based on his own teaching experience. Hopefully, these will be useful for colleagues and students and help them to overcome the boundless and perform better listening.

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