ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' LISTENING DIFFICULTIES AND USE OF STRATEGIES AT MIEN DONG UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, VIETNAM

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Abstract:

Through the years, difficulties in English listening and listening strategies have been conducted by many researchers. Most of studies have pointed out the common difficulties and strategies which students often have. Focusing on the same subject with a new perspective, this research aimed at understanding English majors' difficulties in listening and use of listening strategies. A total of ninety eight freshmen English-majored students at Mien Dong University took part in answering the questionnaire and five students answered the semi-structure interview questions. The data gained from the questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS version 20.0 in terms of descriptive statistic. The findings revealed that English-majored students had many difficulties in listening such as the difficulties related to the listener, the content of the dialogue, the speaker, the physical setting and the linguistic factors. In terms of listening strategies, the finding showed that the cognitive listening strategies were used more frequently than metacognitive and socio-affective strategies. Based on the findings, some implications were made to contribute to the administrations, teachers and students at Mien Dong University of Technology.

Keywords: English listening skills, listening difficulties, listening strategies, English majors

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1. Introduction

According to British Council (2020), English is the most spoken language in the world and first language of about 400 million people worldwide. Besides that, it is also the second language of two billion people in the world. In fact, English is considered one of the principal and most used languages in the world. It is the language of computers, diplomacy, science, education and etc. Therefore, learning and practicing English every day is very necessary to people. Moreover, among English skills, listening is the most important skill in daily life (Morley, 1991). Everyday people listen for different purposes such as entertainment, learning purposes and achieving information. In addition, listening gives us vital input which help us to survive and communicate with other people. A similar case was supported by Rost (1994) who affirmed that listening is essential in oral communication. Morley (1991) also demonstrated that we listen twice as much as we speak, four times more than we read, and five times more than we write. However, Walker (2010) stated that listening is one of the most difficult skills. Moreover, it has been given little attention (Prentis and Parrot, 2014). As a result, people seem to neglect these skills and cannot have enough strategies to deal with listening activities (Hamouda, 2013).

Difficulties in English listening skills come from many factors such as the listening text, the speaker, the listener and the physical environment (Trismasari, 2016). These factors cause listeners to misunderstand the contents of message. As results, they cannot respond well to their partners or reach agreements in relations. Furthermore, difficulties in listening skills make listeners feel uncomfortable and unconfident to communicate with other people. In order to solve difficulties, listeners always make great efforts to find the best solutions or suitable strategies. In fact, using appropriate listening strategies is necessary for learners. Vandergrift (2007) stated that strategies are used to help listeners understand, analyze and interpret the text. It is not doubt that the choice of suitable strategies has a positive impact listeners' competence. In reality, English majors of the current research confront a great deal of difficulties in English listening skills. Moreover, the choice of appropriate listening strategies to deal with difficulties is not clear to most of these students. Although many studies have been conducted to find out the solutions, the answer is still far from conclusive.

The study aims at discovering English majors' listening difficulties and use of listening strategies at Mien Dong University of Technology, Vietnam. The research questions are addressed as follows:

1) What are the difficulties that English majors often encounter in listening to English?
2) What are the strategies that they use to cope with English listening difficulties?

2. Literature review

2.1. Difficulties in listening to a second or foreign language

As indicated by Bingol et al. (2014), there are a great deal of challenges and difficulties that listeners may have in English listening skills. They are the difficulties related to the content of the dialogue, the content of linguistic factors, the listener, the speaker and the physical setting. These difficulties are discussed as follows:

2.1.1. Difficulties related to the content of the dialogue

It is obvious that the shortage of background information and contextual knowledge were big problems for listeners to comprehend the spoken message.

Underwood (1989) reported that unfamiliar topics and learners' lack of background information cause listeners difficulties to approach the meaning of messages. Anderson and Lynch (2003), background information includes common culture beliefs, facts, ideas and lifestyle. Lacking of these data cause difficulties for listeners to follow what other people says. In fact, the native English speakers tend to use idioms and slangs for their messages (Koichi, 2002). Therefore, listeners need to have enough background to analyze the data in each spoken message. Cervantes and Gainer (1992) found that long and complex dialogue also have negative impact on listeners. In fact, listeners find it easy to comprehend short messages or dialogues. In terms of long dialogue, they do not have ability to summary and draw clear conclusions of the dialogue.

2.1.2. Difficulties related to the content of linguistic factors

Munro and Derwing (1999) stated that different accents in speech can bring about the deduction in listeners' comprehension. Goh (1999) confirmed that a speaker's intonation or pronunciation are the most important components that influence listeners' understanding. New intonations can cause genuine problems in listening comprehension. Buck (2001) said that when listeners listen to a new accent for example, Thai English for the first time, they find it difficult to recognize speakers' meanings. This will surely affect listeners' understanding and make them feel confused during the conversation.

Moreover, Underwood (1989) said that listeners cannot distinguish the content and signal words. They do not realize that the signal words are rarely given the same stress as key words in spoken message. As a result, they cannot hear signal words and recognize the transition points in long dialogues. As indicated by Bingol et al. (2014), when spoken messages contain unknown words, it would be difficult for listen to recognize. As a result, a great deal of unfamiliar words appears in conversations, listeners feel exhausted to catch up with the meaning. It also makes listeners become bored and tired.

2.1.3. Difficulties related to the listeners

Bingol et al. (2014) expressed that the level of listeners can have an impact on what they can hear. In fact, good listeners can hear long message and keep information in their mind for a long time. However, lower-level students will find it exhausted to collect the data from spoken messages. Properly speaking, elementary and pre-inter mediate levels of students can find it easy to understand short messages (Underwood, 1989). If the speaker talks too fast, listeners can have obstacles to interpret the contents. It is because listeners will find it difficult to control the speed of spoken message (Underwood, 1989). Underwood (1989) states some reasons which cause individuals find it hard to understand the content of spoken message. These reasons are demonstrated as follows.

To start with, listeners find it difficult to manage the speed of messages. Underwood (1989) said that numerous English language listeners accepted that the most common trouble with listening comprehension is that the listeners cannot manage how rapidly a speaker says. Second, listeners cannot generally have words repeated. This is a serious problem in some circumstances. In the classroom or a specific situation, listeners cannot replay the recording or ask speakers to repeat the sentences too many times. Third, listeners have a shortage of vocabulary. The speaker may pick words that listeners do not have a clue. Fourth, listeners cannot perceive the signs which demonstrate that the speaker wants to move from one point to another point. In fact, signals sometimes cause difficulties for listeners to catch up with the speed of sound. Fifth, listeners lack contextual background. It is obvious that mutual conversations make communication easier. However, listeners may have considerable difficulties when they are not familiar with the context. Last but not least, it tends to be hard for listeners to have good concentration in listening to foreign language. It is a fact that short and long messages cause difficulties for listeners to focus on.

2.1.4. Difficulties related to the speaker

As a fact, the speaker has an impact on what listeners hear. Different accents and pronunciation lead to listeners' low understanding (Underwood, 1989). Unfamiliar accents may discourage listeners to continue their listening. To some extent, familiar accents such as American or English accents are quite easy for listener to follow. However, in reality, listeners sometimes find it difficult to catch the words said by non-native English-speaking countries.

Besides, the speed of spoken messages also hinders the listeners to comprehend. It is obvious that most of listeners perceived that it is too fast to follow the messages of native speakers (Brown & Yule, 1983). What is more, pauses in speech also cause problems in listening comprehension. According to Hasan (2000), pauses cause problems in perceptions and comprehension for listeners. It might be said that speakers often use ungrammatical structures and change minds halfway in sentences. These things are normal for speakers; however, they are big obstacles to listeners.

2.1.5. Difficulties related to the physical setting

The physical setting relates to the space as well as facilities which have positive or negative impact on listeners. Chetchumlong (1987) admitted that large room and noises surrounding cause difficulties for listening. It seems that these factors decrease listeners' ability and interpreting spoken messages. Noises can distract listeners' attention to the content of dialogue. Without the support of essential equipment, listeners cannot transmit sounds into their mind for understanding.

2.2. Strategies for listening comprehension

In order to have the best strategies for listening tasks, it is vital that learners must have appropriate strategies which can assist them to listen better. A lot of researchers discuss strategies in listening in different perspectives. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) said that good listening strategies include predicting, clarifying and taking advantage of non-verbal signs which can be applied for listening skills. According to Oxford (1990) there are two main groups of strategies: direct and indirect strategies.

Regarding to direct strategies, they refer to the language processing such as vocabulary memory and recognition of form. Indirect strategies include solving listening obstacles. Holden (2004) emphasized that individuals find it easy to understand the contents of spoken messages with suitable listening strategies. Brown (1995) suitably thinks about techniques which are used to deal with listening difficulties are explicit strategies. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) mentioned about strategies like meta-cognitive, cognitive and socio-affective listening strategies. These strategies were chosen to solve listening difficulties for the participants of this study and discussed in detail as follows:

a. Meta-cognitive listening strategy

Metacognitive strategies are based on the definition of metacognition which mentions about the nature of learning. It can be used to reinforce self-confidence, motivation in learning.

According to Vandergrift (1999), metacognitive strategy consists of planning, monitoring, selective attention and evaluating. Flavell (1979) said that metacognitive strategies are beliefs about what factors affect the outcome of cognitive enterprises. Sheorey and Mokhatari (2001) claimed that this strategy is useful to plan particular actions to achieve defined aims. Holden (2004) proved that this strategy has an impact on listeners in a positive way. Wenden (1998) demonstrated that this strategy is the first step to construct learners' character. It is clear that the use of this strategy assists learners to have learning autonomy. Learners are more active to control and look for the best methods to practice and strengthen their learning. Learners have to draw a plan to listen, examine the process of listening and evaluate learning outcomes through listening exercises.

b. Cognitive listening strategy

The cognitive strategies are techniques that students use to deal with the learning tasks and reinforce the language acquisition (Derry & Murphy, 1986). Language learners use this strategy to process and store new information (Goh, 1998). The cognitive strategies are identified with appreciating and putting away contribution to working memory or long-haul memory for later recovery (Richard, 2008). According to Brown (2006), top-down and bottom-up strategy are two categories of this strategy.

Bottom - up processing refers to the use of sound, meanings and semantic contents to comprehend what is heard step by step. Firstly, learners get the words from recording. After that they get the meaning by merging the words they had got. Nunan (2010) stated that listeners have to listen to sounds and then put them into working memory in order that they can make a link of these sounds and comprehend the contents of recordings. Top - down processing mentions background knowledge to understand what is mentioned in spoken messages (Richards, 2008). With this listening strategy, learners can use previous knowledge to interpret the sounds in an effective way.

c. Socio-affective listening strategy

Vandergrift (1997) said that this strategy assists individuals feel more confident to work with speakers in order to interpret the meanings in s smart way. Griffiths (2010) defined "*socio-affective strategy are activities which are selected by individuals to adjust their language learning*" (p.1). It is considered a good way to enhance listeners' motivation in listening. Flowerdew and Miller (2005), it can be taken advantage to improve individuals' learning and encourage them to keep the conversation. Bacon (1992) divided this strategy in social and affective strategy.

Regarding to the social strategy, individuals have the chances to share what they hear to others in order that they can comprehend listening activity. According to Savigon and Sysoyev (2002), social strategies assist learners to corporate with work with others and comprehend the target languages. Affective strategy relates to individual's confidence during the listening process. It is considered a self-motivated strategy (Dörnyei, 2003).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research setting and research participants

This research was carried out at Mien Dong University of Technology (MUT) located at Dau Giay, Thong Nhat district, Dong Nai province. The study was conducted in the second semester of the school year 2020 - 2021. The university consists of 6 departments, with the total of over 2500 students. MUT students come from every part of the country. At the time of conducting the research, English-majored students had finished the first semester at the university. In the first semester, these students had to take general English courses such as listening, speaking, writing, grammar and pronunciation. They had become familiar with teaching and learning environment at the university.

This study consisted of 98 English-majored students who were conveniently chosen in each class. As seen in Table 1, the number of male students was 56 while that of female students was 42, which accounted for 57.1% and 42.9% respectively. In terms of time for learning English, most of MUT students had 7 years of learning English from secondary to high school, accounting for 81.6% and the rest was 11 years which accounted for 18.4%. Regarding the time for listening activity, the number of students spending less than an hour listening to English was 56 (57.1%), 1-3 hours per week was 37(37.8%), 3-5 hours per week was 4(4%) and more than 5 hours per week was 1(0.1%).

Table 1: Participants' general information

No.	Information		N = 98	
			No. of respondents	Percent
1	Gender	Male	56	57.1%
		Female	42	42.9%
2	Time for learning English	7 years	80	81.6%
		11 years	18	18.4%
4	Time for listening activity per week	Less than an hour	56	57.1%
		1-3 hours	37	37.8%
		3-5 hours	4	4%
		More than 5 hours	1	1%

3.2. Research instruments

The instruments included closed-ended questionnaire and semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was designed with a 5 – point Likert scale. In order to avoid the misunderstanding, the questionnaire was translated into Vietnamese. Additionally, the Cronbach's Alpha of the whole questionnaire was at .965, so the reliability level of the questionnaire was high. In addition, the Cronbach's Alpha of English majors' difficulties in listening skills and listening strategies are .967 and .894 respectively. The semi-structured interview was taken advantage to have clear insights into listening difficulties and use of listening strategies among English-majored students. Five participants were invited to join the interview. The interview was also conducted in Vietnamese to ensure the accuracy. The responses of each participant in this study were coded as S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5.

3.3. Data collection and data analysis procedures

The researcher piloted the questionnaire and interview. The official questionnaire was delivered to 140 students. However, there were only 98 questionnaire which were chosen after checking. The questionnaire was delivered to student and an instruction how to choose the multiple choices was explained in detailed. For the data analysis, the researcher employed SPSS 22.0 in which the descriptive statistic was processed. In terms of interview, each interview took from 15-20 minutes to discuss questions. To ensure the accuracy of each response, the data were recorded in Vietnamese, then translated into English.

4. Findings

4.1. English majors' difficulties in listening to English

Table 2 shows that the total mean scores of English majors' difficulties in listening was rather high (M=3.64; SD=.65). The table interpreted that students faced difficulties in listening in five factors (M=3.64; SD=.65). The responses to each difficulty were not the same. Among the collected data, the difficulties related to the listener was the highest factor (Group 3: M=3.74; SD=.60). The following factor was the difficulties related to the content of the dialogue (Group 1: M=3.70; SD=.68). The difficulties related to the speaker were ranked the third (Group 4: M=3.63; SD=.64). The fourth factor was the difficulties related to the physical setting (Group 5: M=3.61; SD=.70). The difficulties related to the linguistic factors were ranked the last (Group 1: M=3.51; SD=.64).

Table 2: English majors' difficulties in listening to English

No.	Difficulties	N=98	
		M	SD
1	The content of the dialogue	3.70	.68
2	The linguistic factors	3.51	.64
3	The listener	3.74	.60
4	The speaker	3.63	.64
5	The physical setting	3.61	.70
Total		**3.64**	**.652**

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

These data are analyzed and discussed descriptive as follows:

A. Listening difficulties related to the content of the dialogue

The questionnaire included 7 items to ask English majors' difficulties in listening. As can be seen in Table 4.2, it is clear that difficulties that English majors faced were rather high (M=3.72; SD=.861). The results of the study showed that the majority of English majors found it difficult to understand the dialogue in which there were too many unfamiliar words (item 1.1: M=3.83; SD=.800). Besides that, they also said that they had difficulties in understanding the whole dialogue (item 1.7: M=3.79; SD=.815). Moreover, every single word in the dialogue cause students difficulty to understand (item 1.6: M=3.74; SD=.853). As a results, they might not understand the dialogues containing jargon, idioms and slang expressions (item 1.2: M=3.73; SD=.868). Concerning to the topic of dialogue, it also caused difficulties for English majors to understand (item 1.5: M=3.72; SD=.906). Most English majors also commented that long dialogues made them feel tired to follow (item 1.4: M=3.70; SD=.876). Furthermore, English majors agreed that they also found it difficult to understand the dialogue when it had complex grammatical structures (item 1.3: M=3.59; SD=.906).

Table 3: The difficulties related to the content of the dialogue

| No. | The difficulties related to the content of the dialogue | N=98 | |
		M	SD
1.1	I find it difficult to understand the dialogue in which there are too many unfamiliar words.	3.83	.800
1.2	I find it difficult to understand the dialogue when it contains jargon, idioms and slang expressions.	3.73	.868
1.3	I find it difficult to understand the dialogue when it contains complex grammatical structures.	3.59	.906
1.4	A long dialogue makes me tired or distracted when I listen to the speaker.	3.70	.876
1.5	I find it difficult to grasp the meaning of all words when the topic of the dialogue is unfamiliar.	3.72	.906
1.6	I find it difficult to understand every single word of every dialogue.	3.74	.853
1.7	I find it difficult to understand the whole dialogue.	3.79	.815
Total		3.72	.861

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation.

To further explained the difficulties that English majors had in listening skill, the qualitative data from the interview was analyzed. The most of English majors admitted that they always experienced difficulties with listening comprehension. They also reported some reasons as follows:

"I cannot understand the unfamiliar words in the dialogue." (S1)

"I am confused to understand the dialogues consisting of much information." (S2)

"Speakers keep talking and I do not have time to take notes and respond." (S3)

"I cannot understand the dialogues because there are too many idioms and slangs." (S4)

"I cannot grasp the main ideas of unfamiliar topics." (S5)

B. Listening difficulties related to the linguistic factors
The difficulties related to the content of the linguistic factors were evaluated by 5 items. As can be seen in Table 4.3, the difficulties of linguistic factors were rather high (M=3.49; SD=.81). Truly speaking, it was not easy for English majors to follow the sequence of the dialogue when it was too long and complex (item 1.12: M=3.62; SD=.711). Furthermore, although the pronunciation was very familiar, English majors could not recognize the words (item 1.8: M=3.57; SD=.908). Therefore, they find it difficult to infer the meaning of unfamiliar words while listening (item 1.11: M=3.55; SD=.761). Consequently, English majors said that they often stopped listening and thinking about the meaning of difficult words (item 1.10: M=3.37; SD=.792). What is more, English majors said that it is difficult for them to follow the signals in spoken messages (item 1.9: M=3.36; SD=888).

Table 4: The difficulties related to the linguistic factors

No.	The difficulties related to content of the linguistic factors	N=98	
		M	**SD**
1.8	I find pronunciation familiar but cannot recognize the words.	3.57	.908
1.9	I find it difficult to recognize the signals, which indicate that the speaker is moving from one point to another.	3.36	.888
1.10	I stop listening and start thinking about the meaning of word when encountering an unknown word.	3.37	.792
1.11	I find it difficult to infer the meaning of an unknown word while listening.	3.55	.761
1.12	I find it difficult to follow the sequence of the dialogue when the sentences are too long and complex.	3.62	.711
Total		3.49	.812

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

The qualitative data were used to interpreted English majors' comments on the linguistic factors. It was evident that English majors were trapped into common factors as follows:

"I do not understand the use of signal words in spoken messages." (S1)

"I always spend three to five minutes to think of the meaning of unfamiliar words." (S2)

"I do my best to separate long sentences into smaller ones to understand." (S3)

"I cannot understand complex sentences in spoken messages." (S4)

"I try to imitate the pronunciation of clients to guess the meaning. However, I cannot infer the whole meaning of messages." (S5)

C. Listening difficulties related to the listener
The difficulties related to the listener were measured by 11 items. As can be noticed in Table 4.4, the difficulties that English majors dealt with were very high (M=3.74; SD=.79). The findings revealed that English majors had difficulty to follow the dialogue they had no interest (item 1.22: M=3.94; SD=.771). Most of them confessed that they were slow at guessing the meaning of words in dialogue (item 1.21: M=3.89; SD=.823). Moreover, they were not confident to listen to speaker' English (item 1.20: M=3.81; SD=.808). As results of negative feelings while listening, they could not concentrate well and predict the content of dialogue (item 1.21 & 1.13: M=3.80; SD=.873 & .625). Besides, they could not catch up with the flow of speech because of dealing with the concentration on words and phrases (item 1.15: M=3.71; SD=.786). As they lacked vocabulary and necessary grammatical structures, they also did not listen well (item 1.17: M=3.70; SD=.763). Furthermore, because of not being good at listening skills, they found it difficult to listen to the dialogue (item 1.23: M=3.65; SD=.801). In case of long dialogues, English majors could not concentrate well (item 1.14: M=3.63; SD=.878). Apparently, poor pronunciation caused difficulty for students to understand while listening (item 1.18: M=3.61; SD=.727).

With regard to English proficiency, it was also a problem for English majors (item 1.16: M=3.56; SD=.897).

Table 5: The difficulties related to the listener

No.	The difficulties related to the listener	N=98	
		M	SD
1.13	I am unable to concentrate because I look for the answers and listen to the dialogue at the same time.	3.80	.873
1.14	I lose my concentration when the dialogue is too long.	3.63	.878
1.15	I lose the flow of speech because I concentrate very hard on understanding every word or phrase I hear.	3.71	.786
1.16	I find it difficult to understand dialogues because of my poor pronunciation.	3.56	.897
1.17	I find it difficult to understand dialogues because of poor vocabulary and grammar.	3.70	.763
1.18	I find it difficult to understand dialogues because of my low English proficiency level.	3.61	.727
1.19	I am not good at predicting what would come next in a dialogue.	3.80	.625
1.20	I feel nervous when listen to my customers' speaking English.	3.81	.808
1.21	I am very slow at guessing the meaning of words in a dialogue.	3.89	.823
1.22	I find it difficult to follow a dialogue when I am not interested.	3.94	.771
1.23	I find it difficult to follow a dialogue because of my poor listening skills.	3.65	.801
Total		3.74	.795

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

Aligning with quantitative data, the qualitative data were used to show English majors' personal difficulties while listening. In the interview, English majors reported some possible difficulties concerned with listening:

"I do not know how to interpret the meaning correctly while listening." (S1)

"I feel exhausted in the middle of long dialogues". (S3)

"I do not prepare essential words to use for each dialogue." (S4)

D. Listening difficulties related to the speaker
The difficulties related to the speaker were measured by 5 items. As can be seen in Table 4.5, English majors' difficulties related to the speaker while listening were rather high (M=3.68; SD=.859). Among items, English majors admitted that they found difficult to understand unclearly pronounced words (item 1.24: M=3.84; SD=.821). It was also the reason why English majors could not understand the dialogue without looking at the speaker's body language (item 1.25: M=3.80; SD=.837). Moreover, unfamiliar accents made them feel confused to understand (item 1.26: M=3.72; SD=.871). In fact, English majors faced obstacles to understand when the speakers speak to fast (item 1.27: M=3.59; SD=.918). Unsurprisingly, English majors felt exhausted when the speaker did not pause long enough (item 1.28: M=3.49; SD=.852).

Table 6: The difficulties related to the speaker

No.	The difficulties related to the speaker	N=98	
		M	SD
1.24	I find it difficult to understand the meaning of words which are not pronounced clearly.	3.84	.821
1.25	I find it difficult to understand the dialogue without seeing the speaker's body language.	3.80	.837
1.26	I have difficulty understanding speakers with unfamiliar accents.	3.72	.871
1.27	I find it difficult to understand when speakers speak too fast.	3.59	.918
1.28	I find it difficult to understand the dialogue when the speaker does not pause long enough.	3.49	.852
Total		3.68	.859

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

In addition, some qualitative data proved English majors' difficulties while listening. In the interview, they expressed their ideas as follows:

"I feel exhausted and scared to cope with different accents of clients." (S1)

"I try to imagine the words from clients' pronunciation. However, I cannot have any clues." (S2)

"My partners do not split up sentences, so I cannot understand what they say." (S4)

"It seems they speak too fast and I am left behind. As a result, I cannot hear anything from them." (S5)

E. Listening difficulties related to the physical setting

Listening difficulties related to the physical setting were measured by 2 items. As can be seen in Table 7, the difficulties related to the physical setting were rather high (M=3.61; SD=.81). Related to this factor, the noise of surroundings also causes difficulties for students to understand (item 1.29: M=3.76; SD=.838). Besides that, too many speakers at the same time made students find it difficult to hear (item 1.30: M=3.47; SD=.789).

Table 7: The difficulties related to the physical setting

No.	The difficulties related to the physical setting	N=98	
		M	SD
1.29	I find it difficult to concentrate with noise around.	3.76	.838
1.30	I find it difficult to listen to a group of speakers simultaneously.	3.47	.789
	Total	3.61	.81

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

In terms of qualitative data, some examples for the reasons why the physical setting was difficult for them to listen were interpreted as follows:

"I cannot concentrate well while other people are working next to me." (S2)

"There are too many people joining the conversation. Consequently, I cannot listen well to their ideas." (S3)

"The noise of vehicles on street nearby cause me difficult to hear." (S4)

4.2. English majors' use of listening strategies

With respect to the listening strategies, as can be observed in Table 8, the frequency of using listening strategies was rather high (M=3.62; SD=.495), which means that English majors used listening strategies rather frequently.

Listening strategies included metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective. Among the listening strategies, the frequency of using cognitive strategies was the highest (Group 2: M=3.72; SD=.455). The next one was metacognitive strategies (Group 1: M=3.60; SD=.568). The socio-affective strategies were used at the least level (Group 3: M=3.55; SD=.463).

Table 8: English majors' listening strategies

No.	Listening strategies	N=98	
		M	**SD**
1	Meta-cognitive	3.64	.729
2	Cognitive	3.72	.455
3	Socio-affective	3.59	.463
Total		**3.62**	**.495**

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

These data are analyzed and discussed descriptively as follows:

A. Metacognitive listening strategies

There were 5 items to check English majors' frequency of using metacognitive listening strategies. As can be seen in Table 9, students always prepare their mind to focus on speakers' messages (item 2.2: M=.73; SD=.726). The findings further confirmed that English majors had a clear plan for what they were going to listen to (item 2.3: M=3.71; SD=.732). As a result, they always clarified objectives of listening activities (item 2.1: M=3.69; SD=.817). Moreover, English majors often reflected on their problems such as strange words that they did not understand (item 2.4: M=3.66; SD=.786). They also evaluated their understanding by checking with partners (item 2.5: M=3.49; SD=750).

Table 9: The frequency of using meta-cognitive listening strategy

No.	Meta-cognitive listening strategy	N=98	
		M	SD
2.1	I clarify objectives of listening activities.	3.69	.817
2.2	I prepare my mind to concentrate on speakers' messages.	3.73	.726
2.3	I have a clear plan in my head for how I am going to listen.	3.71	.732
2.4	I reflect on my problems such as strange words that I do not understand.	3.66	.786
2.5	I evaluate how much I can understand by confirming the contents with my partners	3.49	.750
Total		3.64	.729

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

For the reason why metacognitive listening strategies were important and often used in oral commutation, 42% of English majors said that they needed to have clear steps to comprehension speakers' messages. Besides that, they also mentioned about the ways how to cope with listening difficulties by using the strategy as follows:

"I often evaluate my understanding when I listen to my partners." (S2)

"I reflect problems and try to find out the best solution for understanding." (S3)

"I keep listening to partners and make efforts to solve listening difficulties." (S5)

B. Cognitive listening strategies
Cognitive listening strategies were the most frequent used by English majors (M=3.72; SD=.455). As can be seen in Table 10, it was measured by seven items. English majors usually concentrate on main ideas then details (item 2.10: M=3.83; SD=.460). In addition, they usually guessed the meanings based on familiar words (item 2.12: M=3.81; SD=.421) and tried to understand each word in spoken messages (item 2.7: M=3.80; SD=.461). Furthermore, they usually guessed the meaning of words by connecting with speakers' gestures (item 2.8: M=3.70; SD=.461). What is more, English majors usually noticed the stressed words from spoken messages (item 2.6: M=3.68; SD=.501). As a result, they usually may much attention to key words and stressed words (item 2.9: M=3.65; SD=.421). However, English majors also sometimes predicted the contents of spoken messages by looking at speakers' body language (item 2.11: M=3.62; SD=.420).

Table 10: The frequency of using cognitive listening strategy

No.	Cognitive listening strategy	N=98	
		M	SD
2.6	I notice the stressed words from spoken messages.	3.68	.501
2.7	I try to understand each word in spoken messages.	3.80	.500
2.8	I guess the meaning of words by connecting them with speakers' gestures.	3.70	.461
2.9	I pay much attention to key words and stressed words.	3.65	.421
2.10	I concentrate on main ideas first and then details.	3.83	.460
2.11	I predict the contents of spoken messages by look at speakers' body language	3.62	.420

2.12	I guess the meanings based on the familiar vocabulary.	3.81	.421
Total		3.60	.455

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

Concerning the data collected from the interview, 65.8% of English majors agreed that cognitive strategy was the most meaningful for listening to clients. They admitted that they usually used this strategy. Some of their responses are as follows:

> *"I try to connect new vocabulary with existing word system."* (S1)

> *"I pay attention to speakers' gestures to guess the meaning of strange words."* (S3)

> *"I write down strange words and transferred into long-term memory for retrieval.* (S4)

> *"I sometimes imitate speakers' pronunciation to guess the meanings."* (S5)

C. Socio-affective listening strategies

Socio-affective listening strategies were the last strategy which was used by English majors. As gleaned from Table 11, English majors relatively often used this strategy (M=3.55; SD=.463). Among 4 items, English majors usually asked their partners in case they did not understand what they spoke (item 2.15: M=3.92; SD=.421). Besides that they usually asked their partners to confirm their understanding (item 2.14: M=3.61; SD=.510). Furthermore, they immediately asked their partners if they did not understand spoken messages (item 2.13: M=3.50; SD=.501). Besides, they tried to relax while they were listening to their clients (item 2.16: M=3.36; SD=.420).

Table 11: The frequency of using socio-affective listening strategy

No.	Socio-affective listening strategy	N=98	
		M	**SD**
2.13	I ask my partners questions I do not understand.	3.50	.501
2.14	I ask my partners to confirm the contents of spoken messages.	3.61	.510
2.15	I ask my partners to check my understanding of each spoken message	3.92	.421
2.16	I try to relax myself while I am listening to my clients.	3.36	.420
Total		3.59	.463

Note: M: mean; SD: Standard deviation

Along with quantitative, qualitative interview unfolded that English majors (42%) also agree that this strategy was essential while listening to clients. It was obvious that they want to have a supportive working environment for understanding. Some of the examples were listed as follows:

> *"I try to take a deep breath and relax while I listen to my partners."* (S1)

"I always share problems with my partners in order they I can solve difficulties in listening comprehension." (S2)

"I am willing to ask my partners to repeat when I don't understand." (S4)

5. Discussion

The findings of the study have revealed some highlighted English majors' difficulties in listening and use of listening strategies.

Firstly, the results showed that English majors' difficulties in listening consisted of the difficulties related to the content of dialogue, the content of linguistic factors, the listener, the speaker and the physical setting. In terms of the difficulties related to the content of dialogue, the findings corroborated the ideas of Underwood (1998) and Higgins (1995), who mentioned about the difficulties in listening when the listeners did not have enough words and cannot focus on the whole dialogue. As found in this study, students said that they found it difficult to understand the whole dialogue because of containing too many unfamiliar words. Moreover, the results also divulged that the students dealt with difficulties because of unfamiliar topics and shortage of prior knowledge and grammatical structures. These finding were partially supported by the previous research carried out by Anderson and Lynch (2003); Khamprated (2012); Abidin (2013); Desliana, Marzuki and Hadrinana (2016); Amir et al. (2019). With reference to the difficulties related to the linguistic factors, the study found that students found it difficult to understand speakers' spoken messages because they could not catch up with long dialogues and unknown words. Besides that, the signals in the dialogue also caused them difficulty to understand while listening. These findings are in line with Cervantes and Gainer (1992); Littlewood (1998); Julamonthol (2015) who also concluded that signals and long messages caused difficulties for listeners to understand. Bingo et al. (2014) also pointed out unknown words in dialogues would be difficult for listeners to recognize. In addition, the length of spoken message is also the most difficult for listeners to follow (Higgins, 1995). In terms of the difficulties related to the listeners, it is obvious that students found it difficult to follow speakers because of low English level. They seemed to lack vocabulary and grammatical structures to support their understanding. This finding is in line with Khamprated (2012). Besides that, students' interest was also a big obstacle. This finding is consistent with that of Assaf (2015) revealing that listeners faced problems when they had no interest in listening activity. What is more, the finding is in line with Amir et al. (2019) who emphasized that insufficient listening skills make listeners find it difficult to understand. Concerning the difficulties related to the speakers, the findings seemed to be consistent with Brown and Yule (1983); Munro and Derwing (1999); Goh (1999) who showed that different accents can reduce listeners' comprehension. In fact, students had bad experience with different and unfamiliar accents of speakers. The findings are also in line with studies of Khamprated (2012); Hamouda (2013) and Abidn (2013) who mentioned about regional accent and unfamiliar

pronunciation leading to difficulties in listeners' understanding. Regarding the difficulties related to the physical setting, this factor seemed to have the least difficult for students. However, it is also in line with Chetchumlong (1987); Hamouda (2013) who said that surroundings can cause problems for listeners.

With reference to listening strategies used by English majors, the finding showed that students frequently used listening strategies which consisted of meta-cognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies. In terms of meta-cognitive listening strategy, the findings of study were in line with Flavell (1979); Vandergrift (1999); Sheorey and Mokhatari (2001); Holden (2004) who mentioned about the process of meta-cognitive and building listeners' character. The findings of this study showed that students always had plans for their listening. They had their own ways to check the understanding by confirming information with speakers. Regarding cognitive listening strategy, the results were partially consistent with Vandergrift (1997); Teng (1998); Purnomowati (2016); Raeisi and Mohseny (2009); Ngo Thi Hang Nga (2014), Duong My Tham, Tran Thi Hoang Trang and Tran Quoc Thao (2019), Nguyen Dinh Nhu Ha (2020) who reported that the cognitive listening strategy was used the most by students. The findings revealed that English majors always paid much attention to key words and guessed the meaning by connecting with speakers' gestures. These findings were similar to the study of Ngo Thi Hang Nga (2014). In terms of socio-affective listening strategy, the results were similar to Vandergrift (1997); Savigon and Sysoyev (2002); Flowerdew and Miller (2005) and Ngo Thi Hang Nga (2015); Purnomowati (2016) findings which showed that socio-affective strategy supported English majors to become confident and active to share difficulties with their partners. The current study found that students always collaborated with the speakers in order to have better comprehension in listening.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicates that English-majored students at Mien Dong University of Technology had difficulties in listening skills such the difficulties related to the content of dialogue, the content of linguistic factor, the speaker, the listener and the physical setting. However, they were aware of employing listening strategies to improve listening skills and cope with difficulties. One of the significant findings to emerge from the study was that MUT English-majored students frequently used listening strategies such as metacognitive, cognitive and socio-affective strategies in most of conversation or listening activities.

The findings recommend several courses of action for the administrations, English teacher and English-majored students at MUT. For the administrations, it would be better to design well-equipped laboratories so that students can have more chances to practice English skills with their partners and find out learning materials for their learning. Besides, they must make sure that conferences or workshops in English language should be frequently organized to share English teaching and learning methods to teachers and English-majored students. For the English teachers, they should pay careful attention to

students' difficulties in English listening skills. As a result, they can encourage and motivate students to learn better. Besides that, they should instruct students how to take advantage of listening strategies to deal with difficulties effectively. Moreover, the teachers should design more in-class and out-of-class activities for students to improve their listening skills. To English majors, they should frequently practice English listening skills in order that they can find it easy to realize and overcome difficulties in listening. Besides that, they should be aware of the importance of English listening strategies to apply into various kinds of listening tasks.

There were some limitations that related to this study. Firstly, the sample size was not big enough to represent the whole situation in MUT. Secondly, it would be better to use pre-test and post-test to check students' difficulties in listening as well as effective use of listening strategies instead of questionnaire and semi-structure interview.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

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