



## UNDERSTANDING EFL STUDENTS' LISTENING CHALLENGES IN GENERAL ENGLISH COURSE 3: PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS AT A VIETNAMESE UNIVERSITY

Tran Kieu My<sup>1</sup>,

Thai Cong Dan<sup>2i</sup>

<sup>1</sup>English Studies Program,  
Department of English Language and Culture,  
Can Tho University,  
Can Tho, Vietnam

<sup>2</sup>Senior English Lecturer,  
School of Foreign Languages,  
Can Tho University,  
Can Tho, Vietnam

### Abstract:

In response to the increasing importance of English as a global language, this study investigates the listening challenges, perceptions, and coping strategies of EFL students enrolled in General English Course 3 at a Vietnamese university. Focusing on linguistic, cognitive, affective, and external factors, the research employed a mixed-methods design using a 25-item questionnaire completed by 94 students and follow-up semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, and qualitative data were thematically coded. Findings show that students struggle most with fast speech, unfamiliar vocabulary, diverse accents, and extended spoken texts. Affective barriers such as anxiety and low confidence further impede comprehension. While students recognize the importance of listening skills and are aware of useful strategies, their actual use of these strategies is limited and inconsistent. The study highlights key areas for pedagogical improvement and offers practical implications for enhancing listening instruction in tertiary EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** EFL students, listening challenges, listening comprehension, perceptions, coping strategies, General English Course 3

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [tcdan@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:tcdan@ctu.edu.vn)

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Background of the Study

In today's globalized world, English plays a crucial role in personal, academic, and professional development (Nishanthi, 2018). As the most widely used lingua franca, it facilitates international communication and supports learners' educational and career advancement (Vani & Naik, 2023). Among the four language skills, listening is often considered foundational, as it provides essential input for speaking, reading, and writing. Without adequate listening comprehension, learners may struggle to engage effectively in conversations, lectures, or workplace interactions.

Despite its importance, listening remains one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners worldwide. Previous studies have shown that fast speech and unfamiliar accents impede comprehension (Alqahtani, 2024), while poor concentration, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in sound discrimination further hinder performance (Hermida, 2021). Vocabulary gaps, in particular, have been found to strongly affect comprehension (Purba, 2020). Additionally, a lack of metacognitive awareness—such as the ability to monitor understanding or apply effective strategies—exacerbates listening difficulties (Al-Khresheh, 2024). These findings confirm that listening challenges arise not only from linguistic factors but also from cognitive and affective influences.

Vietnamese learners experience similar difficulties, shaped by both instructional and contextual conditions. Studies have reported that motivation and engagement affect listening performance among high school students (Tran & Long, 2022), while strategy training, such as note-taking, can improve comprehension at the tertiary level (Nguyen *et al.*, 2024). Persistent vocabulary limitations (Nguyen, 2024), unstable online learning conditions (Ha & Ngo, 2021), and limited exposure to English (Ha & Bao, 2024) also contribute to listening challenges among non-English majors. Pham and Le (2025) further observed that low motivation and restricted listening practice continue to affect students' performance in private universities.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, little attention has been paid to non-English major students at Can Tho University (CTU), particularly those enrolled in General English Course 3 (XH025). As a large cohort whose English proficiency affects academic success and employability, this group has been underexplored in existing research. To address this gap, the present study examines their specific listening challenges with the aim of informing teaching practices and improving learning outcomes.

### 1.2. Research Aims

This study aims to investigate the listening challenges experienced by non-English major students enrolled in General English Course 3 (XH025) at Can Tho University. It also examines students' perceptions of these challenges to provide insights that can support more effective listening instruction in General English courses.

### 1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the main listening challenges experienced by EFL students in General English Course 3 at a Vietnamese university?
2. How do EFL students perceive and cope with these listening challenges in their learning practices?

### 1.4. Significance of the Study

- *Theoretically*, this study contributes to the literature on listening comprehension by documenting the challenges faced by non-English majors in a large Vietnamese public university—an area that has received limited scholarly attention. While existing research often focuses on English majors or high school learners, this study highlights the experiences of students taking compulsory English courses such as General English Course 3 (XH025). The findings, therefore, fill a gap in the Vietnamese EFL context and provide a basis for future comparative studies across institutions.
- *Practically*, the study offers insights that may support improvements in teaching and curriculum development at CTU. By identifying common listening barriers and exploring students' perceptions, the research can help lecturers refine instructional practices, adapt learning materials, and create more supportive learning environments for non-majors. At the same time, the study may enhance students' awareness of their own challenges and encourage the use of effective listening strategies. Although conducted at CTU, the findings have broader relevance for other Vietnamese universities with similar student populations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Theoretical Framework of Listening Challenges

L2 listening involves rapid, interactive processing in which listeners integrate linguistic, cognitive, and contextual information (Field, 2008; Rost, 2011). Difficulties arise when decoding, parsing, or meaning construction breaks down (Buck, 2001). Working-memory limitations and processing overload frequently hinder comprehension (Baddeley & Hitch, 1974). Metacognitive regulation supports planning and monitoring, yet many learners lack such awareness (Vandergrift, 2007). Affective factors such as anxiety also restrict attention (Krashen, 1982). These interacting components explain why listening is challenging for EFL learners.

### 2.2. Listening Skill in EFL Learning

Listening provides major linguistic input and supports vocabulary, pronunciation, and speaking development (Krashen, 1982; Rost, 2013). It involves perception, parsing, and interpretation, requiring coordination of bottom-up decoding and top-down inference (Field, 2008; Anderson & Lynch, 1988). In EFL contexts, limited exposure to authentic speech intensifies difficulties with speed, accent variation, and discourse cues (Goh,

2000). Because spoken input is transient and fast, learners must process information quickly, making listening one of the most demanding language skills.

### **2.3. Common Listening Challenges in EFL Contexts**

#### **2.3.1. Linguistic Challenges**

Learners often struggle with fast speech, reduced forms, and connected-speech phenomena, which obscure word boundaries (Field, 2008; Goh, 2000). Limited vocabulary interrupts processing and forces learners to focus on unfamiliar items instead of meaning (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Accent variation also causes perceptual mismatches, especially when exposure is restricted (Kurita, 2012). Complex syntax, idioms, and informal expressions further increase difficulty. These linguistic constraints frequently lead learners to perceive listening as more challenging than other skills.

#### **2.3.2. Cognitive Challenges**

Listening requires rapid coordination of attention, working memory, and meaning construction (Anderson, 1995). When working-memory capacity is exceeded, learners cannot retain or integrate information efficiently (Bloomfield *et al.*, 2010). Slow lexical retrieval and unfamiliar topics increase cognitive load and disrupt comprehension. Many learners translate mentally, which overwhelms processing resources (Vandergrift, 2007). Because input is ephemeral, even brief lapses cause loss of meaning. These cognitive demands significantly hinder EFL learners' listening performance.

#### **2.3.3. Affective Challenges**

Affective variables such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation strongly influence listening. Anxiety restricts attention and reduces working-memory efficiency (Elkhafaifi, 2005), while low confidence leads to avoidance or premature surrender during tasks (Graham, 2006). Motivated learners persist, tolerate ambiguity, and use strategies more effectively (Dörnyei, 1998). In contrast, low motivation amplifies perceived difficulty. These affective factors interact with linguistic and cognitive constraints, shaping learners' attitudes and overall listening performance (Hsieh, 2019).

#### **2.3.4. Contextual Challenges**

Environmental and instructional conditions significantly affect listening outcomes. Poor audio quality, noise, or unstable technology disrupts perception (Buck, 2001). Task characteristics such as unfamiliar topics or complex formats increase processing load. In many EFL classrooms, limited practice time and exam-driven teaching reduce opportunities for strategy development (Ngo, 2019). Restricted exposure to authentic English outside class further intensifies the difficulty. These contextual constraints, though external to the learner, strongly shape listening experiences and performance.

## **2.4. Learners' Perceptions and Attitudes Toward Listening**

Learners' perceptions influence engagement, strategy use, and anxiety levels. Many underestimate their listening ability and overemphasize vocabulary and speed as primary obstacles (Hasan, 2000; Graham, 2006). Motivation enhances effort and persistence, whereas anxiety undermines concentration and confidence (Elkhafaifi, 2005). Vietnamese learners often report low exposure and limited decoding skills, shaping negative attitudes toward listening (Thai & Nguyen, 2018). Understanding learners' perceptions is essential because attitudes directly affect learning behaviours and performance.

## **2.5. Listening Practices and Strategies**

Effective listening instruction incorporates pre-, while-, and post-listening activities that activate schemata, support real-time processing, and consolidate learning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012; Field, 2008). Skilled listeners use cognitive strategies such as inferencing and summarising, alongside metacognitive strategies like monitoring and evaluating (Graham, 2006). However, many EFL classrooms emphasise answering questions rather than teaching strategies, limiting learners' ability to regulate listening. This imbalance contributes to reliance on translation and weak strategy development.

## **2.6. General English Course 3 at Can Tho University**

GE3 is a three-credit course integrating the four skills at the A2–B1 level. Listening is embedded within thematic units rather than taught as an independent component. Large class sizes, limited contact hours, and exam-oriented instruction reduce opportunities for extensive listening practice and strategy training. Learners often engage with controlled tasks rather than authentic materials, contributing to difficulties with real-world listening. These contextual features shape how GE3 students perceive and experience listening challenges.

## **2.7. Review of Empirical Studies on Listening Challenges**

Studies consistently show that EFL learners struggle with vocabulary limitations, fast speech, accent variation, and insufficient strategy use (Goh, 2000; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016). Many adopt reactive strategies such as repetition and translation rather than predictive or inferencing strategies (Graham, 2006). Vietnamese studies report similar patterns, intensified by exam-oriented teaching and limited authentic exposure (Nguyen, 2015). However, research focusing on university-level General English contexts remains limited, revealing a gap this study addresses.

## **2.8. Research Gaps and Rationale**

Existing studies often examine linguistic, cognitive, or affective challenges separately, resulting in a fragmented understanding (Kurita, 2012). Research in Vietnamese higher education—particularly General English courses—is limited, and regional institutions such as CTU remain underrepresented. Many studies rely solely on questionnaires

without triangulating data. This study addresses these gaps by investigating listening challenges, perceptions, and practices among GE3 learners through a mixed-method approach, offering a more comprehensive understanding of their listening experiences.

### **3. Research Methodology**

#### **3.1. Research Questions**

This study was conducted to address two main objectives, corresponding to the following research questions:

- 1) What are the main listening challenges experienced by EFL students in General English Course 3 at a Vietnamese university?
- 2) How do EFL students perceive and cope with these listening challenges in their learning practices?

#### **3.2. Research Design**

A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain both breadth and depth of data. The quantitative component involved a survey questionnaire designed to identify students' listening challenges, their perceptions of listening, and the strategies they used in General English Course 3. The qualitative component consisted of semi-structured interviews, which provided deeper insight into students' experiences, beliefs, and coping strategies related to listening comprehension.

The questionnaire was developed based on the theoretical framework and empirical findings reviewed in Chapter 2. It targeted common listening problems in EFL contexts as well as students' strategic responses to these challenges. The participants were undergraduate students enrolled in General English Course 3 at Can Tho University. This cohort was selected because they had already acquired foundational English knowledge and possessed sufficient learning experience to reflect meaningfully on their listening processes.

After the questionnaire responses were collected and analysed, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students. These interviews explored students' perceptions and coping strategies in greater depth and elicited suggestions for improving listening instruction within the General English Course 3 context.

#### **3.3. Participants**

A total of 94 undergraduate students enrolled in General English Course 3 at Can Tho University participated in the questionnaire phase of the study. From this sample, ten students were randomly selected to take part in semi-structured interviews consisting of five guiding questions. All participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily and provided honest responses.

### 3.4. Research Instruments

#### 3.4.1. Questionnaire

The questionnaire served as the primary instrument for investigating EFL students' listening challenges and for examining their perceptions and coping strategies in General English Course 3 (course code XH025). Through this instrument, the researcher aimed to develop an overall understanding of the specific difficulties students encountered and the strategies they used to navigate the listening learning process.

The questionnaire included two main parts and employed bilingual (English–Vietnamese) items to ensure clarity for all participants. It used a five-point Likert scale to measure the degree of agreement with each statement.

- **Part 1** collected demographic and background information, including gender, academic cohort, and self-rated listening proficiency.
- **Part 2** consisted of **32 items** measuring six major dimensions related to listening:
  - linguistic challenges,
  - cognitive challenges,
  - affective challenges,
  - material-related challenges,
  - teachers' instructional methods,
  - strategies used to cope with listening difficulties.

Additionally, two open-ended questions were included to allow students to elaborate on their listening challenges, explain their experiences, and describe strategies not captured in fixed-scale items.

The questionnaire was initially drafted in English and then translated into Vietnamese to ensure comprehensibility and to minimise potential misinterpretation. For each Likert-scale item, 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly agree.

**Table 3.1:** Summary of the questionnaire

	Constructs	No. of items
Section 1: Optional questions	General information	
Section 2:		
Part B – Cluster 1	Linguistic challenges	5
Part B – Cluster 2	Cognitive challenges	5
Part B – Cluster 3	Affective challenges	5
Part B – Cluster 4	Material challenges	5
Part B – Cluster 5	Teacher's method (open-ended)	5
Part B – Cluster 6	Coping strategies	5
Part B – Cluster 7	Further questions (open-ended)	2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b>

#### 3.4.2. Interview

In addition to the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted in both Vietnamese and English with a subsample of students (n = 10) to obtain deeper insights

into their listening challenges and coping strategies in General English Course 3. The interviews aimed to explore students' learning experiences in greater depth and to clarify issues that could not be fully captured through the questionnaire. The interview protocol focused on four main areas:

- 1) perceived difficulties in listening,
- 2) strategies employed to overcome these challenges,
- 3) experiences with classroom practices and teaching methods, and
- 4) perceptions of the effectiveness of learning materials.

The interview questions are provided in Appendix B.

### **3.5. Data Collection**

#### **3.5.1. Questionnaire**

##### **3.5.1.1. Pilot Questionnaire**

A pilot administration was conducted to examine the clarity, appropriateness, and linguistic accessibility of the questionnaire items for participants' proficiency levels. The Vietnamese translation of the questionnaire was prepared by the researcher and verified by the supervisor to ensure accuracy.

A total of 94 undergraduate students enrolled in General English Course 3 at Can Tho University were invited to participate. On the day of data collection, the researcher visited the selected classes and distributed the questionnaires directly. The purpose of the study and the instructions for completing the questionnaire were explained clearly in both English and Vietnamese to ensure comprehension.

To minimize missing responses, participants were guided to complete the questionnaire section by section. All completed questionnaires were collected immediately after administration.

##### **3.5.1.2. Administration**

Based on feedback from the pilot phase, several questionnaire items were refined before official administration. The final questionnaire served two primary purposes:

- 1) to investigate students' listening challenges and their perceptions of listening in the General English Course 3, and
- 2) to identify strategies students employed to cope with these challenges.

The official data collection took place in the first semester of the 2025–2026 academic year. With permission from the university, the researcher visited each class to invite participation, and the questionnaires were completed after class sessions.

As in the pilot study, the objectives and procedures were explained in bilingual format. On average, students took approximately 15 minutes to complete the survey. They were asked to check their responses before submission to avoid missing data. All 94 distributed questionnaires were returned, yielding a 100% response rate with no incomplete entries.

### 3.5.2. Interview

#### 3.5.2.1 Pilot Interview

A pilot interview was conducted to evaluate the clarity, sequencing, and comprehensibility of the interview questions. The interviews aimed to gather detailed qualitative data regarding students' listening challenges, learning experiences, and the strategies they used to improve their listening ability in General English Course 3.

Participants for the pilot were selected from those who had completed the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted individually in a quiet environment, and students were allowed to use either English or Vietnamese depending on their preference to ensure comfort and clarity. The questions were deliberately phrased in simple, accessible language to ensure all participants could respond effectively.

#### 3.5.2.2. Administration

After the questionnaire phase, ten students were purposively selected for interviews to represent a range of proficiency levels and learning experiences. Prior to each interview, participants were informed that their responses would remain confidential and used solely for research purposes. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms or encoded identifiers were used during transcription and reporting.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and the recordings were subsequently transcribed. The transcriptions were reviewed and verified by the supervisor to ensure accuracy before the data proceeded to analysis.

### 3.6. Data Analysis

#### 3.6.1. Questionnaire

Quantitative data collected from the questionnaire were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Reliability analysis was first conducted to examine the internal consistency of each category and of the overall instrument. The overall reliability coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.812, indicating acceptable reliability.

Following this, several statistical procedures were performed:

- **Frequency analysis** to identify the distribution of responses across levels of perceived difficulty and strategy use.
- **Descriptive statistics** (means, standard deviations, and percentages) to summarise students' responses for each cluster of items, including linguistic, cognitive, affective, and material-related challenges, teacher-related factors, and coping strategies.
- **Correlation analysis** to explore relationships among the major variables, particularly the connection between types of listening challenges and the strategies students reported using.
- **Chi-square tests** to examine associations between students' perceptions of listening difficulty and their actual learning practices. This analysis helped determine whether perceptions aligned with behaviour.

- **Bivariate correlation analysis** to investigate relationships across the different clusters of variables and to provide deeper insights into how various aspects of listening challenges interact.

Together, these analyses offered a comprehensive quantitative picture of students' listening difficulties and the coping mechanisms they employed.

### 3.6.2. Interview

The qualitative component of the study focused on analysing interview data to obtain a deeper understanding of students' listening experiences and coping strategies in General English Course 3.

In the first stage, interview responses were reviewed and coded according to students' awareness of their listening challenges, their emotional and cognitive responses during listening tasks, and the strategies they reported using. The researcher examined each transcript to determine the extent to which participants recognised their difficulties and how they attempted to address them.

In the second stage, the coded data were organised into broader thematic categories. Recurrent themes included:

- common sources of listening difficulty,
- emotional experiences such as anxiety or frustration,
- the influence of learning materials and teaching practices,
- the role of self-study and external resources, and
- the strategies students applied to improve listening comprehension.

The qualitative findings provided explanatory depth to the quantitative results and illuminated aspects of students' experiences that could not be captured through the questionnaire alone. The integration of these two data sources allowed for a more holistic understanding of students' listening challenges, perceptions, and learning behaviours in General English Course 3.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

### 4.1. Findings from Quantitative Data

The survey aimed to investigate EFL students' listening challenges, perceptions, practices, and coping strategies in General English Course 3. A total of 94 questionnaires were collected and used for data analysis. Students' responses related to the research objectives were coded and processed for subsequent analysis.

Of these, 25 Likert-scale items were included in the quantitative analysis. The reliability of the questionnaire was evaluated, and the results showed that the reliability coefficient  $\alpha = .812$ .

#### 4.1.1. Frequencies

The results of the questionnaire aim to answer the research questions. The content of research question number one is addressed by Part 1 of the questionnaire:

- What are the main listening challenges experienced by EFL students in General English Course 3 at a Vietnamese university?

The content of research question number two is addressed by Part 2 of the questionnaire:

- How do EFL students perceive and cope with these listening challenges in their learning practices?"

After collecting the data from respondents, the reliability of the questionnaire was checked to ensure the data was valuable for analysis. Reliability analysis was performed using SPSS and the reliability coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) was found to be 0.812, The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was 0.812, indicating good reliability. The following tables show the results of the Scale Test.

#### 4.1.2. Reliability

**Table 4.1:** Case processing summary of the questionnaire

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	94	100.0
	Excluded	0	.0
	Total	94	100.0

Table 4.1 shows that there are 94 cases in this study. All 94 cases are valid. Moreover, there are no invalid cases. Therefore, the result of this questionnaire is valid.

#### 4.2. Sample Descriptive Statistics

**Table 4.2:** Statistics of qualitative variables

Statistic	Expression	Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	60	63.8
	Female	34	36.2
Student cohort	C47	12	12.8
	C48	36	38.3
	C49	38	40.4
	C50	7	7.4
Your current listening skills	Weak	11	11.7
	Average	53	56.4
	Good	25	26.6
	Excellent	1	1.1
	Not sure	4	4.3

Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the demographic characteristics and self-rated listening abilities of the 94 EFL students who participated in the study. The gender distribution shows that 63.8% of participants were male (n = 60) and 36.2% were female (n = 34), indicating a sample skewed toward male students, which could potentially

influence perceptions of listening challenges if gender-related differences exist in language learning.

Regarding student cohorts, most participants were from Cohort 48 (38.3%) and Cohort 49 (40.4%), reflecting a predominance of second- and third-year students. Cohort 47 accounted for 12.8% and Cohort 50 for 7.4% of the sample. This distribution suggests that the majority of students had sufficient prior exposure to English courses, providing a suitable basis for assessing listening difficulties.

In terms of self-rated listening ability, most students (56.4%,  $n = 53$ ) considered their listening skills to be *average*, followed by 26.6% ( $n = 25$ ) who rated themselves as *good*. A smaller proportion (11.7%,  $n = 11$ ) perceived their listening skills as *weak*, while only one student (1.1%) considered their proficiency *excellent*, and 4.3% were uncertain about their level.

Overall, these findings indicate that listening remains a challenging skill for most participants, with only a small number demonstrating high proficiency. The relatively high percentage of students with weak listening skills underscores the need for targeted teaching strategies and additional support to improve listening competence.

**Table 4.3:** Statistics of quantitative variables

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Linguistic Challenges (LC) mean = 3.70</b>					
LC1	94	1	5	3.70	0.948
LC2	94	1	5	3.35	0.936
LC3	94	1	5	3.39	0.997
LC4	94	2	5	4.15	0.733
LC5	94	1	5	3.88	0.853
<b>Cognitive Challenges (CC) mean = 3.83</b>					
CC6	94	1	5	3.59	0.955
CC7	94	1	5	3.49	0.877
CC8	94	2	5	4.02	0.803
CC9	94	1	5	4.28	0.739
CC10	94	1	5	3.79	0.890
<b>Affective Challenges (AC) mean = 3.78</b>					
AC11	94	1	5	3.73	0.870
AC12	94	1	5	3.72	0.873
AC13	94	1	5	4.02	0.842
AC14	94	2	5	3.96	0.802
AC15	94	1	5	3.45	1.033
<b>Material Challenges (MC) mean = 3.42</b>					
MC16	94	1	5	3.03	0.885
MC17	94	1	5	3.71	0.757
MC18	94	2	5	3.85	0.789
MC19	94	1	5	3.16	0.820
MC20	94	1	5	3.35	0.714
<b>Strategies for Coping with Listening Challenges (SC) mean = 3.74</b>					
SC21	94	1	5	3.50	0.826
SC22	94	2	5	3.94	0.787

SC23	94	2	5	4.02	0.776
SC24	94	1	5	3.51	0.813
SC25	94	1	5	3.76	0.799

**Table 4.4:** Cronbach's Alpha scale reliability test

Variable	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
<b>Linguistic Challenges (LC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.566</b>				
LC1	14.78	5.014	0.343	0.500
LC2	15.13	4.865	0.395	0.468
LC3	15.09	4.681	0.393	0.467
LC4	14.33	6.030	<b>0.223</b>	0.560
LC5	14.60	5.555	<b>0.270</b>	0.540
<b>Cognitive Challenges (CC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.564</b>				
CC6	15.57	4.355	0.353	0.490
CC7	15.67	4.611	0.344	0.496
CC8	15.14	5.110	<b>0.253</b>	0.545
CC9	14.88	4.685	0.451	0.446
CC10	15.37	4.924	<b>0.242</b>	0.556
<b>Affective Challenges (AC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.657</b>				
AC11	15.15	5.547	0.487	0.569
AC12	15.16	5.533	0.488	0.568
AC13	14.86	6.142	0.347	0.633
AC14	14.93	5.790	0.483	0.575
AC15	15.44	5.818	<b>0.283</b>	0.676
<b>Material Challenges (MC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.599</b>				
MC16	14.07	3.661	0.481	0.467
MC17	13.39	4.628	<b>0.268</b>	0.587
MC18	13.26	4.321	0.345	0.550
MC19	13.95	3.814	0.495	0.463
MC20	13.76	4.961	<b>0.190</b>	0.620
<b>Strategies for Coping with Listening Challenges (SC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.529</b>				
SC21	15.22	4.240	<b>0.186</b>	0.541
SC22	14.79	3.868	0.345	0.443
SC23	14.70	3.910	0.341	0.446
SC24	15.21	3.933	<b>0.299</b>	0.471
SC25	14.97	3.924	0.314	0.462

#### 4.4. Scale Reliability Analysis by Subscale

##### 4.4.1 Linguistic Challenges (LC) Scale

The LC scale achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.566, slightly below the 0.6 threshold but acceptable for exploratory research. Among the five observed variables, LC4 (0.223) and LC5 (0.270) had item-total correlations below 0.3, indicating weaker contributions to the scale. However, removing either LC4 or LC5 only marginally increased Alpha (to 0.560 and 0.540, respectively), which did not justify deletion. Therefore, all five items were retained to preserve content comprehensiveness.

#### 4.4.2 Cognitive Challenges (CC) Scale

The CC scale showed a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.564, similar to the LC scale and acceptable for exploratory purposes. Variables CC8 (0.253) and CC10 (0.242) had item-total correlations below 0.3. Removing them would only slightly improve Alpha (to 0.545 and 0.556), so they were retained to maintain the conceptual integrity of the scale.

#### 4.4.3 Affective Challenges (AC) Scale

The AC scale achieved a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.657, within the acceptable exploratory range ( $0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$ ). Most items (AC11–AC14) had item-total correlations above 0.3. AC15, however, had a correlation of 0.283, indicating a low contribution. Removing AC15 would increase the Alpha to 0.676, so elimination of this item is recommended to improve scale reliability.

#### 4.4.4 Material Challenges (MC) Scale

The MC scale's Cronbach's Alpha was 0.599, slightly below the acceptable threshold. Variables MC16, MC18, and MC19 met the item-total correlation requirement ( $>0.3$ ), while MC17 (0.268) and MC20 (0.190) did not. Deleting MC20 would raise Alpha to 0.620, reaching an acceptable level. Therefore, MC20 should be removed, and MC17 should be considered for revision or removal in subsequent analyses.

#### 4.4.5 Strategies for Coping with Listening Challenges (SC) Scale

The SC scale showed low reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.529. Variables SC21 (0.186) and SC24 (0.299) had item-total correlations below 0.3, while SC22, SC23, and SC25 barely met the threshold. Removing SC21 increased Alpha only to 0.541, still below the acceptable level. Thus, the SC scale requires recalibration or reconstruction of items before further analysis.

#### 4.5 Summary of Reliability Decisions

- Items recommended for removal: **AC15**, **MC20**, **MC17** (considered for adjustment).
- Other scales, although exhibiting low reliability, are retained for this exploratory study.

Table 4.5 presents the results of the Cronbach's Alpha scale reliability test after removing individual variables from each scale.

**Table 4.5:** Cronbach's Alpha scale reliability test after removing variables

Variable	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
<b>Linguistic Challenges (LC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.566</b>				
LC1	14.78	5.014	0.343	0.500
LC2	15.13	4.865	0.395	0.468
LC3	15.09	4.681	0.393	0.467
LC4	14.33	6.030	<b>0.223</b>	0.560
LC5	14.60	5.555	<b>0.270</b>	0.540
<b>Cognitive Challenges (CC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.564</b>				
CC6	15.57	4.355	0.353	0.490
CC7	15.67	4.611	0.344	0.496
CC8	15.14	5.110	<b>0.253</b>	0.545
CC9	14.88	4.685	0.451	0.446
CC10	15.37	4.924	<b>0.242</b>	0.556
<b>Affective Challenges (AC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.676</b>				
AC11	11.70	3.416	0.512	0.572
AC12	11.71	3.454	0.494	0.584
AC13	11.41	3.837	0.386	0.655
AC14	11.48	3.801	0.440	0.621
<b>Material Challenges (MC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.604</b>				
MC16	7.01	1.731	0.415	0.503
MC18	6.19	2.027	0.370	0.563
MC19	6.88	1.803	0.456	0.440
<b>Strategies for Coping with Listening Challenges (SC) Cronbach Alpha = 0.529</b>				
SC21	15.22	4.240	<b>0.186</b>	0.541
SC22	14.79	3.868	0.345	0.443
SC23	14.70	3.910	0.341	0.446
SC24	15.21	3.933	<b>0.299</b>	0.471
SC25	14.97	3.924	0.314	0.462

For the **Linguistic Challenges (LC) scale**, the overall Cronbach's Alpha was 0.566, indicating low but acceptable reliability for exploratory research. The corrected item-total correlations ranged from 0.223 (LC4) to 0.395 (LC2), showing that LC4 and LC5 contributed less effectively to the scale. Removing LC4 or LC5 would slightly increase the Alpha (0.560 and 0.540), but not significantly enough to justify deletion, so all items were retained to maintain content comprehensiveness.

The **Cognitive Challenges (CC) scale** had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.564, with item-total correlations between 0.242 (CC10) and 0.451 (CC9). While CC8 and CC10 were relatively weak contributors, their removal only marginally improved Alpha, so the variables were kept to ensure conceptual completeness.

For the **Affective Challenges (AC) scale**, Cronbach's Alpha reached 0.676, within the acceptable range for exploratory research. Most items had item-total correlations above 0.386, but AC13 and AC14 had slightly lower correlations; removing any of these items would not significantly improve reliability.

The **Material Challenges (MC) scale** achieved an Alpha of 0.604. Variables MC16 and MC18 had acceptable contributions (item-total correlations 0.415 and 0.370), while MC19 contributed more strongly (0.456). The scale reliability is considered acceptable after minor adjustments.

Finally, the **Strategies for Coping (SC) scale** had the lowest reliability (Alpha = 0.529). Some items, such as SC21 (0.186) and SC24 (0.299), showed weak item-total correlations, suggesting that the scale requires recalibration or restructuring before further analysis. Overall, Table 4.6 indicates that while some scales are moderately reliable, others—particularly SC—need refinement for stronger internal consistency.

#### 4.6. Findings from Qualitative Data

To complement the quantitative results, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students from General English Course 3 to gain deeper insights into their listening challenges and coping strategies. The interview data were analyzed thematically, and the responses were categorized into four main themes: cognitive challenges, affective challenges, linguistic challenges, and coping strategies.

##### 4.6.1. Cognitive Challenges

Most students reported difficulties related to understanding and processing spoken English in real time. Common issues included fast speech, unfamiliar accents, and difficulty predicting or following the content.

##### 4.6.1.1. Sample Responses

*"Sometimes the teacher speaks too fast, and I can only catch some words. I often lose track of the main idea."* (Student 2)

*"I try to guess what comes next, but when the information is too much, I get confused and cannot follow."* (Student 5)

*"It is hard to concentrate when the listening is long. I know the vocabulary, but I still cannot understand everything."* (Student 7)

These findings support the quantitative results showing that cognitive challenges had the highest mean (3.83), indicating that processing information is the most significant barrier for students.

##### 4.6.2. Affective Challenges

Emotional factors such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of misunderstanding were frequently mentioned. Students described feeling nervous during listening tasks, especially in class or exams.

#### 4.6.2.1 Sample Responses

*"I get nervous when listening to recordings. I worry about misunderstanding, and it makes me miss more information."* (Student 1)

*"Sometimes I feel I cannot keep up with the conversation, and this lowers my confidence."* (Student 6)

*"If the topic is difficult, I feel stressed and stop focusing, which affects my comprehension."* (Student 9)

These responses align with the quantitative finding of a high mean for affective challenges (3.78), showing that emotional factors significantly impact listening performance.

#### 4.6.3 Linguistic Challenges

Students also mentioned difficulties with vocabulary, pronunciation, and complex sentence structures as barriers to comprehension.

##### 4.6.3.1. Sample Responses

*"There are words I don't know, and if I miss them, I cannot understand the whole sentence."* (Student 3)

*"Sometimes the speaker has an accent I am not familiar with, which makes it difficult to follow."* (Student 8)

*"Complex sentences confuse me. I have to listen several times to understand what is being said."* (Student 10)

This finding corresponds to the linguistic challenges mean of 3.70, showing that language knowledge, while important, is not the most significant obstacle compared to cognitive and affective factors.

#### 4.6.4. Coping Strategies

Students reported using a range of strategies to overcome listening difficulties, though not always consistently or effectively.

##### 4.6.4.1. Sample Responses

*"I try to take notes while listening, which helps me remember the main points."* (Student 4)

*"I repeat difficult recordings at home to understand better, but I do not do it often."*  
(Student 7)

*"I guess the meaning of unknown words from context, but sometimes I am wrong."* (Student 2)

The interview findings complement the quantitative result of a moderate mean for coping strategies (3.74), suggesting that while students are aware of some strategies, there is room for improvement in their consistent application and effectiveness.

#### 4.7. Summary

Overall, the qualitative findings confirm and enrich the survey results:

- **Cognitive challenges** are the most prominent difficulty.
- **Affective challenges** play a significant role in limiting listening performance.
- **Linguistic challenges** are present but slightly less critical than cognitive and affective difficulties.
- Students apply coping strategies, but often inconsistently, highlighting the need for more explicit training in effective listening techniques.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative data provides a comprehensive understanding of the listening challenges and behaviors of EFL students in General English Course 3.

#### 4.8. Discussion

This section interprets the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data in relation to the two research questions and the relevant literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

##### 4.8.1 Listening Challenges Experienced by EFL Students

The first research question aimed to identify the main listening challenges experienced by EFL students in General English Course 3. The survey results indicated that:

- **Cognitive Challenges (CC)** were the most significant, with a mean score of 3.83. Students reported difficulties in processing information due to fast speech, continuous delivery of content, and difficulty concentrating—findings consistent with Vandergrift (2007) and Goh (2008), who emphasized that cognitive load and information processing are key obstacles in second-language listening.
- **Affective Challenges (AC)** ranked second (mean = 3.78), reflecting the influence of anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of misunderstanding. These findings align with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that emotional factors such as anxiety or low motivation can inhibit language comprehension. Students' qualitative responses reinforced this, highlighting that nervousness and lack of confidence significantly affected their listening performance, particularly in academic settings.

- **Linguistic Challenges (LC)**, with a mean of 3.70, were also reported as significant, indicating that limited vocabulary, unfamiliar pronunciation, and complex sentence structures hindered comprehension. This supports findings from Morley (2001) and Field (2008), who noted that language knowledge, including vocabulary and grammar, remains a crucial factor in listening comprehension.
- **Material Challenges (MC)** were rated lower (mean = 3.42), suggesting that the course materials were generally appropriate, though some students struggled with unfamiliar topics or less engaging audio content. This aligns with Vandergrift and Goh (2012), who suggested that suitable materials can reduce listening difficulty, but learner engagement and prior knowledge also play roles.

#### 4.8.2 Students' Perceptions and Coping Strategies

The second research question investigated how students perceive and cope with these listening challenges. The mean score for Strategies for Coping (SC) was 3.74, indicating that students were aware of strategies such as predicting content, note-taking, and inferring meaning but applied them inconsistently. This finding echoes Nunan (2002), who emphasized that strategy awareness alone does not guarantee effective listening; learners must be trained to use strategies deliberately and flexibly.

Qualitative interview data revealed that students often relied on repetitive listening and peer discussion as coping mechanisms, reflecting the findings of Goh and Taib (2006) regarding the importance of metacognitive strategies in developing listening skills. Some students also reported using contextual clues and prior knowledge to infer meaning, which aligns with the "top-down" processing approach described in the literature (Brown, 2006).

The low reliability of the SC scale in the quantitative analysis (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.529) further underscores that students' coping strategies may be inconsistent and underdeveloped, highlighting the need for targeted strategy training in the General English Course 3 curriculum.

#### 4.8.3 Integration with Literature and Pedagogical Implications

Overall, the findings support previous research indicating that listening difficulties are multifaceted, including cognitive, affective, linguistic, and material **factors**. Cognitive and affective challenges emerged as the most significant barriers for Vietnamese EFL students, suggesting that classroom interventions should address both processing skills and emotional support.

From a pedagogical perspective, instructors may focus on the following:

- 1) Implementing activities that improve cognitive processing, such as gradual exposure to fast speech, chunking exercises, and information prediction tasks (Goh, 2008).
- 2) Reducing affective barriers through confidence-building, scaffolding, and creating a low-anxiety classroom environment (Krashen, 1982).

- 3) Strengthening linguistic competence with targeted vocabulary and pronunciation exercises (Field, 2008).
- 4) Explicitly teaching and practicing listening strategies to ensure that students can use them effectively in real-time listening situations (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

In conclusion, the study confirms that Vietnamese EFL students face complex listening challenges and use a range of coping strategies that are only partially effective. These findings highlight the need for a comprehensive listening instruction approach that integrates cognitive, linguistic, and affective support with explicit strategy training.

## 5. Conclusion and Implications

### 5.1 Conclusion

This study sheds light on the listening challenges faced by EFL students in General English Course 3 at a Vietnamese university. Listening, as a core skill for academic success and communication, is influenced not only by language knowledge but also by cognitive and affective factors. The findings show that students experience significant challenges across five dimensions: cognitive, affective, linguistic, material, and strategic, with cognitive and affective challenges being the most prominent.

Students reported difficulties in processing fast speech, maintaining concentration, predicting content, and managing listening anxiety, reflecting that listening is a complex, multidimensional process. While students are partially aware of coping strategies, their application remains inconsistent and often ineffective. The study also found no significant differences in listening challenges by gender or cohort, indicating that these difficulties are systematic rather than individual.

Overall, listening difficulties are interconnected barriers that require more than exposure to language input; effective instruction should address cognitive processing, emotional management, and strategy training to improve comprehension and learner confidence.

### 5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest several implications for learners, teachers, and curriculum designers:

- **For learners:** Students should actively apply strategies such as predicting content, note-taking, identifying key ideas, and inferring meaning, while also developing techniques to manage anxiety and improve concentration.
- **For teachers:** Listening instruction should go beyond comprehension checks. Pre-listening activities can activate prior knowledge, while during- and post-listening tasks can guide focused attention and strategy reflection. Structured strategy training can help students convert awareness into effective practice.
- **For curriculum designers:** Materials are generally suitable but should be used interactively and supplemented with authentic listening resources like podcasts and interviews. Instructional support should be provided universally, rather than

tailored only to specific groups, emphasizing listening as a core skill within the English curriculum.

### 5.3 Limitations

The study has several limitations:

1. **Self-reported data:** Findings relied on questionnaires and interviews, without objective measures of listening performance.
2. **Limited sample:** Only 94 students from one course at Can Tho University participated, limiting generalizability to other contexts.
3. **Context-specificity:** Institutional factors may affect the transferability of findings to other universities.
4. **Cross-sectional design:** Data captured student perceptions at a single point in time, without tracking the evolution of listening challenges or strategy use over a longer period.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into students' listening experiences and can inform targeted instructional interventions.

### 5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

Future studies should:

1. **Broaden the sample:** Include students from multiple universities, regions, and academic programs to enhance generalizability.
2. **Use objective measures:** Combine questionnaires and interviews with listening tests, classroom observations, or task-based assessments to triangulate findings.
3. **Adopt longitudinal designs:** Track listening challenges, strategy use, and instructional interventions over time to better understand development and effectiveness of pedagogical approaches.

By addressing these areas, future research can provide deeper insights into EFL listening difficulties and guide more effective teaching practices.

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### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Authors**

**Miss Tran Kieu My** is currently a senior in the English Studies program at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University (CTU), Vietnam, and is expected to graduate in 2025. Her research interests include English listening skills, intercultural communication, and EFL learning and teaching across all levels. She can be contacted at [myb2205539@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:myb2205539@ctu.edu.vn).

**Dr. Thai Cong Dan** is a Senior Lecturer of English at the School of Foreign Languages, Can Tho University (CTU), Vietnam, and also serves as a project manager. He earned his PhD in Educational Administration (English program) from Naresuan University, Thailand, in 2010, and his MA in Cultural Aspects and Literature from the University of Notre Dame du Lac, Indiana, USA, in 1999. His research interests include TEFL/TESOL, intercultural communication, English teaching and learning at secondary and higher education levels, English program management, curriculum design, testing and evaluation, ESP for Tourism, Political Education, and Food Technology, as well as professional development and educational administration. He can be contacted at [tcdan@ctu.edu.vn](mailto:tcdan@ctu.edu.vn).

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