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Research Article

# **Exploring English Listening Difficulties Among Vocational Freshmen: A Case Study at LILAMA 2 College**

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#### **Abstract**

This study investigates the difficulties faced by first-year vocational students at LILAMA 2 International Technology College in acquiring English listening skills. Using a questionnaire distributed to 163 freshmen from various technical majors, the study examines four main areas of challenge: linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and environmental/technical factors. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's Alpha analysis were used to identify key problem areas. Results indicate that fast speech, limited vocabulary, and background noise were the most frequently reported issues. Psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence also significantly hindered listening comprehension. In contrast, students were generally satisfied with teaching methods and materials. Based on these findings, the paper suggests practical strategies such as using authentic listening resources, offering emotional support in class, and improving classroom audio quality. The study provides insights for English teachers and administrators in vocational settings, aiming to improve students' listening proficiency through more targeted instructional support.

## **Keywords**

Vocational students, English listening skills, linguistic barriers, psychological factors, SPSS analysis, teaching improvement

#### 1. Introduction

English listening skills are important for students in vocational education, especially when they prepare to work in technical fields where English is often used. However, many vocational students in Vietnam, including those at LILAMA 2 International Technology College, still find listening to English very difficult. Most of them have studied English before, but they often struggle to understand when people speak fast, use different accents or use words they don't know.

First-year students at LILAMA 2 come from different majors such as mechanical, electrical, or electronic engineering. English is a compulsory subject for them, but many feel unconfident and stressed during listening tasks. In addition, problems like low-quality audio, noise in the classroom, and a lack of useful strategies make it harder for them to improve.

While previous research has addressed listening difficulties

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among general learners, limited attention has been paid to the experiences of vocational students in Vietnam, especially those in their first year of study. These learners often lack prior exposure to authentic listening materials and are unfamiliar with strategies to cope with fast speech.

unfamiliar accents, or specialized vocabulary.

This study aims to explore the major difficulties that vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 face in developing English listening comprehension. By examining both internal and external barriers, the study seeks to offer insights that can support the improvement of English teaching practices in vocational colleges.

To achieve this goal, the study addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the main challenges that vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 International Technology College encounter in acquiring English listening skills?
- 2) What are the primary reasons contributing to these challenges (e.g., linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, environmental or technical)?
- 3) What suggestions can help vocational freshmen in enhancing their English listening proficiency?

#### 2. Literature Review

English listening comprehension has long been recognized as a demanding skill for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), as it requires both rapid decoding of speech and higher-level interpretation (Anderson & Lynch, 1988; Buck, 2001; Field, 2008). Contemporary perspectives emphasize that bottom-up processes such as word recognition and grammar parsing operate interactively with top-down knowledge and strategies (Vandergrift, 2007; Rost, 2011). Metacognitive models further highlight that successful listeners monitor and regulate their listening, a dimension often underdeveloped among less experienced learners (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). For vocational students, who have limited prior exposure to authentic listening tasks, these challenges may be amplified in real-world contexts like safety briefings or workplace instructions (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Research consistently points to four broad categories of listening difficulties. The first is linguistic barriers. Learners often struggle with fast speech, reduced forms, varied accents, complex syntax, and insufficient vocabulary (Underwood, 1989; Hasan, 2000; Goh, 2000; Field, 2008). Rate of delivery is particularly problematic: when speech is rapid, students lose the ability to segment and decode words, which impedes comprehension (Buck, 2001). Vocabulary coverage is another key predictor; Nation (2001) and Vandergrift (2007) showed that limited lexicon prevents learners from grasping main ideas, a finding echoed across EFL contexts.

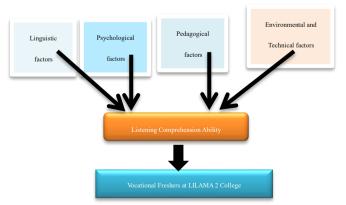
The second category is psychological factors. Listening anxiety, low confidence, and declining motivation are frequently linked to weaker comprehension (Graham, 2006; Hamouda, 2013; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Anxiety can narrow attentional focus and increase cognitive load, making it harder to process input in real time (Graham, 2006). For vocational freshmen who are new to academic listening in English, these affective challenges may be especially acute.

The third category concerns pedagogical factors. Studies note that task design, relevance of materials, and the quality of teacher feedback strongly influence outcomes (Richards, 2008; Field, 2008; Graham & Santos, 2015). Traditional comprehension exercises may test knowledge but do not necessarily build skills. More recent approaches advocate explicit training in decoding, strategy instruction, and authentic tasks to foster sustained improvement (Rost, 2011; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). In vocational settings, tailoring materials to domain-specific contexts is particularly important for relevance and transferability (Flowerdew & Miller, 2005).

Finally, environmental and technical factors have also been highlighted. Poor audio quality, background noise, and malfunctioning equipment raise the perceptual burden and distract learners (Goh, 2000; Hamouda, 2013). In vocational classrooms that may be adjacent to workshops, such issues can be especially disruptive unless addressed systematically.

While many studies have documented these challenges among general EFL learners, relatively few have focused specifically on Vietnamese vocational students. Prior work in Vietnam suggests that fast speech, vocabulary gaps, and affective barriers are common (Nguyễn, 2011; Hoàng, 2023; Nguyễn & Phan, 2024). However, little research has disaggregated their difficulties according to the four-factor scheme above. The present study, therefore, adopts this framework: linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and environmental/technical as the theoretical basis for examining the listening comprehension problems faced by vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 International Technology College.

The following conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates the hypothesized relationships between these factors and the listening performance of vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 College.



#### *Figure 1.* Conceptual framework of the study

This figure illustrates the conceptual framework used to explore English listening difficulties among vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 College. The framework identifies four major categories of factors that may influence students' comprehension ability: linguistic listening psychological factors, pedagogical factors, and environmental and technical factors. Linguistic factors relate to students' vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, and grammatical understanding, which directly affect message decoding. Psychological factors include motivation, anxiety, attention, and confidence, all of which shape learners' cognitive engagement during listening. Pedagogical factors refer to teaching methods, materials, and classroom activities that facilitate or hinder listening development. Environmental and technical factors involve external conditions such as classroom acoustics, equipment quality, and exposure to authentic listening contexts. Together, these dimensions interact to influence the overall listening comprehension ability of vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 College.

## 3. Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design to explore the listening comprehension difficulties faced by vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 International Technology College. The purpose was to identify key barriers affecting their English listening skills and to provide pedagogical suggestions based on students' perspectives.

#### 3.1. Data Analysis

A total of 163 first-year vocational students participated in the study. They were selected using convenience sampling, as they were readily accessible and had just completed their first semester of English instruction at the college.

Table 1. Demographic Summary of Participants

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	149	91.4%
Gender	Female	14	8.6%
	19 years old	112	68.7%
Age	Over 19 years old	51	31.3%
Years of	6 - 10 years	155	95.1%
learning English	Over 10 years	8	4.9%

The primary research instrument was a structured questionnaire consisting of 16 items categorized into four groups of factors: linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and

environmental/technical. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

The questionnaire was distributed and collected manually during class sessions. The data collection took place in the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. The responses were entered into SPSS (Version 28.0) for descriptive statistical analysis and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure the internal consistency of the items.

#### 3.2. Validity and reliability of the study

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection procedure, multiple strategies were employed throughout the research process, including explanations of the questionnaire to the participants and collecting them carefully and objectively for the data analysis.. The main research instruments are the questionnaire and the software SPSS. A pilot study was conducted with a small group of students to refine the instruments and confirm their comprehensibility. Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire, which yielded a satisfactory value above 0.60, indicating high internal consistency. These steps collectively enhanced the accuracy, dependability, and trustworthiness of the collected data.

#### 3.3. Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to ethical standards for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all vocational freshmen before data collection, and participants were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. All responses were used solely for academic purposes and stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. By employing quantitative method, the study aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting students' English listening comprehension. The quantitative design enabled a deeper exploration of learners' difficulties, perceptions, and experiences, thereby providing meaningful insights for improving English listening instruction at LILAMA 2 College. Before starting the research, the study received permission from the English Department at LILAMA 2. Students were informed clearly about what the research was about, what they would be asked to do, and how their information would be used. Only those who agreed to take part signed a consent form. The researcher explained that joining the study was voluntary and would not affect their grades or classes. This approach aligns with ethical research emphasize principles that transparency, voluntary participation, and informed consent in educational contexts (BERA, 2018; Israel & Hay, 2006).

## 4. Findings and Discussion

#### 4.1. Linguistic Factors

As shown in Table 1, fast speech (M = 4.55, SD = .610) and limited vocabulary (M = 4.53, SD = .580) were rated as the most serious linguistic difficulties, indicating that students often struggle to process rapid spoken input and lack the lexical resources needed for effective comprehension. In comparison, complex grammar (M = 4.36, SD = .646) and different accents (M = 4.35, SD = .634) were reported as slightly less problematic, though still considered significant barriers. These findings are consistent with Hasan (2000) and Goh (2000), who identified fast speech and vocabulary limitations as critical challenges for EFL learners. The consistently high means further suggest that vocational freshmen are particularly vulnerable to linguistic obstacles due to their limited exposure to authentic spoken English prior to entering college. This highlights the need for teaching practices that prioritize vocabulary expansion and provide training with authentic, fast-paced listening materials to better prepare students for real-life communication.

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for Linguistic Factors (N = 163)

Item (Linguistic Difficulties)	Mean	SD	Rank
Fast speech	4.55	.610	1
Limited vocabulary	4.53	.580	2
Complex grammar	4.36	.646	3
Different accents	4.35	.634	4

#### 4.2. Psychological Factors

As presented in Table 3, psychological barriers also posed significant difficulties for vocational freshmen, with all mean scores exceeding 4.1 on a five-point scale. The most critical issue was psychological stress and inability to stay focused (M = 4.60, SD = .529), followed by anxiety during listening (M = 4.37, SD = .686) and low self-confidence (M = 4.33, SD)= .656). Lack of motivation (M = 4.15, SD = .681) was rated slightly lower, though it still represents a considerable challenge. These results align with Graham (2006) and Hamouda (2013), who emphasized that anxiety and low confidence are among the most common affective barriers to listening comprehension. The findings suggest that vocational students' listening performance is strongly influenced by their emotional state, with stress and anxiety often preventing them from applying effective listening strategies. Given the consistently high means, teachers should pay particular attention to creating a supportive learning environment that reduces stress, builds learners' confidence, and fosters sustained motivation in listening practice.

*Table 3.* Descriptive Statistics for Psychological Factors (N = 163)

Item (Psychological Difficulties)	Mean	SD	Rank
Psychological stress / lack of focus	4.60	.529	1
Anxiety while listening	4.37	.686	2
Low self-confidence	4.33	.656	3
Lack of motivation	4.15	.681	4

#### 4.3. Pedagogical Factors

Table 4 indicates that, compared with linguistic and psychological challenges, pedagogical factors were rated relatively low, with mean scores ranging from 1.40 to 2.22. Among these, students most frequently mentioned the lack of teacher feedback (M = 2.22, SD = .599) as a limitation, while issues such as unsuitable listening materials (M = 1.83, SD = .580) and ineffective teaching methods (M = 1.40, SD = .624) were considered less problematic. This suggests that, overall, students were fairly satisfied with the way listening was taught and the materials provided, but they still desired more individualized feedback to help them improve.

These findings are somewhat different from those reported by Richards (2008), who highlighted that poorly designed listening tasks and limited materials often pose significant barriers. In the case of vocational students at LILAMA 2, teaching methods and resources appear to be less of an obstacle, possibly because instructors already adapt lessons to suit students' needs. Instead, the emphasis falls on the quality and frequency of feedback, which students believe could better support their listening development. This underlines the importance of formative assessment and continuous teacher support in helping learners refine their strategies and overcome difficulties in listening comprehension.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for Pedagogical Factors (N = 163)

Item (Pedagogical Difficulties)	Mean	SD	Rank
Lack of teacher feedback	2.22	.599	1
Ineffective classroom activities	1.85	.631	2
Unsuitable listening materials	1.83	.580	3

Ineffective teaching	1 40	624	4
methods	1.40	.024	7

#### 4.4. Environmental and Technical Factors

As shown in Table 5, environmental and technical conditions were also rated highly as barriers to listening comprehension, with mean scores ranging from 4.10 to 4.53. The most critical issues were technical problems such as unclear recordings or malfunctioning devices (M = 4.53, SD = .601) and the poor quality of audio equipment (M = 4.48, SD = .559). Meanwhile, difficulties caused by the classroom environment (M = 4.17, SD = .669) and background noise (M = 4.10, SD = .562) were also reported but to a slightly lesser extent.

These results confirm earlier observations by Hamouda (2013), who noted that poor sound quality and technical constraints can significantly reduce learners' ability to follow spoken input. In the context of vocational education, such challenges may be particularly disruptive, as students often learn in noisy workshops or practice rooms where background sounds are unavoidable. The findings emphasize the importance of ensuring reliable audio equipment and minimizing classroom noise in order to create more supportive listening conditions. In addition, improving access to high-quality recordings and updated technology would allow students to practice in environments that are closer to real-life communication contexts.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics for Environmental/Technical Factors (N = 163)

Item (Environmental/Technical Difficulties)	Mean	SD	Rank
Technical issues (unclear recordings, malfunctioning devices)	4.53	.601	1
Poor quality of audio equipment	4.48	.559	2
Classroom environment not conducive	4.17	.669	3
Background noise in the classroom	4.10	.562	4

Overall, the findings indicate that linguistic and psychological factors posed the greatest barriers for vocational freshmen, while pedagogical and environmental issues were less critical but still influential. Together, these findings highlight the multifaceted nature of listening comprehension difficulties and provide a basis for drawing practical implications, which are summarized in the conclusion.

#### 5. Conclusion

This study examined the major difficulties that vocational freshmen at LILAMA 2 International Technology College encounter in English listening comprehension. The findings revealed that linguistic and psychological factors represented the greatest challenges. In particular, fast speech and limited vocabulary emerged as the most critical linguistic obstacles, psychological stress, anxiety, and lack of self-confidence strongly hindered students' ability to focus and process listening input. In contrast, pedagogical factors were rated less severe, with students generally satisfied with teaching methods and materials, though they highlighted the need for more individualized feedback. Environmental and technical issues, especially poor audio quality and malfunctioning equipment, also proved disruptive to listening performance.

The results carry important implications for teaching practice in vocational education. Teachers should place greater emphasis on vocabulary development and provide more exposure to authentic, fast-paced listening materials to prepare students for real-world communication. At the same time, classroom strategies should aim to reduce listening-related anxiety and build learners' confidence. Addressing technical limitations, such as ensuring high-quality audio equipment and reducing classroom noise, will further enhance the learning environment. Finally, more consistent teacher feedback should be integrated to support students' progress in listening skills.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was based on a single vocational institution, and the findings may not fully represent other contexts. Moreover, the study relied solely on self-reported questionnaire data, which might not capture the full range of learners' listening difficulties.

Future research could expand by including multiple vocational colleges across Vietnam to enhance generalizability. It may also combine surveys with classroom observations or listening tests for more comprehensive insights. Longitudinal studies or intervention-based research would be valuable to evaluate the effectiveness of specific pedagogical strategies in overcoming the challenges identified.

## **Appendix**

Appendix A:	Questionnaire
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Gender: Age:	Male 18	Female	Over 19		
PART I. PERSONAL INFORMATION  Your major at Lilama 2 College: (Please specify your					

– Úc) khiến tôi gặp khó

• /	)							khăn trong việc hiểu nội					
Hov	w long have you b	een learning	g Engli	ish?				dung nghe tiếng Anh.)					
	3 - 5 years												
	6 - 10 years												
	•												
Шаг	Over 10 years	adad any F	naliah	liato.	.i			My limited vocabulary					
	ve you ever atter le school?	ided any E	ngusn	nstei	ning c	ourse		prevents me from					
outsiu								understanding English					
Ш	Yes No							listening materials					
PAI		ORS AFF	ECTI	NG	ENG	LISH	Q4	effectively.					
	ENING SKILLS				0.11			(Vốn từ vựng hạn chế					
	ase indicate how	much you a	gree w	1th th	e follo	owing		khiến tôi gặp khó khăn					
questi	ons:	I			1			trong việc hiểu tài liệu					
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đồn	ng ý đồng ý	kiến			toàn đ	ong y	No.	Questions	1	2	3	4	5
Plea	ase rate the foll	owing state	ments	base	d on	your							
experi	ence with learning	English list	ening s	kills.				I feel low					
The	eme 1: Linguistic	Factors						self-confidence when					
								listening to English,					
No.	. Questio	ns 1	2	3	4	5		which affects my					
	Complex gram	morin				+	Q5	comprehension.					
	listening material							(Sự thiếu tự tin khi					
	it hard for me to	S IIIakes						nghe tiếng Anh ảnh					
	understand spoke	an.						hưởng đến khả năng hiểu					
Q1	English.	11						của tôi)					
	(Ngữ pháp phú	rc tan						Anxiety while listening					
	trong tài liệu ngh							to English makes it					
	tôi khó hiểu tiếng							difficult for me to focus					
	Fast speech in					<del>                                     </del>	Q6	and understand.					
	conversations or	Ziigiisii						(Cảm giác lo lắng khi					
	recordings is a ma	aior						nghe tiếng Anh khiến tôi					
	obstacle to my lis	•						khó tập trung và hiểu nội					
	comprehension.							dung)					
Q2	(Tốc độ nói nhơ	anh trong						Lack of motivation					
	các đoạn hội thoạ							reduces my effort to					
	bản ghi tiếng Anh							improve my English					
	trở ngại lớn đối v						Q7	listening skills. (Việc thiếu động lực					
	năng nghe hiểu c							làm giảm nỗ lực của tôi					
	Different accer							trong việc cải thiện kỹ					
	British, American	ı,						năng nghe tiếng Anh)					
	Australian) make							I find it hard to stay					
	difficult for me to							focused during English					
Q3	understand Englis	sh						listening tasks due to					
	listening content.	(Các					Q8	psychological stress.					
	giọng khác nhau	(ví dụ:						(Căng thẳng tâm lý					
	Anh - Anh, $Anh -$	Mỹ, Anh						khiến tôi khó duy trì sự					
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Them	e 3: Pedagogical Factor					
No.	Questions	1	2	3	4	
	The teaching					
	methods used in class					
	do not effectively					
	improve my English					
	listening skills.					
Q9	(Tôi thấy phương					
	pháp giảng dạy trên					
	lớp chưa thực sự hiệu					
	quả trong việc cải					
	thiện kỹ năng nghe					
	tiếng Anh của tôi)					
	The listening					
	materials provided are					
	not suitable for my					
	current English					
Q10	proficiency level.					
	(Tôi cảm thấy tài					
	liệu nghe chưa phù					
	hợp với trình độ tiếng					
	Anh hiện tại của mình)					
	Classroom activities					
	for listening practice					
	are not engaging or					
	effective for me.					
Q11	(Các hoạt động					
	luyện nghe trên lớp					
	không hấp dẫn hoặc					
	không hiệu quả đối với					
	tôi.)					
	Teachers do not					
	provide enough					
	feedback to help me					
	improve my listening					
Q12	skills.					
	(Giáo viên không					
	cung cấp đủ phản hồi					
	146		1			1

để giúp tôi cải thiện kỹ

possible)

có).....

năng nghe)

Other

Theme 4: Environmental/Technical Factors

No.	Questions	1	2	3	4	5
	Background noise in					
	the classroom disrupts my					
	ability to focus on English					
O12	listening tasks.					
QIS	(Heng on trong top nọc					
	ảnh hưởng đến khả năng					
	tập trung của tôi khi nghe					
	tiếng Anh.)					
	Poor quality of audio					
	equipment (e.g., speakers,					
	headphones) affects my					
	listening comprehension.					
Q14						
	thiết bị âm thanh (ví dụ:					
	loa, tai nghe) ảnh hưởng					
	đến khả năng nghe hiểu					
	của tôi.)					
	The learning					
	environment (e.g.,					
	classroom setting) is not					
	conducive to practicing					
O15	English listening.					
(	(Moi irương nọc iạp (Vi					
	dụ: không gian lớp học)					
	không thuận lợi cho việc					
	luyện kỹ năng nghe tiếng					
	Anh.)					
	Technical issues (e.g.,					
	unclear recordings,					
	malfunctioning devices)					
	hinder my ability to					
Q16	practice listening.  (Các sự cố kỹ thuật (ví					
	(euc sự co kỳ thuật (vi					
	dụ: bản ghi âm không rõ, thiết bị trục trặc) cản trở					
	khả năng luyện nghe của					
	tôi.)					
Othe		Ý	kiến	kh	ác	(Nế
		-		N/L	uc	(116
<i>,</i>	•••••	•••••	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •			

Project Title: An Investigation into the Difficulties of Learning English Listening Skills among Vocational Freshers at LILAMA 2 International Technology College

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#### **Purpose of the Study:**

This research aims to explore the challenges that first-year vocational students face in English listening comprehension and to suggest practical strategies to improve their listening skills.

#### Participation:

You are invited to take part in this study voluntarily. Your responses will help contribute to better English teaching practices for vocational learners.

#### **Confidentiality:**

All information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. No names or identifying details will be recorded. Data will be used solely for academic purposes.

#### Right to Withdraw:

You may withdraw from the study at any time, without explanation or penalty.

#### **Declaration:**

By signing below, you confirm that:

You have read and understood the information above. You voluntarily agree to take part in this research.

Participant's Name:	
Signature:	
Date:	

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