

## AN INVESTIGATION ON STUDENTS' NEEDS FOR AN ENGLISH LISTENING WORKBOOK AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
<b>Received:</b>	<b>22/3/2023</b>	Workbooks play big roles in both teaching and learning processes. A good workbook is considered as a good learning resource which can improve learners' autonomy and help them to achieve the course objectives. To design a suitable and quality workbook to particular learners, workbook designers are advised to take learners' needs in consideration. The research aims at investigating learners' needs for an English listening workbook at elementary level for English majored students at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University. 360 first-year students were invited to answer a seven-item questionnaire for data about their learning motivations, conditions, necessities, lacks and wants toward a listening workbook at elementary level. The results show that the majority had strong desires and good reasons for learning English listening. Additionally, they expected for a listening workbook which is suitable to their level and can help them to sharpen their listening skill.
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## TÌM HIỂU NHU CẦU CỦA NGƯỜI HỌC ĐỐI VỚI SÁCH BÀI TẬP NGHE TRÌNH ĐỘ SƠ CẤP

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
<b>Ngày nhận bài:</b>	<b>22/3/2023</b>	Sách bài tập đóng một vai trò quan trọng trong quá trình dạy và học. Một cuốn sách bài tập hay được coi là một nguồn học liệu tốt, giúp phát triển tính chủ động học tập của người học; đồng thời giúp người học đạt được chuẩn đầu ra của học phần. Để thiết kế được một cuốn sách bài tập chất lượng, phù hợp với người học, người thiết kế sách nên tìm hiểu nhu cầu của người học đối với cuốn sách bài tập của học phần đó. Nghiên cứu này nhằm tìm hiểu nhu cầu của người học tại Trường Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Thái Nguyên đối với một cuốn sách bài tập nghe, trình độ sơ cấp. Nghiên cứu có sự tham gia của 360 sinh viên năm nhất tại trường, trả lời một phiếu khảo sát gồm 7 câu hỏi. Kết quả cho thấy sinh viên có động lực và điều kiện học nghe tốt. Ngoài ra, sinh viên mong muốn có một cuốn sách bài tập nghe phù hợp, giúp bản thân nâng cao khả năng nghe tiếng Anh.
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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Rationale

Textbooks are thought to play big roles in the process of teaching and learning because of their benefits to both teachers and learners. Young teachers who may not have much teaching experience can find textbook packages as useful teaching resources. To learners, a suitable textbook package can improve their learning autonomy because they have resources for oriented-study and self-study [1]. However, selecting a suitable textbook package, which consists of a student's book and a workbook with their supporting materials, is not an easy task for teachers since there is no perfect textbook package for all teaching contexts.

Despite the importance of the four skills in learning a language, listening is believed as one of the most important skills because of its roles in the teaching-learning cycle. As a member in a society, a good listener shows readiness and possesses an ability to manipulate the sound into words and their contextual meaning. As a member in a language class, a student learns better if he or she can listen better [2]. Therefore, teaching listening skill, which is very vital in language classes, is paid a lot of attention and effort by language teachers and educators. Teachers at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University share the same considerations with their fellows around the world, who never stop seeking for suitable textbooks to their students. Although a series of student's book are carefully selected and applied for the English listening and speaking courses at the school, it is believed that there is a lack of a series of workbooks for the courses for some reasons including prices, task types, the gap between target levels of the workbooks and students' levels. Therefore, it is essential to design workbooks, which are suitable to the learning and teaching context at the school.

### 1.2. Designing listening tasks

In order to design effective listening tasks for a listening workbook, it is very essential to take some consideration on listening processes, features, criteria for evaluating listening tasks and types of listening tasks. David Nunan [3] mentioned two listening process including bottom-up process which is "a process of decoding the sounds that one hears in a linear fashion, from the smallest meaningful units (phonemes) to complete texts" and top-down process in which listeners can understand the information they hear by using their prior knowledge of the context or situation. He also gave seven characteristics of an effective listening course [3]:

- The materials should be based on a wide range of authentic texts, including both monologues and dialogues.
- Schema-building tasks should precede the listening.
- Strategies for effective listening should be incorporated into the materials.
- Learners should be given opportunities to progressively structure their listening by listening to a text several times and by working through increasingly challenging listening tasks.
- Learners should know what they are listening for and why.
- The task should include opportunities for learners to play an active role in their own learning.
- Content should be personalized.

Jack C. Richards [4] suggested four criteria for evaluating listening tasks and exercises, after that he suggested some types of listening exercises. They are content validity (if the listening tasks practice listening comprehension); listening comprehension or memory (if the listening task help to train learners' processing information or long-term memorize the information); purposefulness and transferability (if the listening tasks reflect a purpose of authentic real-life listening); testing or teaching; and authenticity (to what degree if the input resembles natural discourse). Moreover, he made a list of listening exercise types.

**Matching or distinguishing:** Learners listen to the input to choose a response in written or pictorial form that corresponds with what they hear. For example, placing pictures in a sequence which matches a story or set of events; choosing a picture to match a situation, such as listening to a radio advertisement and finding the product from a set of pictures.

**Transferring:** Learners listen to some information in one form and then transfer the information or parts of it into another form. For example, listening to a discussion about a house and then sketching the house.

**Transcribing:** Learners listen to the input and write down what was heard. For example, listening for dictation.

**Scanning:** Learners listen to the input and extract selected items by scanning the input in order to find a specific piece of information. For example, listening to a news broadcast and identifying the name of the winning party in an election.

**Extending:** Learners listen to the input and do some tasks that beyond on what they heard. For example, reconstructing a dialogue when alternate lines are missing or providing a conclusion to a story.

**Condensing:** Learners listen to the input and reduce the information to an outline of main points, such as is required in note taking.

**Answering:** Learners listen to the input and answer questions related to the information they heard. A variety of questions may be made. For example, questions for details, questions for inferences, questions for evaluation or reactions.

**Predicting:** Learners listen to the input and guess outcomes, causes, relationships ... based on information presented in the audio file.

It can be inferred that there are types of listening exercises for listening task designers to choose. When writing a listening task, designers are advised to all of the aspects above and choose a variety of listening exercises.

### ***1.3. Target needs and learning needs***

There are several models of curriculum design and these components include setting objectives based on assessment; determining content, materials, methods; and evaluation. Among the assessments, analyzing students' needs is the first component [5]. West [6] stated that identifying students' needs is a crucial initial step in developing a learning program. Need analysis means a plan for gathering information which makes a base for designing a program [7]. Moreover, need analysis can provide course programmers core information so that they can decide the most appropriate methods and contents of the course [8]. In the research, the researcher followed the model of needs analysis by Hutchinson and Waters [9] who suggested two concepts of needs: "target needs" and "learning needs".

Target needs means learners' necessities, learners' lacks and learners' wants". Learners' necessities mean the course objectives - what learners are expected to achieve after the program or the course. Learners' lacks means the gap between the learners' current level and the target level which should be addressed. Learners' lacks help material designers to decide teaching contents and teaching methodology in the programme. Learners' wants refer to ways that learners do to get the program's objects [10].

Learning needs refer to learners' motivations, learning conditions and their existing knowledge and skill. At School of Foreign Languages, before the freshmen started their first academic term, they were asked to take a test which is used to investigate their levels before the course for more suitable teaching methodologies. The test results showed that nearly 100% of the test takers got below A1 for the listening skill. Therefore, regarding learning needs in the research, the current researcher intends to investigate the students' motivations and learning conditions only.

Hutchinson and Waters [9] stated that a program might not be successful if it is based on the programme objectives. A successful program should be designed with the attention of target objectives and learners' needs. This research aims at gathering information about learners' motivations, learning conditions, necessities, lacks and wants for a listening workbook at the elementary level, which would be applied for the course named *English listening and Speaking 1*. The results of the research will provide useful evidence for the next steps of designing an English

listening workbook for the level. The steps include determining content, teaching methods and evaluation. In other words, the research aims at answering the question: What are students' needs for an English listening workbook at elementary level?

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Participants

The participants of the research were 360 students whose major was either English Language or English Education. Among them, there were 318 females and 42 males. They had experience studying English as a foreign language at their high school and they had spent three weeks at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University. It was hoped that the large number of participants made the results more reliable. After the course named *Listening and speaking 1*, the participants were expected to get A2 for their listening skill. In other words, they were expected to "understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance" and "catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements" [10].

### 2.2. Data collection instruments

The research aims at gathering information about learners' motivations, their learning conditions, their necessities, lacks and wants for an English listening workbook at elementary level. It is a quantitative research in which a questionnaire was delivered to 360 students. The questionnaire was adapted from Hutchinson's and Jowkar's research teams with 7 questions [9], [12]. For each item in the questions, the participants were asked to choose one of the five scales which was accurate to their situations (1: strongly agree; 2: agree; 3: neutral; 4: disagree; 5: strongly disagree). The collected data was analyzed descriptively and demonstrated into tables.

To get the results, the researcher experienced steps. Firstly, after reading books and articles related to the topic, the researcher found some shared ideas among Hutchinson's and Jowkar's teams [9], [12]. The researcher studied the questionnaires used by the two teams and picked up some ideas and questions which were useful for the current research. Secondly, the current researcher adapted a questionnaire for her own research. Thirdly, the questionnaire was piloted on 30 students and adjusted until the value of Cronbach's Alpha reached 0.7, which is acceptable index for exploratory researches. Fourthly, in order to help the participants clearly understand the questions, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese. Additionally, the questionnaire was delivered to the participants face-to-face so that the researcher could support the participants whenever they needed.

## 3. Findings

In this section, the collected data are presented in details and the research is going to answer the research question.

### 3.1. Learning needs

#### 3.1.1. Learners' motivations

**Table 1.** Students' motivations of learning listening

No.	Q1. I learn English listening because ...	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q1.1	I love it.	25	25	33	17	0
Q1.2	Being good at listening helps/will help me understand my lecturers.	25	58	17	0	0
Q1.3	Being good at English listening, I can understand films, songs or news outside the classroom.	8	25	50	17	0
Q1.4	It is a compulsory part in my course.	77	23	0	0	0

Table 1 shows why the participants studied English listening. Regarding the intrinsic motivation, a half of the participants revealed that they were interested in the skill, while more than a third of them didn't know if they liked the skill and nearly one fifth of the participants showed that listening

skill was not their favourite. In term of the integrative motivations, 83% of the participants agreed that they studied English listening for academic purposes. While 33% of the students shared that being good at listening helped them understand their outside-classroom listening activities, two thirds of them had no ideas or denied the roles of listening in understanding films, songs and news in English. In reference to the extrinsic motivation, all of the participants stated that they were asked to learning English listening skill because it was a compulsory part in their course.

### 3.1.2. Learners' learning conditions

**Table 2.** Students' learning conditions

No	Q2. I learn English listening by ...	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q2.1	Finishing listening homework given by my teachers only.	58	25	17	0	0
Q2.2	Watching news and films, and songs in English every day at least 30 minutes outside my class.	25	0	33	42	0
Q2.3	Talking with a foreigner every week at least once a week.	25	0	0	75	0
Q2.4	Using a smart phone and/ or a laptop to learn English listening.	100	0	0	0	0

It can be seen in Table 2 that most of the participants (83%) learned the listening skill by finishing their assignments. While only 25% agreed that outside class they listened to news, songs, and films; nearly a half shared that they did not learn the skill through news, films and songs. In term of chances to listen to foreigners, 25% showed that they talked with foreigner at least one time every week while 75% showed that they did not have any chance communicating with a foreigner. Table 2 also shows that all of the participants had smart-phones or laptops which can be used to study listening skill.

### 3.2. Learning targets

It should be reminded that the course objects of *Listening and speaking 1* is A2 level for listening and speaking skills. It means that learners' necessities are to get A2 level for the speaking skill and A2 level for the listening skill. The current research only focuses on listening skill; therefore, only learners' necessities related to listening skill is investigated.

#### 3.2.1. Learners' necessities

Table 3 shows a uniformity among the participants' responses to the two questions. While nearly 84% of the participants look forward to a listening material which could help them to get main ideas and details of the listening resources, nearly 17% could not decide what they would like from the listening workbook.

**Table 3.** Students' demands for an English listening workbook

No.	Q3. The listening workbook should ....	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q3.1	help me to catch main ideas of small talks, speeches and conversations which are clear and slow.	41.6	41.7	16.7	0	0
Q3.2	help me to get details from the messages and announcements about personal information, family information, shopping, sports ...	41.6	41.7	16.7	0	0

#### 3.2.2. Learners' lacks

All of the participants admitted that they were provided with an English listening workbook when they started the course; however, 100% thought that the contents should be improved. They agreed that the workbook should briefly present listening sub-skills, and provide them with the tape-scripts. Regarding to the role of the workbook to the course objectives, 45% thought that the material would help them to get A2 for the listening skill and the rest (55%) were not sure about the usefulness of the workbook toward their target level.

**Table 4.** *The current listening workbook*

No	Q4. The listening workbook is ...	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q4.1	delivered to me at the beginning of the course.	100	0	0	0	0
Q4.2	designed with parts of theory for listening sub-skills with examples, and tape-scripts addition to practice tasks and audio files.	0	0	0	100	0
Q4.3	well-designed with a system of tasks which fits to the course objectives.	0	45	35	20	0

In reference to challenges that the participants had to face when they learned English listening, Table 5 shows that about 83% had difficulty in identifying key information for the questions; identifying words which sounded familiar to them and explaining why they got wrong answer due to the unavailable tape-scripts. 91% and 83.3% showed that they found listening for gist and listening for details challenging respectively.

**Table 5.** *Learners' challenges in learning English listening*

No	Q5. When learning English listening, ...	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q5.1	I do not know what information I should attentively listen, so that I try to listen all of the words.	50	33	17	0	0
Q5.2	I find difficult to identify main ideas.	25	66.7	0	8.3	0
Q5.3	I find difficult to identify details.	16.6	66.7	0	16.7	0
Q5.4	I cannot understand some words even though they sound familiar to me.	8.3	50	16.7	25	0
Q5.5	I can slowly improve my listening skill because I do not know why I got wrong answer due to the unavailable tape-scripts.	8.3	75	0	16.7	0

### 3.2.3. Learners' wants

The learners' wants for an English listening workbook are illustrated in Table 6. The table shows that more than 90% looked forward for an English listening workbook which could help them to improve their ability of analyzing questions. Additionally, 88.4% and 83.4% expected that the workbook could help them to more exactly identify main ideas and details. Particularly, 88.3% responded that they needed a listening workbook which provided them with some theory of sub-skills with examples and tape-scripts.

**Table 6.** *Learners' expectations for an English listening material*

No.	Q6. I need an English listening workbook which helps me to improve my ability of ...	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q6.1	analyzing questions before listening.	25	66.7	8.3	0	0
Q6.2	identifying main ideas.	21.7	66.7	3.3	8.3	0
Q6.3	identifying details.	16.7	66.7	8.3	8.3	0
Q6.4	providing me with brief theory of listening sub-skills.	33.3	55	11.7	0	0
Q6.5	providing me with tape-scripts besides audio files	33.3	55	11.7	0	0

**Table 7.** *Learners' expectations for kinds of listening tasks*

No.	Q7. Kinds of listening tasks I want are ...	Scales (%)				
		1	2	3	4	5
Q7.1	Multiple choice	33.3	50	16.7	0	0
Q7.2	Matching	33.3	50	16.7	0	0
Q7.3	Note completion	13.3	50	20	16.7	0
Q7.4	Form completion	16.7	45	21.6	16.7	0
Q7.5	Table completion	11.7	42.7	21.6	25	0
Q7.6	Sentence completion	13.3	43.3	23.4	20	0
Q7.7	Summary completion	0	16.7	58.3	25	0
Q7.8	Short answer questions	6.7	21.7	41.6	30	0
Q7.9	Diagram and flowchart completion	0	0	50	50	0

Regardless the students' expectations for types of listening tasks, the majority of the participants loved multiple choice and matching tasks (83.3%). More than a half of them loved completion tasks in levels of notes, tables, and sentences. In contrast, summary completion and short answer questions were less welcomed by the participants with 16.7% and 28.4% respectively. In particular, no one expected diagram and flowchart completion.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research primarily aims at investigating the learners' needs for an English listening workbook at the elementary level for first-year students who are studying English as major at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University.

According to Hutchinson and Waters [7], material developers are advised to pay much attention to learners' learning needs (learners' motivations and learning conditions) in connection with learners' target (learners' necessities, lacks and wants). After the material developers get the information about their learners, they can decide contents and teaching methods of designing the material so that the material can address learners' needs.

All of 360 English majored freshmen were invited to answer a questionnaire which was adapted from Hutchinson's and Jowkar's teams for the research data [7], [11]. The results revealed that the majority of the students had strong desire for learning English listening; they also had good conditions to study the skill. Although they were provided an English listening workbook consisting of listening tasks, they still hoped another workbook which had brief summaries of listening sub-skills, listening examples and tape-scripts. Additionally, the students expected that the workbook could help them to analyze listening questions before listening, identify gists and details more successfully. In reference to types of tasks, they expected the combination of multiple choice, matching, note completion, form completion and sentence completion. Designers of an English listening workbook at elementary level applied for *English Listening and Speaking 1* at School of Foreign Languages, Thai Nguyen University are strongly suggested to take the results in consideration so that they can create an English listening workbook which is suitable the context and can helps the students obtain the course objectives.

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