

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

APPLYING EFFORTLESS LISTENING TECHNIQUES TO IMPROVING LISTENING SKILL AND LIMITING DIFFICULTIES IN LISTENING LEARNING ENCOUNTERED BY VIETNAMESE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT: The goal of this study is to discover the challenges in listening skills of first-year students at FE-UFLS-UD, and to propose the Effortless listening approach as a recommendation for Vietnamese students. To do so because listening is one of the four essential abilities in language acquisition, especially in English. Listening helps students improve their pronunciation and establish effective communication skills. Listening is consistently ranked as one of the most difficult abilities for non-English majors, followed by speaking and reading. This study's participants were 100 freshmen majoring in English, University of Foreign Language Studies, The University of Danang. They came from a variety of backgrounds, both rural and urban. They were given a questionnaire and asked to complete an interview paper in order to learn more about their listening skills difficulties and problems. From 100 students above, 20 students joined the experiment of listening test randomly.

KEY WORDS: listening skill; first-year students; Effortless listening approach; experiment, improve.

RECEIVED: March, 8th, 2024.

EDITED: June, 19th, 2024

1. Rationale

Listening is considered to be the most challenging out of four language skills: Listening, speaking, reading and writing because it requires the complex of listening comprehension in a foreign language. According to Bostrom's (1997), listening is the "acquisition, processing, and retention of information in the interpersonal context".

Therefore, this study is conducted with several reasons below:

First of all, listening plays an important role in communication in real life. Communication includes two major parts: listening and speaking. They have a special connection to each other. We can sensibly talk when we understand what others say to us. Listening is a useful way to provide students adequate input as an integral content of the whole learning process. Listening in classroom can be applied into practical English in our lives more easily.

Secondly, it is commonly believed that listening is the most difficult in acquiring a foreign language, compared to reading which readers have more time to get back to the previous piece of information for better understanding but listeners cannot do the same during listening to TV programs, lessons or conversations.

Thirdly obstacles of listening skills can be attributed to the lack of students' enthusiasm. They are uninterested in listening because practicing this skill is challenging and time-consuming.

Finally, another cause of this situation is the language barrier between mother language and foreign language. Students may take a lot of time and effort to translate words from one language to another.

First-year students who have been accustomed to the English curriculum focusing mainly on grammar in high school, may find difficult to study listening skills in university

2. Literature review

In recent decades, listening comprehension skills have attracted more and more attention from researchers in teaching and learning foreign languages in general and learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in particular. Many scholars believe that the most important step in starting to learn a language other than your mother tongue is to try to hear it. Rubin(1994) asserted: "Listening is

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probably the most important language skill, because people spend about 60% of their time listening...In addition, listening skills gives you the opportunity to feel the language and improve your overall use of the language.” Rost (1994) also emphasizes that Listening can be viewed as a necessary skill in the process of training a foreign language learner and can even be considered as a predictor of language success. of learners. However, the reality shows that listening is the skill that causes the most difficulties for learners of English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). Stemming from the above fact, some authors have conducted studies to improve English listening comprehension skills of ESL and EFL students such as the study of Kretsai Woottipong (2014) from Thaksin University, Thailand and research by Normah Yusof (2012) from Sultan Zainal Abidin University, Malaysia. Kretsai Woottipong conducted a study on 41 first-year language major students in the second semester of 2012 at Thaksin University, Thailand with the aim of understanding students' attitudes and the effectiveness of applying video materials in teaching. taught listening skills to this group of 41 students.

2.1. Definition of listening

Listening is recognized as a multidimensional construct that consists of complex (a) affective processes, such as being motivated to attend to others; (b) behavioral processes, such as responding with verbal and nonverbal feedback; and (c) cognitive processes, such as attending to, understanding, receiving, and interpreting content and relational messages (Halone, Cunconan, Coakley, & Wolvin, 1998). “The process of receiving, attending to, and assigning meaning to aural and visual stimuli” (Wolvin & Coarkey, 1996, p.69).

2.2.Characteristics of listening skill

Attentive - A good listener must be attentive to the main issues. He/she should be cautious and avoid any distractions.

Assume - A good listener does not dismiss information that you deem superfluous. Always summarize the speaker's ideas so that there is no misinterpretation of the speaker's thoughts. You avoid making hasty conclusions about the speaker's message.

Listen for feelings and facts- A good listener carefully listens to the speaker's feelings. You are completely focused on the facts. You make an objective assessment of the facts. You are compassionate, energetic, and aware in your listening. You pay close attention to the speaker's gestures, facial expressions, and body language. In summary, a good listener should be projective (i.e., try to grasp the speaker's point of view) and empathetic (i.e. one who concentrates not only on the surface meaning of the message but tries to probe the feelings and emotions of the speaker).

2.3.Factors influencing learners' listening competence

When it comes to listening comprehension, Rubin (1994) indicates five influential factors. That is (1) Characteristics of listening tests such as speed speaking, stops, stress, and rhyme, the difference between first language and second language, etc.; (2) Characteristics of interlocutors such as gender and degree of language proficiency; (3) Features of the lesson exercise as a kind of exercise; (4) Listeners' characteristics like language proficiency, intelligence memory, concentration, age, gender, ability to use the first language, and background (5) Characteristics of processing information when listening as the use of listening strategy.

In general, if the listening message has unfamiliar content, dense information density, it is difficult for listeners to receive and memorize all. Besides, when speakers express information at a natural and native pace, learners may also have difficulty. The third reason is the listener. When listeners lack vocabulary and background knowledge; not receiving sound well; have the desire to be heard many times; lack recording technique note, infer, memorize, judge, and psychological stress, and ability to concentrate it leads to a lack of good listening is inevitable.

3. Research design and methodology

3.1. Research design

The study was conducted to identify issues with English listening skills as well as to answer the research question. The students who took part were freshmen majoring in English. The data from the

interview and questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively to identify the listening difficulties that English-major freshmen face.

3.2. Research methods

The study employs the following research methods:

- Theoretical research method: collect, select, and analyze research topic information from documents in order to find definitions and previous study results.

- Questionnaire: used to ascertain students' perspectives and attitudes toward English Listening activities, specifically practice placement tests and other level-based Listening content. Furthermore, in part 3 of the end-of-course oral exam, students can learn about the difficulties they face. A questionnaire and an interview were used as instruments. The importance of the questionnaire was that it aids in the identification of problems. In addition, an interview was a useful method for gathering more detailed information. There were two sections to the questionnaire:

- The first section included seven questions designed to gather general information from participants.

- The second section included 18 statements that were scored on a 5-point scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree.

- Interview: To ascertain first-year students' attitudes toward a listening test. An interview paper served as the second data collection tool. It was created to provide insight into the challenges of teaching listening skills. It was composed of three open-ended questions that focused on three main ideas: broad concepts regarding listening ability, challenges that students have encountered while learning to listen, and ways to overcome them. Additionally, by giving students the chance to respond in their own words, we may learn more about their attitudes and comprehension of some of these challenges.

This study's participants were 50 freshmen majoring in English. They came from a variety of backgrounds, both rural and urban. They spoke Vietnamese as their first language and English as a second. They were given a questionnaire and asked to complete an interview paper in order to learn more about their listening skills problems.

4. Research results

4.1. Results from analyzing data from questionnaires about the awareness of first-year students about student's listening background

1. How common do you start your English study, especially with listening comprehensions and approaches?

A half of participants usually practice their listening skills which is followed by 30% of students doing survey sometimes spend time on comprehensive listening. The remaining figures show that only 20% of them rarely or never do listening exercises. Besides, the percentage of students who satisfy with their studying corner account for 60% of the total. However, the figures of survey takers who are unable to own sufficient living conditions and afford their own amenities share the same proportion, with 20%.

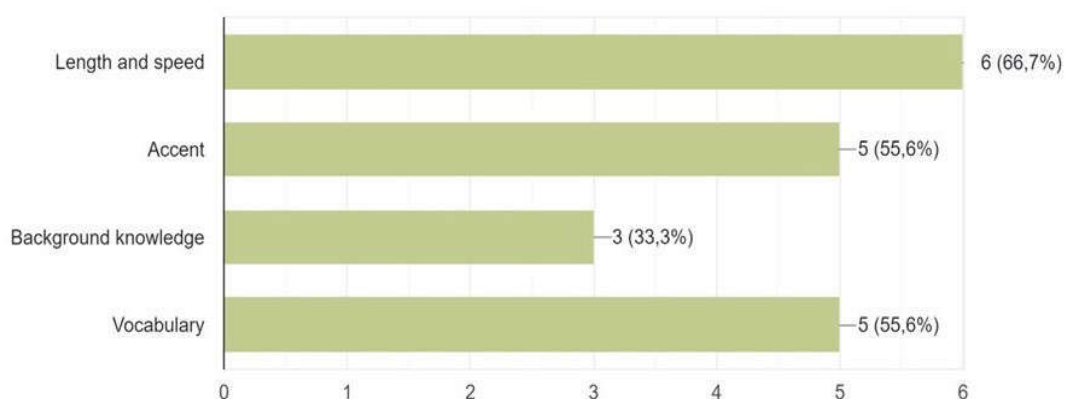
2. What attitude do you take toward the importance of English?

Overall, there are two point of views which are positive and negative toward how crucial English is accounting for a half in the pie chart. 40% of students who took the survey struggled to acquire English, taking up the highest proportion. The second largest figure can be seen in survey takers who show respect to the importance of English. The remaining illustrate the percentage of who study for pleasure and suffer from scary during the process English learning. With 20% and 10% respectively.

3. What attitude do you take toward the importance of English listening skill?

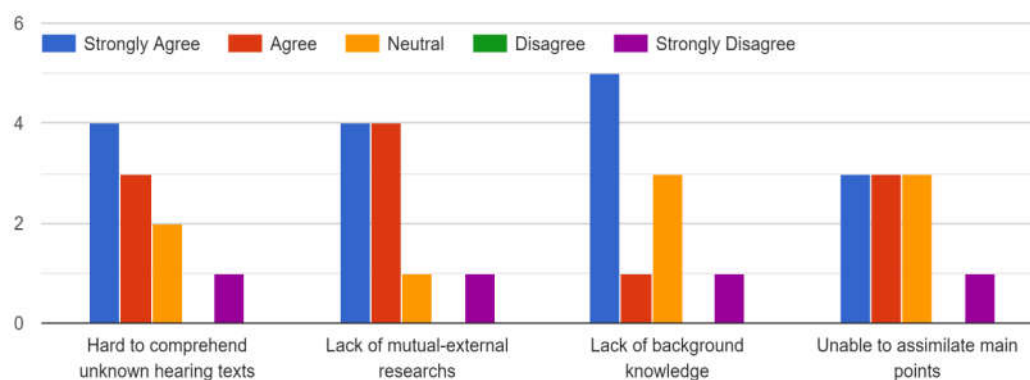
A half of students get into trouble in listening, compared to only 20% of them find this skill useful. 70% of participants sometimes work on their listening skills which is seven times higher than remaining figures, at only 10%. Most of the participants work on their own listening skills practices and lessons whereas $\frac{1}{5}$ of them choose to enroll outer sources.

What are the most common difficulties in students' listening skill?



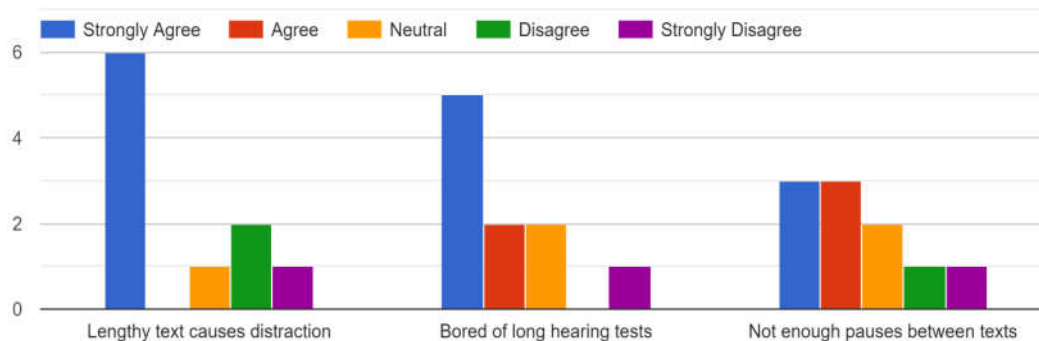
Participants's background are eligible for studying listening skills, while more than half of them have struggles with structure and hearing mobility.

Difficulties in listening skill related to background knowledge



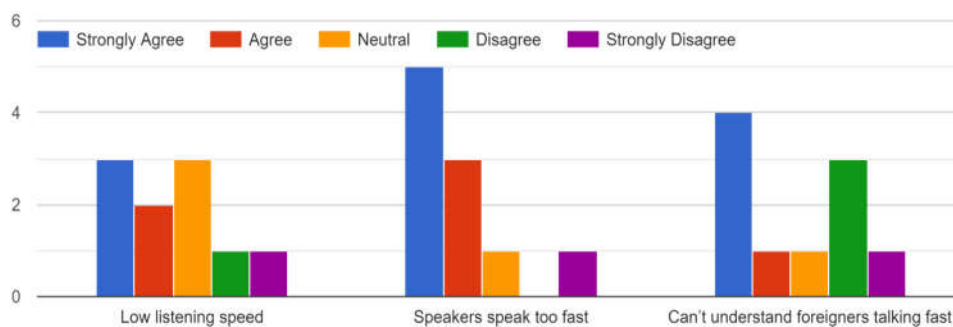
Since most participants lack of wide, significant researches, they are unable to make out suitable information.

Difficulties in listening skills related to the length of texts



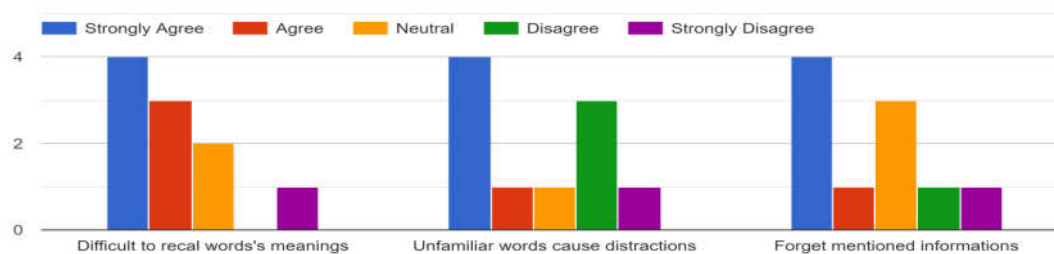
Listening tests which are long and don't have continuous pauses make participants bored of the contents.

Difficulties in listening skills related to speed



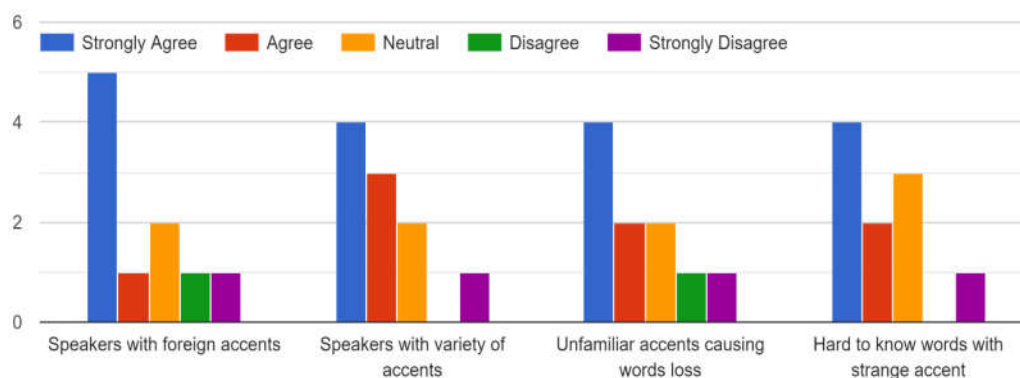
Most participants have low listening speed, which causes them to hardly comprehend what others/speakers are talking about.

Difficulties in listening skills related to vocabulary



Since the vocabulary is the key to remind words of information, distractions can be caused if the words are unfamiliar and forgettable.

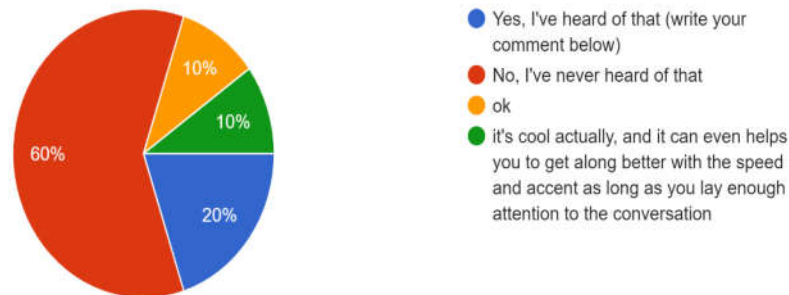
Difficulties in listening skills related to accent



With most speakers, which is native or English-related, can make participants feel strange and lose their senses of word recollection.

Have you ever heard about the Effortless Listening method? (A.J Hoge). If so, do you think it's an effective and appropriate way to improve your listening skills?

10 câu trả lời



There are more than a half of students who have not known the Effortless listening method in comparison to only 20% of who have heard. From data research, this method is not really popular in society. And that is the reason why its experiment was conducted.

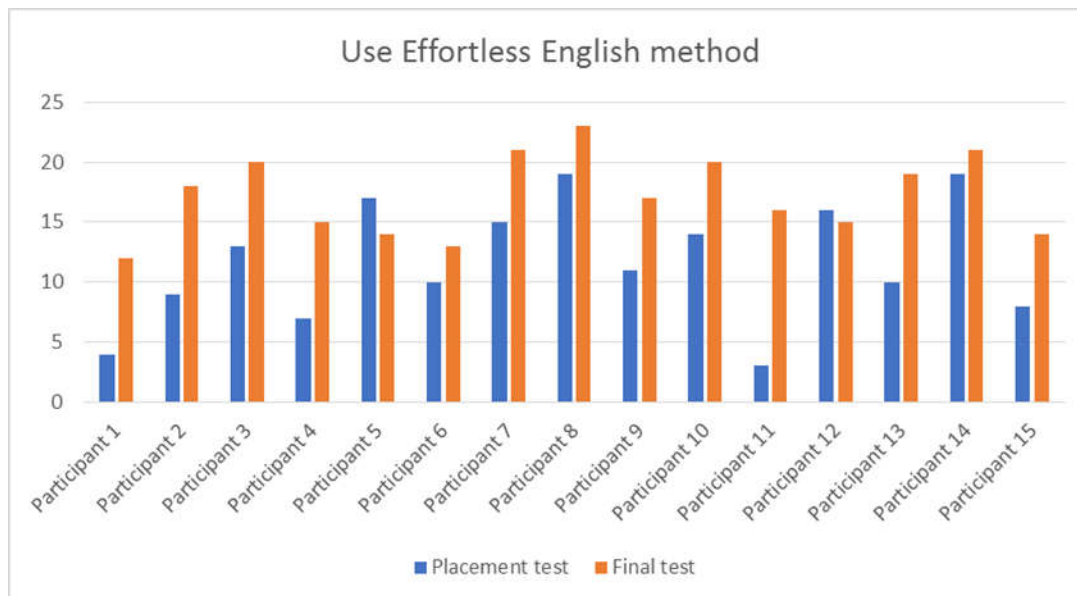
4.2. Experiment

To be aware of participant's problems, we carry out a narrow-scale experiment to help them learn listening skills at ease through a method called "Effortless English" of A.J.Hoge.

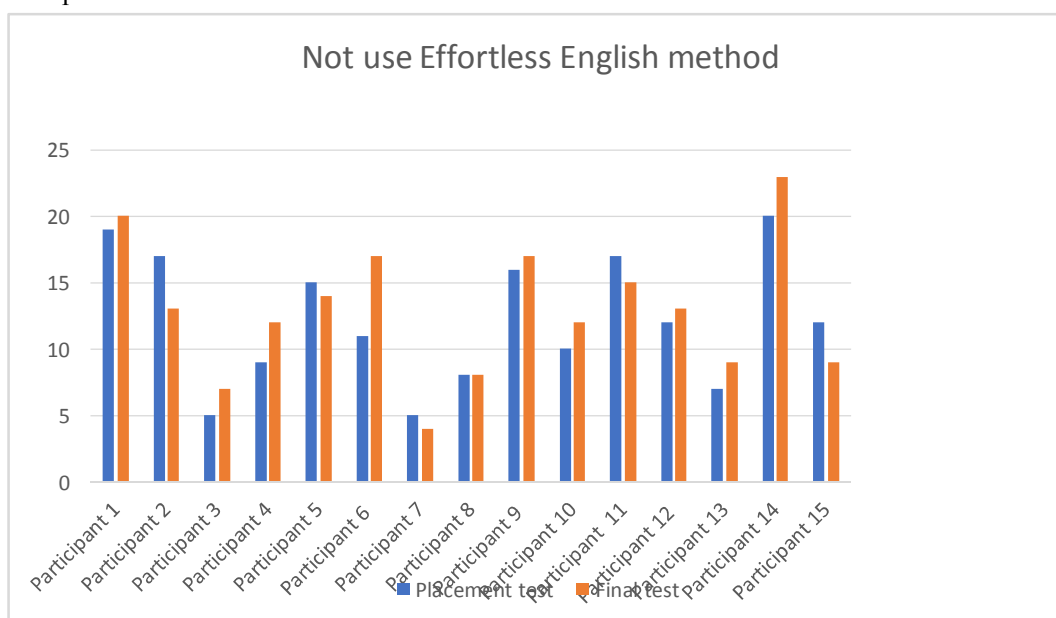
15 random participants were given a series of video (12 units) on Power English Youtube channel (created by A.J.Hoge, 2014) and they carried out them in a period of three months. In each week, they had to complete 1 unit including introduction of the topic, vocabulary and revision. To be more specific, participants tried to get accustomed to the repetition of those videos they follow as the content of them stick into their memory. Therefore, all key factors in English learning such as pronunciation, grammar structures, topic vocabulary enter their brains naturally. However, another group of 15 participants did not involve in this experiment during that period.

To examine the effectiveness of the experiment between two groups, we held a short placement and final online test (taken from Oxford free online test level B2) before and after the project respectively.

In our test, it has 24 multiple choices with 4 answers A, B, C, and D which are divided in 4 parts. In each part, there is a 2 minutes audio covering a specific topic. The participants have to click on the answers as they hear during only one-time listening.



As we can see from the first charts, the majority of participants had better outcomes in the final exam than in the input test, and more right sentences in the test, resulting in better survey findings when they applied Effortless English method to their listening progress. 13 out of 15 participants show considerably enhancements in their listening results. The most significant progress is illustrated in participant 11 who had 13 more correct answers in final exam.



However, those who did not use this strategy made little progress in their examinations and remained stable across the board. Participant 5 and participant 12 showed a slight decrease in performance, which dropped 3 and 1 correct chooses compared to the placement test respectively.

5. Conclusion

Listening is considered as a very important skill to receive information from other people in daily conversations but also to learn academic curriculum in educational institutions

According to the survey conducted above, there are some problems that students commonly face in listening:

- Lack of background knowledge: In non-English-speaking countries, many learners struggle to understand the culture and identities of English-speaking nations.

- Lack of vocabulary: When listening to an audio that includes unfamiliar words, students may miss several answers. Therefore, they can be confused and then cannot keep up with the speaker. As a result, students do not have their best performance in listening exams.

- Different accent: In multicultural environment or tests with variety of accents from speakers around the world, survey takers face the problem of distinguish how the words pronounced by different examiners, especially who are familiar with British or American English.

- Length of text: For lower-intermediate-level learners, it is such an issue of listening to an audio with long text in transcription. They can be overwhelmed and back down in first step to improve their listening skills.

The experiment of applying Effortless English in learning can partially help students overcome these difficulties and have better performances in listening skills.

If the student is suspected of problems with listening, check for physical (hearing deficit), developmental (student's comprehension), and cultural (e.g., bilingualism) reasons. Once these potential reasons for listening failure have been eliminated, proceed with the following:

- Establish simple rules for listening (e.g., listen when others are talking, ask questions if you do not comprehend, etc.).

- Minimize competing messages (e.g., at home, turn off TV or radio; at school, make sure peers take turns expressing their opinion, etc.).

- Teachers should divide their classroom in small groups that include students who are good at listening skills and who are not. Therefore, they can help each other in solving problems in exercise and get better together.

- Gesture, post of standing, facial expression are helpful in delivery of information orally.

- Give students more signal words in lectures in order to catch students's attention. In addition, they can follow what teachers are talking about easily.

- Have the student follow an outline form when taking notes that answers important information questions (who, what, where, when, why, and how).

- Bring more games relating to the syllabus in the lectures to ease the stress of students and give them more opportunities to involve in lessons.

- Listening class participants may find some topic familiar to them, such as "Family", "Environment", "Daily conversations", etc. So that, if they face these kinds of theme in test or reality, they can deal with these at ease. However, situations are not always be familiar to learners as they have to hear about variety of topics on a daily basis. Therefore, students have to equip themselves good base of general knowledge to understand the main idea of delivered contents immediately without hesitation. There is no short cut to the knowledge. Thus, teachers should organize the structure of lectures that contain more learner-centered exercises and activities so that students have chance to reach more insighted understanding about specific topic.

- Learners have to hear different accents of a same word to be accustomed to the way speakers pronounce in each country, not just follow the conventional audio played with British English or American English.

- During listening, students do not have to understand all the words speakers deliver, they only need to figure out the general meaning. Nevertheless, wide range of vocabulary is a must for good listeners. Without reinforcement of learning new words, learners are likely to be confused in listening tests and even get trouble in misunderstanding with other people. Although vocabulary always be compulsory for all students in linguistic syllabus, they still find it difficult to learn these words.

- One reason is that learners get bored with traditional method as they have to learn by heart and repeat continuously. To address this problem, students can grasp the meaning of words in more funny ways such as playing vocabulary games on the Internet or involving role-play activities to guess the meaning through action.

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Áp dụng phương pháp nghe tự nhiên để nâng cao kỹ năng nghe và những khó khăn hạn chế trong việc học kỹ năng nghe của sinh viên Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Mục tiêu của nghiên cứu này là khám phá những thách thức trong kỹ năng nghe của sinh viên năm thứ nhất Khoa Anh, trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, ĐHQĐN và đề xuất phương pháp Effortless listening (Luyện nghe một cách tự nhiên) như một gợi ý cho sinh viên Việt Nam. Kỹ năng nghe là một trong bốn khả năng thiết yếu trong việc tiếp thu ngôn ngữ, đặc biệt là trong tiếng Anh. Nghe giúp học viên cải thiện khả năng phát âm và hình thành các kỹ năng giao tiếp hiệu quả. Nghe luôn được xếp hạng là một trong những kỹ năng khó nhất đối với những người không học chuyên ngành tiếng Anh, tiếp theo mới đến nói và đọc. Đối tượng tham gia nghiên cứu này là 100 sinh viên năm nhất Khoa Tiếng Anh, Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Đà Nẵng. Những sinh viên này đến từ nhiều nơi khác nhau, cả nông thôn và thành thị. Sinh viên được phát một bảng câu hỏi và được yêu cầu hoàn thành một bài phỏng vấn để tìm hiểu thêm về những khó khăn và vấn đề về kỹ năng nghe của họ. Trong số 100 học sinh trên có 20 học sinh tham gia thí nghiệm nghe một cách ngẫu nhiên. Và nghiên cứu cho thấy những sinh viên có luyện tập với phương pháp trên cải thiện rất rõ kỹ năng nghe của bản thân.

Từ khóa: kỹ năng nghe; sinh viên năm thứ nhất; phương pháp nghe tự nhiên Effortless Listening; thử nghiệm; cải thiện.