

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE USE OF
AN INTEGRATED LISTENING PROCESS
IN EFL LISTENING COMPREHENSION: A CASE STUDY****NGO THI HIEN TRANG* - LUU QUY KHUONG****

ABSTRACT: Listening comprehension is one of the four essential skills for learning a foreign language. This study is a quantitative and qualitative research collecting data from interviews and questionnaires. Initially, the researchers interviewed first-year students at Faculty of English, The University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies and found out that the lack of an effective listening process was the cause of difficulties they encountered in listening comprehension. Concurrently, students' interviews revealed listening processes they applied in listening comprehension which were not in great details. Then, a listening process with more detailed steps integrated from the frameworks of DeVito (2017) and Harmer (2015) was suggested for students. This listening process was supposed to have a positive impact on the enhancement of this skill for first-year students. Ultimately, the students' attitudes towards the listening process was analyzed through questionnaire results showing that most of students found the newly proposed listening process "very effective" to boost their listening comprehension skills.

KEY WORDS: Attitudes; difficulties; first-year students; integrated listening process; listening comprehension.

RECEIVED: September, 26th, 2024.

EDITED: November, 20th, 2024

1. Introduction

Students at The University of Danang-University of Foreign Language Studies (UD-UFLS) are required to show their English proficiency at the required level before graduation by submitting certificates from standardized English proficiency tests, such as IELTS, TOEFL, or the Vietnamese Standardized Test of English Proficiency (VSTEP) to the University. In each of these tests, students' four language skills, namely reading, listening, writing, and speaking will be evaluated. On the University regulation, students graduated from the Faculty of English (FE) at UD-UFLS (hereafter FE first-year students for short) have to achieve an overall band at level 5 in the Vietnam 6-level language proficiency framework (from 8.5 to 10 points), which corresponds to the C1 level of the CEFR. Therefore, the FE First-year students are given practice in all four skills with the orientation towards the level 5 mentioned. Regarding the listening skill, Fitch-Hauser (2018) claims that listening is considered to be an essential aspect for an effective communication among interlocutors, and nurturing this ability from the very beginning is crucial for students majoring in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and significantly impacts their overall language acquisition. Thus, this paper focuses on the FE first-year students' listening skill with the aim to investigate difficulties in listening comprehension that they faced, the listening process they used in classes, and their attitudes toward the application of a newly proposed listening process. This study tried to find the answers to three main research questions as follows:

- What are the difficulties in listening comprehension that first-year students at FE, UD-UFLS confront?
- What listening processes that FE first-year students use in listening comprehension?
- What are FE first-year students' attitudes towards applying a proposed listening process?

2. Literature review**2.1. Listening comprehension**

Fitch-Hauser (2018) asserts that listening is a cognitive process where listening builds knowledge,

**Dr.; University of Foreign Language Studies, the University of Danang;*

Email: nthtrang@ufl.udn.vn

***Assoc. Prof. Dr.; University of Foreign Language Studies, the University of Danang;*

Email: lqkhuong@ufl.udn.vn

insight, and skill to help the reader achieve the desired outcome of effective listening. Wolvin and Coakley (2000) state that listening is a process where the auditory organ approaches, processes and determines the message of speech. According to Rao (2004, p.185), comprehension is “*the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected grammatical knowledge, experience with listening texts and other strategies to help understand listening texts*”. According to Lynch and Mendelsohn (2013), listening is regarded as a bundle of related processes including the recognition of the sounds, perception of intonation patterns showing information focus, interpretation of the relevance of what is being said to the current topic and so on. The above definitions proved that comprehensive listening is a complex problem-solving skill.

This study decided to choose the definition of listening process developed by Anderson and Lynch (1988) who affirm that the comprehensive listening is to comprehend whatever the speakers said, and the listener plays an important role in the listening process by using his own knowledge in analyzing whatever he listens to comprehend the speaker’s utterance.

2.2. Stages in language learning and in listening comprehension

In this study, the researchers based on the two frameworks by DeVito (2017) and Harmer (2015).

2.2.1. The framework of listening stages by DeVito (2017)

DeVito (2017, p.158) has divided “*the listening process into five key stages namely receiving, understanding, remembering, evaluating, and responding*”.

Stage 1. Receiving: Receiving is the intentional focus on hearing a speaker’s message, which happens when listeners filter out other sources in order to isolate the message and avoid the confusing mixture of incoming stimuli.

Stage 2. Understanding: In the understanding stage, listeners attempt to learn the meaning of the message, which is not always easy.

Stage 3. Remembering: Remembering begins with listening; if listeners cannot remember something that was said, listeners might not have been listening effectively.

Stage 4. Evaluating: Evaluating means judging the value of the message. Listeners are more likely to evaluate a message positively if the voice of the speakers is clear and the ideas are logical. However, personal opinions sometimes result in prejudiced evaluations. Therefore, good listeners should learn to refrain from making judgments and should focus on the speaker’s meanings.

Stage 5. Responding: Responding is the stage at which listeners indicate the involvement. Almost anything the listeners do at this stage can be interpreted as feedback.

2.2.2. The framework of listening stages by Harmer (2015)

According to Harmer (2015, p.65), “*the PPP approach is commonly utilized in teaching basic language at beginner levels*”. PPP is a three-part learning paradigm which stands for Presentation (pre), Practice (while) and Production (post). Integrating PPP into listening comprehension, the process includes pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening.

Stage 1. Pre-listening: Pre-listening means steps that learners should prepare before they actual listen to listening texts.

Stage 2. While-listening: While-listening includes steps that learners apply during the time they are listening to listening texts.

Stage 3. Post-listening: Post-listening is the process that learners double check or get feedbacks on the answers for the listening tasks they have done in while-listening.

2.2.3. The integrated listening process used in this study

The researchers integrated the two frameworks in section 2.2.1 and 2.2.2 to form the theoretical framework for the listening process. This framework is also suggested for FE first-year students. The five stages in the listening process by DeVito (2017) were added to that of Harmer (2015). To be

more specific, the first four stages of DeVito (2017) were included in while-listening of Harmer (2015), the last stage of DeVito (2017) was inserted into post-listening of Harmer (2015).

Table 1. *The integrated theoretical framework for listening process*

Stages	Steps	Activities	Purposes
Pre-listening	1	Reading the requirement of the listening task	Identifying listening task types
	2	Reading question 1 (Q1)	Understanding the meaning/information of question 1
	3	- Analyzing keywords of Q1 by underlying or highlighting keywords - Listing keywords in students' schemata related to the listening topic	Preparing for keyword scanning in while – listening
	4	Repeating step 2 and 3 for other questions	Understanding the meaning of the whole listening task
While-listening	5	Receiving information in listening text for Q1 by scanning keywords of Q1	Locating where to start listening for Q1
	6	Understanding information in listening text for Q1	Listening for comprehension which means students have to connect the meaning of words, grammars, sounds in the sentences in order to understand the whole sentence which consists of the answers
	7	Remembering information in listening text for Q1	After understanding the listening texts, remembering the answers to write them down in later steps.
	8	Evaluating information in listening text for Q1	Distractors may occur during listening comprehension; students need to evaluate different options for the answer of Q1 to pick up the most correct answer.
	9	Writing down the answer for Q1	The answer of Q1 is assessed.
	10	Repeating step 5 to step 9 for other questions	The answers of all questions are assessed.
Post-listening	11	Responding to information in listening text which mean students have to give feedback of every single answer.	Double checking the accuracy of answers in terms of spellings, word limit, types of information, parts of speech, grammar

3. Research design

This study has resorted to a combination of the quantitative and the qualitative approaches.

3.1. Textbooks

The official textbook for listening comprehension which is used for FE first-year students in two semesters of one academic year is “Pathways 2: Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking”, 2nd edition. This book is written by Becky Tarver Chase and published by National Geographic Learning,

a part of Cengage Learning. It is used in two different courses namely General English (GE) B1.1 and B1.3 which aim to provide first-year students with language proficiency at CEFR B1 level.

3.2. Participants and sampling

3.2.1. Participants

The participants of this study included 77 FE first-year students whose ages ranged from 18 to 20 years old. They are all majored in English Translation and Interpreting. These participants have been studying English for at least 10 years. They had finished their first semester of academic year 2023 – 2024; and were supposed to attain level 3, equivalent to level B1 of the CEFR.

Table 2. First-year students' classes

Time	Classes	Quantity of students	Subjects	Textbooks
Semester I	GE-B1.1-02	39	GE B1.1	Unit 1 – Unit 5 Pathways 2: Listening, Speaking, and Critical Thinking, 2 nd edition
August 2023 - January 2024	GE-B1.1-01	38		

3.2.2. Sampling

According to statistics from the Faculty of English, UD-UFLS, there were 177 FE first-year students in the classes that the researchers were teaching at the time. The researchers took the entire samples with the total population sampling. The steps were as follows:

- Making the name lists of FE first-year students related based on the information provided by the FE Faculty.

- Delivering the questionnaires to all intended FE first-year students online. The results were 77 samples (n = 77).

3.3. Research Instruments

In-person interviews were conducted at the beginning of semester 1 in the academic school year 2023-2024. There were two questions which were not extracted from the questionnaire, asking students about the difficulties and how many steps that they applied in listening comprehension. The interview was conducted to 77 FE first-year students, hence the researchers conducted 77 interviews at once.

A questionnaire containing both closed- and open-ended questions was created by the researchers. In particular, the first section contained two questions about the age range of first-year students and the length of time they have spent learning English. The second section asked about first-year students' opinions regarding the use of the integrated listening process to enhance their listening comprehension skills. This questionnaire was transferred to a google form at the end of the first semester, which subsequently released a link for the researchers. In order to collect data for study, the researchers sent this link to participants via Zalo or Messenger.

3.4. Research methods

Each academic year at FE, UFLS - UD includes two semesters. There are 15 weeks for each one. A questionnaire and an interview were used as research instruments to collect data. The data collection process was as follows.

Step 1: In the beginning of semester 1, the interview was carried out to identify challenges first-year students faced in listening comprehension. At the same time, students were also asked to reveal listening processes they used when listening.

Step 2: a listening process (Table 1) with detailed steps was suggested for students to apply in listening comprehension classes during semester 1.

Step 3: At the end of semester 1, a set of questionnaires related to students' attitudes and difficulties in applying the listening process into listening comprehension classes was delivered to students to investigate the effectiveness of the proposed listening process.

The data gathered from questionnaires and interviews were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively to address the research questions. Following data collection, the researchers categorized and grouped the information. The results were then presented as percentages and visualized with graphs. Based on this analysis, the researchers discussed the findings to draw conclusions for this study.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Difficulties in listening comprehension encountered by FE First-year students

If FE first-year students struggle with listening comprehension, effective communication can be challenging for them, and they might even have difficulty passing listening exams for mid-term or final assessments. Many students encounter issues with listening, which often leads to poor results. According to Wenden (1986), it is important to recognize that how learners first-year students perceive their listening difficulties and strategies can influence their listening comprehension, either positively or negatively. To help students improve their listening skills, it is crucial to identify the specific problems affecting them.

At the start of the first semester, an interview was conducted to identify the challenges FE first-year students encountered with listening comprehension. The result displayed ten different difficulties in listening comprehension FE first-year students might face which were the lack of sufficient vocabulary (LoSV), the shortage of grammatical structures (SoGS), the pronunciation or accents of speakers (PoAoS), the lack of detailed listening process (LoDLP), the lack of listening skills (LoLS), the poor quality of listening equipment or sound systems (PQoLE), the complicated content of listening texts (CCoLT), the length of listening texts (LoLT), too many distractors in listening texts (DiLT), and only one time of listening (OOToL).

When comparing the difficulties in listening comprehension among different categories, Krathwohl (2002) revises Bloom's taxonomy for different levels of difficulty. To be specific, there were distinct patterns emerging namely the highest difficulty (above 80%), intermediate difficulty (from 60% to 79%), moderate difficulty (from 40% to 59%) and lower difficulty (below 40%).

Regarding the highest difficulty, there was no record for this level. As for intermediate difficulty, the percentages of difficulty were seen in PoAoS at 72.73% (n=56), LoSV at 70.13% (n=54), LoDLP at 62.34% (n=48) indicating that these areas posed the most significant challenges for FE first-year students. These three categories were characterized by relatively high difficulty levels, with PoAoS slightly surpassing LoSV.

In terms of moderate difficulty, several categories illustrated moderate difficulty levels. For example, CCoLT at 49.35% (n=38) fell into this range, suggesting that while this category was challenging, it was not as severe as those in the highest difficulty group. Additionally, DiLT at 45.45% (n=35) and OOToL at 44.16% (n=34) also reflected moderate difficulty, with DiLT having a slightly higher challenge level. It is clear that PQoLE at 40.26% (n=31) ranked the least in this group.

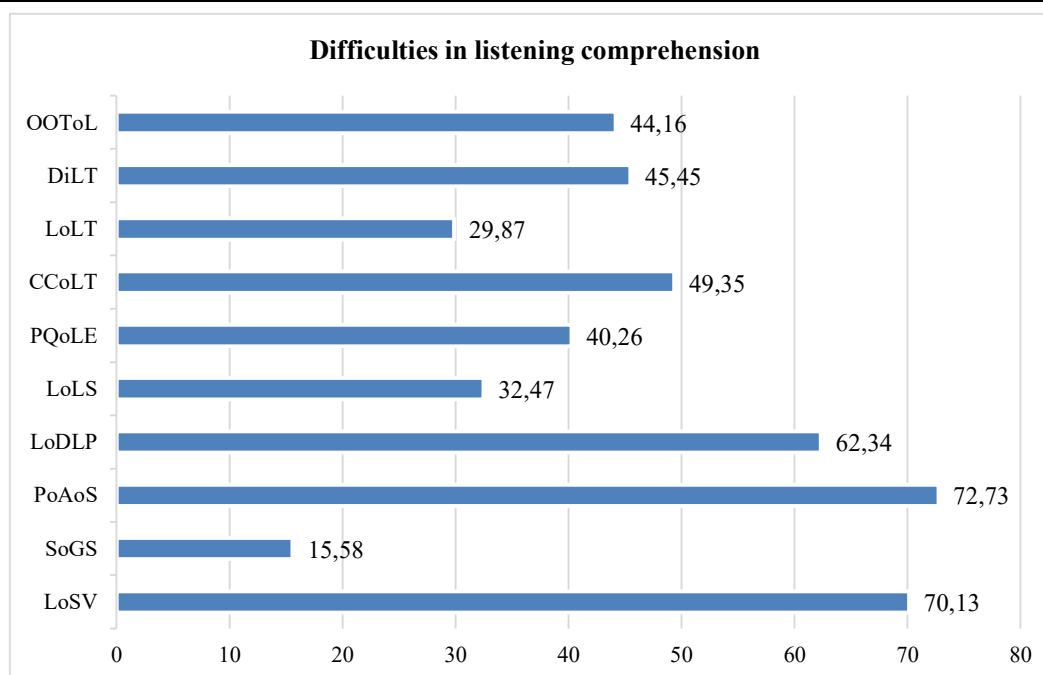


Figure 1. Difficulties in listening comprehension

Furthermore, categories with lower difficulty percentages include LoLS at 32,47% (n=25), LoLT at 29,87% (n=23), and SoGS at 15,58% (n=12). These percentages indicate that these areas are less challenging compared to others, with SoGS being the least difficult overall.

In summary, the difficulties range from high to low, with PoAoS, LoSV, and LoDLP representing the most challenging areas, while SoGS is the least challenging. The remaining categories fell into a moderate range, highlighting varying degrees of listening comprehension difficulty across different aspects. The difficulties in listening comprehension faced by first-year students in this study went in line with Yagang (1994) who identifies four separate aspects leading to challenges in listening comprehension namely the message, the speaker, the listener, and the physical setting. Furthermore, this study also has some factors in common with Higgins (1995) who regards speech rate, vocabulary, and pronunciation as obstacles.

4.2. Listening processes used by FE First-year students

The interviews revealed that the processes of listening comprehension differed among first-year students, ranging from 2 steps to 9 steps as shown in Figure 2.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the distribution of different steps in listed in the integrated listening process (Table 1) among FE first-year students ranged into distinct ranks based on the percentage of students falling into each step.

The steps with the highest percentages were "3 steps" and "5 steps," both at 19,48% (n=15). This indicated that a significant portion of students engage in these steps, reflecting common levels of difficulty or complexity in listening comprehension tasks.

The steps ranking the second includes "4 steps" at 15,58% (n=12), "6 steps" and "9 steps," both at 12,99% (n=10). These steps showed a moderate level of engagement or challenge, suggesting that while they were less prevalent than the highest percentage steps, they still represented a notable portion of students' experiences.

As regard to lowest percentage steps, "7 steps" was at 11.69% (n=9), and "8 steps" was at 7.79% (n=6). These figures indicated a lower level of engagement or difficulty compared to the higher percentages, suggesting fewer students faced these steps as a significant part of their listening comprehension process.

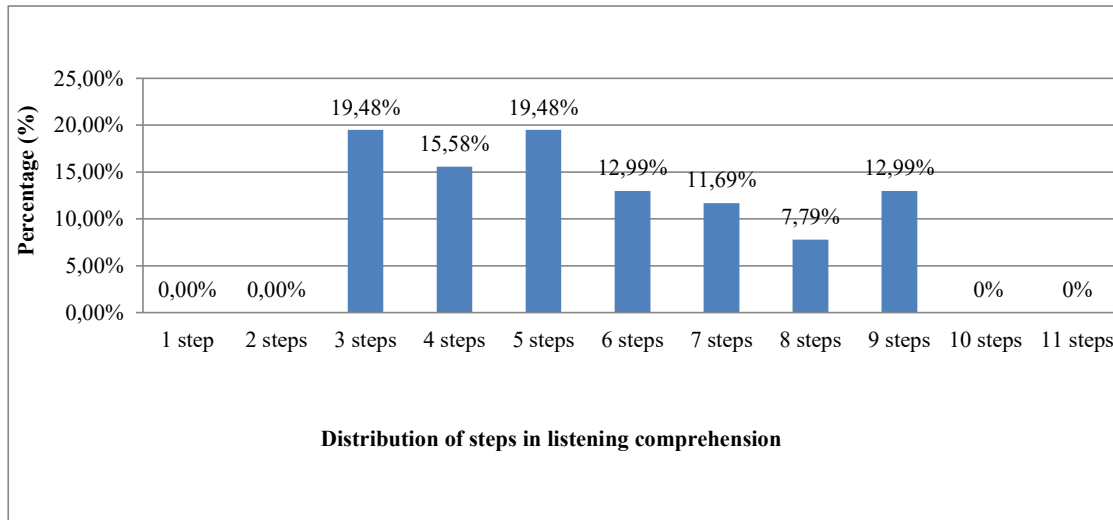


Figure 2. The distribution of steps in the integrated listening processs among FE first-year students

Lastly, "1 step," "2 steps," "10 steps," and "11 steps" all had 0% (n=0), meaning no students were categorized into these steps. This absence suggests that these steps either were not encountered or were not applicable to the listening comprehension difficulties faced by the first-year students.

In summary, the distribution showed a range of engagement or difficulty levels, with "3 steps" and "5 steps" representing the most common experiences. In contrast, "1 step," "2 steps," "10 steps," and "11 steps" were not represented, indicating a clear absence in students' listening comprehension challenges at these specific steps.

4.3. FE First-year students' attitudes towards using the proposed integrated listening process in listening comprehension

Figure 3 illustrated the FE first-year students' attitudes towards applying the proposed integrated listening process comprising of 11 steps as shown in Table 1. According to Figure 3, all of the FE first-year students found it effective at three different levels when using the proposed integrated listening process to improve listening comprehension skills with 35.07% of the "moderately effective" voters, 46.75% and 18.18% of the "very effective" and "extremely effective" ones, respectively.

In analyzing the effectiveness, the distribution reveals some interesting contrasts. Among the voters classified as "moderately effective", 35.07% (n=27) fell into this category, indicating a moderate level of influence. In comparison, 46.75% (n=36) of those deemed "very effective" showed a higher level of impact, suggesting that a significant portion of the electorate wielded considerable influence.

Meanwhile, only 18.18% (n=14) classified it as "extremely effective," representing the smallest segment but potentially the most impactful group. This breakdown highlighted that while a larger proportion of voters had a strong but not overwhelming influence, a smaller yet critical fraction of voters possessed an exceptionally high level of effectiveness. There had no students denying the effectiveness of this proposed integrated listening process and 0% considering it as a "slightly effective" process to develop their listening comprehension skill.

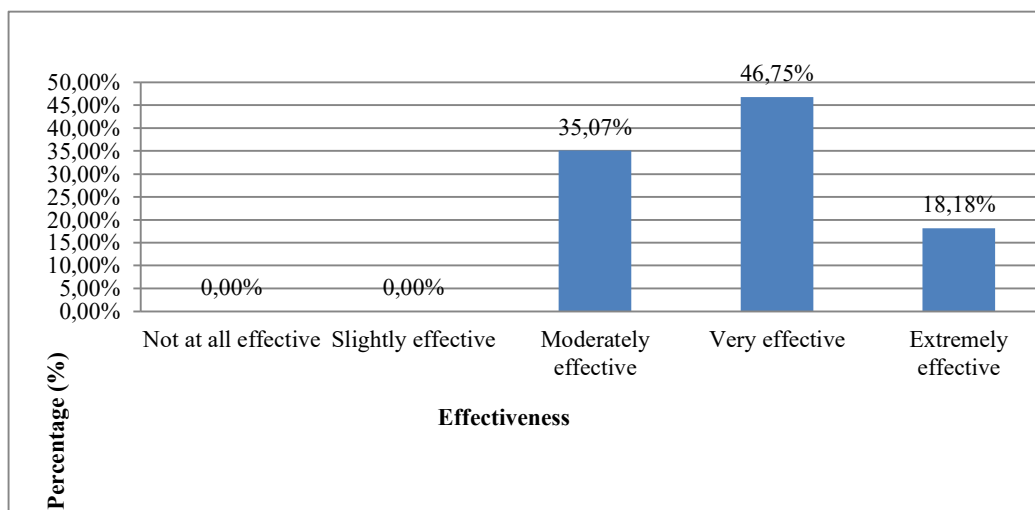


Figure 3. Students' attitudes towards effectiveness of the proposed integrated listening process

5. Conclusion and implications

5.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, the three research questions about difficulties in listening comprehension that FE first-year students faced, the listening process that they used in listening comprehension classes, students' attitudes after applying a proposed integrated listening process have been answered in this study.

In order to answer the first two research questions related to the difficulties and listening processes in listening comprehension, interviews were conducted at the beginning of semester 1 in the academic year 2023 – 2024. The difficulty levels in listening comprehension faced by first-year students varied, with PoAoS, LoSV, and LoDLP being the most challenging areas, while SoGS was the least difficult. The other categories fell into a moderate range, reflecting different levels of listening comprehension difficulty across various aspects. LoDLP was one of the top three difficulties; therefore, the researchers suggested a detailed listening process which was based on the integration of two frameworks developed by DeVito (2017) and Harmer (2015) as can be seen in Table 1.

Before delivering the lectures on the proposed integrated listening process, the researchers investigated the listening process usually used by first-year students. Overall, the interview results showed a range of steps engaged in listening process, with "3 steps" and "5 steps" being the most frequently encountered experiences. Conversely, "1 step," "2 steps," "10 steps," and "11 steps" were not represented, indicating a tremendous absence of these specific steps. What should be understood from that, the listening steps followed by students were not very detailed. Therefore, the researchers decided to deliver the proposed integrated listening process for them to overcome this difficulty.

At the end of the first half of the school year, a set of questionnaires handed out to students was to investigate the students' attitude toward using the proposed integrated listening process. Among FE first year students, the proposed integrated listening process was deemed effective at three different levels: 35.07% found it "moderately effective," 46.75% considered it "very effective," and 18.18% rated it as "extremely effective" for improving listening comprehension skills. All in all, the proposed listening process can be useful since 100% advocated its effectiveness at different levels to develop their listening comprehension skills.

5.2. Implications

The integrated listening process is used in the courses of GE-B1.1 and GE-B1.3 for first-year students at FE, UD-UFLS, in GE-B2.1 and GE-B2.3 for second-year students, and in C1.3 for the third-year students. Hence, understanding and then applying the integrated listening process from the frameworks of DeVito (2017) and Harmer (2015) in listening comprehension from the beginning at B1 level plays an important role in developing this skill through B2 and C1 levels.

REFERENCES

1. Anderson, A., & Lynch, T. (1988), *Listening*. Oxford University Press.
2. DeVito, J. A. (2017), *The interpersonal communication book* (15th ed.). Pearson.
3. Fitch-Hauser, M. E. (2018). *Listening: Processes, Functions, and Competency*. Routledge.
4. Harmer, J. (2015), *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (5th ed.). Pearson.
5. Higgins, J. (1995), *Facilitating listening in second language classrooms through the manipulation of temporal variables*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Kent at Canterbury.
6. Krathwohl, D.R. (2002), A revision of Bloom's taxonomy: an overview. *Theory into Practice*. 41(4), 212-218.
7. Lynch, T., & Mendelsohn, D. (2013), Listening. In *An introduction to applied linguistics* (pp. 190-206). Routledge.
8. Rao, B.D. (2004), *Educational practices: Research and recommendation*. New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House.
9. Wenden, A. L. (1986), Incorporating learner training in the classroom. *System*, 14(3), 315-325.
10. Wolvin, A. D., & Coakley, C. G. (2000), "Listening education in the 21st century". *International Journal of Listening*, 14(1), 143-152.
11. Yagang, F. (1994), Listening: Problems and solutions. *Teacher Development: Making the Right Moves*. Washington, DC: English Language Programs Divisions, USIA, 43(8), 626-636.

Khảo sát việc áp dụng quy trình nghe tích hợp trong các lớp nghe hiểu cho sinh viên tiếng Anh: Nghiên cứu trường hợp

Tóm tắt: Nghe hiểu là một trong bốn kỹ năng quan trọng khi học một ngoại ngữ. Bài báo này là một nghiên cứu định lượng và định tính, dữ liệu thu thập từ các cuộc phỏng vấn và bảng câu hỏi cho sinh viên (SV) năm nhất của Khoa Tiếng Anh, trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ – Đại học Đà Nẵng. Đầu tiên, nhóm tác giả phỏng vấn SV năm nhất và nhận thấy nguyên nhân dẫn đến những khó khăn SV gặp phải là các bạn chưa xây dựng cho mình một quy trình nghe gồm những bước cụ thể trong khi nghe. Sau đó, SV đã được phỏng vấn để chia sẻ quy trình nghe các bạn đang áp dụng. Có thể thấy, quy trình này còn đang chung chung và thiếu những bước cụ thể, chi tiết. Trên cơ sở đó, nhóm tác giả đã đề xuất một quy trình nghe tích hợp dựa trên mô hình nghe hiểu của DeVito (2017) và Harmer (2015) với các bước chi tiết hơn gồm ba giai đoạn trước khi nghe, trong khi nghe, và sau khi nghe. Quy trình nghe này được kỳ vọng sẽ có tác động tích cực đến việc nâng cao kỹ năng nghe hiểu cho SV. Cuối cùng, hiệu quả của quy trình nghe đã được khảo sát thông qua một bộ câu hỏi đã cho thấy phần lớn sinh viên năm một thấy “rất hiệu quả” khi áp dụng quy trình nghe đề xuất vào các lớp học nghe hiểu.

Từ khóa: thái độ; khó khăn; sinh viên năm một; quy trình nghe hiểu tích hợp; nghe hiểu.