

**Insights into Listening Comprehension Problems:
A Case Study in Vietnam**

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Abstract

In EFL learning and teaching, listening is believed to be the most challenging of the four macro language skills. Various obstacles have been reported as causing challenges to English listening comprehension for EFL learners. This study, therefore, aimed to determine the English listening comprehension problems of Vietnamese high school students as perceived by students and their teachers. The research was conducted at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with the participation of 368 eleventh graders who answered a questionnaire and 8 EFL teachers who took part in semi-structured interviews. Then the collected quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e. frequencies/percentages) and content analysis, respectively. Both the teachers and the students pointed out English listening comprehension problems relating to perception, parsing, and utilization. In particular, the students encountered phonological and lexical problems (i.e. high speech rates and challenging vocabulary), semantic and syntactic problems (i.e. long utterances), and discursal problems (i.e.

implied meanings, unfamiliar topics, and organization of ideas). The results are discussed in relation to the Vietnamese EFL context, and some pedagogical implications are presented.

Keywords: listening comprehension, perspectives, problems, Vietnamese EFL context

Introduction

Although listening comprehension is a fundamental skill in the process of acquiring a language, it is deemed one of the hardest skills for learners to master. Additionally, learners may experience some difficulty in exchanging information orally if they are not good at listening (Rost, 2002; Underwood, 1989). In the same vein, one of the factors negatively affecting learners' communicative competence is their poor listening ability (Anderson & Lynch, 2003; Nguyen & Tran, 2015; Ur, 1996). This suggests that listening skills are essential for EFL/ESL learners since they equip learners with language input. Nevertheless, listening skills have been underemphasized in the English learning process at most Vietnamese schools (Duong & Chau, 2019; Nguyen & Thai, 2018). This is because the official curriculum for English language learning and teaching in Vietnam has focused on exam-driven instruction, i.e. students are prepared for examinations on grammar, reading, and vocabulary rather than communicative competence (Bui & Duong, 2018; Denham, 1992; Duong, 2014) even though all four macro skills are included as integral sections in the textbooks at the high school level. As a result, high school students have few opportunities to practice their communication skills, especially their listening skills. Furthermore, they are not provided with linguistics knowledge (i.e. phonology, pragmatics, syntax, and semantics) at this level. As a consequence, Vietnamese high school students may fail to conduct successful conversations in English. This depressing situation also occurs at the studied high school, i.e. listening and speaking skills are undervalued in comparison with other skills.

Hence, this study endeavored to investigate the EFL listening comprehension problems that eleventh graders confront during their learning process. The research questions were formulated as follows:

1. What problems were perceived by 11th graders during their English listening comprehension learning?
2. What did the teachers think about their students' English listening comprehension problems?

Literature Review

Definition of Listening Comprehension

Listening comprehension is not an easy or simple concept despite the fact that mastering listening comprehension may help learners acquire a second language. Liu (2008) commented that it was challenging to construct a specific definition of listening comprehension because this term had been defined differently by various researchers.

Vandergrift (1999) defined listening comprehension as a complicated interactive process in which listeners must focus on all elements such as sounds, intonation, linguistic structures, and social structural contexts. In the same vein, Holden (2004) viewed listening comprehension as a complicated activity that needs mental exertion to ensure understanding. Furthermore, the author argued that listeners have to listen passively and then produce what they have comprehended.

However, according to Thomson (2003), the listeners are active in the process of listening comprehension, not passive. In this regard, Jinhong (2011) argued that listening comprehension is not only “a process-oriented activity in which listeners need to deal with the input actively step by step” (p. 6) but also “a creative activity [that] listeners construct or assign meanings based on the given information or their experience and background knowledge” (p. 7).

From the above-mentioned definitions, it can be concluded that listening comprehension is a complex process in which students need to exert both their language knowledge (i.e.

vocabulary, sounds, and grammar) and background knowledge to comprehend what is spoken.

Listening Comprehension Problems

Numerous researchers have focused their studies on the various problems and challenges that language learners confront in listening comprehension (Goh, 2000). Underwood (1989) enumerated some of the hindrances to listening comprehension: (1) listeners cannot control the speed of spoken information; (2) listeners cannot always have words repeated in listening tasks; (3) listeners usually possess a limited vocabulary; (4) listeners may fail to recognize the signals which indicate that the speaker is moving from one idea to another, and (5) listeners may lack background knowledge.

In contrast, Anderson (1995) and Goh (2000) attributed listening comprehension problems to all the difficulties that listeners have during the three phases of perception, parsing, and utilization. Firstly, perception problems are concerned with the listeners' failure to recognize intonation, stress, and different accents in a speech stream (Anderson, 1995). Phonological and lexical problems are two different types of challenges that listeners face during the perception phase. Additionally, high speech rates and unfamiliar vocabulary may affect learners' listening comprehension (Goh, 2000). Secondly, parsing problems including syntactic and semantic matters may also occur in the processing phase of listening comprehension. For example, listeners may quickly forget what is heard, and therefore, they may fail to form a mental representation from the words heard (Goh, 2000). Utilization is another phase in the cognitive processing of L2 listening comprehension. The issues confronted by EFL/ESL learners during this phase are normally discourse-related; for example, listeners may have difficulties in recognizing the overall structure of the ideas in a text. According to Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), unfamiliar listening topics may also hamper students' listening comprehension.

The present study has been based on the three-phase model of listening comprehension problems proposed by Anderson (1995) and Goh (2000) because of its sufficiency and clarity.

Previous Studies

The following is a review of previous studies on English listening problems perceived by EFL students at different levels and by teachers of English. Hamouda (2013) examined listening difficulties that Saudi students encountered in their listening learning process. The study was a mixed-methods approach utilizing a questionnaire and an interview. The participants were 60 first-year English majors at Qassim University. The findings revealed problems relating to speech delivery (i.e. the speed of speech, the bad quality of recordings, and the different accents of the speakers) and to listeners (i.e. a lack of concentration, anxiety, and insufficient vocabulary). Duong and Chau (2018) conducted a study in Vietnam in which listening comprehension problems were addressed. The data collected from a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were analyzed statistically and qualitatively. The results showed that the 115 English majors found listening texts (i.e. unfamiliar words, slangs, idioms, colloquial words, and complex sentence structures) the most dominant cause for their low listening comprehension. Furthermore, speedy delivery, unclear pronunciation, different accents, anxiety, invisibility for speakers' facial expression, and noise affected their listening comprehension. In Thailand, Khamprated's (2012) study explored the English listening and speaking problems faced by private vocational school students and determined the possible causes of their problems. Quantitative data were collected by means of a questionnaire. One of the major findings was the types of English listening problems that the participants commonly reported such as local accents, the speakers' speed, cultural differences, and limited English grammar and lexical resources. A different aspect was investigated by Alrawashdeh and Al-zayed (2017) in their study of the difficulties encountered by teachers of English in listening comprehension teaching. A questionnaire for teachers

and informal interviews were used as the instruments for data collection. The teachers pinpointed three major problems, namely the learning environment, the availability of source and teaching aids, and the teachers' proficiency, which hindered them from teaching English listening comprehension effectively.

Methodology

Research Setting and Participants

The present study was carried out at a high school in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. The surveyed school had nine EFL teachers (i.e., eight participated in the main study and one in the pilot study), who were invited to take part in semi-structured interviews. All of them were female and had at least five years' experience teaching English as a foreign language. Two out of the nine teachers (22.2%) had an M.A. degree, while each of the remainder (77.8%) had a B.A. degree.

Each academic year the school has between 9 and 11 classes with 35 to 40 students per class. In total, there between 1000 and 1500 students at the school. In the present study, the sample was composed of 368 students in grade 11. Out of the 368 student participants, 187 were female (50.82%), and 181 were male (49.18%). All the participants had learnt English for over five years (i.e. four years at secondary school, and one year at grade 10).

Instruments

There were two types of instruments employed in this research: a closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Firstly, the questionnaire contained two sections: Section 1 collected personal information, whereas Section 2 with 15 items was used to explore the students' listening problems in terms of perception (6 items), parsing (4 items), and utilization (5 items) during their learning process. In Section 2, the participants were asked to choose the appropriate level for five closed-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = frequently, 5 = always). A Cronbach alpha score

of .75 for the questionnaire indicated that it was internally consistent. Before the survey, the questionnaire was piloted with five students in grade eleven from the same school to test its clarity in terms of content and form.

Secondly, the semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. The interviews were conducted privately with every teacher to make sure that they had pressure-free space to provide frank opinions. To assist in eliciting detailed information and to avoid any language barriers, Vietnamese was used during the interviews. After translating the transcriptions into English, the authors cross-checked them with each other to reduce translation errors. Moreover, to increase the reliability of the study, the interview questions were piloted with one teacher that was excluded from the main study. The interviewees were labelled TI1 to TI8 in accordance with the order of the interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before collecting the quantitative data, the researchers first obtained the relevant permissions and then went to each of the classes to be surveyed to introduce the purpose and significance of the study. Following this, the researchers carefully explained to the students how to fill in the questionnaire and then the questionnaire was given to the students in the class. They completed the questionnaire within 10 minutes and returned it to one of the researchers. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies (F) and percentages (%), for the collected data on the students' listening problems were subsequently calculated using SPSS 20.0.

In addition, eight EFL teachers in charge of these classes were invited for individual interviews. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Content analysis was used to analyze the data in three steps. First, the authors keyed the data into a form and read the transcripts repeatedly in order to become familiar with the content. Next, the collected data were coded and recoded, and then the coded information was grouped into larger

categories. Finally, the authors examined the categories and themes in order to determine any relationships and connections.

Results

The Eleventh Graders' Perceptions of Listening Problems

Perception Problems

The data analysis for the first six items in the questionnaire relating to the eleventh graders' perception problems is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Questionnaire Results of the Eleventh Graders' Perception Problems*

Item	Perception problems		Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Usually	Always	Total
1	I hear sounds but I am not sure if it is right or I cannot recognize so many sounds.	F	11	30	31	81	215	368
		%	3.0	8.2	8.4	22	58.4	100
2	Fast speech rate makes me miss the beginning of the text.	F	7	11	40	98	212	368
		%	1.9	3.0	10.9	26.6	57.6	100
3	I mistake one word for another.	F	54	24	91	127	72	368
		%	14.7	6.5	24.7	34.5	19.6	100
4	I encounter too many unfamiliar words and/or expressions.	F	13	21	102	89	143	368
		%	3.5	5.7	27.7	24.2	38.9	100
5	I miss the next part of the text while I am thinking about the meaning of the earlier part.	F	9	19	75	101	164	364
		%	2.4	5.2	20.4	27.4	44.6	100
6	I find it hard to concentrate.	F	12	15	45	109	187	368
		%	3.3	4.1	12.2	29.6	50.8	100

As can be seen in Table 1, a large number of participants (80.4%) admitted that they were frequently unsure about what they had listened to and could not recognize all the sounds in the listening text (Item 1). The same percentage of students reported

that they found it difficult to concentrate on the listening tasks. Similarly, the fast speech rate resulted in most of them (84.2%) missing the beginning of the listening text (Item 2).

In addition, several eleventh graders identified other listening problems such as missing a later part of the text while thinking about the meaning of an earlier part (72%), encountering too many unfamiliar words and expressions (63.1%), and mistaking one word for another (54.1%).

In brief, the majority of the eleventh graders encountered some perception problems that influenced their listening comprehension ability. Specifically, the students failed to recognize many of the sounds in the listening text while the fast speech rate caused them to miss the beginning of the listening text as well as subsequent parts of the text while they were thinking about the meaning of an earlier part. Furthermore, many students encountered a large number of unfamiliar words and expressions. Finally, most of the eleven-grade students lost concentration while listening to the texts.

Parsing Problems

The results for the next five items that were designed to uncover the eleventh graders' parsing problems in their listening process are listed in Table 2. Most of the participants admitted that they frequently forgot what they had just heard due to the length of the audio track (84%), and that they could not understand the meaning of some words in the sentences (81%).

Furthermore, several high school students found it difficult to divide the longer sentences in the listening text into several parts to assist in comprehension (70.9%) and to understand the new information within a short time (63.1%).

In summary, it can be seen that the eleventh graders encountered parsing problems (i.e. the length of the text, the meaning of words, the length of some sentences, and the limited time) that inhibited their listening comprehension ability.

Table 2: Questionnaire Results of the Eleventh Graders' Parsing Problems

Item	Parsing problems		Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Usually	Always	Total
7	I forget phrases or sentences just heard because of the length.	F	7	11	41	134	175	368
		P	1.9	3.0	11.1	36.4	47.6	100
8	I cannot understand the meaning of some words in sentences.	F	5	17	48	110	188	368
		%	1.4	4.6	13.0	29.9	51.1	100
9	It is difficult to divide long sentences into several parts.	F	19	18	70	96	165	368
		%	5.2	4.9	19	26.1	44.8	100
10	It is difficult to understand a lot of new information in a short time.	F	1	21	76	90	180	368
		%	3.5	5.7	27.7	24.2	38.9	100

Utilization Problems

The findings for the last five items concerning utilization problems are presented in Table 3. The majority of participants in this study (83.1%) found it difficult to understand what they had listened to due to the unfamiliar themes of the material. Another very common problem (77.4%) was extracting details or supporting ideas. Not only did they find it difficult to get detailed information, 66.9% of them also experienced problems when listening for main ideas.

Meanwhile, approximately three-quarters of the participants believed that they did not grasp the intended message of the listening text although they were able to understand the meaning of words (74.5%). They also felt that they had failed to arrange the ideas in the listening text properly to establish the relationships between them (75.5%).

In short, a great number of the eleventh graders faced some utilization problems during their listening process such as unfamiliar topics, a failure to grasp the intended message of the

listening text despite understanding the lexical meaning, difficulties in arranging the ideas in the listening text so as to establish any links between them, and confusion about identifying the main idea and/or details of the listening text.

Table 3: *Questionnaire Results of the Eleventh Graders' Utilization Problems*

Item	Parsing problems		Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Usually	Always	Total
11	I have difficulties in following unfamiliar topics.	F	7	18	37	63	243	368
		%	1.9	4.9	10.1	17.1	66	100
12	I can't grasp the intended message though I know words.	F	19	11	64	118	156	368
		%	5.2	3.0	17.4	32.1	42.4	100.0
13	It is difficult to arrange ideas of a text to get the relationship among ideas.	F	11	18	61	91	187	368
		%	3.0	4.9	16.6	24.7	50.8	100.0
14	I get confused about the main idea of the text.	F	11	30	81	96	150	368
		%	3.0	8.2	22.0	26.1	40.8	100.0
15	I can't get details or supporting ideas.	F	0	22	61	94	191	368
		%	0	6.0	16.6	25.5	51.9	100

The Teachers' Perceptions and Suggestions about Learners' Listening Problems

Perception problems

All the teachers affirmed that their students were confused about unfamiliar words or phrases in their listening process. Specifically, six interviewees believed their students were slow in recalling the meaning of some words or phrases in the listening texts, whereas unknown words really challenged the students. According to the teachers, due to the fixed curriculum, they did not have enough time to provide students with necessary listening strategies and ample vocabulary for the listening texts. Meanwhile, some others revealed that the main reason for paying less

attention to listening skills in their classes was that listening was only a minor part of the end-of-term English test.

Additionally, based on the reports of seven teachers, the fast speech rate of the listening texts also hampered students' listening comprehension. According to TI2, the listeners could not understand the content of the listening texts when the speech rate was too fast; for example, "[...] the speech rate of the listening texts usually is fast [...] actually, this problem prevented my students from being able to grasp some parts of the listening texts." On this issue, one of the teacher participants (TI5) stated, "Students often fail to listen to the texts because they do not practice their listening skills outside the classroom." Another interviewee (TI3) added, "Students need real learning environments to improve their oral skills."

The last perception problem in listening reported by the teacher participants was that the high school students often missed a later part of the text while they were thinking about the meaning of an earlier part. In general, the interviewees attributed the misunderstanding of listening texts to these perception problems. TI1 described this problem as follows:

While listening, my students tend to focus more on recalling vocabulary meaning in the earlier part instead of getting the points in the upcoming parts. Consequently, they often miss later important ideas. (TI1)

In short, teachers reported three core perception problems influencing their students' listening comprehension, namely challenging lexical items, the fast speaking rate, and the distraction caused by earlier parts of the text.

Parsing Problems

The interview results indicated that the 11th graders in this setting encountered syntactic and semantic problems. In particular, the students were unable to comprehend the text to which they just listened. For example, TI8 stated:

After I had played a recording, I asked the students to check whether they understood the main idea. Unfortunately, most of them, except for a few excellent students, did not know what the speakers said.

In addition, the interviewed teachers addressed another parsing problem that commonly occurred during the listening process. The high school students had difficulty in dividing the auditory sentences into several smaller parts to aid comprehension, which had a direct impact on their understanding of the listening texts. As an illustration of this, T17 stated the following:

My students often find it difficult to divide the whole listening text into smaller parts in order to understand it better. Consequently, their listening skills are problematic. (T17)

To sum up, the teachers believed that their eleventh-grade students were unlikely to remember long phrases/utterances in the recordings or to break sentences into smaller segments for better understanding while listening.

Utilization Problems

The utilization problems agreed by all the interviewees were related to grasping details and/or main ideas during the listening process. T12 pointed out that “it may be a lack of lexical knowledge and the fast speech rate of the listening texts that hindered the identification of specific information”.

In terms of the level of difficulty between identifying main ideas and listening for details, T16 suggested the following reasons:

I think my students were able to give me the key points when I played the recording twice or three times. However, they could hardly understand the details of the listening texts due to [...] many difficult words, [...]

concentrating on one sentence, [...] and the native speakers' natural pronunciation. (TI6)

Apart from the above-mentioned issues, the teachers also revealed that although the students knew many of the words or phrases in the listening texts, they were stuck for the underlying meanings implied by the speakers. For example, TI5 described this problem as follows:

Actually, understanding what the speakers want to convey is tremendously difficult for my 11th graders because of their limited linguistic knowledge. In other words, the students only know the literal meaning of what is spoken. (TI5)

TI4 agreed with IT5 on this and added further that “[...] fortunately, most of the listening texts used for high school students are not really challenging in terms of semantic or pragmatic features.”

In general, according to the teachers, difficulty in identifying main ideas and/or details and comprehending the intended meaning of words/phrases were the two predominant causes of students misunderstanding the listening texts.

Discussion

Perception Problems: Pronunciation-and-lexis-related issues

Both the teachers and the students agreed that the students frequently faced some perception problems that impeded their listening comprehension ability. First, the eleventh graders were incapable of understanding intonation, stress, and different accents in a natural speech stream and could not control the speed of the spoken material. This is because, in EFL classrooms, it is the teachers who make decisions on when and how to play and replay recordings even though it is hard for them to judge whether the students have understood what they have heard. This finding is in line with the study of Duong and Chau (2019) which identified the high speed of delivery and speakers' pronunciation

as causes of the listening problems of English majors. Underwood (1989), who considered this the most common problem, stated, "The greatest difficulty with listening comprehension is that the listener cannot control how quickly a speaker speaks." (p. 16) Furthermore, pronunciation was identified as the predominant cause of the failure of Vietnamese high school students in English listening comprehension.

Too many unfamiliar words and/or expressions were found to be a second perception problem. The listeners had a limited lexical range for listening comprehension. This finding is in line with the result of Juan and Abidin (2013) who showed that the lack of prior knowledge of English vocabulary caused problems for Chinese undergraduate students in English listening comprehension. One consequence of a higher density of unknown words in a listening text and an inability to recognize known words is that listeners may stop and think about the meaning of that word in their mother tongue. This may result in a failure to understand the next part of the speech (Anderson, 1995; Darti & Asmawati, 2017; Goh, 2000).

Parsing Problems: Language Proficiency

Parsing is the next major phase in EFL listening comprehension. To begin with, according to both the student and teacher participants, the students quickly forgot what they had just heard; at the same time, some words in sentences and even whole sentences hampered their understanding of the text to which they had just listened. Students were unable to form a mental representation from what they had heard (Goh, 2000). To further elaborate, the students desired to understand every word in the text. Since these listeners put an emphasis on individual words, they were unable to interpret the listening texts. That is why almost two-thirds of the students agreed on this matter although the teachers did not mention this point in the interviews.

This result is quite similar to those of some earlier studies (e.g. Duong & Chau, 2019; Phung, 2008). It can be inferred that students' low level of proficiency may affect their English listening

comprehension as found by Phung (2008). This assumption is likely to be true for the grade 11 participants in this study. According to Circular No. 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT issued by the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam in January 2014, high school graduates are required to achieve Level 3 (equivalent to B1) of the Vietnamese six-level framework of reference for foreign languages (CEFR-V). That is, Vietnamese learners should be able to understand the main points of standard input on familiar matters which they encounter at work, school, leisure, etc. and deal with most situations likely to arise in a place where the target language is spoken. However, as mentioned earlier, the students had few opportunities for listening to English materials both inside and outside the classroom. Low language proficiency can be a consequence of minimal practice, which probably then hinders them in their efforts to master listening comprehension.

Utilization Problems: Socio-cultural and Metacognitive Factors

Utilization is the final phase in the cognitive processing of EFL listening comprehension. The quantitative results showed that a large number of the eleventh graders faced certain discourse-related problems during the listening process. First, both the teachers and the students agreed that the students could not grasp the intended message of the listening text although they could understand the meaning of the words. This problem may be related to the fact that these high school students have established certain learning habits such as a desire to hear and understand each word in a listening text. Such a learning behavior may discourage them from grasping the text's actual meaning. Furthermore, from a pragmatic perspective, language is a form of social action because linguistic communication occurs in the context of structured interpersonal exchange, and meaning is thus socially regulated. To speak and listen to a language, one must know how the language is used in a social context. According to Brown (2000), "a language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language; the two are intricately interwoven

so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture.” (p. 177). Because of specific cultural norms, non-native speakers find it difficult to select forms appropriate for certain situations. Brown (2000) stressed that learners need to learn the culture of the speakers’ language in order to learn the language successfully.

In addition, a large proportion of the students found it difficult to arrange the ideas in a listening text to see the links between them. In particular, these students were confused about how to extract the main ideas or details of a listening text. In other words, the students failed to recognize the overall structure of the ideas as well as to distinguish the details in a listening text. As Underwood (1989) suggested, listeners may fail to recognize the signals indicating the speaker moving from one point to another, giving an example, or repeating a point, etc. Therefore, focusing on rhetorical signaling cues can help listeners understand the discursal features of spoken texts.

Unfamiliar listening topics impeding students’ listening comprehension was another utilization problem reported by a large number of the eleventh graders in the current study. In reality, listeners may have considerable difficulties in comprehending the meaning of an entire passage unless they are familiar with the context (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). One implication of the results is that many of the target students lacked contextual knowledge as well as language knowledge such as the relevant vocabulary mentioned earlier. If students are required to listen to uncommon or unusual topics in spoken texts, they may lose motivation and engagement in their listening process since, as is claimed by Thornbury (2005), successful communication is attributed to familiarity with topics, genres, and interlocutors.

In general, almost all the students encountered several listening problems that led to their low listening comprehension ability. This is because conventional methods of teaching listening simply involve practicing answering listening test questions and explaining the meaning of the text (Chen, 2013). However,

listening comprehension is a complex process that requires students to utilize both their knowledge of vocabulary, sounds, grammar, etc. and background knowledge to comprehend the auditory information. In order to improve their listening comprehension, it is imperative to guide and assist learners to process listening tasks more efficiently and effectively in order to overcome the obstacles that occur during their listening process.

Conclusion and Implications

The results from both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews indicated that almost all of the eleventh graders at a Vietnamese high school encountered several listening problems in their listening process. First, these high school students faced some perception problems as they could not understand English pronunciation or control the speed of the spoken material. It can be inferred that the first language (L1) probably influences second language (L2) acquisition. According to Nguyen (2007), Vietnamese speakers tend to omit the final sounds or move the final consonants and clusters towards their first language, which may cause misunderstanding and confusion. These omissions and shifts occur because Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language that does not contain ending sounds. Additionally, Nguyen (n.d.) reported problems relating to vowels (i.e. single sounds, diphthongs, and triphthongs), consonants (i.e. consonant positions, and consonant clusters), stress, and intonation that Vietnamese speakers often encounter. Second, the students lacked the necessary vocabulary knowledge to comprehend the listening texts fully.

With reference to parsing problems, the majority of eleventh graders also experienced common syntactic and semantic problems; for instance, some complex sentences to which they had just listened hindered their understanding. Furthermore, long sentences in the listening text and the limited time contributed considerably to the misunderstanding of the audio track content.

Together with the two previously mentioned problems, the majority of the eleventh graders also faced certain discourse-

related problems during their listening process (i.e. utilization problems). Typically, they could not grasp the intended message of the listening text although they could understand the meaning of individual words. In addition, unfamiliar topics were a common cause for listening comprehension problems. Lastly, they found it difficult to arrange the ideas of a listening text to determine the relationships between ideas.

In order to facilitate English listening comprehension in Vietnam, the following pedagogical changes are recommended.

A pre-listening task in which text-related key words are introduced should be included in the listening teaching process (Spratt et al., 2011). Moreover, there should be more emphasis on the content and the scores for the listening section in the final English test; as a consequence, high school teachers may acquire better English listening teaching skills from their teaching practices. In regards to a solution for pronunciation and speed problems, it is recommended that high school students familiarize themselves with extensive listening via authentic materials such as English movies, Discovery channel, Disney channel, BBC news, and VOA news. Authentic materials that are designed for speakers of a language help increase learner motivation and allow learners to develop strategies to cope with real language challenges (Guariento & Morley, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Spratt et al., 2011). Furthermore, to help students concentrate on listening texts, teachers should provide better listening strategies to direct students' listening such as identifying key words and looking for nonverbal cues to meaning (Brown, 2001). As a result, they will be better prepared to listen to and understand the recordings.

With reference to parsing problems, the student participants predominantly encountered difficulties in remembering long utterances and breaking sentences into understandable segments. For the first problem, eleventh graders should be equipped with note-taking skills which facilitate their listening process (Hayati & Jalilifar, 2009). To be able to grasp the segments of a listening text, high school students should be

taught to classify or group ideas (Brown, 2001; Duong et al., 2019).

In order to deal with utilization problems concerning getting main ideas and/or details, EFL teachers should provide students with strategies such as listening for gist, predicting a speaker's purpose from the context of the discourse, activating one's background knowledge, and guessing meanings from the context (Brown, 2001; Duong et al., 2019)., The new textbook for grade 11, which has been piloted throughout Vietnam since 2012, should help learners understand the underlying meaning of texts about other cultures since it includes a new section called "*Communication and Culture*". Furthermore, they will be able to gain more understanding of listening texts through guessing from context or predicting using prior knowledge. As for unfamiliar topics, the new textbook addresses the themes of life, society, environment, and the future. These real-life topics are appropriate for teenagers and should increase learner motivation.

In spite of the possible contributions of the study to the field, there remain some limitations. First, the sample size is not large enough for generalizations to other contexts. This is because only students in grade eleven and eight teachers of English at a Vietnamese high school participated in this study. Second, the findings would be more useful if more research instruments such as observations and/or journals to provide students and teachers with opportunities for insightful accounts of listening problems had been employed. Finally, culture has not been addressed in this study although cultural familiarity may help improve listening comprehension (Carlson, 2019). Therefore, it is strongly recommended that this issue be explored in future research.

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