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Research Article

Young Learners' Attitudes toward Dictation-Based Listening Practice: Evidence from a Vietnamese EFL Context

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Abstract

The integration of dictation-based listening has been acknowledged not only as a traditional language learning method but also as a contemporary focus in second language acquisition due to its potential for developing listening, vocabulary, and spelling skills. Although this instructional approach has demonstrated effectiveness, empirical research examining the perceptions of young learners towards dictation-based listening, particularly within the Southeast Asian context, remains limited. This paper addresses this gap by exploring the attitudes of Vietnamese EFL young learners at a private English school toward the use of dictation-based listening exercises.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative data from a structured questionnaire (n = 100) with qualitative information gathered through semi-structured interviews (n = 15). The attitudinal framework was developed using Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), focusing on cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of attitude. The findings indicate that the majority of learners held positive attitudes across all three dimensions. Cognitively, students recognized the value of dictation as a tool for improving vocabulary and listening skills. Affectively, they expressed enjoyment, despite experiencing slight anxiety when encountering unfamiliar words. Behaviorally, most students showed regular involvement and a desire to continue with dictation-based practice.

The research provides empirical evidence supporting the use of dictation as a valid method in EFL curricula for young learners. It also emphasizes the importance of learner-based adjustments, such as modifying speech rate and using engaging content, to optimize the student experience. These results offer beneficial pedagogical implications for language teachers and administrators interested in incorporating effective listening instruction at introductory levels.

Keywords

Dictation-based listening, young learners, attitudes, EFL, Vietnam, AMTB, TPB

1. Introduction

The significance of listening comprehension in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become increasingly prominent,

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particularly at the primary school level. In Vietnam, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has implemented policies to encourage early English instruction, aligning with the National Foreign Language 2020 Project and its extension to 2030. However, a persistent challenge remains in identifying and implementing effective and engaging methods for enhancing young learners'listening skills. Listening is often cited as the most difficult of the four language skills, especially for young learners who have limited exposure to authentic English input outside the classroom.

Traditional listening activities, such as responding to comprehension questions post-audio, may not effectively facilitate the acquisition of real-time processing skills. Dictation, a technique with a long history in language instruction, is currently undergoing a revival as a viable method to reconcile listening and writing. It compels learners to focus on form, sound segmentation, and vocabulary in context, thereby enhancing critical decoding abilities.

Although numerous studies have demonstrated the pedagogical advantages of dictation among adult learners (e.g., Nation & Newton, 2009; Field, 2008), research focusing on its perceived effectiveness among young learners, particularly within Vietnamese EFL contexts, is scarce. Little is known about primary school students' perceptions of dictation-based listening activities-specifically, whether they view them as useful, enjoyable, or overly demanding.

To address this empirical gap, the current study investigates the attitudes of young learners toward dictation-based listening at the KAEC center, a private English language institution in Ho Chi Minh City that teaches Cambridge-based courses (KET/PET) to primary students aged 9 to 12 years. This research employs a dual theoretical lens: Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to frame attitudes as predictors of behavioral intention, and Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) to emphasize the role of affective and cognitive responses in language learning. By applying this framework, the study provides a nuanced image of learners' reactions-cognitively (e.g., usefulness), affectively (e.g., anxiety/enjoyment), and behaviorally (e.g., willingness to continue). The findings are intended to inform the design of dictation tasks and broader listening instructional practices in Vietnamese EFL classrooms and similar Southeast Asian contexts, such as Thailand, Malaysia, or the Philippines, where early English instruction is a growing focus. The study utilizes a mixed-methods case study with 100 young learners at KAEC, triangulating survey and interview data to gain a comprehensive understanding of their attitudes. The results carry significant pedagogical implications for curriculum developers, educators, and policy-makers seeking to integrate low-tech yet cognitively challenging listening strategies into early EFL education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Listening in EFL Contexts

Listening comprehension is a foundational skill in second language acquisition, particularly for young EFL learners whose cognitive and linguistic resources are still developing. Listening is not a passive reception of sound but an active, multidimensional process of perception, interpretation, and meaning construction. Rost (2011) describes listening as an integration of bottom-up processing (decoding phonological features) and top-down processing (activating schemas and contextualized mental frameworks).

For Vietnamese learners, these challenges are compounded by the phonological distance between Vietnamese and English, where the English use of consonant clusters, unstressed syllables, and the schwa sound contrasts sharply with the syllable-timed nature of Vietnamese. Consequently, young students frequently struggle to segment continuous speech, misunderstand stress, and fail to recognize known words in spoken form.

Effective listening instruction for this age group must be structured, scaffolded, and developmentally appropriate. Modern pedagogy suggests a three-step process: pre-listening (activating prior knowledge, pre-teaching vocabulary), while-listening (comprehension activities, strategy use like cloze passages), and post-listening (consolidation, metacognitive reflection) (Ur, 2012; Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Given young learners' shorter attention spans, affective vulnerability, and developing memory systems (Pinter, 2011), instructional methods should prioritize activities involving movement, imagery, narrative, or rhythm to make learning more appealing and reduce anxiety. The teaching approach must therefore balance cognitive challenge with emotional safety.

2.2. Dictation and Cognitive Contribution to Listening Development

Historically a testing instrument, dictation has been substantially reconceptualized into a powerful pedagogical tool. Contemporary applied linguistics views dictation as a cognitively enriched process that integrates listening, writing, memory, and grammatical processing (Nation and Newton, 2009).

On a cognitive level, dictation strengthens bottom-up processing by requiring learners to focus intently on phonemes, stress, and intonation (Field, 2008). Learners must discriminate between sounds, identify word boundaries, and reassemble connected speech forms, thereby bolstering phonological awareness. This is particularly relevant for Vietnamese learners, who commonly struggle with reduced

forms, linking, and assimilation-issues directly targeted by the repeated oral exposure in dictation.

Dictation is also highly effective for vocabulary and spelling acquisition. The association of lexical items within meaningful contexts, coupled with repeated exposure, facilitates memory consolidation and long-term retention (Thornbury, 2002). This is especially true for partial dictation (cloze dictation), which mandates active retrieval of target words based on surrounding context (Ur, 1996).

Furthermore, dictation aligns with the developmental needs of young learners by being structured and predictable, which can lessen the fear of failure. Adaptations like running dictation, jazz-chant dictation, and picture dictation transform the exercise into interactive, game-like activities that enhance interest and memory through movement and collaborative learning (Brewster et al., 2002; Wajnryb, 1990). The transcription process in dictation also strengthens the connection between listening and writing, enabling learners to internalize sentence rhythm, grammar, and punctuation (Davis & Rinvolucri, 1988).

Despite these benefits, potential drawbacks exist. Young learners may become anxious due to the pressure to transcribe correctly or lose motivation from repetitiveness (Goh & Taib, 2006; Lê, 2018). Therefore, educators must vary formats, adjust the pace, scaffold unfamiliar words, and integrate post-task communicative activities to maximize learning and mitigate affective barriers.

2.3. Attitude Formation Listening-Based Learning

Learner attitudes are central to a student's readiness to engage, persevere, and effectively employ learning strategies. Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) offers a framework for understanding how attitudes influence language learning behavior. TPB posits that attitude is composed of three interconnected elements:

- Cognitive beliefs: Learners' perceptions of the value, utility, and difficulty of an activity.
- Affective responses: Emotional reactions, such as enjoyment, anxiety, interest, or boredom.
- Behavioral disposition: Observable actions, including effort, persistence, and participation.

These components are highly interactive in dictation-based activities. Students who believe dictation improves their vocabulary and concentration (cognitive) tend to feel more motivated and less anxious (affective), leading to greater participation (behavioral). Conversely, perceiving dictation as overly challenging or pressuring may lead to avoidance.

Affective influences are particularly sensitive in young learners, where anxiety can rapidly inhibit auditory processing and elevate the affective filter (Krashen, 1985). Research suggests that scaffolded dictation (structured, with support) can reduce anxiety and build confidence, especially when done collaboratively (Asrobi & Amni, 2017; Wajnryb, 1990). Moreover, developing metacognitive awareness-where learners understand why they are doing dictation and its benefits for comprehension-is crucial for fostering positive attitudes and self-regulated behaviors (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Attitude formation is also mediated by demographic variables. Studies show girls often prefer group work and detailed tasks, while boys respond better to movement- or competition-based activities (Oxford, 1994). Younger learners (10-12 years) tend to prefer sensory and action-based dictation, while older students (13-14 years) may handle more abstract reconstruction tasks like dictogloss. Proficiency level also dictates perceived difficulty: novices require slower input and more scaffolding, while advanced learners can manage authentic-speed dictation. These factors underscore the need for differentiated dictation design.

2.4. Empirical Data about Dictation in Global and Vietnamese EFL

Global literature provides extensive evidence for dictation's efficacy across diverse teaching contexts. Studies in Indonesia (Izza, 2015) and Iran (Marzban & Abdollahi, 2013) confirm its ability to improve phoneme recognition, audio processing, vocabulary memory, and bottom-up processing. Interactive variations, such as *dictogloss*, have been found to decrease anxiety, enhance grammatical awareness, and increase motivation through collaboration and movement (Cooke & Leis, 2018; Jaya et al., 2020; Wajnryb, 1990). Digital dictation tools further enhance learner autonomy and accuracy through features like playback and immediate feedback (Jia & Hew, 2022; Rahimi, 2008).

In the Vietnamese context, the pedagogical value of dictation has also been a research focus. Nguyen (2016) found that partial dictation enhances spelling and listening comprehension in secondary schools. Tran and Voi (2019) noted that running dictation increases motivation and concentration among primary learners. The use of digital platforms has been highlighted for its role in reducing anxiety and facilitating repeated listening, a key scaffolding strategy for young Vietnamese learners (Tran Duy & Huynh, 2019; Tran Quoc Thao, 2018). Recent action research by Pham and Vuong (2025) reported a statistically significant improvement of 14.8% in listening scores after an eight-week dictation intervention with Grade 10 students, alongside reported improvements in pronunciation perception and vocabulary retention. These consistently positive outcomes across listening, vocabulary, phonological awareness, motivation, and confidence establish dictation as an evidence-based practice.

2.5. Synthesis and Determined Research Gaps

While substantial research affirms the utility of dictation, several gaps persist, particularly within the Vietnamese supplementary education setting.

1. Focus on Population: Most studies target secondary or university populations. There is a lack of understanding regarding the reactions of young learners (ages 10-14) in an after-school language center environment, where students exhibit significant variation in cognitive development, English exposure, and emotional needs.
2. Focus on Outcome: Previous research has prioritized performance outcomes over attitudinal aspects (Dörnyei, 2001). Understanding how young students *think, feel, and behave* regarding dictation is crucial for optimizing pedagogy.
3. Lack of Differentiation Research: There is limited research on the influence of demographic moderators such as age groups, gender, and proficiency level on responses to dictation tasks.
4. Format Comparison: Despite the widespread use of dictation in Vietnam, comparative studies on the effectiveness of various dictation forms (e.g., standard, partial, running, dictogloss) for young learners are few.

Addressing these gaps is essential for designing developmentally-appropriate dictation practice in supplementary language centers and provides a more nuanced understanding of young Vietnamese students' experience with listening-based instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods convergent design to comprehensively investigate young learners' experiences with dictation-based listening at KAEC. A single data source was deemed insufficient to capture the complexity of young learners' thoughts and feelings, which often manifest indirectly through questionnaire responses. The design combined quantitative data from a structured questionnaire (n = 100) to identify overall group patterns with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews (n = 15) to explore personal reactions, preferences, and difficulties in detail. This triangulation allowed the study to compare general trends with individual voices, providing both the statistical adequacy of quantitative analysis and the depth required to understand children's genuine experiences.

3.2. Participants

The participants were 100 young learners aged 10-14 years old currently enrolled at the KAEC Center in Ho Chi Minh City. This group represented the full population of young learners at the center who regularly engaged in dictation activities, ensuring the findings accurately reflected the authentic classroom context.

The sample included:

- Gender Distribution: 56.0% Female and 44.0% Male
- Age Distribution: 46% aged 10-12 and 54% aged 13-15
- Proficiency Distribution: The learners were distributed across four proficiency levels (Beginner, Elementary, Pre-Intermediate, and Intermediate) based on KAEC's placement test, allowing for the examination of how different linguistic stages influence attitude.

Participation was voluntary, with parental consent collected for all learners under 15. The smaller group of 15 interview participants was selected to ensure representation across all four proficiency levels.

3.3. Instruments

The research utilized two instruments:

1. **Structured Questionnaire**: Consisted of 10 statements, categorized into three groups corresponding to Ajzen's TPB model:
   - Cognitive beliefs (4 items)
   - Affective responses (3 items)
   - Behavioral tendencies (3 items)

Learners rated each item on a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to agree strongly). The questionnaire was reviewed by two TESOL lecturers and piloted with 12 learners to ensure clarity, reliability, and age-appropriateness.

2. **Semi-structured Interview Guide**: Designed to elicit learners' subjective experiences in their own words, focusing on perceived helpfulness, difficulties, format preferences, and emotional responses during dictation. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to promote comfortable and authentic expression.

3.4. Procedures and Data Analysis

The Sampling Process involved Total Population Convenience Sampling for the survey (n = 100) and Stratified Purposive Sampling for the interviews (n = 15) to ensure all proficiency levels were qualitatively represented. Data collection spanned four weeks, with the survey completed first, followed by the audio-recorded interviews.

Data Analysis procedures were as follows:

- **Quantitative Analysis**: Survey responses

were analyzed using SPSS. Means and standard deviations were calculated for all attitude components to identify general trends. Independent samples t-tests examined gender differences, and one-way ANOVA explored differences across proficiency levels.

- **Qualitative Analysis**: Interview transcripts were coded using an inductive coding method. Repeated expressions were grouped into themes related to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, and the thematic patterns were compared with the quantitative results for confirmation, refinement, or explanation.

Data Integration: The final stage merged both data sources, with areas of agreement strengthening conclusions and discrepancies providing additional insights into learners' holistic experience.

4. Findings and Discussion

This section presents the mixed-methods findings on young learners' attitudes toward dictation-based listening activities at KAEC, interpreted in relation to Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior and the metacognitive models of listening (Vandergrift and Goh, 2012) .

4.1. Overview of Quantitative Findings

The survey revealed a generally **positive attitude** toward dictation. Mean scores across the three attitudinal dimensions were favorable:

- **Behavioral** (M ~ 4.02)
- **Cognitive** (M ~ 3.98)
- **Affective** (M ~ 3.84)

These scores indicate that learners recognized the usefulness of dictation, experienced moderate enjoyment, and willingly engaged with the tasks. Inferential analyses showed no significant differences by gender or age. However, proficiency level exhibited a statistically significant effect, with Intermediate and Pre-intermediate learners showing stronger positive attitudes compared to Beginners, aligning with the expectation that linguistic resources shape success experiences (Nation & Newton, 2009).

4.2. Findings for Research Question 1: Learners' Overall Attitudes

An item-level analysis provided a clearer picture:

Table 1. *Item-level analysis*

Question	Attitude Component	Mean	SD
Dictation helps me understand spoken English better.	Cognitive	3.09	1.35
Dictation helps me identify and recognize key vocabulary while listening.	Cognitive	3.2	1.28
I believe dictation improves my English spelling and sentence awareness.	Cognitive	2.95	1.37
Dictation practice supports my learning for listening exams (e.g., KET, PET).	Cognitive	3.12	1.32
I enjoy doing dictation in my listening lessons.	Affective	3	1.22
I feel confident when completing dictation exercises in class.	Affective	2.97	1.26
Dictation makes me feel anxious or stressed during listening tasks. (Reverse-coded)	Affective	2.85	1.3
After class, I review my dictation notes to check for mistakes.	Behavioral	3.14	1.31
I practice dictation at home or outside of the classroom.	Behavioral	2.9	1.25
I ask my teacher questions if I do not understand a word during dictation.	Behavioral	2.94	1.33

- **Cognitive Attitudes**: Scores were only slightly above the midpoint (M = 3.09 to 3.20 on a 5-point scale), suggesting students acknowledged the benefits (e.g., identifying key words, improving spelling/sentence awareness, exam preparation) but held moderate, rather than exceptionally strong,

views on the impact. Interview data confirmed this, with a learner explaining that dictation "helps me hear new words more clearly and remember spelling better," demonstrating a belief in its practical utility (Mai, 11, Elementary).

- **Affective Attitudes**: Scores fell near the middle of the scale (M = 2.85–3.00), reflecting a blend of positive feelings and moments of stress. While positive feelings were prevalent (enjoyment, confidence), interviews revealed clear moments of stress, especially with fast audio or unfamiliar words (Huy, 10, Beginner: "scared when the teacher reads too fast"). This emotional ambivalence is consistent with research on young learners (Goh & Taib, 2006).
- **Behavioral Attitudes**: These scores were slightly stronger (M = 2.90 to 3.14), pointing to a greater willingness to engage in concrete actions such as reviewing notes, asking questions, and attempting to practice outside class. This proactive behavior, such as correcting mistakes on a second listening, aligns with the metacognitive processes outlined by Vandergrift and Goh (2012).

In summary, KAEC learners exhibited consistently positive attitudes across the cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, demonstrating that they perceive dictation as a useful, moderately enjoyable, and engaging activity.

4.3. Findings for Research Question 2: Effects of Gender, Age, and Proficiency

4.3.1. Gender

Gender did not produce significant differences in any of the attitude dimensions. Male and female learners reported similar levels of usefulness, enjoyment, and willingness to participate. While minor preference variations were noted in interviews (boys preferred movement; girls preferred structure), these differences did not impact overall attitudes, which is consistent with Oxford's (1994) observations.

4.3.2. Age

Age also did not play a significant role in changing overall reactions to dictation. Although younger students (10=12) tended to favor the "fun" versions, and older students (13-14) preferred tasks requiring critical thinking (like *dictogloss*), the overall attitude remained stable across age groups. This suggests that the KAEC lesson design successfully mitigated potential age-related variation.

4.3.3. Proficiency Level

Proficiency level was the only variable that resulted in statistically significant differences. Intermediate and Pre-intermediate learners reported more positive attitudes than Beginner learners. The qualitative data identified several contributing factors:

- **Linguistic Comfort**: Higher-level learners more comfortably handled connected speech.
- **Reduced Stress**: A larger vocabulary reduced processing stress and increased comprehension.
- **Success and Confidence**: Successful task completion generated enjoyment and confidence.

This distinction was evident in the interviews: Beginner learners (e.g., Khoa, 10) expressed nervousness when they "cannot catch the words," while Intermediate learners (e.g., Lam, 13) expressed "pride in getting... sentences correct". Thus, RQ2 is only partially supported: **proficiency influenced attitudes**, whereas gender and age did not.

5. Conclusion

This study, employing a mixed-methods approach, successfully investigated young learners' attitudes toward dictation-based listening at the KAEC center, providing valuable insights into a previously under-represented population in Vietnamese EFL literature.

The key findings are:

- **Positive Attitudes**: Learners aged 10-14 years held consistently positive attitudes across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. They primarily valued dictation for its role in sharpening their ability to catch key words, retain new vocabulary, and improve sentence awareness.
- **Emotional Ambivalence and Scaffolding**: While learners generally engaged willingly, they expressed a mixture of enthusiasm for active, collaborative formats and apprehension about fast speech or unfamiliar words. These concerns highlight the crucial need for appropriate scaffolding, such as slowing the audio, pre-introducing vocabulary, and enabling peer comparison, to reduce affective barriers.
- **Proficiency as a Moderator**: The data strongly suggest that proficiency level is a far more influential factor than age or gender in shaping attitudes toward dictation. Higher-proficiency students felt calmer and more capable, underscoring the necessity for teachers to differentiate tasks based on the group's language level (e.g., adjusting reading speed and vocabulary difficulty).

These results align with both Ajzen's attitude theory and metacognitive models of listening, confirming that beliefs, emotions, and classroom behaviors are intrinsically linked. The study contributes to the Vietnamese EFL literature by demonstrating that dictation, when thoughtfully delivered

through varied, scaffolded, and appropriately paced tasks, remains a valuable, learner-centered tool for developing stronger, more attentive young listeners.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest several practical implications for EFL instruction:

1. **Scaffolding for Beginners**: Low-proficiency students require more support with audio speed and blending sound. Simple steps like warm-up tasks, slower playback, or repeated listening can effectively reduce stress.
2. **Interactive Formats**: Interactive and game-based variations (e.g., running dictation) were highly enjoyable and motivating, especially for younger learners.
3. **Feedback and Metacognition**: Timely, precise feedback increases confidence and willingness to attempt difficult sections. Providing learners with a clear rationale for the dictation task reinforces their cognitive beliefs and promotes self-regulated learning.
4. **Technology Integration**: Tools that offer adjustable speed, replay functions, and instant feedback can support independent practice and reduce in-class stress.

Limitations and Future Research

This study's scope was limited to a specific private language center in Vietnam, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research should explore the sustained effects of varied dictation formats (e.g., *dictogloss* vs. running dictation) across different age and proficiency groups over a longer intervention period. Further qualitative investigations into learners' self-correction strategies during dictation would also provide deeper

Declaration:

Author Contributions

Huynh Thi Kim Anh was responsible for the study design, data collection, data analysis, and the writing of the manuscript.

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Ethics approval

The study adhered to institutional ethical guidelines. Parental consent was obtained for all learners under the age of 15, and participation was voluntary and anonymous.

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