

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF USING DICTATION TECHNIQUE TO ENHANCE ENGLISH LISTENING SKILL OF FIRST-YEAR ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS AT KHANH HOA UNIVERSITY

Do Hang Uyen Thy

Khanh Hoa University

Abstract: This research investigates the effectiveness of dictation techniques in enhancing English listening skills among first-year English-majored students at Khanh Hoa University. The study involved 40 students over a 10-week period. Data were collected through pre-tests, post-tests, questionnaires, group interviews, and classroom observations to assess listening proficiency improvements and student perceptions. Results indicate that dictation exercises significantly improved students' listening comprehension abilities, particularly in discriminating sounds, recognizing word boundaries, and processing connected speech. Students demonstrated measurable gains in listening accuracy, retention, and overall comprehension when systematic dictation practice was incorporated compared to traditional listening activities. Furthermore, the study revealed positive student responses, with participants reporting increased confidence and motivation in developing listening skills.

Keywords: dictation technique, listening skills, English majors, effectiveness, students' responses.

Received: 15/01/2026

Reviewed: 05/02/2026

Accepted for publication: 10/02/2026

I. INTRODUCTION

Listening comprehension represents one of the most challenging yet essential skills in English language acquisition, particularly for English-majored students who require advanced proficiency for academic and professional purposes. Research indicates that listening constitutes approximately 45% of daily communication activities, yet it remains the least explicitly taught language skill in many EFL contexts (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). The ability to comprehend spoken English accurately serves as a foundation for successful communication and academic achievement in English-medium educational environments.

As an instructor teaching listening courses at Khanh Hoa University, I have observed considerable difficulties among first-year English-majored students in comprehending authentic spoken English. Many students struggle with distinguishing individual words in connected speech, processing information at natural speaking speeds, and retaining auditory information long enough to comprehend complete utterances. Common listening problems include difficulty recognizing word boundaries in continuous speech, inability to discriminate between similar phonemes, weak auditory memory, and slow processing speed. Students frequently report feeling overwhelmed when encountering natural speech with features such as assimilation, elision, and weak forms. These challenges often result from limited exposure to authentic listening materials, insufficient training in bottom-up processing skills, and over-reliance on top-down strategies that emphasize guessing rather than accurate perception.

These observations prompted me to explore dictation as a potentially effective technique for developing foundational listening skills. Dictation, where learners write down exactly what they hear, has a long history in language teaching but has been somewhat neglected in recent communicative approaches. However, contemporary research suggests that properly designed dictation exercises can effectively develop multiple listening sub-skills simultaneously (Davis & Rinvoluceri, 2016). The technique engages both bottom-up processing (phoneme discrimination, word recognition, parsing) and top-down processing (using context and prior knowledge) in integrated ways. Furthermore, dictation provides immediate feedback on listening accuracy, allows for repeated exposure to the same content, and creates opportunities for focused attention on problematic features of spoken English.

While several studies have examined dictation applications in general EFL contexts, limited research specifically focuses on its effectiveness among English-majored students at Vietnamese universities. This study aims to fill this research gap by evaluating systematic implementation of dictation techniques in listening instruction for first-year students at Khanh Hoa University. Two primary research questions were formulated:

1. How can dictation techniques improve first-year English-majored students' listening skills?
2. What are students' responses towards using dictation techniques in listening instruction?

II. RESEARCH CONTENT

2.1. Literature Review on Dictation and Listening Skills

2.1.1. *Listening Comprehension in Second Language Acquisition*

Listening comprehension represents a complex cognitive process involving multiple interrelated sub-skills and knowledge sources. According to Vandergrift and Goh (2012), successful listening requires both bottom-up processing (decoding individual sounds, words, and grammatical structures) and top-down processing (using contextual knowledge, schemas, and discourse patterns to construct meaning). Field (2008) emphasizes that many listening problems stem from inadequate bottom-up processing abilities rather than insufficient vocabulary or background knowledge, suggesting the need for instructional approaches that develop accurate perception and decoding skills.

Research in cognitive psychology reveals that listening comprehension places significant demands on working memory, requiring learners to process incoming auditory information while simultaneously storing and integrating previously heard content (Baddeley, 2012). This dual processing requirement makes listening particularly challenging for second language learners whose automatic processing skills are less developed than those of native speakers.

2.1.2. *The Dictation Technique in Language Learning*

Dictation, defined as "the transcription of heard speech in writing" (Nation & Newton, 2009, p. 42), has evolved from traditional pedagogical approaches emphasizing accuracy to contemporary applications supporting communicative competence development. Davis and Rinvulcri (2016) categorize dictation activities into various types including standard dictation, partial dictation, running dictation, and dictogloss, each offering distinct pedagogical benefits.

From a cognitive perspective, dictation engages multiple language processing systems simultaneously. Learners must perceive phonetic input, segment continuous speech into meaningful units, activate lexical and grammatical knowledge, maintain information in working memory, and coordinate motor systems for written production (Kiany & Shiramiry, 2002).

2.1.3. *Research on Dictation Effectiveness*

Empirical studies have demonstrated dictation's effectiveness in developing listening skills across

various EFL contexts. Kiany and Shiramiry (2002) investigated dictation's impact on listening comprehension among Iranian EFL learners and found significant improvements in students' ability to discriminate sounds, recognize grammatical structures, and process connected speech. The study concluded that regular dictation practice enhanced both bottom-up and top-down processing abilities.

More recently, Khosravian and Tahmasebi (2019) conducted research comparing traditional listening activities with dictation-based instruction among Iranian intermediate-level learners. Results showed that the dictation group achieved significantly higher scores on listening comprehension tests, with particularly strong improvements in bottom-up processing skills such as word recognition and phoneme discrimination.

Research has also explored dictation's affective benefits. Rahimi and Sadeghi (2011) found that regular dictation practice reduced listening anxiety among Iranian EFL students while increasing their confidence in comprehending authentic spoken English. The structured, repetitive nature of dictation exercises provided learners with clear objectives and measurable progress indicators, contributing to enhanced self-efficacy.

2.2. The Study

2.2.1. *Participants*

Forty first-year English-majored students at Khanh Hoa University participated in this study. All participants were 18-19 years old and had studied English for at least seven years in secondary and high school education. The students were enrolled in Basic Listening and Speaking course, which focuses on developing fundamental listening comprehension skills. All participants had achieved equivalent proficiency levels in university entrance examinations.

2.2.2. *Research Design*

This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data collection to provide comprehensive understanding of dictation's effectiveness and student responses. The research was conducted over 10 weeks during the first semester of the 2025-2026 academic year.

2.2.3. *Data Collection Instruments and Procedures*

Listening comprehension tests were administered

before and after the intervention period to measure quantifiable improvements. Both tests included sections assessing phoneme discrimination, word recognition, sentence comprehension, and short passage understanding. Test content was based on materials from Cambridge English: Key English Test (KET) listening sections, ensuring content validity and appropriate difficulty level. Each test consisted of 25 questions worth 10 points total, with parallel test forms used to prevent practice effects.

Over 10 weeks, students participated in systematic dictation training integrated into their regular listening course. Each 90-minute class session included 30–40 minutes of dictation activities. All materials were selected from authentic sources including BBC Learning English, VOA Learning English, and Cambridge English textbooks, ensuring exposure to various accents and content types.

A structured questionnaire containing 10 questions was administered after the intervention to assess student perceptions. Five questions addressed listening difficulties before and after training, while five explored attitudes toward dictation. Eight students were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews conducted in Vietnamese to ensure comfortable expression.

Throughout the intervention, systematic observations documented student engagement levels, participation patterns, and emotional responses. Quantitative data from pre- and post-tests were analyzed using paired-samples t-tests. Qualitative data from questionnaires, interviews, and observations were transcribed and coded thematically. All data sources were triangulated to enhance validity.

2.3. Findings and Discussion

2.3.1. Effectiveness of Dictation in Improving Listening Skills

Pre-test and post-test comparisons revealed significant improvements in listening comprehension abilities. Mean scores increased from 62.3 (SD = 8.7) on the pre-test to 76.8 (SD = 7.2) on the post-test, representing a 23.3% average improvement. Paired-samples t-test results indicated this improvement was statistically significant ($t = 12.47, p < 0.001$), demonstrating that dictation-based instruction produced measurable gains in listening proficiency. Analysis of specific test sections revealed differential improvement patterns. The greatest

gains appeared in phoneme discrimination (31% improvement) and word recognition in connected speech (28% improvement), supporting research suggesting dictation particularly enhances bottom-up processing skills. Moderate improvements were observed in sentence comprehension (21% improvement) and passage understanding (18% improvement), indicating benefits extending beyond low-level processing to integrated comprehension.

Classroom observations documented notable changes in students' listening behaviors and strategies over the intervention period. Early dictation sessions revealed significant difficulties with word segmentation. By week 6, students demonstrated increased ability to chunk spoken input effectively and required fewer repetitions.

Interview data corroborated quantitative findings. Seven of eight interviewees reported that dictation practice significantly improved their ability to "catch" individual words in natural speech. Students particularly noted improvements in recognizing grammatical function words and weak forms—elements often problematic for Vietnamese learners.

Regarding specific listening challenges, 77.5% of questionnaire respondents agreed that dictation helped them better distinguish similar sounds while 72.5% reported improved ability to recognize word boundaries in continuous speech. An unexpected finding concerned improvements in processing speed and auditory memory. Initially, students could accurately process and retain only 5–6 word utterances. By the study's conclusion, most students could process and reproduce 10–12 word sentences with comparable accuracy. Interview participants attributed this improvement to regular practice holding increasingly longer chunks of speech in working memory during dictation exercises. As one student noted: "At first, I had to ask the teacher to repeat after every 3–4 words. Now I can listen to a whole sentence and remember it to write down. My listening memory got stronger." Questionnaire responses indicated that 68% of students felt more confident identifying weak forms of auxiliary verbs and prepositions after dictation training, while 71% reported improved recognition of contracted forms. Students expressed preferences for varied dictation formats, with 83% agreeing that using different types of dictation activities maintained interest and addressed diverse learning needs.

2.3.2. Students' Responses and Attitudes Toward Dictation

Student responses toward dictation implementation were predominantly positive across data sources. Questionnaire results showed that 82.5% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that dictation activities effectively improved their listening skills, while 78% expressed desire to continue using dictation in future listening courses. Interview data revealed initial resistance that transformed into appreciation as students experienced tangible progress. While 71% of students reported feeling anxious or unconfident about listening tasks before the intervention, this percentage decreased to 31% after the 10-week period. Students attributed confidence gains to visible progress and clear feedback provided by dictation exercises.

Classroom observations documented increased participation and willingness to attempt challenging listening tasks as the study progressed. Students who initially hesitated to participate in dictation activities became more engaged and even requested additional dictation practice beyond assigned coursework. Additionally, 48% of students mentioned frustration when unable to recognize words they later discovered they knew in written form. As one interviewee explained: "Sometimes I didn't catch a word when listening, but when the teacher showed us the answer, I knew that word! This was frustrating but also helped me realize my problem was listening, not vocabulary." An unexpected positive finding concerned collaborative learning during group dictation activities. When students worked in pairs or small groups to reconstruct dictated passages, peer interaction facilitated learning through negotiation of meaning and pooling of comprehension. Interview participants overwhelmingly favored collaborative dictation formats.

In terms of authentic materials appreciation, students responded very positively to authentic listening materials used in dictation exercises. Questionnaire results showed 86% agreement that exposure to real English through dictation (BBC clips, authentic

conversations) was valuable and motivating. Students appreciated encountering various accents, speech rates, and content types, feeling this prepared them better for real-world listening situations than exclusively textbook materials.

III. CONCLUSION

This research successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of dictation techniques in enhancing English listening skills among first-year English-major students at Khanh Hoa University. Students achieved an average 23.3% improvement in listening comprehension scores over the 10-week intervention period, with the greatest gains in phoneme discrimination, word recognition in connected speech, and processing of reduced forms—areas where Vietnamese EFL learners typically struggle most. The study revealed predominantly positive student responses toward dictation implementation. Despite initial resistance, students appreciated the technique's effectiveness as they experienced tangible progress, reporting reduced listening anxiety, increased confidence, and greater motivation. Varied dictation formats (standard, partial, dictogloss) and collaborative activities enhanced engagement while fostering peer learning and social interaction. From a pedagogical perspective, these findings suggest that properly designed dictation can effectively address specific listening difficulties faced by Vietnamese EFL learners, particularly bottom-up processing challenges. The technique's simultaneous engagement of multiple cognitive processes makes it a comprehensive and efficient language learning activity. However, several limitations should be acknowledged, including the small sample size (40 students), short timeframe (10 weeks), absence of a control group, and potential teacher-researcher bias. Future research should conduct comparative studies, examine long-term retention, explore technology integration, and investigate transfer effects to other language skills across multiple Vietnamese universities.

REFERENCES

- Baddeley, A. (2012). *Working memory: Theories, models, and controversies*. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 63, 1-29. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-120710-100422>
- Davis, P., & Rinvolucri, M. (2016). *Dictation: New methods, new possibilities*. Cambridge University Press.
- Field, J. (2008). *Listening in the language classroom*. Cambridge University Press.
- Khosravian, F., & Tahmasebi, A. (2019). *The effect of dictation on Iranian EFL learners' listening comprehension ability*. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 4(2), 13-24.
- Kiany, G. R., & Shiramiry, E. (2002). *The effect of frequent dictation on the listening comprehension ability of elementary EFL learners*. *TESL Journal*, 8(1), 1-11.
- Nation, I. S. P., & Newton, J. (2009). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. Routledge.
- Nguyen, T. T. M., & Newton, J. (2020). *Pronunciation and listening comprehension by Vietnamese learners of English*. *RELC Journal*, 51(3), 381-396. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688219900265>
- Rahimi, M., & Sadeghi, K. (2011). *Effects of frequent dictation on the listening comprehension ability of elementary EFL learners*. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 15(1), 115-132.
- Tran, T. Q. (2018). *Vietnamese learners' difficulties in listening comprehension and their solutions*. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 34(4), 85-100.
- Vandergrift, L., & Goh, C. C. M. (2012). *Teaching and learning second language listening: Metacognition in action*. Routledge.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.