



**THE EFL 8TH GRADERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS
THE USE OF COMPETENCY-BASED INSTRUCTION
IN LISTENING COMPREHENSION AT A SECONDARY
SCHOOL IN KIEN GIANG, VIETNAM**

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Abstract:

Listening skill is a vital component of language acquisition on the grounds that it can foster the improvement of other language skills. Therefore, enhancing students' listening is constantly gaining the prominent attention of most English teachers at secondary schools. Besides, applying competency-based instruction into teaching listening is a novel method that helps teachers attain students' attitudes, affecting their listening comprehension. Therefore, this current study aimed to examine students' attitudes toward using competency-based instruction in listening for a main idea and specific information. The study employed a qualitative approach to determine 45 8th graders' attitudes at a secondary school in Kien Giang province. The students' diaries were the critical data collection. The study's findings showed that their views affected their listening skills. Most of them had positive attitudes toward the utilization of competency-based instruction in listening comprehension.

Keywords: competency-based instruction, listening comprehension, listening for gist, listening for specific information, students' attitudes

1. Introduction

English is a global language that enables individuals to obtain better employment and gain admission to prestigious universities (Vu & Shah, 2016). Listening skills have occupied a prominent role in absorbing language and people's understanding (DeVito, 2016; King, 1981; Li & Renandya, 2012; Nihei, 2002). In other words, it is well-known that

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listening comprehension helps learners reach the input, allowing them to learn a language and comprehend the information (Renukadevi, 2014).

In the Vietnamese language teaching context, English is chosen as the compulsory subject and a national foreign language for graduation examination (Ngan, 2017; Vu & Peters, 2021). However, listening instruction is still a contentious issue. Teachers' emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and reading instruction ignores teaching listening skills. Besides, many listening activities have not been designed in the national pilot textbook. Therefore, there is little doubt that students have not had enough opportunities to practice listening skills, which may exert a negative impact on their listening performance. This has led to the failures of their listening comprehension. One of the failures is that they are not able to grasp the main idea of the talk. Another problem with listening skills faced by them is to get detailed information. Those hurdles made them misunderstand the information and become hesitant in the classroom. Several studies explored the impact of competency-based instruction (CBI) on foreign language learning; however, the scant research on students' attitudes in listening was found in secondary schools in Vietnam. As a consequence, this study's purpose was to delve into the eighth graders' views towards the use of CBI in listening comprehension at a secondary school in Kien Giang province, Vietnam.

2. Literature review

2.1 Competency-based instruction

Richards and Rodgers (2001) claim CBI is a performance-based instruction that aims to resolve what language learners are expected to do. It emphasizes the output instead of the input. Sturgis and Patrick (2010) state that it is a form of instructional method that combines instruction, individualized learning, and metacognitive reflection on the part of both teachers and students. Soares (2012) defines competency as the combination of skills, abilities, and knowledge necessary to perform a task in a particular setting.

As stated by Ameziane (2016), CBI, or competency-based approach, is a product-based method pertaining to competency as compared with knowledge. In brief, CBI concentrates on competencies (Khaleel & Mahshad, 2014), also known as the integration of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Mrowicki, 1986), or learning outcomes related to what students can do at the end of instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

2.2 Listening comprehension

Theoretically, listening comprehension is seen as an active process in which listeners give attention to specific aural information, create meaning from passages, and connect what they hear to prior knowledge (O'Malley et al., 1989). Listening comprehension is an engaging, interpretive process (Nunan, 2002), an integrative skill (Toumi, 2002), or a complex procedure (Buck, 2001) in which listeners use previous knowledge and linguistic knowledge as required (Hattingh, 2014) to aid the process of language acquisition and facilitate another language skill. Coşkun and Köprü (2021) define it as the ability to

interpret external information through a variety of brain processes and the capacity to express emotion in response to that interpretation.

Listening comprehension is composed of two main key features including listening and comprehension. Listening refers to acquisition, memorization, and reproduction of the sound wave of the voice. Comprehension pertains to the ability to articulate what one has heard (Zhang & Miao, 2005). Consequently, the context and purpose of listening play a crucial role in assessing listening comprehension. When listeners are aware of the context of a text or utterance, the process is greatly facilitated because they are able to activate prior knowledge and make the necessary inferences to comprehend the message (Byrnes, 1984).

When it comes to types of listening comprehension subskills, gist and specific listening function as the two major keys of listening subskills (Nunan, 2002) are mentioned below.

2.2.1 Listening for gist

Listening for gist is a vital skill, allowing people to make a decision relevant to their preferences, selective consideration and drive. Gist-level listening entails numerous interrelated components such as linguistic areas (intonation, stress structure, and terminology), real-world experience, inference abilities, and understanding of culture (Siegel, 2018). It is also renowned as listening for main ideas, global listening, or topic listening, which is an integral skill for individual and educational purposes (Fuertes, 2021). Listening for main ideas refers to situations wherein people want to recognize the general gist of what has been said, and just who is conversing to whom and what for, and how effective they are in conveying their point (Wilson, 2010). It is viewed as an intensive listening for skimming. General speaking, listening for a main idea is frequently performed with a low level of concentration so that the listener can extract relevant information from which s/he can decide whether to carry on listening or to pay more or less attention to the text. It is akin to aural skimming in determining a text's general subject matter, topic, and key points (Field, 2008).

2.2.2 Listening for specific information

Listening for specific information is an effective strategy because it facilitates people in a majority of real-world first language situations. Simply stated, it indicates that only specific information, not the entire text, should be extracted (Ozanbulagh, 2018). When listening for detailed information, one is not required to perceive the whole message but only a tiny portion. This also requires the ability to ignore most of what one is about to hear and focus solely on what is relevant (Wilson, 2010). When listening, students can use any of the aforementioned language models to extract specific information. They can develop the ability to filter out irrelevant information by listening with a purpose (Hadfield & Hadfield, 2008). Before relying on language decoding units (bottom-up process) to construct their meaning and comprehension, they can activate their

preexisting knowledge (schemata) to assist them in making predictions about what they will hear (top-down process).

2.3 The roles of competency-based instruction in listening comprehension

CBI, well-known as a backward design, has significantly influenced language pedagogy since the 1970s (Wiggins & McTighe, 2006). Listening can be divided into listening subskills, or listening competencies, namely listening for a main idea and specific information that second language learners must acquire (Field, 1998; Mrowicki, 1986).

Learning outcomes are intended to improve listening skills and effectively instruct listening techniques (Coşkun & Uzunyol-Köprü, 2021). Based on them, listening acquisition at each grade level can be progressed in a progression in acquisition. In other words, the teacher should place the emphasis on listening outcomes by modelling listening techniques relevant to tasks, and not impart separately. S/he can use the listening activity to promote opportunities for language acquisition. That is to say, s/he is responsible for raising students' awareness of this and encouraging them to take command of their language acquisition. As a result, s/he can help his/her students improve accurate responses and boost their listening success (Field, 1998).

Furthermore, it is the students' responsibilities to use the listening input to actively advanced language development. For both comprehension and acquisition, the learner must be an active participant in listening (Hattingh, 2014).

2.4 Attitudes

Both first- and second-language researchers have paid an intense amount of focus on attitude. Coakley and Wolvin (1994) and Brownell (2015) state that attitudes are the most influential factor in motivating listeners due to their relationship with listening behavior and listening ability. According to Gardner (1985), attitude is an evaluation of the referent of an attitudinal object derived from the individual's beliefs or notions about the referent. It is considered a component of a favorable or unfavorable response to an object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Taysi, 2019).

The majority of studies on the topic have come to the conclusion that a student's attitude is an integral element of learning and ought to be built into second or foreign language pedagogy. There are several reasons why research on students' attitudes towards language acquisition is crucial. First, it is believed that attitudes influence behaviors of learning listening (Cook, 2001). A link between attitudes and success or accomplishment has been proven. There is evidence that attitudes influence achievement rather than achievement affecting attitudes (Boillos, 2018). Both negative and positive attitudes have a substantial effect on language acquisition success. Therefore, instructors should take students' attitudes into consideration. It is because people's attitudes impact their behaviors, interior mood, and thus learning.

2.5 Related studies

Related research on two listening subskills — listening for gist and specific information — among EFL students at diverse proficiency levels has expanded the literature on listening. It will shed light on and support the current investigation.

In a study conducted by Jin (2002), the listening comprehension of 46 high school students was investigated subsequent to their exposure to various listening methodologies. The experimental group (EG) demonstrated superior listening skills in terms of both identifying the main idea and extracting specific details, compared to the control group (CG). However, the research conducted exhibited notable limitations. One limitation of the EG intervention is its relatively short duration of one month. Additionally, the study employed a quantitative approach, thereby excluding an investigation into students' opinions regarding listening for main ideas and detailed information. If additional time had been allocated to EG and if the study had employed a more appropriate design for the intervention technique, it is plausible that the outcomes could have diverged.

The study done by Zare-Behtash et al. (2017) examined the association between personality traits and performance outcomes on two distinct listening assessments, namely gist comprehension and minimal pairs discrimination. The study utilized a mixed-method research design, incorporating computerized Myers-Briggs questionnaires and tests administered to a sample of 60 advanced second language students. The study's findings indicate a significant correlation between individuals' cognitive and affective states and their performance on the listening for gist assessment. The students' performance on the gist listening test was influenced by fluctuations in their affective and cognitive states. Specifically, an increase in their emotional or cognitive engagement was associated with improved performance, whereas a decrease in these states was associated with poorer performance. However, the research assessed the students' ability to comprehend the main points of the listening material while also considering their cognitive and emotional responses without any external interference. Therefore, it was imperative to examine their attitudes in a comprehensive manner thoroughly.

Numerous scholarly inquiries have been conducted to examine the influence of listening techniques on students' listening subskills, as evidenced by the works of Caro (2013), and Zare-Behtash et al. (2017). However, it is important to acknowledge that the data collection methods employed in these investigations encompassed tests and questionnaires. This phenomenon gives rise to divergent research outcomes, necessitating the acquisition of more compelling evidence. Moreover, there is a scarcity of research examining the impact of CBI on the development of listening skills among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) secondary school students, both globally and locally. In response to this lack, the researcher conducted an investigation to ascertain the extent to which CBI impacted the students' attitudes towards listening.

3. Methodology

Hinging on the purpose of the studies, one of the research approaches, namely quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches, is opted for research (Creswell, 2012). Each of the approaches has its benefits and drawbacks due to its features. As alluded to above, qualitative methodology was deployed to delve into students' attitudes towards listening comprehension associated with gist listening and detailed listening

Qualitative approach employing students' diaries was conducted in an effort to get an insight into the students' emotions and views of listening comprehension. In other words, their dairies were analyzed to examine the impacts of CBI on their listening skills. They were required to comment on their feelings of and attitudes toward three themes of pre-listening, while-listening and post listening stages. After each listening lesson, they wrote diaries and handed them in in a week.

Forty five 8th graders comprising 19 males and 26 females were at a secondary school in Kien Giang province. They were chosen as the researcher was appointed to teach them at the start of the academic year 2022-2023. They had 7 years of learning English and learned the same English textbook "Tieng Anh 8" (English for Grade 8) (the first pilot version, volume 2). In order to protect their anonymity, all of them were labeled in accordance with gender (male: M1-19, female: F1-26). They gave permission for qualitative data collection and analysis.

4. Findings

In the pre-listening stage, the students showed their views on two major types of attitudes, including positive and negative one when listening for gist using CBI in the pre-listening stage. Data analysis for this stage is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Students' attitudes towards the pre-listening stage

Concept	Theme	Sub-theme	Elements	Students	Total	
CBI (Students' Attitudes)	Pre- listening stage (Gist listening)	Attitudes	Positive	Comprehensible	M1-9, M11, M14-19 F(1-7, 14, 16-18, 20, 25-26)	28
				Curious/ Funny	M(5, 7-10, 12, 14-16) F(7, 10-11, 13, 15-17, 21-22, 25)	17
			Negative	Nervous	M2-3, M7-8, F1-2, F4-5, F10, F12, F15, F18-21, F23, F24-26	18
				Difficult	M14, M26, M21, F21, F23-24, F26	7

Regarding positive feelings, 28 students showed their favorable attitudes when learning listening with CBI in the pre-listening stage. They expressed that warm-ups in the pre-

listening activities aimed to support gist listening were *understandable* (M11), *explicable* (F17), and *apprehensible* (F20). Seventeen asserted that they were intrigued by the gist listening task. Taking the cases of several students as an example, they verbalized that they felt the listening period was so *curious* (M9), *happy* (M15), *interested* (F25) and *joyful* (F21) that they expected to listen for gist.

Nevertheless, 18 showed their anxiety and difficulty, which were regarded as negative attitudes. It could be explained that one of the common feelings was that they were *low-achieved listeners* (M10). Therefore, they opined that listening for a main idea was *hard* (M-14) and *frightening* (F-26).

Table 2 below provides an overview of the perspectives expressed by the informants regarding positive and negative attitudes pertaining to the subsequent theme of the while-listening stage.

Table 1: Students' attitudes towards a while-listening stage

Concept	Theme	Sub-themes	Elements	Students	Total
CBI (Students' Attitudes)	While-listening stage (Detail listening techniques)	Positive attitudes	Nerveless	M(1, 3, 7, 9, 13-14) F(8-9, 13-14, 17-18, 24-26)	15
		Negative attitudes	Nervous	M(6, 8, 14) F(1, 4, 7, 15, 22-23, 25-26)	12
			Difficult	F(3, 7, 9-11, 16, 20-24)	11

It is apparent from Table 2, 15 had favorable attitudes towards using CBI to enhance their listening skills. The individuals demonstrated their self-assurance while engaging themselves in the process of listening with CBI. They felt *relaxed* (6F) and *unworried* (6M, 3F). Their feelings positively affected their listening for specific information. Nevertheless, 3 male 9 female students exhibited contrary emotions due to their unconfidence. They had to handle a variety of feelings. Specifically, they felt *anxious* (2F), *scared* (4F), *fearful* (3F), *frightened* (2M), and *alarmed* (1M). Eleven asserted that they underwent uncomfortable listening experiences. They thought listening for specific information was *hard* (5F), and *it was not as easy as pie* (6F). They disclosed that despite gaining *listening techniques* (F7, F20), they *were not able to improve their listening competence* (M3) right away. Consequently, getting a *correct option* did not shock them (F24, M14).

Lastly, Table 3 demonstrates the final theme of the post-listening stage, wherein the students expressed their perspectives regarding two primary categories of attitudes, namely positive and negative.

Table 2: Students' attitudes towards a post-listening stage

Concept	Theme	Sub-themes	Elements	Students	Total
CBI Students' attitudes	Post-listening stage (Skill integration & A form-focused task)	Positive attitudes	Interested	M(10-13, 16-17) F(2, 5, 7, 10, 20, 23, 25-26)	14
			Happy/ Relax	M(1, 5-6, 8, 11-19) F(1, 5, 7, 12-13, 15, 17-18, 20, 22-25)	27
			Confident	M(4, 8-9, 11-13, 15), F(5, 9, 11, 13-14, 17-18, 22)	15
			Useful	M(5-6, 12-13, 20) F(2, 9-10, 12-13, 15, 18, 25-26)	14
		Negative attitudes	Tired/ Bored/ Sad	M10, F(9, 18, 19, 26)	5

It is obvious that the participants expressed a positive perception towards the post-listening stage. Fourteen participants, including 6 males, and 8 females, indicated experiencing a sense of *interest* (M16) during CBI listening lessons. Twenty seven indicated that they were *glad* (M8), *pleased* (F7), and *cheerful* (F22) when they took a discussion with their peers about the topic they had just listened to. Exchanging ideas with friends could enable them to express their opinions and develop their speaking skills. Besides, 15 showed their sense of confidence. F11 articulated: "After applying listening techniques to listen for gist and specific information, my listening skills were improved". 5 male 9 female students confirmed that analyzing language in the tapescript at the end of listening was *useful* (F2). This activity allowed them to get closer to pronouncing and linking unfamiliar words and knowing how to manipulate new grammatical structures for linguistic use. As a result, the students could boost their self-reliance and their language learning.

In contrast, only 5 participants, comprising one male and four females, reported feeling *tired* (1M), *bored* (2F), and *sad* (2F) subsequent to the sessions. These individuals expressed that they perceived themselves as being academically challenged, resulting in a lack of affinity for listening activities.

5. Discussion

The diary analysis identifies three themes in students' attitudes towards the pre-, while, and post-listening stages. The diary data suggest that at each listening stage, the students showed different attitudes. The qualitative data support the theory that students' listening performance results from positive and negative attitudes. If they are pessimistic, their feelings determine their attitudes towards listening. That adversely influences their listening acquisition and affects their listening outcomes.

Conversely, students with positive feelings find listening intriguing. Positive-attitude students were self-motivated by adjusting themselves and adapting their listening-learning process whenever they encountered lengthy materials, complex

indicators, a dearth of strategies, hesitance in the classroom, or misunderstandings of information. The more they thought positively, the less anxiety they faced. As a result, their listening comprehension could improve significantly.

The study's findings are in line with the findings of Zare-Behtash et al. (2017), who stated that the students' optimistic views could support their listening for gist and specific information. Nevertheless, the most striking finding is that optimistic students are likely to develop listening subskills thanks to practising language areas and language skills. If the teacher provides students with more opportunities to learn listening with integrated skills and language analysis, they can accumulate knowledge for further use.

6. Conclusion

The students' perspectives about the three pre-, while-, and post-listening themes, as aligned with CBI exhibited varying sentiments towards each listening stage. During the pre-listening stage, a majority of them displayed a happy mindset, although a minority demonstrated more nuanced emotions.

During the phase of listening to the audio, it became apparent that a quantity of the students indicated a close balance between their good and negative emotions. However, a significant portion of individuals encountered difficulties in obtaining comprehensive responses.

In the post-listening stage, a majority of the students expressed a positive perspective towards the act of listening, highlighting its potential to facilitate the development of various linguistic abilities. Moreover, engaging in a language analysis assignment that assists them in navigating novel terminology is likely to foster the development of various linguistic skills, in contrast to the perspectives of certain dissenting students.

In summary, a more significant number of the students exhibit a favorable response towards engaging in gist-oriented listening as opposed to listening for precise details while utilising CBI as a learning approach. It can be inferred that their optimistic perspective significantly impacts their listening results whereas pessimistic attitudes pose negatively listening performance.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Tran Thi Thanh Nga has been working as an English teacher at Hon Dat Town Secondary School, Hon Dat District, Kien Giang Province for 14 years. She is currently studying for a master's degree at Tra Vinh University. She is very interested in doing research relevant to student autonomy and foreign language learning. At present, she is researching the effects of competency-based instruction on EFL secondary school students' listening performance in Kien Giang province. She believes that her research endeavors will make a huge contribution to improving the English educational quality at her school.

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