



DIFFICULTIES IN STUDYING TOEIC LISTENING COMPREHENSION OF NON-ENGLISH MAJORED FRESHMEN AT TAY DO UNIVERSITY, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

TOEIC Certificate is becoming more and more popular all over the world in general and in particular, Vietnam. It is considered as one of the most compulsory demands for graduating university, especially at Tay Do university. Listening seems to be a skill that many students usually face difficulties in learning. Therefore, the survey research "Difficulties in studying TOEIC Listening Comprehension of non – English majored freshmen at Tay Do University" was conducted to figure out common difficulties in studying TOEIC listening of non-English majored students. Freshmen of Bachelor of Tourism and Travel Management class at Tay Do university were chosen as the participants. Questionnaire and interview were used as instruments to collect the data. The findings of the study would point out learners' difficulties consisting of general difficulties (vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge and psychological) and difficulties in each part in the TOEIC listening test. Thanks to the results, some solutions would be suggested for students' improvement.

Keywords: TOEIC, listening, difficulty, non-English freshmen, university

1. Introduction

This chapter addresses the rationale, the objection of the research, the significance of the study and research organization.

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1.1 Rationale

Nowadays, language plays a vital role in human's life. In today's era of globalization and internationalization, we cannot deny the importance of English in lives and social development. English is considered as an international language used to exchange information, either for those who speak it as their first language and those who speak it as a second language. It is considered as an effective tool to communicate effectually in the process of integration. Having good English proficiency is an indispensable condition to get a promising future for many people.

English has become a prerequisite for job seekers, so a number of English learners wish to sit for worldwide standardized English tests such as IELTS, TOEFL or TOEIC. Among these, TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) has been increasingly applied in both workplace and educational institutions. Many universities offer English courses based on students' TOEIC test scores. At Tay Do University, the TOEIC test has been used since 2016 to classify students' English proficiency. Students have to get at least a TOEIC result with 450 scores to meet the requirements for graduation.

Traditionally, a TOEIC test consists of two sections, which are designed to test candidates' two skills: listening and reading. Generally, listening skill is considered as the most essential as well as the most difficult skill for students. Because it comprises different task types with various topics. Listening is a prominent skill and plays a significant role. Although the more vital listening is, the harder they are to learn. Listening in any language requires focus and attention. Non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do University still face some difficulties because of two main reasons. Firstly, the general difficulties in the whole TOEIC listening test are vocabulary, background knowledge and pronunciation. Secondly, some elements can affect each of parts such as psychological, the speed rate, the length, unfamiliar word, etc.

For these above reasons, the research "Difficulties in studying TOEIC Listening skill of non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do University" has been conducted to gain insights into the difficulties encountered by students in TOEIC listening. Thus, based on the difficulties stated in this study, students can find out the difficulties and methods to improve their skill.

1.2 The Aims of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the difficulties of studying TOEIC Listening Comprehension. Therefore, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Do non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do University often get difficult in studying TOEIC listening?
- 2) What challenges do they face in studying TOEIC listening?

1.3 The Significance of the Study

This study shows the difficulties that students at Tay Do University face in the listening part of the TOEIC test. By doing this research, the researcher wants to help Tay Do

students find out the problems and overcome them in order to improve their listening scores.

1.4 The Organization of the Study

This study is divided into 5 main chapters:

- *Introduction* provides the rationale, significance and organization of the study.
- *Literature review* covers the theory of listening, consisting of definitions of listening, the important of listening, overview TOEIC test, some obstacles that students get in trouble in studying TOEIC Listening Comprehension.
- *Methodology* states the study's method employed in the study, including research questions, research design, participants, instruments and procedure.
- *Results and discussion*, give the results of the study in order to find out the common mistakes that are troubling the participants in studying TOEIC Listening Comprehension. This chapter consists of results, data analysis and discussion.
- *Conclusion, limitations and recommendations* give the conclusion, the limitations of the study and suggest recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

This part presents the overview TOEIC test, the definitions of listening and its importance, the general difficulties and its obstacles of each of parts in TOEIC Listening Comprehension.

2.1 Definitions of Listening

Communication has various parts which could be effective with a view of improving the productivity and effectiveness of interaction. Listening is one part of communication that must also gain huge priority by an individual. In a variety of ways, there have been numerous definitions of listening. Nunan (1998) asserted that "*listening is the basic skill in language learning. Without listening skill, learners will never learn to communicate effectively. In fact, over 50% of time that students spend functioning in a foreign language will be devoted to listening*". However, it appears as a challenge in the process of learning English. "*Listening is far more difficult than many people can image*" because it "*involves an active process of deciphering and constructing meaning form both verbal and non – verbal messages*" (Nunan, 1998). International Listening Association (1995, p.4-5) defined "*the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken or non-verbal messages*".

According to Underwood (1989, p.1), "*listening is the activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear*". In other words, a good listener, does not only need to hear the words but also understands the meaning implied by the speaker. Listening skill can be also defined as "*Listening is the act of hearing attentively*". In addition, Thomlison (1984) defines listening as "*Active listening, which is very important for effective communication*". Listening is a process of receiving, interpreting and reacting to a message received from the speaker. "*According to Management guru Tom Peters, Listening is an*

essential management and leadership skill". Listening cannot be done only by ears. One can listen with their eyes, sense, mind, heart and imagination.

Listening is often confused with hearing. Roland Barthes (1994), a linguist, distinguishes between hearing and listening, stated that "*Hearing is a physiological phenomenon; listening is a psychological act*". Hearing is the physical ability, while listening is a skill. Listening skill allows one to make sense of and understand what another person is saying. In other words, listening skill allows people to understand what someone is talking about the meaning behind the words.

2.2 The Importance of Listening

Listening is the skill of understanding spoken language. Listening is an essential skill presenting in most of the activities we carry out throughout our lives. In learning a foreign language, it is extremely important to learn this skill. Listening plays a central and possibly predominant part in the whole process of language learning. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four skills that "*indivisible range called communication*". They are interrelated and interdependent. Furthermore, listening is an important skill that allows us to receive, understand and evaluate information that is communicated to us. As human beings, we seek to interact on a daily basis with each other. According to Nadig (2010) "*speaking is only half of the communication process needed for interpersonal effectiveness. The other half is listening and understanding what others communicate to us*". When nobody listens to a speaker or when a listener fails to understand the message, communication is considered unsuccessful. Brownell (1994) and Fracaro (2001), in Flynn et al (2008) state "*listening is considered by some to be the single most important element in the communication process, even more highly valued than speaking as a communication skill necessary in the business world*" (p.143-144). Everybody knows that in order to listen to a message is not as simple as hear it, so the listener has to understand the message and respond in the right manner.

Most relationships fall apart because partners feel unheard or misunderstood. People often listen simply to respond, not to actually understand what is being said. Listening is a key factor to the success of learning another language, especially in studying English. That is the reason why the students have to pay attention to this skill.

2.3 The General Obstacles of TOEIC Listening

2.3.1 Vocabulary

Vocabulary has a considerable impact on listeners' listening comprehension. It can be defined as "*words we must know to communicate effectively; words in speaking (expressive vocabulary) and words in listening (receptive vocabulary)*" (Neuman & Dwyer, 2009, p. 385). In addition, Hornby (1995) defines vocabulary as "*the total number of words in a language; vocabulary is a list of words with their meanings*". In other word, it is a list or collection of words or phrases usually alphabetically arranged and have meaning.

Vocabulary plays an indispensable role in language learning. The more student master vocabulary, the more they can listen well. Vocabulary knowledge encompasses

all the words we must know to access our background knowledge, express our ideas and communicate effectively, and learn about new concepts. *“Vocabulary is the glue that holds stories, ideas and content together... making comprehension accessible for children.”* (Rupley, Logan & Nichols, 1998/99). In addition, Wilkins in Thornbury (2004) stated that *“without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed. It means that even someone has good grammar, but it will be useless if they do not know vocabulary”*.

Words are the basis in learning a language. If students have a good command of large numbers of vocabularies, they can achieve breakthrough in their listening skill. Small knowledge of vocabulary directly weakens your listening ability. For example, in sentences “you will view some seers trying to prove that the world is going to end” and “They probably will not even remember the nighttime stroll”, the rate of students answering correctly both questions is very low. Students said they were unfamiliar with these blank words, so they just guessed the answer which increased the error rate. In their daily learning, students do not pay enough attention to words recitation, which definitely has a negative effect on their listening comprehension. Hence, shortage of vocabulary is another reason of listening barrier.

From the above points, it seems reasonable to infer that vocabulary plays a significant role in learners’ listening comprehension. Many words have more than one meaning and some meanings are not common use so students can get confused. Thus, the richer listeners’ amount of vocabulary is, the better their listening skill is.

2.3.2 Background Knowledge

Lack of background knowledge is one of the obstacles in listening. According to Goh (2002) *“language is rather like a mirror that reflects the national culture of its speakers”*. In fact, language cannot exist without culture. Culture can be explained as what the society thinks and does, and the language is the expression off the ideas of the society. For this reason, students need to have knowledge about the cultural background of the language. Knowledge of cultural background refers to a country’s history, politics, economy and customs, moral code, religious belief, etc. in the listening materials. Therefore, in order to improve listening level of a language, having a command of its pronunciation and vocabulary is far from enough, one must have profound knowledge of its culture as well. This may imply that most learners have limited knowledge of their ways of dealing with listening input and little awareness of the actual problems occurring during their online processing.

Background knowledge is an extensive term to describe different kinds of knowledge. According to Proverb (1990), *“General background knowledge includes knowledge of target culture, knowledge of the topic under discussion, and general world knowledge of current affairs, arts, politics, and literature”*. It can be referred that background knowledge includes learners’ linguistics knowledge, world knowledge, understanding about the context they are entering and their past experience which is same as acquiring new knowledge. Anderson & Lynch (2000) stated that *“lack of social cultural, factual and*

contextual knowledge of the target language can also present an obstacle to comprehension because language is used to express culture”.

In short, background knowledge mentions all what learners have known, which may strongly affect the way in which the listeners interpret and understanding the message when listening. If you do not have vast knowledge in many fields, you cannot apply your knowledge to the listening text. Consequently, successful comprehension in listening takes place when the listeners have a good background knowledge.

2.3.3 Pronunciation

Pronunciation plays a critical role for students who want to master in both listening and speaking. In other words, if students concentrate hard on their pronunciation, they will be proficient in listening. In fact, Yates (2001) noted that *“pronunciation relates to the generation of sounds that we use to form meaning”*. It includes paying attention to specific sounds of a language. Aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sound are intonation, stress, timing rhythm, and how the voice is designed. It is a central significance because it is a section of successful oral production or communicative competence (Hismanoglu, 2006). In contrast, Gilakjani (2012) said that *“learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in others areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is prefect”*. This means if the listeners often pronounce some certain words inaccurately, they cannot recognize those words in listening text. As a result, they cannot identify the main information or the meaning of what they hear and grasp the main content. Moreover, listeners fail in listening competence partly because their recognition of keywords is weak, and their pronunciation is poor. Thus, one of the important steps in listening competence is learning the way to identify and select sound signals corresponding to its pronunciation.

In short, pronunciation is a big drawback for the students. That is the reason why they usually face difficulties in listening. Thus, listeners should improve pronunciation and practice it frequently because this would help to develop their skills and to perceive the messages.

2.3.4 Psychological Factors

Psychological factors are those of the most complicated factors causing many difficulties in listening English of many students. Psychological or emotional factors refer to the psychological state of a student such as opinions, attitudes, status consciousness, emotions, etc. that deeply affect the ability of listen. When the student is pre-occupied by some other things and do not listen carefully what the other person is speaking, then arises the psychological barrier in listening.

According to Dulay (1982), *“when a student is exposed to a new language, his/ her first internal hurdles are posed by the individual’s emotion barriers”*. Indeed, listeners with a bad mood find it difficult to concentrate on listening text. Moreover, when the student does not listen to others, they will not be able to comprehend the message as it is intended and

will not be able to give a proper feedback. They usually feel stressful when they cannot listen clearly what English speakers are saying.

The listening work is greatly influenced by the emotion of the student. If students are not in a good mood, they will not listen properly to what is being said and might say things offending the speaker. Several emotions such as anger, nervousness, confusion, restlessness, etc. affect the process of listening. To sum up, psychological factors are the weaknesses of most students when learning TOEIC Listening Comprehension. Therefore, students need to overcome them in order to study well.

2.4. Difficultes in Each Part of TOEIC Listening

2.4.1 Picture Description

50% of this part is the American's accent and the rests are the accents of British, Australian, New Zealand and Canada. Therefore, this part is regarded as the easiest part. However, it is not that easy if students do not listen carefully. The examiners set many traps for contestants in TOEIC listening. The main difficulties in this part are homophones. It is easy to fall into this trap. Furthermore, using collocations instead of simple words is one of the obstacles during listening. Moreover, having unclear and invisible pictures makes students confused too. And the students cannot predict what the speaker will say when the picture has too many details. For instance, the picture has a boat in harbour in the center and some lamp-posts in the left. The correct answer describes those lamp-posts, not a boat. Thus, the student has to examine carefully each of the detail. To sum up, the more careful they are, the higher score they have in this part.

2.4.2 Questions and Responses

This part has a bigger amount of questions than other parts in TOEIC listening test. Some students have difficulty in this part due to the rate of speech and the length of questions. Most researchers agree that speech rate has created a problem in listening comprehension and may be a key and controlling factor too. Most of the students complain that speech rate seems to have an influential effect on their listening comprehension. The more quickly the speed rate is, the more difficult they have. In addition, they cannot hear and recognize what the type of question is, which makes them confused. Words are used in many different contexts that make them bewildered. Furthermore, it is not easy to understand what the speaker's intention is.

2.4.3 Short Conversations

Listening Part 3 is one of the most challenging parts in the TOEIC listening test. In order to achieve satisfactory success in this part of the test, one needs to improve both his language skills and test-taking skills. When students listen to this part, they always try to listen to more than they can, which makes them tired and miss much information. If they can not concentrate on listening, they will not follow the conversation. Another difficulty is to understand the content of listening texts with unfamiliar words. In addition,

students get in trouble when listening different accents, which make it hard to hear keywords in the conversation.

2.4.4 Short Talks

This part is considered as the most difficult part in TOEIC listening. Students do not have time to preview questions so they cannot follow the text easily. Most of the time they translate all the information into Vietnamese, that is why they easily miss the information while listening. Furthermore, some find it hard to remain concentrated when listening for a long time. Consequently, they feel tired and stressful.

3. Research Methodology

In this chapter, the methodology of the research includes research design, participants, instruments and the procedure.

3.1 Research Design

In order to answer the research question stated in chapter 1, this survey research was carried out at Tay Do University in Can Tho city. The participants are non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do University, who would answer questionnaires and interviews to gather information on their difficulties when studying TOEIC listening. The collected information would be analyzed to show the research aims.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this study are 81 freshmen from non-English majored freshmen Tourism and Travel Management 12 class, course XII at Tay Do University. There are 21 males and 59 females. They come from different areas, both rural and urban. They speak Vietnamese as their mother tongue and English is considered as their foreign language, which have been learned from 7 to 11 years. "Very easy TOIEC" is the book they use during the first semester at university. It is a basis for them to get acquainted with TOEIC. Therefore, it has fewer questions with an easier level than the real TOEIC test. This provides reliable results and generalizes the findings of the research.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is considered a very common mean or instrument used to collect data on phenomena, which are not easily observed, such as attitude, motivation, and self-conceptions, or in other words, those in social science. Therefore, to seek for information about the students' recognition of difficulties as well as the ways they improve their listening skills, the researcher used the questionnaire.

In the study, the questionnaire consists of 29 questions. The 81 copies of questionnaire in English were given to the students in the non-English majored class, course XII at Tay Do University, and 66 questionnaires were collected because other

students were absent. The questionnaire included two parts which can be described as follows.

Table 1: The Content of the Question Group

Group	Summary of the content of the question group
a. 1,2,3,4	Students' background
b. 5,6,7,8,9	General difficulties in TOEIC listening
c. From 10 to 24	Difficulties in each of parts in TOEIC listening

3.3.2 Interview questions

In order to make the study more reliable, the interview papers were delivered to 15 students who were randomly selected in the non-English majored class, course XII at Tay Do University with 5 questions which mentioned the difficulties when studying TOEIC listening and 1 question about students' solutions.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the study to report basing on the reliable data collected from the questionnaire and the interview. The results show difficulties in studying TOEIC Listening Comprehension of non-English majored freshmen through statistical evidence.

4.1 Results

This part shows the findings of the questionnaires and interview papers. The results are drawn for analyzing necessary data and ideas that the researcher collected from 66 non-English majored freshmen. The findings were split into two groups: the result of questionnaire and the result of interview.

4.1.1 The Result of Questionnaires

The researcher got a lot of valuable and reliable information from participants thanks to the questionnaires. The findings were classified into four basic items consisting of the students' background, students' attitude, students' evaluation on listening and students' difficulties in studying TOEIC listening comprehension.

4.1.1.1 Students' Background

Obviously, to realize the students' level as well as their knowledge, the researcher needed to get the information about their years of studying English. The following pie chart shows the participants' year of studying English calculated from this year (2018).

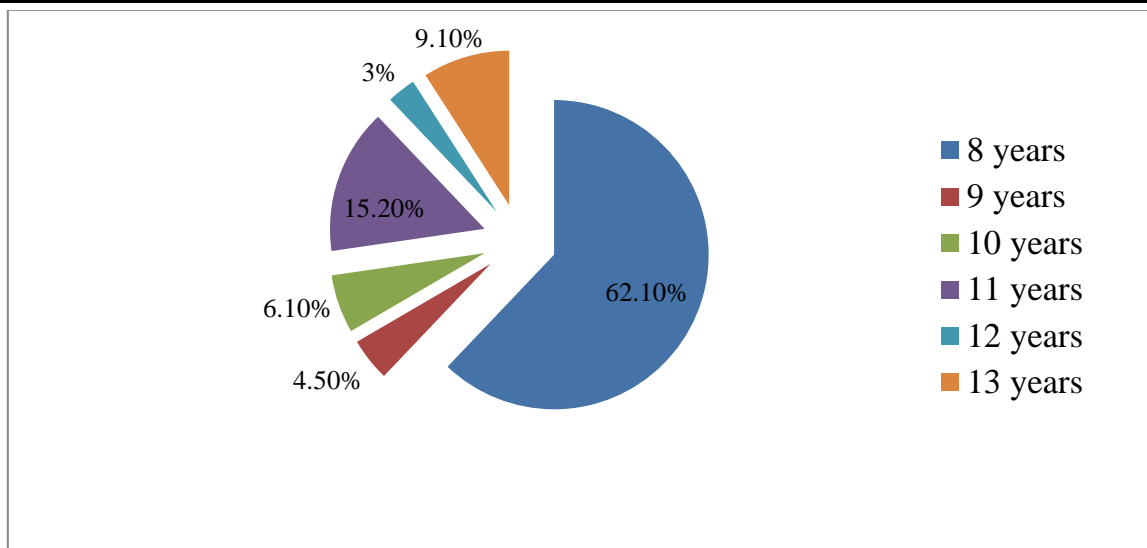


Figure 1: Students' Years of Studying English

Looking at the chart, the biggest piece of the pie chart accounted for 65.2% (43/66) of participants who have been studying English for 8 years. This means that they have studied English since they were in grade 6th and they had 7 years learning English before entering the university. Students who have learned English for 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13 years made up for 4.5% (3/66), 6.1% (4/66), 15.2% (10/66), 3% (2/66) and 9.1% (6/66) respectively. Thus, they must have had basic English knowledge.

To sum up, the percentage of students studying English 9-13 years was much lower than that of the students who have learnt English 8 years. However, this does not mean that they have good listening skill because the skill cannot be identified by the number of years they spent studying English.

4.1.1.2 Students' Attitude towards Learning English and English Listening Skill

As you know, English has become an international language and it is also a useful tool for job requirements in many countries around the world in general and in Vietnam in particular. Nowadays, most jobs demand some qualifications that relate to English. Thus, students' attitude towards the importance of learning English is shown clearly in this chart.

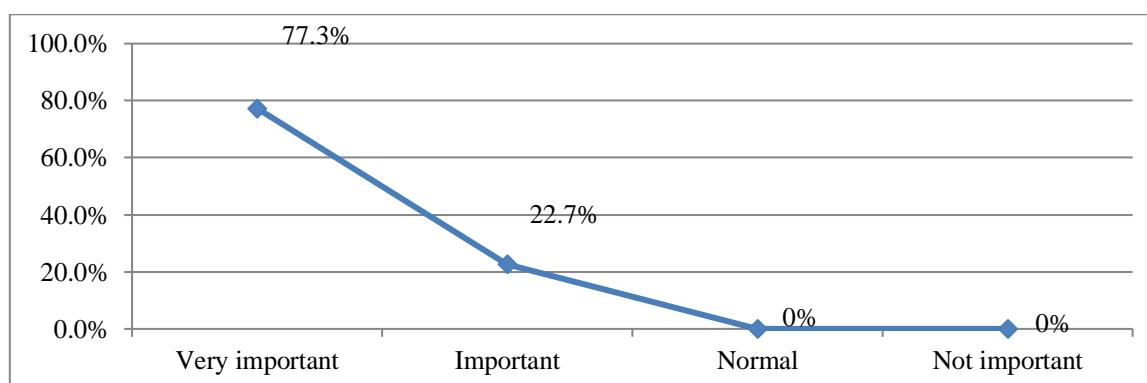


Figure 2: The Importance of Learning English

The crucial role of learning English cannot be denied. Looking at the figure, it is obvious that the percentage of students who claimed that English was very important was extremely high, more than three-fourths of the total numbers (77,3%) and 22,7% of non-English majored thought that learning English was important. Whereas, no one thought that English was normal and not important. The more important English students consider, the more awareness they should raise.

Before entering the university, students had their own goals for their jobs in the future. Indeed, there were many different aims. Although English was not their major, they had to study and took English examinations for getting certifications, especially TOEIC. Basically, their purposes of taking TOEIC test are shown in the following table.

Table 2: Students' Purposes of Taking TOEIC Test

The purposes of taking TOEIC test	Findings
a. To fulfill the requirements of graduating university	25,7%
b. To be prepared for the future job	57,6%
c. To improve English proficiency	10,6%
d. To satisfy your interest	6,1%

Students who chose to take TOEIC test to prepare for their future jobs composed the highest percentage, with over a half of the students (57,6%). This means that English is an indispensable tool for finding a job with high salary nowadays. About 25,7% students want to get TOEIC certificate to fulfill the requirements of graduating university, which is a compulsory demand in most universities. There were 10,6% of students wanting to improve their English proficiency because the higher score they want to get, the more practice they should do. As a result, they can develop their English ability. Moreover, 6,1% students wish to satisfy their interest. So, students have many different opinions about English, depending on their own purpose and passion on English.

4.1.1.3 Students' Self-evaluation on their Listening Ability

Another significant key factor is that the freshmen made an evaluation on their real listening ability. The level of listening skill of students is various because it depends on the difference of the years they studying and their purpose of studying English. When being asked "How do you evaluate your listening ability?", there was no one believing that their ability of listen was very good or good. They were not confident about their ability. Conversely, the majority of freshmen thought that their listening ability was average. This is proved in the highest percentage which represents 65,2% (43/66) of the participants. Furthermore, the rate of students admitting they were bad at listening was 34,8% (23/66). This means that they still face some difficulties in listening whether they study hard or not.

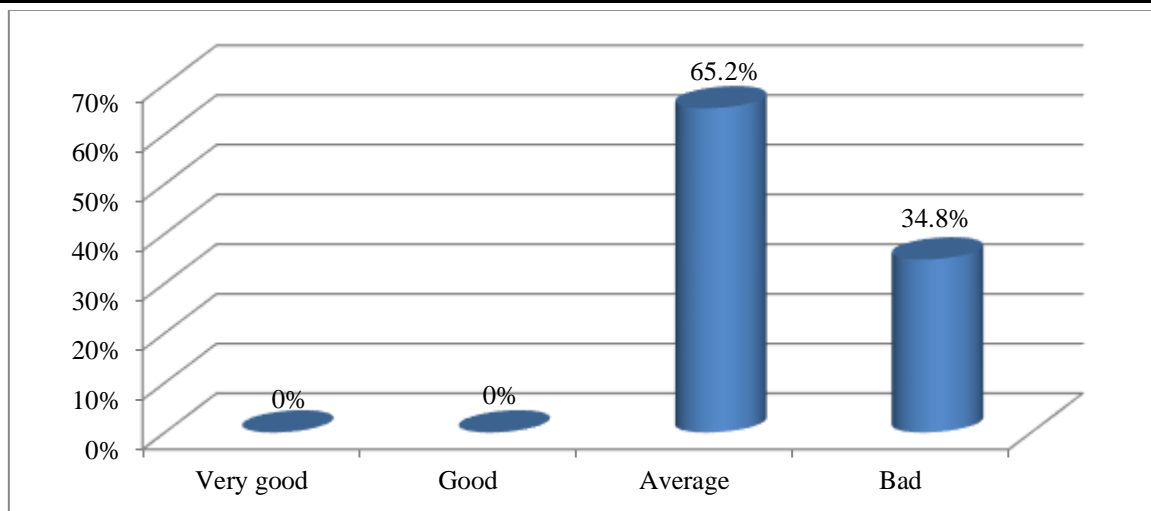


Figure 3: Students' Self-evaluation on their Listening Ability

4.1.1.4 Students' Difficulties in Learning TOEIC Listening Comprehension

Learning TOEIC listening was not really easy for non-English majored freshmen. Therefore, they had to face a lot of obstacles when learning it. This study was split into two main obstacles: general difficulties (vocabulary, background knowledge, pronunciation and psychological factors) and particular difficulties in each part.

4.1.1.4.1 Students' General Difficulties in TOEIC Listening

Most students have many difficulties in listening because of vocabulary, background knowledge, pronunciation and psychological factors. The figure below shows their problems in learning TOEIC listening comprehension.

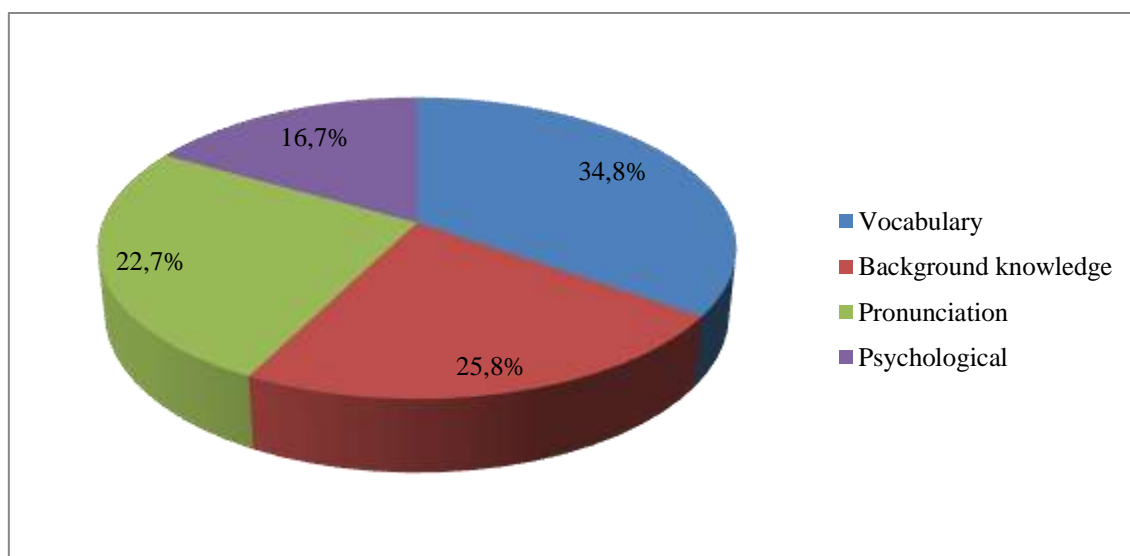


Figure 4: Students' General Difficulties in TOEIC Listening

Looking at the chart, the highest percentage was that of students choosing vocabulary as the most difficult problem, with 34,8% (23/66). With unfamiliar words,

students cannot not follow the information during the listening task. Even though there are common words, they can not recognize any words because they mispronounce those words. Thus, pronunciation comprised 25,8% (17/66) of the total number. Moreover, some students considered background knowledge as a big problem. When having a strange or uninformed topic, they are always confused. Hence, with 16,7% (11/66) it is proved that students also have difficulty with psychological factors.

a. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is considered as an essential part of learning English. Without vocabulary, the students cannot study English well. However, having a moderate amount of vocabulary is not easy for the students, especially non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. Therefore, it was one of the difficulties. Looking at the table below, we could see the obstacles the students must face in vocabulary term.

Table 3: Difficulties in Vocabulary Term

Difficulties in Vocabulary term	Findings
a. Not having opportunity to use words regularly	53,2%
b. Hindering collocation	25,3%
c. Meaning of words in different contexts	21,5%

Giving a glance at Table 3, more than half of the students (53,2%) stated that they did not have many opportunities to practise regularly new words in daily life. Although they had studied numerous vocabularies, they used them so seldom that they could not remember them for a long time, which made their vocabulary source limited. Thus, they could not understand the listening text. Besides that, a hindering collocation was also a big problem for the students, with the rate of 25,3%. In the TOEIC listening test, there are more collocations than simple words. However, to study and understand collocation, students should practise hard. The rest (21,5%) acknowledged that they had trouble in understanding the meaning of words that were used in different contexts.

b. Background Knowledge

Following next is another difficulty – background knowledge. Looking at the chart below, we could see some obstacles that the students have met.

Definitely, specialized terminology prevented learners from listening to the content well, which was proved with the highest percentage (63,7%). It was hard for them to study, remember and understand technical terms. Additionally, 24,2% of the students felt that encountering unfamiliar topics made them confused. The remaining ones (12,1%) stated that lacking cultural background inhibited them from foreseeing listening contents.

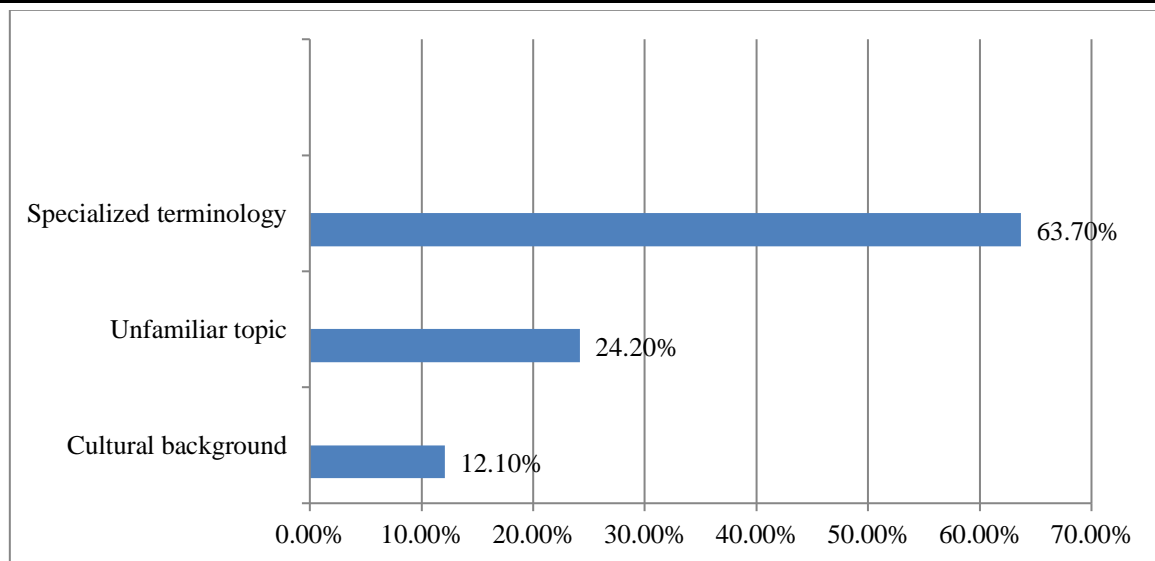


Figure 5: Difficulties in Background Knowledge Term

c. Pronunciation

It is no doubt that pronunciation is one of the weaknesses of students when listening. Looking at the table, we could see some evidence that proved this notion.

Table 4: Difficulties in Pronunciation Term

Difficulties in Pronunciation term	Findings
a. Not recognize the words	67,4%
b. Not understand the meaning of word	19,4%
c. Not identify the main information	13,2%

The biggest difficulty for students was not being able to recognize the words, with the highest percentage 67,4%. Mispronunciation leads to the fact that they find it hard to recognize the spoken words, even though those words are familiar with them. Furthermore, 19,4% of the students believed that with bad pronunciation, students could not understand the meaning of words. Additionally, 13,2% of them could not identify the main information of what they listened.

d. Psychological Factors

Moving to the last difficulty in learning TOEIC listening is psychological elements, which is presented in this chart.

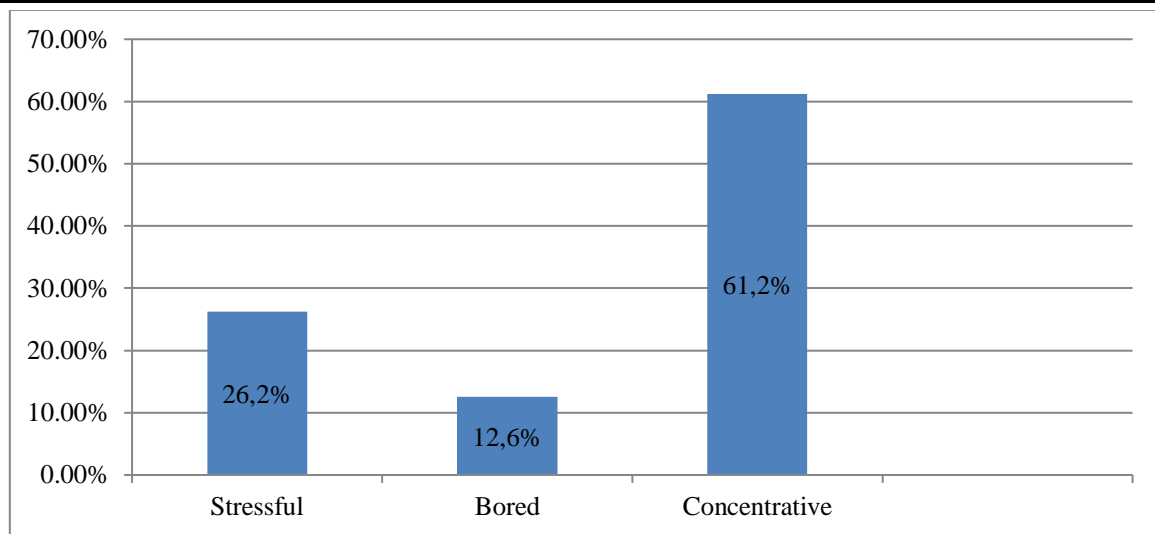


Figure 6: Difficulties in Psychological Factors Term

Concentration is a vital psychological factor for listening skill. Without concentration, students cannot listen well. However, to keep a concentration is not easy. More than half of the students (61,2%) thought that it was the biggest problem for them. In fact, with a bad mood, it is hard to pay attention to listening. Besides, 26,2% of the participants claimed that they were stressful when they could not listen clearly to the content. Others (12,6%) found that listening for a long period of time is boring.

4.1.1.4.2 Students' Difficulties in each of Parts in TOEIC listening

With different parts, the students face dissimilar difficulties. But which part is the most difficult for them? With the following chart, it can be clearly seen.

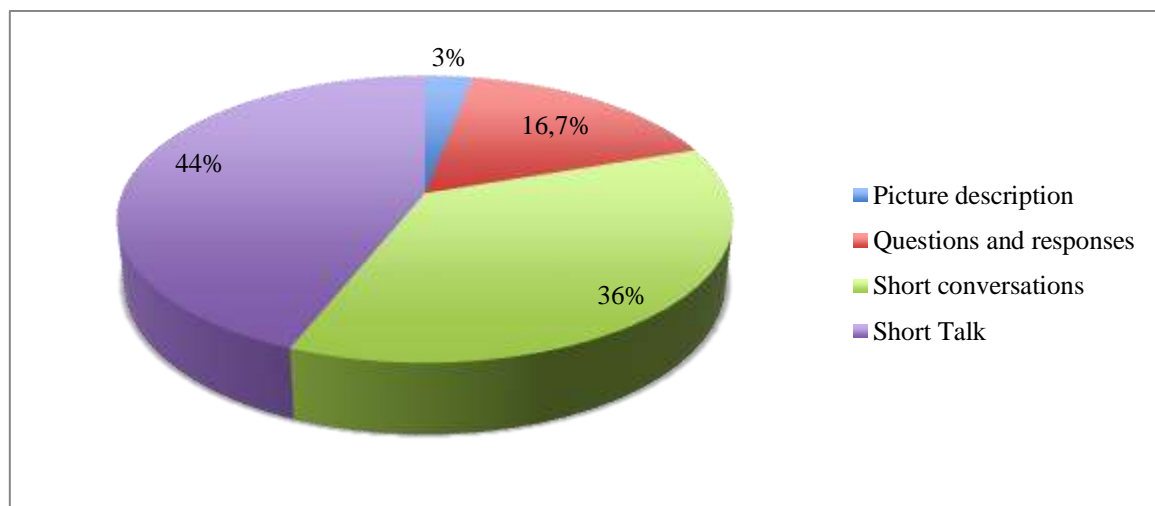


Figure 7: Students' Difficulties in each of Parts in Listening

From the figure, it is undeniable that the percentage of students who considered the short talk as the most difficult part was 44%. 36% have trouble with the short conversation, which means almost students fell in traps in these two parts. With 30

questions in the question-respond part, 16,7% of the students faced some difficulties. On the contrary, only 2 students thought that the picture description part is the most challenging, with a proportion of 3%.

a. Picture Description

In TOEIC listening, picture description is considered as the easiest part compared to other parts. However, it is also very easy to make mistakes if students do not listen carefully. Some obstacles in this part are shown in the table below.

Table 5: Difficulties in Picture Description

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
11. You find it difficult to see with unclear and invisible pictures.	5,3%	27,4%	33,5%	19,5%	14,3%
12. You can not foresee what the speaker says when the picture has too much details.	13,7%	31,2%	25,6%	17,3%	12,2%
13. Using collocations instead of simple words is one of your obstacles during listening.	18,2%	55,7%	18,8%	7,3%	0%
14. It is easy for you to fall into traps with similar- sound words.	26,9%	42,5%	25,1%	5,5%	0%

As can be seen from the table, the first statement stated that students had difficulty in seeing with unclear and invisible pictures. With 3,5% “strongly agree” and 27,3% “agree”, it was proved that some students got in trouble with this section. The highest percentage (33,5%) was students having no idea of this statement. Additionally, the rest disagreed (19,5%) and strongly disagreed (14,3%) with the problem. In statement 12, it was said that they had many difficulties when they could not predict what the speakers said, 31,2% of them chose “agree” and 13,7% of the total chose “strongly agree”, 25,6% gave no comment on this statement because they had no idea, others disagreed (17,3%) and strongly disagreed (12,2%) because it was not their problem.

For statement 13, 63,9% of the students agreed that collocation made them confused because of their limited knowledge of collocation. (18,2% of them strongly agreed and 55,7% of them agreed). 18,8% of students said they did not have an idea and very few of them (7,3%) disagreed.

25,1% of students gave no comment on statement 14. Most of them (69,4%) agreed that it was easy to fall into traps when encountering homophone words. (26,9% of them strongly agreed and 42,5% of them agreed). Nevertheless, 5,5% of participants were neutral about this difficulty and no one strongly disagreed.

To sum up, the biggest problem that the students have faced in this part was collocation, with a very high percentage of 73,9%. Actually, to study, understand as well as remember collocations are really hard.

b. Questions and Responses

Apparently, this is a part which has only three answers for each question. The more careful they are, the higher mark they have. However, the students also have problems in this part. The results is demonstrated in the table.

Table 6: Difficulties in Questions and Responses

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
15. You are confused when you can't hear and recognize what the type of question is.	13,7%	68,3%	11,6%	6,4%	0%
16. Words are used in many different context that make you bewildered.	23,3%	58,7%	8,9%	5,4%	3,7%
17. The speech rate has created a problem in listening comprehension.	62,3%	31,8%	5,9%	0%	0%
18. You can not easy to understand what the speaker's intention is.	12,4%	30,8%	36,2%	16,3%	4,3%

Let's have a look at statement 15, not recognizing types of questions seemed to be a difficulty obstructing the students from being able to listen well. Hence, most of the freshmen thought that it was one of the difficulties in listening TOEIC with 82%. (13,7% of them strongly agree and 68,3% of them agree). 11,6% of students had no idea about this statement and 6,4% of them disagreed.

As for statement 16, it was uncomplicated to see that more than half of the participants (58,7%) admitted that they had a trend of being used words in many different contexts. Similarly, there was 23,3% of them who strongly agreed with this statement. In contrast, 5,4% of them said they disagreed, very few of them thought that it was not absolutely true and 8,9% of them had no idea. Statement 17 revealed the number of freshmen approved that it was hard for them to catch up with the speech of the speakers. About 62,3% strongly agreed and 31,8% agreed felt that the speech rate was too fast, and they could not follow. The remaining ones were 5,9% had no idea and no one disagreed this statement.

With statement 18, about 12,4% of participants strongly agreed and 30,8% of them agreed that they were confused when they did not understand the speakers' intention. Nevertheless, 36,2% of students had no think about it and 20,6% of them did not think that was their difficulty. (16,3% of them disagreed and 4,3% of them strongly agreed).

In short, almost students (94,1%) revealed that the speech rate of the speaker prevented them from able to listen well. In fact, the faster the speaker talk, the less fluently they listen. Thus, the student should practise more and more by listening to some English news such as VOA, BBC learning English, etc.

c. Short Conversations

Continuing with another problem in the conversation part, three statements were about the difficulties of students in this part illustrated in the table.

Table 7: Difficulties in Short Conversations

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
19. It's difficult to understand the content of the texts if you face with unfamiliar words.	53,4%	33,7%	12,9%	0%	0%
20. You get in trouble in listening from many different accents.	27,3%	35,8%	26,3%	10,6%	0%
21. It is hard for you to hear key words in a conversation.	21,2%	34,3%	34,2%	10,3%	0%

Looking at the table, the percentage of the respondents who strongly disagreed with the three statements in the table was zero. Nevertheless, the percentage choosing “strongly agree” and “agree” was almost overwhelming. In detail, 53,4% of them strongly agreed that to understand the content with unfamiliar words was a big problem, 33,7% of freshmen agreed, 12,9% no idea and no one disagreed. In statement 20, more than half of the participants agreed that they got trouble in listening from many different accents. (27,3% of students strongly agreed and 35,8% of them agreed). About 26,3% of them gave no comments. And only 10,6% disagreed. As for the statement 21, 34,3% of participants agreed that it was hard to recognize keywords in conversation. Besides, the percentages of freshmen choosing “strongly agreed”, “no idea”, “disagreed” were 21,2%, 34,2% and 10,3% respectively.

In summary, with the highest percentage 53,4% of them strongly agreed and 33,7% of them agreed in statement 19, it meant that unfamiliar words were the most drawback in this part. Without vocabulary, they might not listen and understand the content.

d. Short Talks

Table 8: Difficulties in Short Talks

Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Strongly disagree
22. It doesn't have time for you to preview the question so you can't easily follow the text.	32,5%	46,3%	21,2%	0%	0%
23. You often translate all the information into Vietnamese so you can easily miss the text while listening.	68,7%	25,4%	5,9%	0%	0%
24. You find it hard to keep your concentration when listening in a long time.	29,3%	61,3%	9,4%	0%	0%

Definitely, it was clear that no one chose the column of “strongly agree” and “disagree” was zero. Getting started with statement 22, the difficulty was their ability to follow the text when they could not preview the question. It can be deduced that approximately fourth-fifths of students (32,5% strongly agreed and 46,3% agreed) had a big problem.

Conversely, 21,2% of them had no comment on this statement. The next one, statement 23, it stated that translating all the information into Vietnamese made them easily miss the content while listening. The percentage of the respondents who concurred was 68,7% strongly approved and 25,4% approved. The rest ones 5,9% had no opinions. Additionally, as the statement 24 "You find it hard to keep your concentration when listening in a long time" was stated, more than a half of freshmen showed their agreement with this (61,3%). Similarly, 29,3% of them strongly agreed with the fact that they could not concentrate on listening to text when listening for a very long time. Yet, 9,4% of them believed that it was not a big deal and they had no idea about this.

From the findings above, zero percentage for all the column of "strongly agree" and "agree", it proved that almost students got the most difficulty in this part. Actually, this part made students confused when listening to a short talk but having a lot of information.

4.1.2 The Results of Interview

After analyzing the interviews of fifteen freshmen carefully, the researcher got the final results that were in accord with the results of the questionnaire. First of all, when asking the participants about the reason why they took the TOEIC test, most of them gave the answers that met the researcher's expectation. 9/15 students thought that English was an international language; therefore, this certificate could be helpful for their future job. Three students shared their ideas that it was one of the compulsory demands for graduating from university so that they must take it. The rest were the participants whose purpose of taking the TOEIC test was to improve their English proficiency.

Secondly, as reading the answers to the next interview question, listening seemed to be a challenge for the students. The researcher found out that almost all fifteen interviewees (15/15) considered listening was more difficult than reading in the TOEIC test. For some reasons, "with different accents of foreigners, I can't listen clearly" said the students. Additionally, it was hard for them to understand what the speakers said because of lacking vocabulary, pronunciation as well as background knowledge.

As for the interview question 3, "Which difficulties do you face when learning listening in TOEIC?". They listed out some difficulties such as their vocabulary source limited so they could not listen well. Moreover, bad pronunciation prevented them from recognizing the words even though it was a familiar word. Furthermore, "I was confused when meeting unfamiliar topics" said the student. Thus, lacking background knowledge was also a big problem for them.

When being asked among those difficulties "which was the most difficult factor that made them not listen well?". Of all fifteen students, there were eleven students who did think that vocabulary was the most difficult key factor affecting them when learning TOEIC listening. Lacking vocabulary could make the students misunderstand the listening contents. Students did not use the words that they learnt regularly, so they were easy to forget those words. This caused a problem that they could not recognize the words they learned before when facing a test of listening. Others shared their ideas that

the speech of the speakers made them embarrassed. When the native speakers spoke fastly, they could not follow their ideas and did not understand what is said.

Additionally, students themselves also suggested some solutions to improve their listening. Almost students thought that vocabulary was an indispensable thing for studying English and in particularly TOEIC listening. Thus, they wanted to improve their vocabulary source through reading English books, learning by heart new words, watching films that had English subtitle, etc. Especially, they practised to put new words to a particular context and combine it with others in its context. That helped them to remember new words so long. The other ideas of students were listening more day by day via listening media or internet. This allowed them to improve their reaction with the speech rate and the spoken accents.

4.2 Discussion

The result of the questionnaire indicates that many of freshmen from non-English majored class have been studying English for 7-9 years. It means that they spent at least 7 years studying English before entering university. However, they still face drawbacks in listening. Therefore, in this research was to figure out the difficulties in learning listening TOEIC of non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. In addition, based on the research results, freshmen at Tay Do university encounter various listening difficulties which may relate to vocabulary, background knowledge, pronunciation, psychological and factor affecting each of the parts.

Firstly, in general difficulties, vocabulary was one of the biggest difficulties for the students. They are easy to forget those words because many words have more than one meaning and students seldom use. Even though, a word can be used in different contexts. Thus, it led students to misunderstand what they heard. In addition, they were not able to understand the listening text because of lacking vocabulary. They could not remember so much vocabulary that they do not use regularly. Besides, their mispronunciation also led them to difficulties in their listening. Even, they could not recognize the familiar words. Additionally, lacking background knowledge was another problem for freshmen. They always felt confused with unfamiliar topics. Thus, they could not foresee the intention of the speaker. Because these topics were strange and it had many unfamiliar words, phrases. Thus, they got anxiety. Furthermore, psychological also affected them when listening. With a bad mood, they could not pay attention or concentrate on the listening test. Or listening in a long time was made them tired and listened no effectively.

Finally, factor affecting each of the parts in TOEIC listening, with different parts, students faced different problems. In the picture description part, the most difficulty was similar-sound words. When listening to those words, they also fell into traps because they could not recognize those words. Besides, collocation prevented them from listening well. It was too hard for them to remember many collocations which they seldom use. In another part – the question–respond part, the students could not listen fluently with the fast speech of the speakers. They could not catch up with the speaker's ideas and miss the content. And they were confused when they could not hear the type of question.

Different accents of the speaker made the students difficult in listening conversation in part 3. Some native accents were too hard for them to listen well. Moreover, unfamiliar words inhibited them to understand the listening content. The final part – the short talk, it was considered as the most difficult part in TOEIC listening. While listening, they had a habit of translating everything into Vietnamese. Thus, it was easy to miss the information in the content. And listening in a long time made them not continue to concentrate on the listening text. As a result of the research, the higher mark in TOEIC listening they wanted to get, the more time they should practised.

5. Conclusion, Limitations and Recommendations

This chapter contains conclusion, limitations and some recommendations for the further research.

5.1 Conclusion

Nowadays, English plays an essential role in social life as no one can exist without the air. More and more people have learnt English. In fact, it is undeniable that English is one of the most common languages in the world. Therefore, taking an English certificate is very necessary such as TOEIC, TOEFL, IELTS, etc. However, studying a new language or getting a certificate, particularly English, is not easy for the students. Actually, they have faced many difficulties to study it. Indeed, non-English majored freshmen at Tay Do university are a specific example. They had to get a TOEIC certificate for graduating. Between two skills in TOEIC- listening and reading, they revealed that listening skill is the most challenge for them to study. During the process of learning TOEIC listening, they recognize many difficulties that limit their listening skill. After collecting and analyzing the information and data, the researcher figured out some common difficulties of freshmen in learning TOEIC listening. Thanks to precious information from questionnaires and interviews we could see that the barriers were about vocabulary, pronunciation, background knowledge, psychological and some difficulties in each of parts in TOEIC listening test. In fact, that learning listening skill is not very difficult if students know clearly their difficulties and they have some ways to solve their difficulties.

For example, facing difficulties in vocabulary could be drawn from the fact that students did not use frequently English words or not taking note the word, so that they would fail to get information from the text during listening. Another difficulty was background knowledge. Students could not have enough knowledge to understand all fields in life, so they were hard to listen to unfamiliar topics or many specialized words. They should spend much time on self-studying as possible to gain knowledge of different fields and large vocabulary source. Additionally, the pronunciation was a problem for the students. Having mispronunciation led them to not recognize words and misunderstand the content of the listening text. Moreover, they got trouble with

psychological factors. They felt ambiguous and discouraged in learning if they lose orientation in determining the core information when listening.

Besides these difficulties, there were many other drawbacks in each of parts affecting students' listening ability. Listening similar-sound words made them confused. They were easy to fail in traps with the words which had the same sound. Furthermore, the speech of the speaker made them not to catch up with the spoken ideas. It led them to miss much information. With unfamiliar words, they could not hear and understand the listening content. And listening in a long time would make them tired and not continue to concentrate on the text.

In brief, the research "Difficulties in studying TOEIC Listening Comprehension of non – English majored freshmen at Tay Do University" intended to figure out the problems that non-English majored freshmen faced in learning TOEIC listening. It helped them to find out some appropriate solutions to overcome those difficulties. Thus, the students should make a lot of effort, try their hardest and spend time for self-studying to improve their listening ability.

5.2 Limitation

Although the supervisor and friends instructed and supported me enthusiastically, there were still some limitations. Actually, it is the first time the researcher conducts such a real study so that it can be unavoidable. Despite the researcher made an effort to collect information from participants many times, the number of participants was limited. In fact, there were 81 students in the class; however, only 66 students took part in the questionnaire. Additionally, it wastes a lot of time in analyzing the data from some participants did not focus on fulfilling the questionnaire.

5.3 Recommendation

This research can be seen as a basis for further research. Actually, the researcher can develop their research with a larger number of the participant. Based on the results of this survey, students also realize their difficulties and have some suggestions to help them to improve their listening skill. I conclude with my ideas about the solutions to improve the listening skill of the students.

First of all, I think that students should spend much time practising. Listening various of topics helps them improve their background knowledge as well as vocabulary. Furthermore, students should know to use suitable strategies for each of the parts in the TOEIC listening test in order to get the best result.

However, students cannot improve themselves without teachers. Teachers play a vital part such as a significant in building up their skill. Teachers will show their students the ways in each stage of listening comprehension. Moreover, teachers advise their students and support them to self-study at home. Hopefully, there will be some research about solutions for students to overcome these obstacles.

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